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# Saudi Graduate Students' Identities in Relation to Emotion and Agency in Applied Linguistics: A Narrative Multiple Case Study

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**Abstract**

This qualitative inquiry explores the identity development processes of graduate students in applied linguistics within the higher education context of Saudi Arabia. Through a merged research design of a multiple-case study and narrative inquiry approach, this study examined the narratives of Saudi graduate students' identity development in applied linguistics, focusing on key experiences across past, present, and future, as well as their emotional and agentive experiences. Despite the growing body of research on identity in applied linguistics and second language acquisition, limited attention has been given to graduate students' identity formation in this field. The study contributed to several key findings: 1) Early experiences shape Saudi graduate students' current academic paths and future aspirations, 2) Positive and negative emotional experiences shape Saudi graduate students' academic self-perception and identity development and 3) Saudi graduate students' agentive responses to the challenges they face shape their identity development. This study's outcomes provide insight into the dynamic relationship between the identities, emotions, and agency of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, offering practical implications and suggesting future directions for further research.

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# SAUDI GRADUATE STUDENTS' IDENTITIES IN RELATION TO EMOTION AND AGENCY IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS: A NARRATIVE MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

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Supervised by: Prof. Fakieh Alrabai

## DEDICATION

"[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds." (Quran, 1:2)

To my beloved parents, for their unwavering support, boundless love, and everything.

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative inquiry explores the identity development processes of graduate students in applied linguistics within the higher education context of Saudi Arabia. Through a merged research design of a multiple-case study and narrative inquiry approach, this study examined the narratives of Saudi graduate students' identity development in applied linguistics, focusing on key experiences across past, present, and future, as well as their emotional and agentive experiences. Despite the growing body of research on identity in applied linguistics and second language acquisition, limited attention has been given to graduate students' identity formation in this field. The study contributed to several key findings: 1) Early experiences shape Saudi graduate students' current academic paths and future aspirations, 2) Positive and negative emotional experiences shape Saudi graduate students' academic self-perception and identity development and 3) Saudi graduate students' agentive responses to the challenges they face shape their identity development. This study's outcomes provide insight into the dynamic relationship between the identities, emotions, and agency of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, offering practical implications and suggesting future directions for further research.



*Keywords:* identity, emotion, agency, applied linguistics, narrative inquiry, multiple-case study, Saudi graduate students

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

In recent decades, a substantial body of research within applied linguistics has focused on the concept of identity. These studies have highlighted the significance of examining identity across various contexts and have presented theoretical and methodological frameworks for their investigation. For instance, McEntee-Atalianis (2018) offered comprehensive reviews of identity research in applied linguistics, encompassing diverse levels and methodologies. Meanwhile, Block (2013) highlighted the importance of considering the interplay between individual agency and social structure in language and identity research. Additionally, Darvin (2015) proposed an elaborate model of investment in language learning that integrates identity, ideology, and capital.

With the resurgence of identity research, new perspectives have emerged across a wide range of fields such as critical education, linguistics, language education, meta-theories, and language education (Awadelkarim, 2022). However, there is still a wide gap in some contexts of identity research, despite many attempts to research identity in various settings across the last three decades (Awadelkarim, 2022). Although these contributions have advanced our understanding of identity within applied linguistics research, there remains a gap in exploring the intersection of identity, emotion, and agency among Saudi graduate students within this field, therefore, this study came to address this gap by exploring the interrelationship between these elements through examining how Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics

construct and develop their identities in relation to the influence of emotions and agency on their identity development.

### 1.2 Research Significance

This study attempts to provide a comprehensive exploration of Saudi graduate students of applied linguistics identity development in relation to emotions and agency by employing a narrative inquiry and a case study merged research design, due to the increasing influx of Saudi students into academic institutions, coupled with the evolving landscape of higher education in Saudi Arabia, which highlights a pressing need to understand their identities, emotions, and agency within the field of applied linguistics. Furthermore, this research responds directly to current educational trends and can significantly enhance the academic experience for Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite significant advancements in identity research over the past three decades (Awadelkarim, 2022), there is a notable gap in understanding the interrelationship between identity, emotion, and agency among Saudi graduate students pursuing higher studies in applied linguistics which represents a critical gap in the current body of research.

Thus, this study aims to address this research gap by conducting a narrative inquiry and a case study merged research design to explore the experiences of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, particularly in terms of how they construct and develop their identities considering their emotional and agentive experiences.

Through this study, we attempt to contribute valuable knowledge to applied linguistics and other fields in providing a more comprehensive exploration of the identity dynamics among Saudi graduate students in relation to emotion and agency.

### 1.4 Goals of Study

The current research aims to fill the gap in understanding how Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics construct and develop their identities, considering the influence of emotions and agency within the higher education setting through narrative inquiry and case study approaches. To achieve this goal, the study is guided by the following objectives and research questions:

1. To explore how Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics narrate and develop their identities within the context of higher education across past, present, and future.
2. To investigate the impact of emotions on the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics.
3. To examine the role of agency in the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics.

### 1.5 Research Questions

Based on the conceptual framework presented here, we explored applied linguistics graduate students' identities, agency, and emotions. For this reason, the following study questions were developed:

1. What are the key experiences shaping Saudi graduate students of applied linguistics identity development across the past, present, and future?
2. What emotions do they experience and how do those emotional experiences shape their identity development?
3. What challenges do they encounter and how do their agentive responses to those challenges shape their identity development?

### 1.6 Organization of the Research

This study comprises five primary chapters. Following this introductory section, the second chapter conducts a review of relevant literature and research that addresses the study's research questions concerning the identity, emotions, and agency of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics. Chapter three outlines the methodology employed in the study and provides justifications for the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures as well as addressing data trustworthiness and researcher positionality.

The fourth chapter presents and discusses the key findings considering the current research literature. The study's conclusions and implications as well as the major contributions and recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter Five. Following these chapters, appendices and references utilized throughout this study are provided as supplements.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the literature relevant to the primary domains of focus of this study. Firstly, starting with reviewing the literature on identity research in applied linguistics while discussing the rise of identity research in applied linguistics, identity conceptualization as well as its theoretical perspectives. Then, delving into the recent literature on emotions and agency research in applied linguistics and their interrelationships with identity. Lastly, providing an overview of the studies concerned with graduate students' identity, emotions, and agency in applied linguistics.

## 2.1 Identity in Applied Linguistics

In this section, I start by discussing the rise of identity research in SLA and applied linguistics. Then, I briefly review how identity was conceptualized in the social sciences and applied linguistics and finally, I present the main theoretical perspectives of identity.

### 2.1.1 Rise of Identity Research in Applied Linguistics

Over the last four decades, identity has gained momentum in the social sciences, especially in applied linguistics, since Bonny Norton Pierce's (1995) appeal for integrating language learning context and language learner in a comprehensive social identity theory has been welcomed enthusiastically by numerous researchers in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and second language learning (Block, 2009).

As a result, identity became the focus of discussions in several studies on language learning and use in educational contexts. McEntee-Atalianis (2018) addressed two influential theories of identity in applied linguistics based on different theoretical underpinnings.

She noted that these contrasting perspectives led to distinct research approaches and assumptions, of which "Social Identity Theory" (SIT), a social-psychological framework developed by Tajfel and Turner, is the first theory, and the second approach to identity is a more recent sociocultural, interactional one introduced by Bucholtz and Hall.

Since applied linguistics generally follows trends in the social sciences, and poststructuralist approaches to identity are no exception (Block, 2006), identity construction has been explored in applied linguistics from various perspectives.

Mora (2017) examined the writer identity of applied linguistics undergraduate students in Mexico and found that USA returning migrants used more advanced linguistic choices in expressing their identity in comparison to the students who are locally educated.

Moreover, Azar (2022) investigated the genre of review articles in applied linguistics and revealed that inclusive pronouns are used by authors as a rhetorical strategy for establishing their credibility and identity as authors. In addition, Hyland (2010) highlighted the independent creativity of identity, which is shaped by shared practices, through the examination of the author's identity construction in the published works of John Swales and Debbie Cameron using a corpus analysis approach.

Finally, McEntee-Atalianis (2018) provided overviews of identity research in applied linguistics, covering different levels and approaches to individual and global identities.

### 2.1.2 What is Identity?

Throughout the history of human thought, identity has been one of the most controversial and debated issues among philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and scholars from different walks of modern academia (Awadelkarim, 2022). They were interested in exploring what is meant by identity, identity components, identity constituents, the features, and characteristics

of identity as a notion, and so on. Moving on to how identity is conceptualized, Sang (2023) reported that identity is defined in social psychology as a part of an individual's mental work about himself, as it refers to internal meanings and expectations related to the individual's roles and positions in social networks. According to this definition, identity is defined by individuals, relationships with others, and collectively in social groups.

An individual's identity consists of multiple identities that co-exist simultaneously and are characterized as a stable construct in terms of the individual's self-concepts and a dynamic construct that changes based on social experience. Similarly, Awadelkarim (2022), reveals that there are several types of identities that people can possess at the same time.

However, Norton (1997) defines identity more precisely by focusing on the identity construction process and the way it is related to time and space rather than only considering the relationship between individuals and the world they live in. This conceptualization emphasizes the subject's or participant's relationship with the world or the academic and social environment they live in, which is highly significant in highlighting identity not as fixed and unique but rather as a fluid, complex, and socially constructed process.

Moreover, Darvin and Norton (2015) discussed how Norton (2013) conceptualized identity as a continually shifting site of struggle across time and space which means that identity is a struggle between desire, ideologies, and imagined identities where individuals position themselves, and others can position them in various settings according to their different ideologies and different levels of capital. Additionally, Li (2023) defines identity as the self-image in general and individuals' awareness of who they are and their roles in a particular sociocultural context. Thus, identity is viewed as a dynamic and context-specific process influenced by personal and social factors both internally and externally that allow an individual to have multiple identities in different roles and contexts and are often negotiated

in interactions with community members. Furthermore, according to McEntee-Atalianis (2018), identity can be achieved and constructed through one's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (known as the agency of the process) or imposed and shaped through others' perceptions and ideas about oneself (known as otherness in identity).

To sum up, issues related to identity are often inconsistent, ubiquitous, and cannot be, pre-determined, clear-cut, or final (McEntee-Atalianis, 2018). As a result, there was a noticeable variation in how these terms were defined by researchers as a single construct and the way they relate to each other (Fisher et al., 2020) and despite the growing interest in highlighting teacher and learner identities in various educational contexts, it is still difficult to define identity clearly.

### 2.1.3 Theoretical Perspectives of Identity

Identity is considered a very complex construct that doesn't fit into a single theoretical framework but shares several features with other theoretical approaches (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 23, as cited in Fisher et al., 2020). In this section, I am going to briefly review the main theoretical frameworks of identity including the sociocultural, psychosocial, and post-structural theories of identity.

According to Fisher et al. (2020), there are three main theoretical frameworks of identity; the psychosocial, sociocultural, and post-structural perspectives that intersect and diverge at some points even though there is no comprehensive analytical framework that can serve researchers in different fields effectively. Starting with the developmental psychological framework, Erikson's work (1968) played a critical role in establishing identity theories from a developmental psychological standpoint. Erikson argues that identity development is a complex psychological process that includes individual, societal, and environmental factors.

Therefore, he was recognized as one of the first to bridge the theoretical gap between psychology and sociology. As for the individual components of identity, Erikson distinguished between the psychological aspect (ego identity) and the behavioral aspect, known as personal identity. He also made a careful distinction between "self" and "identity", since "self" refers to the core of someone's experiences or the inner entity.

It is also considered a tool that assists individuals in thinking consciously and reflecting on themselves to regulate how they behave. On the other hand, identity is often acknowledged as a component of the "self" that is formed through a long-term process with several stages; however, adults struggle the most in establishing a secure identity, which is integral to being accepted into the adult world. The social aspect (social identity) refers to how individuals define themselves in a specific cultural, historical, and sociological context and time. According to Erikson, this is manifested in the role of external factors, including parents and society, on identity formation and how sociocultural processes affect individual decisions. An integral component of the theory of psychosocial identity is a core identity that may include various identities, all of which are integrated into the core identity that connects individuals with their past and future. Despite Erikson's significant contribution to research on identity theory from a psychological and sociological standpoint, some neo-Eriksonian models tended to employ Erikson's work in psychological terminology and neglect the sociological aspects of his work (Côté & Levine, 1987, as cited in Fisher et al., 2020).

Moving to the sociocultural theories, they share some similarities with psychosocial theories in considering both individual and social factors, however; they prioritize the social, cultural, and historical contexts and their influence on individuals.

Therefore, sociocultural perspectives believe that identity is socially constructed, mediated, and situated, for instance, in Vygotsky's work we can only understand how an individual is

mentally functioning by investigating cultural and social processes (Fisher et al., 2020). Additionally, a sociocultural theory believes that identity can be framed in communities of practice through individual participation, therefore, some researchers, such as Vågan (2011) and Park (2015), strongly recommend a sociocultural approach to research identity formation in educational contexts since the emphasis is on social interactions (Fisher et al., 2020).

For example, Wenger's (1998) theory of identity emphasizes the importance of learning as a process of self-transformation, as learning alters one's identity and forms a personal history of self-transformation. This learning and development (i.e., identity formation) is closely linked to the day-to-day functioning of the individual in the community of practice.

A (CoP) is conceptualized as a collective of individuals who share a common set of professional skills and interests (a collective repertoire) and collaborate and interact with one another through the exchange of knowledge and expertise (mutual engagement) with the aim of negotiating and accomplishing shared objectives (a collective enterprise).

As far as participation is concerned, what a person chooses to engage in (participation) is as much a reflection of who they are as what they do not choose to engage in (non-participation). In addition, CoP members often begin by assuming an identity of "non-or peripheral participation" to be accepted into a role (e.g., learning processes to carry out tasks without a comprehensive comprehension of the reasons for doing so).

Members may be able to reach their full potential as they gain experience and/or gain access to more comprehensive knowledge of the role. Wenger (1998) outlines three modes of belonging: engagement (participation, interaction, and relationships within a community), alignment (the level of agreement and coordination needed to achieve common goals), and imagination (creating mental images of oneself and the profession over time and space). These modes interact to help individuals form distinct identities and negotiate with others to

shape their identity. Identification, crucial to this concept, refers to how these modes of belonging contribute to identity formation and expression. Negotiation involves the ability and legitimacy to engage with, take responsibility for, and influence the meanings relevant within a social system, thus playing a role in identity formation.

While Wenger's theory is valuable, it overlooks social structures and power dynamics within groups and society at large. However, the multiplicity of sociocultural identities clashes with the concept of core identity, which is an integral component of psychosocial identity theory, and, on the other hand, poststructuralists don’t agree with the notion of core identity singularity since they believe that identity is incomplete and the existence of a fixed self is beyond the bounds of possibility (Fisher et al., 2020). As a result, non-linear self-transformation and change can be explored, contrary to the psychosocial perspective, which is characterized by a process of change that is more logical.

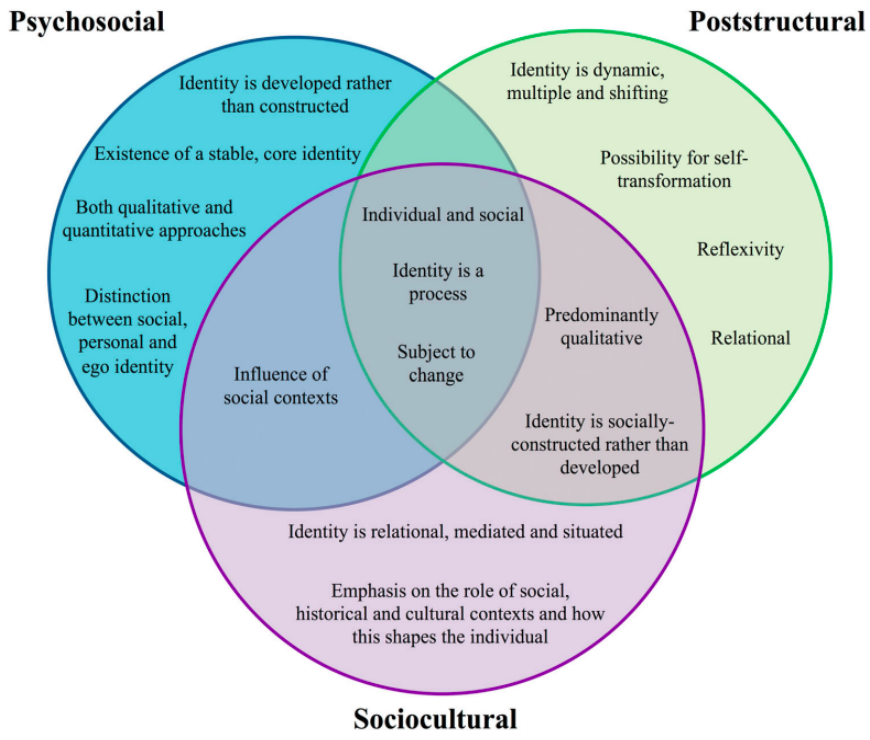



**Figure 1.** Theoretical perspectives on identity: intersections and differences.

*Figure 1 Theoretical Perspectives of Identity by Fisher et al. (2020)*

Finally, although poststructuralist theories integrate both psychological and sociological aspects, they were criticized for the marginalization of psychologists' interests in the self and for overlooking core and stable aspects of identity that are linked to the past and the future identities. To summarize, looking at the key characteristics of the three perspectives described above, we can say that there are some differences; however, they overlap in their respective conceptualizations of identity, as shown in Figure 1.

### 2.2 Emotions and Identity in Applied Linguistics

In this section, I first discuss earlier research into emotions in applied linguistics. Then I address the characteristics of emotions, their conceptualization, and the main theoretical frameworks of emotions. Finally, I explore the interrelationship between emotions and identity in applied linguistics research.

### 2.2.1 Early Research into Emotions in Applied Linguistics

Throughout history, emotions have been neglected and often under-researched at the expense of the rational aspect of language learning and teaching since they were viewed as inferior to rational thought, nevertheless, Barcelos (2015) noted that some researchers started to acknowledge the strong connection between emotion and reason as well as the integral role of emotions in learning language, demonstrated by the emergence of research on emotions and affective aspects in the applied linguistics field, as illustrated in Table 1.

It can be noticed that early research on emotions focused on motivation and attitude, as demonstrated in Gardner and Lambert's (1972) work and Moskowitz's (1978) work on the humanistic approach to teaching. However, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of the first studies on anxiety marked by Bailey's (1983) research and Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1985). Following this, Horwitz and Young (1991) and MacIntyre (1999) explored anxiety's impact on language learning and found that high levels of anxiety inhibit language learning. Additionally, other researchers investigated emotions' neurobiology and affective factors as individual differences in 1997 and 1999. As for the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was a growing interest in the role of emotions and multilingualism demonstrated in Dewaele's (2010) and Pavlenko's (2005, 2006) work.

Moreover, during this decade, there were studies on emotions focusing on self-esteem, positive emotions, the emotions of speakers of different languages, critical theories, and sociocultural theories.

**Table 1** Timeline of research on emotions in AL

| 70s | 80s | 90s | 2000s | 2010s |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Humanistic teaching (Moskowitz, 1978) Attitudes (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) | Affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) First studies on anxiety (Bailey, 1983) | Research on affect (affective factors as individual differences) (Arnold, 1999) | Research on emotions and multilingualism (Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2005, 2006) | "Affective turn" (Pavlenko, 2013) |
| | | Studies on language learning anxiety in language learning (Horwitz, 1990; MacIntyre, 1999) | Emotions within the framework of the biology of cognition (Aragão, 2005, 2007) | Sociocultural approach to emotions (Swain, 2013; Imai, 2010; Golombek & Dorian, 2014; Johnson & Worden, 2014) |
| | | Schumann's work on the (1997) neurobiology of emotions | | Critical approach to emotions (Benesch, 2012) |
| | | | | Research on positive emotions (Gregersen, 2013; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) |

*Table 1 Timeline of research on Emotions in applied linguistics by Barcelos (2015)*

However, Barcelos (2015) stated that this affective turn emotional trend drew criticism for the way emotions were researched in applied linguistics, mainly in the way emotions were conceptualized and examined. First, emotions were viewed as merely affective individual differences disconnected from the social context and reflected only in anxiety, motivation, and personality characteristics. Secondly, the relationship between emotions, power, culture, and ideology received minimal attention from research. Thirdly, most studies disregard the diverse experiences and emotions of learners, in addition to their dynamic nature, and focus only on negative emotions such as anxiety as a single construct. Lastly, affective aspects are often explored only concerning their causal relationship to language acquisition and how they predict success, which can be an issue since identity, emotion, and beliefs share a relationship of reciprocity instead of causality and interact with each other. Thus, these criticisms show that emotions are still seen as decontextualized constructs by current approaches, which don't consider the complex nature of emotions and their interrelationships with other variables.

### 2.2.2 Conceptualizing and Characterizing Emotion

McIntyre and Gregresen (2012) highlight the complexity of defining a concept like emotion, often leading to circular definitions where emotions are described as feelings and feelings are defined as emotional states. They describe Reeve's (2005, p. 294) conceptualization as a multidimensional definition: "Emotions are short-lived, feeling-arousal-purposive-expressive phenomena, aiding adaptation to life events." The feeling component signifies subjective experience. Arousal, extensively researched, shows unique physical patterns accompanying specific emotions, like increased heart rate during anxiety. Purposive reflects emotion's goal-directed nature, and the expressive component adds a social dimension; universal emotions manifest through involuntary facial expressions. Thus, they concluded that emotions surpass the sum of these parts, emerging from the coordination of feeling, arousal, purposive, and expressive aspects. Barcelos (2015), on the other hand, noted that affect reflects the dimensions of emotion, mood, feeling, and attitude that regulate actions, for instance, affective aspects include anxiety, motivation, introversion, and extraversion and conceptualized emotion more dynamically as a multifaceted, complex psychological phenomenon that is continuously formed and changed in recursive ways.

According to Barcelos (2015), emotions can also refer to physical dispositions of action in a particular situation that are manifested in various ways of behaving in relation to the immediate environment's dynamics. However, he noted that emotions have been conceptualized differently since different emotions with different combinations require different definitions. In addition, emotion is defined in psychology as a feeling that organizes, motivates, and controls perception and action but in applied linguistics, emotion is defined as the outcome of psychologically dynamic interactions between internal and external systems

with different layers, including behavioral, cognitive, social, and physiological systems, therefore, due to the dynamic, nonlinear, and self-organizing nature of emotions and their causal interdependence among variables, they should be explored as processes, not states (Barcelos, 2015). Furthermore, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) distinguish between emotions and two related concepts, mood and temperament. They define emotions as brief reactions to personally significant events, while moods are longer-lasting and diffuse experiences, making it difficult for individuals to identify their precise origins. Moreover, they observe that, unlike emotions, moods lack the potential to prompt specific actions, partly because moods operate in the background while emotions take precedence in conscious awareness. Additionally, they highlight that moods are more common, subtly influencing each day with one or more enduring feelings. On a broader scale, they define temperament as a stable predisposition for individuals to experience specific moods and emotions, representing a personality-level trait often linked with physiology, for instance, there is a distinction between the immediate emotional experience of anxiety (state anxiety) and the enduring tendency or disposition to experience anxiety reactions (trait anxiety).

**Table 2** Characteristics of emotions

| Characteristic | Definition | Authors |
|---|---|---|
| Active, interactive & processual | Emotions are processes and not static entities. | Mesquita & Markus (2004, p. 355) |
| | Interactive: Usually they involve a relationship between a subject and an object or an interaction between an individual and his/her environment, as well how we position ourselves towards these. | Bosma & Kunnen (2001, p. 41). |
| Hierarchically constructed | Emotions form a complex network, an open system in which new emotions get added, but nothing gets out easily. | Ekman (2004, pp. 128-129) |
| Socially constructed | Emotions are context dependent (the types of emotion one is allowed to express or not depend on national cultures, as well as on institutional cultures and emotional rules of different contexts). | Mesquita & Marcus (2004), Zembylas (2004). |
| | Emotions are not private, individual, psychological states but social and embodied. | Benesch (2012, p. 133) |
| Culturally constructed | Emotions are shaped by and also shape the sociocultural context (social relationships, systems of values in families, cultures and school situations). | Mesquita & Markus (2004), Zembylas (2004) |
| | Emotion is a mode of social action, developed over time. | Parkinson (1995) |
| Discursively constructed | Emotions are embedded in discursive, ideological practices, and power structures. | Zembylas (2005) |

*Table 2 Emotions Characteristics by Barcelos (2015).*

Finally, Barcelos (2015) reported five interwoven characteristics of emotions, to better define and understand emotions instead of providing one single definition including; behavioral, involving verbal and facial expressions of experiencing an emotion; physiological, including neuroglial, hormonal, and neuromuscular changes; phenomenological, reflecting the physical sensations and the way we see and describe emotions, known as "meta emotions,"; cognitive, referring to thoughts, perceptions, and appraisals of emotions; and lastly, social, referring to cultural considerations and interpersonal interactions. Table 2 provides a summary of emotion characteristics from recent existing literature in education and psychology.

### 2.2.3 Theoretical Perspectives of Emotion

In this section, I'm going to briefly discuss the major theoretical frameworks and theories of emotion in language education and applied linguistics that include the cognitive approach, the Vygotskian sociocultural approach, critical and post-structural approaches, and finally the

broaden and build theory. Bradshaw (2023) outlines three primary theoretical frameworks through which emotion has been conceptualized in second language education: the cognitive approach, the Vygotskian sociocultural approach, and critical and post-structural approaches. The Cognitive Approach focuses on exploring the influence of emotions, particularly constructs such as emotional intelligence (EI) or competence where it is assumed that negative emotions in the classroom are detrimental to teaching and learning, thus, this approach emphasizes eliminating negative emotions and fostering positive ones, often overlooking broader contextual factors, for instance, researchers in this paradigm investigate the relationship between emotions and individual factors relevant to classroom dynamics (Bradshaw, 2023). However, Vygotskian sociocultural theory takes a different perspective, acknowledging the interconnectedness of emotions and cognition and considering the two sides of the same coin where emotional experiences are seen as potential catalysts for learning, with a focus on the concept of perezhivanie described as an "emotional experience that motivates thinking," and conversely, "thinking [that] always implicates an emotional reaction" (Lantolf & Swain, 2019, p. 529 as cited in Bradshaw, 2023).

A notable strength of this approach is its normalization of emotions and its intervention in emotional experiences as they arise in teaching or learning activities. Although critical and post-structural approaches acknowledge the significance of emotions in L2 teaching, they differ in examining how power operates in the discursive construction of emotions, thus, this shift redirects attention from individual emotions to emotions as discourses, as well as to policies and material conditions that contribute to struggles where the emphasis lies not on the nature of emotions or their expression in individual psychology but on understanding how emotions are entwined with power dynamics (Bradshaw, 2023).

Finally, thanks to the recent developments in the literature, attention has been given to positive emotions, a dimension often overlooked by researchers, for instance, the "broaden and build" theory of positive emotion outlined the roles of positive and negative emotions where negative emotions typically prompt specific actions and positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love, on the other hand, broaden immediate thought-action repertoires and serve multiple functions, including expanding attention and cognition, alleviating the impact of negative emotional arousal, fostering resilience, cultivating personal resources, and contributing to an upward spiral towards enhanced well-being (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

### 2.2.4 Identity and Emotions Interrelationship

Although the interrelationship between emotions and identities has been under-searched in applied linguistics, Barcelos (2015) noted that emotions constitute a significant dimension of identity formation and power structures, which means that emotions are performative as identities, reporting Norton's (2001) study on identity and investment.

However, identity research in applied linguistics has not yet explored desire as an emotion or various aspects of emotions, despite their significance in shaping our identity such as fear and pain, for instance, what we fear, and desire expresses who we are, and these fears and desires that are persistently and continually experienced will shape our long-term identity (Barcelos, 2015).

**Table 4** The relationship between emotions and identities

| Applied linguistics | Social sciences | Education |
|---|---|---|
| Self: includes desires, hopes and dreams (Ryan & Irie, 2014) | Identities: shaped by fears and desires | Emotions are aspects of teacher identities |
| Self: dynamic system of beliefs and emotions (Mercer, 2014) | Emotions help us identify with social types (Lemke, 2008) | Teacher identities: composed of how they feel about students (and their jobs, and themselves) |
| | | Teachers' identities are revealed through their way of talking about emotions (Zembylas, 2004) |

*Table 3 The relationship between emotions and identity by Barcelos (2015)*

The following table demonstrates the way identity and emotion are strongly connected as dimensions of identity or as components of the self where the emotions we experience, such as joy, love, fear, and desire, shape who we are and how we construct our identities. Furthermore, Bradshaw (2023) observes a consensus in research concerning the mutual influence between emotions and identity formation, for instance, Yazan and Peercy (2016) discovered that the emotional reactions of pre-service teachers during internships were shaped by their evolving identity as educators. Furthermore, Wolff and De Costa (2017) highlighted the interrelationship between second language teacher emotions, identity, and pedagogy through a narrative analysis of a teacher from Bangladesh where they illuminate the emotional challenges encountered and how emotions are intertwined with cultural, social, structural, cognitive, and neurological influences. Rather than viewing emotions merely as individual cognitive variances, they advocate for acknowledging their social aspect which aligns with the discourse on emotions being discursively constructed and linked to identity.

### 2.3 Agency and Identity in Applied Linguistics

In this section, I start by exploring the way the concept of agency has been addressed in applied linguistics research. Then I delve into the relationship between agency and autonomy,

the role of agency in identity research, and finally the interrelationship between agency, autonomy, and identity.

### 2.3.1 Agency in Applied Linguistics

Within the domain of applied linguistics and language education, Huang and Benson (2013) observed that the concept of agency has lacked explicit definitions. Nonetheless, recent endeavors, particularly in research focused on autonomy, aim to offer clearer definitions. Huang and Benson (2013) highlighted that within the field of second language learner identity, some scholars often touch upon agency without explicitly defining it whereas others extensively discuss agency within what they term "neo-Vygotskyan" frameworks.

They emphasize that agency is not an inherent trait of individuals but rather a continually co-constructed and renegotiated aspect within social and societal contexts (Huang & Benson, 2013). They also highlight that despite the scarcity of explicit working definitions in earlier literature, there have been recent attempts made by researchers to offer definitions that guide empirical research, for instance, Van Lier sees agency as "action potential, mediated by social, interactional, cultural, institutional, and other contextual factors" (2008, p. 171 as cited in Huang & Benson, 2013). Furthermore, Huang and Benson (2013) define agency as a dynamic, co-constructed relationship with society, involving the attribution of relevance and significance to actions and events that pertain to individuals' self-aware reflexive actions within the social context. They noted that agency can be viewed as a resistance to dominant discourses, shaped by contextual factors and that other conceptualization highlight aspects such as deliberation, choice, and contextual influence. Bradshaw (2023), on the other hand, defines agency as the intentional authority to make choices and act within the local context therefore, agency is similar to identity in the sense of being dynamic rather than fixed due to

its fluctuation across contexts and timeframes. Bradshaw (2023) further highlights that agency emerges from the interplay between personal capabilities and environmental factors such as resources, opportunities, and limitations, within both discourse and actions, transcending individual capacity to encompass collective influence.

### 2.3.2 Agency or Autonomy?

In the existing language education autonomy literature, Huang and Benson (2013) highlight that the distinction between autonomy and agency is often unclear, however, incorporating agency into the autonomy discourse may enhance our understanding by examining real-life events. Moreover, they note that instances like "autonomous episodes" may be better viewed as agency rather than autonomy, considering autonomy as a capacity rather than behavior, reflecting individualized learning experiences. Huang and Benson (2013) conclude that terms like "autonomous episodes," "seeds of autonomy," "autonomously individualizing," and "autonomy of learner thought" all denote independent efforts by learners: managing their learning, setting priorities, and attempting to control psychological factors, however, these efforts are episodic and often ineffective, challenging their categorization as fully autonomous. Furthermore, they suggest that the current literature often aligns with the concept of personal agency, indicating that autonomy development relies on the exercise of personal agency, though agency alone may not be enough they differentiate between agendas, defined as "things to do," and agency, denoting actions stemming from deliberation and choice, with autonomy representing the ability to act independently, stressing the tangible and observable nature of agency compared to the gradual development of autonomy. To sum up, despite their similarities, agency and autonomy are typically regarded as separate concepts in applied linguistics and language education research, thus, agency often focuses

on self-aware reflective learning actions, whereas autonomy pertains to a sense of mastery over the learning process (Huang & Benson, 2013).

### 2.3.3 The Role of Agency in Identity Research

Block (2009) notes that the distinction between identity and subjectivity in applied linguistics lacks clarity, reflecting the ambiguity regarding the role of agency in identity research and highlighting the way anthropologists describe agency as often under-specified, misused, and fetishized by social scientists and that recent identity-focused publications tend to avoid explicitly defining agency, exemplified by Benwell and Stokoe's (2006) book where 'agency' appears on 25 pages without a clear definition as well as Block's (2007) work on second language identities, where 'agency' is mentioned on 12 pages without a direct definition, nevertheless, he noted that some authors provide simple definitions.

Furthermore, Block (2009) emphasizes the need to overcome opposition in social theory suggesting a model that includes both identity formation and agency and emphasizing the interplay between structure and agency in identity research since some researchers often present narratives emphasizing individuals' active roles while downplaying the pervasive influence of social constraints. Thus, the challenge for future identity research in applied linguistics lies in maintaining the centrality of both structure and agency (Block, 2009).

### 2.3.4 Agency and Identity Interrelationships in Applied Linguistics

Huang and Benson (2013) documented findings from a comprehensive review on autonomy, proposing that agency could serve as an initial stage for autonomy development, while identity may emerge as a significant outcome and suggesting that identity conceptualization can also serve as a foundation for autonomy. They argue that a personally meaningful agenda can foster agency, leading to increased autonomy over time.

However, both agendas and agency can be shaped by participants' perceptions of future trajectories, such as career aspirations. Huang and Benson (2013) point out, based on Huang's research, a nuanced, nonlinear relationship among identity, agency, and autonomy within specific learning contexts. Additionally, they reference Huang's (2010) self-narrative examination of his life, where he delves into the intricate links among autonomy, identity, and agency in foreign language teaching and teacher development, suggesting that autonomy development hinges on identity formation and agency, which, in turn, reinforce identity and agency. Moreover, they note that Huang (2009) was among the first to explicitly integrate autonomy, agency, and identity in a single study and that his studies emphasize two themes evident in empirical research by other scholars: the pivotal role of agency in autonomy and the role of identity formation in guiding autonomy development.

Huang and Benson (2013) explore the role of agency in the formation of learner identity and autonomy development stating that identity construction may define the direction of autonomy development, illustrated by crafting individual spaces which suggests a close interweaving of individual identity construction and personal autonomy achievement in long-term experiences.

### 2.4 Graduate Students' Identity, Emotions, and Agency in Applied Linguistics

In this section, I review studies concerned with graduate students' identity, emotions, and agency in applied linguistics. For instance, Donato et al. (2014) explore ten individuals' diverse journeys from doctoral studies to their current professional lives in applied linguistics aiming to provide insight into professional identity formation and evolution and offering a comprehensive understanding of how identities are constructed in different contexts.

Moreover, some studies explored the concept of "multiple identity roles" of graduate students

suggesting that individuals can take on various roles from different groups they belong to and based on the organized relationships they engage in (Zareva, 2013).

Furthermore, Thompson (2016) focuses on how international PhD students develop their authorial voices in academic writing, particularly in establishing authority and discipline-specific rhetorical knowledge. Additionally, Ilieva (2019) investigates how applied linguistics faculty construct their identities when engaged in interdisciplinary collaborations, emphasizing their role as boundary-crossing scholars who integrate language and content instruction. Overall, these papers shed light on the multifaceted nature of graduate student identity in applied linguistics, encompassing language proficiency, disciplinary knowledge, and cultural adaptation, but they overlook other dimensions connected to identity such as emotion and agency. However, Yazan et al. (2023) discuss the interconnected nature of identity, emotions, well-being, and agency in the lives of doctoral students of applied linguistics and how they mutually influence each other. Examples from the edited volume illustrate how inner tensions impact a student's agency and capacity to act highlighting the significance of considering emotions and well-being in understanding doctoral students' experiences and the impact of emotional experiences on navigating academic identity.

This chapter delves into three main areas of literature, forming the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the study: 1) identity in applied linguistics, particularly focusing on early research and theoretical frameworks, 2) emotions and identity in applied linguistics, and 3) agency and identity in applied linguistics, as well as 4) graduate students' identity, emotions, and agency. The subsequent chapter elaborates on the combined research methodology of narrative inquiry and case study utilized in this study.

# CHAPTER THREE

# METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative research approach, I explored how each participant develop their identity within their specific contexts. By combining narrative inquiry with a multi-case design, I thoroughly examined the diverse stories of identity development among participants.

This combined methodology offers flexibility and depth in investigating the research issue. The case study paradigm, emphasizing subjective meaning with an element of objectivity and pluralism, resonates with my study's approach.

Narrative inquiry, on the other hand, allows for examining participants' life experiences and identity reflections while incorporating critical and ethical dimensions into analysis.

Thus, investigating multi-cases through a narrative inquiry approach addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key experiences shaping Saudi graduate students of applied linguistics identity development across the past, present, and future?
2. What emotions do they experience and how do those emotional experiences shape their identity development?
3. What challenges do they encounter and how do their agentive responses to those challenges shape their identity development?

To explain the reasoning behind the chosen research methodology, I first explain the rationale and justification for merging the research designs of case study and narrative inquiry. Then, I explore the research context and design, participant selection, and data collection procedures. Subsequently, I go through a detailed examination of the data analysis

process, before concluding with a discussion on ethical considerations and data trustworthiness as well as the researcher's positionality and reflexivity.

### 3.1 Research Design: Justification for the Merged Research Framework

An inquiry-based research design was used for this study. It was used because narrative frameworks construct recursive chains of events that are focused on a certain objective. It is a technique for determining how much of an event fits with the experiencer's reality and existence. It uses narrative to explain one person's experience to a large audience.

Briefly, Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2013) emphasized that the central concern of narrative inquiry lies in how individuals employ storytelling to interpret their experiences and perceive events from their viewpoints. According to Sang (2023), narratives are described as accounts of events or actions, and narrative inquiry, a research method collecting individuals' stories, aims to deeply understand their lived experiences.

To understand the rationale behind selecting a merged research design for this study, Chung (2023) argues against selecting either approach independently, citing Creswell and Poth's (2007) comparative analysis of qualitative methodologies, which initially revealed potential intersections between case study and narrative inquiry. Additionally, Sonday et al. (2020) critically examined the rationale for integrating these methods. Creswell and Poth (2007) delineated the features of different qualitative research approaches, particularly emphasizing case study and narrative research methods. They highlighted similarities between the two, particularly their in-depth focus on individual experiences and stories.

Both approaches are suitable for studying individual experiences, whether singular or within a broader context such as multiple persons or events. Data collection and analysis methods, including descriptions, storytelling, and theme development, overlap between the two

methodologies, making them easily translatable. Furthermore, Sonday et al.'s (2020) proposal for integrating methodologies emphasizes embedding stories within contexts and underscores the social, political, and agentive nature of storytelling. They argue that understanding stories within specific contexts is essential for grasping the intricacies of identity formation processes. The narrative inquiry framework is well-suited for structuring the embedded case data, comprised of participants' narratives. As Sonday et al. (2020) noted, narrative inquiry provides insights into participants' identities and the meanings they derive from their experiences, which complement the analytical perspectives offered by case study methodologies. The validation of the case study which emphasizes context-dependent knowledge aligns with the goals of this research study, particularly in the exploration of graduate student identity development processes. Adopting a flexible definition of "case" as a phenomenon occurring within a bounded context (Chung, 2023), this research focuses on individual participants within the contexts of higher education in applied linguistics in Saudi Arabia. The study benefits from Stake's (1995) view of case study as an approach focused on in-depth description and understanding of singular processes, which aligns with the dynamic nature of identity development. Identity is viewed as a dynamic process, reflected in participants' stories that evolve over time and space.

By treating each graduate student’s narrative as an embedded case, this research captures identity negotiation, the chronological narrative of key experiences, and the contextual nuances underlying the identity formation process. Thus, by connecting individual narratives to the broader narrative framework, each participant’s story becomes a unique case within this multi-case study approach (Chung, 2023).

### 3.2 Research Context and Participants

The research explores graduate student identities in the field of applied linguistics within the higher education environment in Saudi Arabia, since understanding how Saudi graduate students navigate the complexities of academia, influenced by emotion and agency, holds significance in shaping educational policies and practices. Within this context, exploring the experiences of graduate students provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics at play within higher education settings. The target population for this research is represented by three female MA students enrolled in an applied linguistics postgraduate program at a Saudi university. Through purposive sampling, participants were selected to share their perspectives and insights regarding the research questions, reflecting the demographic and academic characteristics relevant to the study's purposes. Recruitment of participants was conducted through invitations to graduate students within the selected academic program and each student was informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. Then, informed consent, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time, was obtained from all participants before the data collection process.

The participants in this study represent a spectrum of Saudi graduate students pursuing advanced degrees in applied linguistics. Their varied academic backgrounds contribute to a comprehensive understanding of their identity development within higher education.

### 3.3 Data Collection

After obtaining approval from King Khalid University in 2024, data collection commenced. Upon finalizing the list of participants through the acquisition of consent forms, I arranged three sets of interviews with each participant, conducted throughout February and March 2024. The final selection included three participants: Amjad, Nora, and Sana, whose

identities are protected using pseudonyms. This study utilized Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interviewing method to conduct three in-depth interviews with each of three individuals, centering on their personal, professional, and reflective narratives.

As outlined in the research design, the study's central approach revolves around understanding the participants' identity development through their narratives.

Seidman (2006) highlights the power of interviewing as a qualitative research method, emphasizing its capacity to illuminate educational and social issues by delving into individuals' narratives and experiences. By engaging with multiple cases, I addressed the uniqueness of each narrative and gained insights into the key experiences across the past, present, and future, as well as their emotional and agentive experiences shaping their identity as graduate students in applied linguistics. Following Seidman's (2006) three series of interviews to situate experiences within their contexts, the first interview session, lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes per participant on average, focused on eliciting a chronological account of past and current experiences related to their roles as graduate students in applied linguistics. This was aimed at establishing a contextual understanding of their experiences and fostering trust between researchers and participants.

The second interview aimed to delve deeper into their emotional experiences and their sense of agency as graduate students in applied linguistics. Open-ended prompts facilitated recollection and narration of significant postgraduate experiences, supplemented by clarifying or follow-up prompts as needed. In line with the three-interview series design, the third interview encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and share their future aspirations. Before this session, I reviewed transcripts from the previous interviews and asked follow-up questions to elicit reflections and clarifications as well as their self-interpretations and future aspirations as graduate students in applied linguistics.

The interviews were conducted primarily through the online livestream platform Telegram, mostly in Arabic to facilitate deep reflection and authenticity given the research topic's nature. All interviews were conducted and transcribed using an Arabic voice recognition engine promptly after each session, as recommended by Stake (1995) to capture exchanges, emotions, and reflections while they are fresh. Transcripts were then translated and reviewed by a translator for quality assurance before being stored in a digital archive.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Riessman (1993) emphasized that narratives require careful analysis, as they do not inherently convey their intended meanings. It is crucial to choose and implement analysis methods thoughtfully. Specifically, she highlighted the need to interpret the cultural and historical contexts embedded within participants' stories. Bearing Riessman's caution in mind, the selection of analysis strategies was approached with care.

This study adhered to Rossman and Rallis's (2016) characterization of data analysis as the "process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data" (p. 273). Given the diverse narratives contributed by several participants, a thematic analysis method was employed. Thematic analysis was found by Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2013) to be particularly suitable for multiple case studies due to its capacity to delineate "shared themes, as well as highlighting individual differences" (p. 78). The analytical process commenced by following Rossman and Rallis's (2016) eight-phase structure of narrative analysis, which involves organizing the transcribed data, familiarizing oneself with it, identifying categories, coding the data in two cycles, generating themes, interpreting, exploring alternative interpretations, and finally, writing the report.

A thematic approach to analysis involves a meticulous examination of the data to identify emerging patterns, which are then categorized as themes. This method enables a comprehensive and insightful analysis that addresses specific research inquiries.

The initial phases of data analysis involved organizing and familiarizing oneself with the data, followed by categorization and differentiation between terms such as category and theme. Coding the data entailed identifying evidence for categories or themes while generating themes involved discerning features of the studied phenomenon based on data frequencies, similarities, differences, transitions, and linguistic connections. Interpreting the data, seeking alternative understandings, and writing the report were integral components of the analysis process, contributing to the depth and clarity of the findings.

Additionally, throughout the analysis, the findings were contextualized in relation to the research questions, with participants' own words used to illuminate and interpret key aspects of identity construction among graduate students. The analysis process aimed to complement, challenge, or contradict existing literature on identity to provide a nuanced understanding.

### 3.5 Data Trustworthiness

The researcher applied rigorous analytical procedures to all collected data to enhance the validity of the findings. Throughout the study, cyclical analysis and refinements were conducted as needed to improve the quality of the data. Furthermore, recurrent themes related to identity construction during the postgraduate journey were also analyzed in a summative evaluation of the interview transcripts. By reviewing the original data and extracting mini-stories from the findings, then cross-validating the findings, the themes were reexamined in depth. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) contended that "Narrative inquiry challenges Western views of scientific research, in which notions of data validity, reliability, and generalizability

are paramount" (p. 40). This study implemented various procedures to ensure trustworthiness. Firstly, a member-checking strategy was employed to authenticate the retold stories with the participants. Following the narration of their stories, participants were contacted to validate the accuracy of their accounts. Additionally, emphasis was placed on providing thick descriptions of the phenomenon through three series interviews.

### 3.6 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher played the roles of both insider and outsider throughout the participants' story-building. The researcher was familiar with the courses, their goals, and the methods used to execute teaching and learning in this setting. Thus, this familiarity offered the researcher an insider's perspective, enabling her to elicit and gain insight into the participants' narratives and encourage candid conversations regarding all aspects of their education and experiences. In my study of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, I adopt an insider/outsider dual positionality, recognizing the critical dimension added by the outsider position and the closer connection enabled by the insider position as a Saudi graduate student in applied linguistics. The researcher aims to engage with and co-construct knowledge about Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics from an insider's perspective, while maintaining a critical observation as an outside researcher.

In summary, the rationale for utilizing a merged research design combining case study and narrative inquiry is multifaceted. The case study approach facilitates a comprehensive grasp of individual experiences and enables in-depth analyses of one or multiple cases. Conversely, narrative inquiry delves into individuals' lives through their narratives and experiences, providing insights into subjective viewpoints and meanings.

By integrating these methodologies, the aim is to attain a comprehensive understanding of participants' processes of professional identity development. This integrated design offers flexibility and depth in examining research inquiries.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research is to explore the development of Saudi graduate students' identities in applied linguistics over time. It also seeks to investigate how their emotional and agentive experiences shape and influence their identities as graduate students in applied linguistics. Each interview session was guided by three research questions.

1. What are the key experiences shaping Saudi graduate students of applied linguistics identity development across the past, present, and future?
2. What emotions do they experience and how do those emotional experiences shape their identity development?
3. What challenges do they encounter and how do their agentive responses to those challenges shape their identity development?

Data were collected from three interview sessions with each participant. The first research question aimed to elicit narratives regarding the significant life events across the past, present, and future that shaped their identity as graduate students in applied linguistics. Common themes emerged including early experiences related to childhood memories and educational backgrounds, present experiences concerning their identity evolution, and finally, themes related to future aspirations. These themes serve as lenses through which the narratives of three female Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, Sana, Amjad, and Nora' stories were shared and examined to highlight these themes and showcase the uniqueness of their experiences. Addressing the second research question that explores their emotional experiences, there were shared themes of positive and negative emotional experiences as well as emotional resilience stories and experiences.

Finally, the last research question examines the participants' sense of agency demonstrated through challenges encountered and their agentive responses to them throughout their journeys.

### 4.1 The Key Experiences Shaping Graduate Students' Identity Development

In this section, I report the key experiences shaping the identity development of three female Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, Sana, Amjad, and Nora, starting with past experiences in their early childhood and educational journeys, moving to their present experiences and reflections regarding their current roles as graduate students in applied linguistics, and finally addressing their future identities, plans, and aspirations.

#### 4.1.1 Past Experiences of Early Childhood and Education

In Sana's case, three early childhood and educational experiences have significantly influenced her decision to pursue a graduate degree in applied linguistics.

Starting with her lifelong passion for learning since childhood which contributed to her desire and commitment to academic pursuits and higher education:

> "Since I was 6 or 7 years old, I have been fond of education in general. I was, I am, and I will be in the future. I liked school. I liked learning new things. I liked reading even before getting to school. So, this has made a huge contribution to my decision to pursue higher education because it is something in me that I like to learn new things. I like the school atmosphere. I like investing my time in something.".

Moreover, her early exposure to English, guided by passionate teachers, played a critical role in shaping her linguistic identity and academic interests.

Reflecting on a significant event from her past, Sana recalls the influence of her first English teacher:

> "In my sixth grade, the first teacher, and I remember her name, in the very first class of English, dedicated the whole class to only speaking about why we should learn English, and I appreciate that because she contributed to my decision to learn English in the BA in the first place. She spoke to us as if we were adults, explaining how English is going to contribute to our knowledge, that we are going to be more open to the world, and that English will help us in numerous fields, etc. So, I do remember that class, and I was fascinated by the way she spoke English, and I wanted to be like her.".

Furthermore, Sana's early exposure to English-language TV shows broadened her linguistic horizons and fuelled her fascination with the language and culture:

> "I used to watch Disney Channel TV shows, and I liked the way they spoke and the culture they came from; it was something new for me. I was a child, and you know TV shows like Hana Montana, Zack and Cody, etc. I liked the way they spoke, and I thought English was easy to learn because I quickly started to pick up words from them. I remember the first word that I acquired was 'exactly' and I kept repeating that word all day just not to forget it.".

These past experiences from Sana's childhood and early education memories are viewed as integral components of her identity development according to Norton's (1997) framework which highlights the dynamic nature of identity, emphasizing its fluidity, complexity, and socially constructed nature. In addition, Sana's lifelong passion for learning, nurtured since childhood, reflects her ongoing engagement with education and the academic environment and her active participation in shaping her identity as a learner and a knowledge seeker. Moreover, Sana's exposure to English through teachers and media showcases the intersection of linguistic and cultural influences on her identity formation which supports Norton's

assumption of the importance of sociocultural contexts in shaping identity, highlighting how Sana's linguistic identity is not static but rather influenced by her interactions with English-speaking communities and cultural artifacts.

Additionally, Sana's past experiences align with Erikson's (1968) theory, particularly in her development of ego identity through a passion for learning and personal identity through exposure to English-language media. However, Erikson's notion of a core identity contrasts with the fluid and socially constructed nature of identity portrayed in Sana's narrative. Finally, Wenger's (1998) theory, which emphasizes the role of social participation in identity formation within communities of practice aligns with Sana's narrative as she navigates her identity within various educational contexts and linguistic communities exemplified by multiple modes of belonging, including engagement, alignment, and imagination.

In Amjad's case, she credits supportive and encouraging teachers during her early childhood schooling for nurturing her talents, particularly in public speaking and teaching.

Her recollections and memories highlight the transformative role educators play in shaping students' interests and aspirations:

> "In my childhood, during my schooling, the teachers were supportive and encouraging. If a student showed any talent, they would support her beyond imagination. I loved public speaking, participating, and giving lessons to other students. Honestly, some teachers had a profound impact on my life, including the school counselor. She would ask me to read the morning announcements. She was supportive and encouraging of my love for teaching and public speaking.".

In addition, Amjad acknowledges the profound influence of a teacher who recognized her potential and encouraged her love for the English language, ultimately inspiring her to pursue teaching as a career path:

> "There was a teacher who had a significant influence on my love for the English language. She saw potential in me that I didn't see. She would say, 'You have a great future; you will surely become a good teacher'. One day, she said, 'Tomorrow, you will teach the lesson.'. I'll never forget that lesson. She took me from class to class [to give English language lessons]. I don't even know how I did it, but she praised me in front of the students, saying how talented and excellent I was, and how well-prepared I was for the lesson. That day truly instilled in me a love for English, and a genuine desire to continue my studies in English and become a teacher like her."

Moreover, Amjad's admiration for her older sister, who majored in English, serves as a significant factor in reviving her passion for learning the language:

> "My older sister majored in English, and I was amazed at how much she enjoyed studying English. I was genuinely impressed by how she could read a book from cover to cover in English. She would study in English, and I was truly fascinated by her. She was very keen on teaching me English songs, and she would read to me. She was my role model."

Amjad's experience aligns with Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individual development and social context exemplified by her interactions with supportive teachers and the influence of her sister reflecting the importance of social factors in identity formation and development. Additionally, her engagement in public speaking and teaching activities aligns with Wenger's (1998) theory of identity formation through participation in educational communities of practice and social groups.

Furthermore, from a post-structuralist viewpoint, Amjad's identity is seen as fluid and continually negotiated rather than fixed which aligns with Norton's (1997) framework since her experiences challenge the notion of a singular core identity, as she navigates multiple identities influenced by her interactions with teachers, family, and societal expectations.

Lastly, Nora's journey in navigating career transitions offers a candid reflection on her experiences and challenges in the job market, particularly in the education sector. Initially, not keen on pursuing higher education, Nora's perspective evolved as she recognized the importance of higher educational qualifications, especially for job opportunities:

> "I applied to multiple places, for almost over five years. Initially, universities weren't on my mind, but then I thought about applying to universities. I took a job at one of the universities and I truly saw the difference in working in an environment where pursuing higher education was encouraged. This motivated me to pursue my master's degree and I felt compelled to pursue a master's degree, realizing its significant impact on my career. Despite initially lacking enthusiasm, I understood the importance of taking this step, even if it seemed daunting. So, you could say the biggest driving force was the job market."

Nora's narrative reflects a shift in societal perspectives on education, influenced by personal experiences and observations of changing trends within her community, particularly in the public education sector which highlights the transformative power of societal perceptions in shaping educational ambitions and emphasizes the influence of the job market on educational pursuits. From a psychosocial perspective, Nora's experience reflects Erikson's (1968) notion of identity development as a complex interplay between individual, societal, and

environmental factors exemplified by her hesitance in pursuing higher education and her recognition of the importance of higher qualifications for career advancement.

Furthermore, Nora's evolving perspective on higher education and career choices exemplifies non-linear self-transformation, contradicting the notion of a logical, linear process of identity change and supporting the post-structuralist perspectives that challenge the notion of a fixed, singular identity and emphasizing the fluidity of identity of Norton's (1997) framework.

Finally, Nora's narrative exemplifies how participation within a community of practice, alignment with its values and norms, and the imagination of future possibilities contribute to the formation of identity, as outlined by Wenger's (1998) theory, particularly in terms of her decision to take a job at a university which represents her engagement and participation within the academic community of practice and her emphasis on pursuing a master's degree reflects Wenger's concept of alignment with the expectations and standards of academia.

### 4.1.2 Present Experiences and Current Roles as Graduate Students

#### Balancing Acts: Time Management, Reading, and Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

Sana'a narrative starts with highlighting the significance of time management, equating it to a valuable resource essential for academic success:

> "A postgraduate student needs to organize his/her time very strictly. Once you lose this organization or this timetable you make for yourself every day, you lose time. As a postgraduate student. I value the hours of the day that I sleep because I need these hours. I value the time with my family because it has become very limited since I became a postgraduate student. So, I believe a postgraduate student values time and organization more than ever before. The root of organizing my time is my passion for doing everything perfectly or in the best possible way."

Similarly, Amjad echoes this sentiment, acknowledging the time's value, particularly with familial obligations as she meticulously plans her day to maximize productivity:

> "I became aware of the value of time. The minute that passes by, I know its value. Of course, the presence of children, in my life, made me aware of the value of time. So, when morning time comes, I wake up with a well-organized schedule."

Sana'a and Amjad's emphasis on time management showcases their negotiation of identity within specific sociocultural contexts in which their narratives highlight the influence of familial obligations and societal expectations on their time management practices.

In Wenger's (1998) theory of Communities of Practice (CoP), their prioritization of time can be viewed as manifestations of participation and alignment within their communities of practice, where societal roles and responsibilities shape their identities as postgraduate students. Additionally, Sana'a and Amjad's narratives highlight the significance of Erikson's (1968) notion of identity development where individuals strive to establish a secure identity exemplified by their acknowledgment of the value of time and organization and their conscious efforts to navigate the challenges of academic life while fulfilling familial roles.

Secondly, both Sana and Amjad emphasize the importance of reading for postgraduate students as a fundamental skill for acquiring knowledge and research and writing skills:

> "One of the most important habits that I have gained as a graduate student is reading. Reading is one of the main things a postgraduate student is going to do, and she or he must do to be a postgraduate student. Reading a lot of research, reading for your next lecture, reading bout subjects and themes to write your essays and the tasks that your supervisor asks you to do. A postgraduate student reads more than anything else

> because you are in a phase of your life where you need to gain knowledge more than producing it and as a researcher, you need to read before you write.".

Amjad, similarly, recognizes reading as a cornerstone of academic endeavors, dedicating significant time to reading and researching amidst various responsibilities:

> "Surely, I am not yet an accomplished researcher, but most of my time spent this semester is dedicated to research. Most of the time I spend sitting at my desk this semester is devoted to reading, researching, and attempting to gather and organize my thoughts to come up with a distinctive idea. Currently, I am working on two research projects, one for publication and the other for my graduation research. Most of my time is spent reading, revising, and researching."

Both Sana and Amjad recognize reading as essential for generating ideas, gathering information, and refining their research projects which aligns with various studies mentioned in the text, such as Mora's (2017) examination of writer identity among applied linguistics undergraduate students and Azar's (2022) investigation of inclusive pronouns as a rhetorical strategy in review articles. Moreover, Sana and Amjad's emphasis on reading as a foundational activity aligns with Erikson's (1968) notion of identity exploration and commitment, where individuals actively seek to understand their roles within their social and academic environments which highlights the significance of reading in facilitating the transition from academic learning to professional identity development.

Thirdly, Amjad further illuminates the multifaceted nature of postgraduate life, describing her roles as a student, employee, homemaker, mother, and wife, each demanding meticulous attention and time management:

"As I mentioned; I am a student, an employee, a homemaker, a mother, and a wife and there is no hired help at the moment. There are practical tasks related to work, job duties that must be fulfilled, and things related to the job that need to be organized and discussed with the employer. As a daughter, my mother always needs me, and so does my family, especially being the youngest daughter and very close to her."

Amjad's account of her various roles aligns with Sang's (2023) notion of identity as a multifaceted and mental construct influenced by individual self-perception and social relationships and shaped by internal meanings and societal expectations associated with one's roles and positions within social networks. Additionally, Amjad's description reflects the diverse roles that contribute to her identity development where her identity is not only self-defined but also influenced by her interactions with others, such as her employer, family, and especially her mother which showcases the complexity of identity formation, particularly in how individuals negotiate their sense of self within the context of their social roles and relationships. Furthermore, Li (2023) emphasizes that identity encompasses individuals' self-image and awareness of their roles within specific sociocultural contexts which is exemplified by her description of herself as a student, employee, homemaker, mother, wife, and daughter. Similarly, Awadelkarim's (2022) perspective on the existence of multiple identities is reflected in Amjad's portrayal of herself as a student, employee, homemaker, mother, wife, and daughter where she possesses multiple identities at the same time.

Lastly, Sana reflects on the responsibility inherent in academic discourse, stressing the significance of accuracy and truthfulness in research writing:

"Regarding my responsibility, of course, I am responsible for every word I write especially my essays and tasks, etc. You as a researcher become responsible for what

you say and I believe that affects you daily, when someone asks me about something that I am not sure about, I don't answer because now I am aware of how valuable is to make sure that what you are saying or what you are spreading is true and verified."

Sana's emphasis on responsibility aligns with Erikson's (1968) concept of identity as a core aspect of the self that evolves through stages of development, including the struggle to establish a secure identity integral to adulthood acceptance. Furthermore, Sana's awareness of the impact of her words reflects an understanding of how societal and environmental factors shape her academic identity and responsibility in research writing.

**Journeys of Transformation: Reflections on Graduate Studies in Applied Linguistics**

Sana's narrative unfolds a transformative journey through her graduate studies in applied linguistics and her expectations of societal recognition and intellectual advancement:

> "Before applying or before being a graduate student, I had a vision, and right now, there is completely something different. Before I didn't know exactly what the journey was going to be like, I thought that I was going to be learning something new, something interesting, I would get a higher position in society, and people would look at me as if I was something different. I liked the idea but when I started the actual real-life journey, I became aware of how little I know about education in general. I have become ten times humbler. I have started to appreciate books, authors, doctors' professors, etc because I have become aware of the hardships they come through."

This realization humbled her and instilled a newfound respect for the depth of knowledge and dedication required in academia contributing to her evolving perspective within her field:

> "I see myself as someone who has a profound understanding of the concepts related to my field. I have become more knowledgeable, and I love my field of specialization

more than before because I have more profound knowledge about most concepts. I also have become humbler and more focused on what I don’t know."

Sana's realization of the vastness of knowledge and the challenges inherent in education highlights aspects of identity development, where individuals confront discrepancies between their initial self-concept and reality (e.g., Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory) which signifies a form of identity manifestation or exploration. Moreover, Sana's narrative reflects the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998) in which individuals initially engage in the community at the periphery characterized by her initial aspirations for societal recognition and intellectual advancement before gradually transitioning to more central roles as she immersed herself in the community and gained a deeper understanding of its practices and values through a process of participation and engagement that facilitated her identity development by exposing her to new perspectives, knowledge, and practices. Furthermore, Sana's narrative highlights the continuous pursuit of knowledge and the importance of humility in scholarly endeavors, along with the personal growth she has experienced and the unique perspective of applied linguistics students, highlighting their profound understanding of language and culture:

"What is different about us as graduate students of applied linguistics, is the kind of knowledge we have, and the way we look at languages is more profound. We are able more than any person to decompose sentences and sounds. We have more profound knowledge of certain things that maybe other people won't be aware of or won't notice these differences between languages and how language fixes the culture. I believe we have a different vision of the world because of our field of knowledge."

Sana’s narrative highlights the potential differences in linguistic proficiency and awareness between students with varying backgrounds which aligns with Mora's (2017) study on the

writer identity of applied linguistics undergraduate students in Mexico, particularly in finding that USA returning migrants used more advanced linguistic choices in expressing their identity compared to locally educated students suggesting that the experiences and educational backgrounds of students can influence their linguistic abilities and perspectives which can shape their identity development.

Secondly, Amjad reflects on a significant moment that solidified his identity as a graduate student and future researcher:

> "The moment I truly felt that I was indeed a graduate student was when we started collecting data from the students and when I began to introduce myself and tell them that I'm a master's student and I'm here to gather data for my graduation research. This was the moment when I felt that I was indeed a graduate student and soon to be a researcher, I mean, truly, with an accredited certificate."

Amjad's narrative reflects Erikson's (1968) concept of ego identity in which identity development involves a continual negotiation between individual experiences and societal expectations where her recognition of herself as a graduate student and future researcher reflects the integration of personal experiences of her engagement in data collection with societal roles where she is recognized as a graduate student and a researcher.

Lastly, Nora articulates the profound personal and academic growth she experienced during her postgraduate studies:

> "I've truly developed. In the beginning, a person might have moments where they might feel that they're not up to it or that they might not excel in anything, but I feel that I've developed the most in this aspect. So, the biggest improvement is my confidence in my abilities. As a researcher, many skills in terms of scientific research

> and my autonomy have developed a lot. In the beginning, it started literally from scratch. We used to see research as just writing and stuff but now we've progressed a lot and I can say about myself that I'm a good researcher. I felt that the postgraduate phase, especially the Master's, had a significant impact on many things for you. Not just academically and professionally, but also aspects of your personality."

Nora's account echoes elements of Erikson's (1968) framework of identity development in her confidence and autonomy which aligns with Erikson's concept of ego identity that involves an individual's self-awareness and sense of continuity over time.

In addition, her acknowledgment of external influences, such as societal expectations and educational experiences reflects Erikson's emphasis on the interplay between individual and social factors in identity formation. Moreover, her description of personal and academic growth emphasizes how identity is socially constructed and influenced by interactions within educational contexts which aligns with Wenger's (1998) acknowledgment of the role of communities of practice in shaping individuals' identities through participation, engagement, and negotiation, exemplified by her confidence and skills development through interaction and collaboration.

### 4.1.3 Future Identities and Aspirations as Graduate Students

Sana, Nora, and Amjad each share their unique perspectives on academic aspirations and strategies for navigating their future paths in applied linguistics.

Firstly, Sana's narrative reflects her future vision demonstrated by her unwavering passion for applied linguistics and her proactive approach to personal and professional development:

> "How I see my future depends on what will happen, if I have been accepted to be a lecturer, for example in college, I would see myself studying abroad to continue my

PhD studies but if not, I see myself as an employee whether as a teacher or something related to my major. Anyhow I see myself being passionate about applied linguistics because I have always been interested in studying it. I am planning to read more seeing for example TV shows or things related to my major more interestingly."

Sana's narrative reflects Erikson's (1968) view of identity development as a lifelong process influenced by individual, societal, and environmental factors by showcasing her ongoing struggle to establish her identity within the context of her future aspirations.
Additionally, her proactive approach to personal and professional development aligns with Erikson's emphasis on the importance of societal factors in shaping identity.
Furthermore, Sana's narrative reflects Wenger's (1998) theory in terms of how individuals form identities through participation in communities of practice, where shared goals and interactions shape their identity development through their engagement with the academic community. Moreover, Wenger's multiple modes of belonging, such as engagement, alignment, and imagination, can be noticed in Sana's narrative as she imagines herself belonging to different academic and professional contexts.

Secondly, Nora's narrative offers a nuanced glimpse into her future aspirations and the strategies she employs to navigate the uncertainties of her academic journey.
With a blend of optimism and uncertainty, she articulates her hopes for the future while acknowledging the unpredictability inherent in her path. Demonstrating a proactive approach to goal setting and planning, Nora outlines her future plan:

"After I finish my graduate studies, I'm very optimistic that it will make a difference in the future. I plan to apply to several places. I also plan to take some courses to develop myself. Like specific courses to take for a certain professional certification,

> for example, in the field of computer science or something like that. I was thinking of volunteering in the research field, like studying at the university's scientific research center to learn more. In the future, I'll try to publish research and stuff like that. So, I wanted to volunteer as a research assistant."

Nora's aspirations and strategies reflect Erikson's (1968) notion of identity as a complex psychological process influenced by societal and environmental factors.

For instance, Nora's plan to apply to multiple institutions and pursue additional courses illustrates her negotiation of personal and social identities within the academic sphere. Additionally, Erikson's concept of "ego identity," which involves a sense of continuity and coherence in one's self-image, can be seen in Nora's proactive approach to goal setting and planning for her future academic and professional endeavors.

Furthermore, Nora's intention to volunteer in a research field and publish research aligns with Wenger's (1998) emphasis on learning and identity formation within social contexts where Nora seeks to develop her identity as a researcher through engaging with the academic community and participating in research activities.

Lastly, Amjad articulates a clear vision for her academic future, indicating a steadfast commitment to advancing her expertise in applied linguistics. Beyond completing her master's degree, she expresses a determined intention to re-engage with academic work, considering avenues for further education such as pursuing a Ph.D. or exploring alternative options like diplomas or developmental courses:

> "After completing my master's, the next plan is, first, to return to academic work and then to search for any opportunity where I can further develop myself, whether it's, for example, pursuing a Ph.D. if I find an opportunity to continue the Ph.D. as a

> scholarship abroad or through internal study, or not necessarily a Ph.D., any diploma or developmental courses. This is the upcoming plan, of course, in addition to enhancing scientific research skills. I will strive hard to seize any opportunity where I can enhance my skills in scientific research, publication, or participation in publications. Surely, I will be happy to develop myself or participate in any future research."

Amjad's narrative reflects the theoretical perspectives on identity discussed in the literature. For example, Erikson's (1968) psychosocial framework emphasizes the interplay between individual, societal, and environmental factors in identity development, highlighting the importance of external influences such as education and societal expectations. Similarly, sociocultural perspectives, as exemplified by Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, emphasize the role of social interactions and participation in shaping identity suggesting that Amjad's academic journey and interactions within educational communities will play a crucial role in shaping her identity as a researcher and scholar.

### 4.2 Emotional Experiences and Graduate Students Identity Development

Addressing the second research question, this section explores the complex interrelationship between emotions and identity development to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional landscape within which the identity development of Saudi graduate students of applied linguistics occurs where emotional experiences, both positive and negative, significantly shape the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics.

### 4.2.1 Positive Emotional Experiences and Identity Development

Amjad's narrative portrays a significant shift in her emotional journey as a graduate student, especially as she approaches the end of her academic semester:

> "The feelings currently are positive feelings towards the goal I've been aspiring to for many years. Graduation was one of the most significant goals in my life that I looked forward to achieving."

Amjad experiences a profound transformation in perspective as she emphasizes the importance of embracing the learning journey rather than the end goal suggesting that cultivating a positive emotional mindset can enhance well-being and success.

Furthermore, despite the pressures of academia, Amjad finds intrinsic satisfaction in her research endeavors, emphasizing a strong sense of purpose and dedication:

> "Despite the pressures, I am so proud of myself. I've worked hard to reach this point. When I started researching, the thought that my research might get published, and someone might read it, brought me immense pride. I find real enjoyment in research and reading. It's not just obligatory reading; it's done with passion and love. There is real enjoyment in starting the morning with a cup of coffee to read. I can tell you that I enjoy this role. Despite the pressures, I'm enjoying it and I'm content with it. As I said, I'm proud of myself for reaching this stage."

It can be noticed through Amjad's narrative that her enjoyment and intrinsic satisfaction in research endeavors emphasize a strong sense of purpose and dedication which aligns with recent developments in emotion research that recognizes the role of positive emotions in language education, as illustrated by the "broaden and build" theory since Amjad's experience

reflects positive emotions potential; such as joy, interest, and pride in promoting well-being and academic success, as outlined by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012).

Furthermore, Amjad's narrative highlights the complex nature of emotions and their interrelationship with identity formation as significant dimensions of identity development, shaping individuals' self-concept and experiences which aligns with Barcelos's (2015) study.

Lastly, Nora's narrative complements this by offering insights into her emotional experiences as a graduate student, particularly regarding enthusiasm and fulfillment derived from academic accomplishments. She also highlights the intrinsic motivation and feelings of excitement driving her pursuit of knowledge and academic excellence:

> "To accomplish the task as required, exactly as it should be, this is the moment of peak enthusiasm and satisfaction when I've done the thing correctly …... I am excited the most when I feel like I've fixed something right at the academic level. Like, for example, when I start to conclude research, I feel that it's good, and I'm at the peak of enthusiasm. Like, a couple of weeks ago when we started analyzing data and I reached a positive result, I felt so excited."

Nora's narrative aligns with Barcelos's (2015) study which suggests that emotions are not just individual cognitive variances but are deeply intertwined with one's sense of self and identity as demonstrated by Nora's experiences which reflect how emotions shape her identity as a graduate student, influencing her perceptions, motivations, and interactions within the academic environment. Moreover, it can be observed in her narrative how her emotional experiences align with the dimensions outlined by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), for instance, Nora's expressions of enthusiasm and satisfaction reflect the feeling component of

emotions, while her heightened excitement during academic accomplishments corresponds to increased arousal.

### 4.2.2 Negative Emotional Experiences and Identity Development

Amjad describes the emotional burden of balancing academic pursuits with parental duties revealing the internal conflict experienced by many parents and the constant negotiation between personal aspirations and familial duties as she highlights the significant emotional challenges she faced at the beginning of her journey as a graduate student where this emotional turmoil evolves into a psychological crisis under mounting pressure, exacerbated by her lack of time management skills and her tendency to procrastinate:

> "I feel a sense of guilt that I left them (her children) watching TV, for example, or didn't sit with them, or they slept without me seeing them, or I wasn't with them ….. These emotions consumed me - tension, anxiety, and moments of intense crying. I felt lost, unable to understand myself. The pressure mounted, I lacked time management skills, and procrastination crept in. I couldn't adapt to the new situation."

Furthermore, Amjad provides a candid glimpse into the emotional rollercoaster of academic pursuit:

> "I always present myself as active and excellent, but when I sit alone with myself, I say 'No, I'm a failure, I can't. These feelings and fears have been growing inside me. The feelings of shame, sadness, disappointment ….. When I was with the therapist and sat talking, I went back to early memories of a professor who had a bad influence on me leading to tension anxiety, and a negative attitude toward learning…… I felt like I hadn't reached the stage where they see me as a graduate student yet. This was a stage of shock. I was confused, I didn't know what was expected of me"

Throughout her narrative, Amjad grapples with the dissonance between her outward portrayal of confidence versus the pervasive feelings of self-doubt and fear of failure showcasing the difficulty of reconciling external expectations with internal uncertainties.

Moreover, Amjad recalled the influence of past experiences, particularly the impact of a professor during her bachelor's degree highlighting the lasting emotional scars left by negative interactions and showcasing their impact on self-esteem and confidence as well as her confusion and frustration about the ambiguity surrounding her role as a novice graduate student and the lack of clear guidance or mentorship. Amjad's narrative reflects McIntyre and Gregresen's (2012) insights into the multidimensional nature of emotions, for instance, when Amjad expresses feelings of guilt, tension, and anxiety regarding balancing academic pursuits with parental duties, she touches upon the feeling and arousal components of emotions. Furthermore, Amjad's narrative highlights the social aspect of emotions as she grapples with societal expectations and cultural norms surrounding academic achievement and parental responsibilities, for instance, her experiences of feeling lost, inadequate, and misunderstood reflect McIntyre and Gregresen's acknowledgment of the social aspects of emotions and the role of interpersonal interactions and culture in shaping Amjad's emotional experiences as a graduate student. Moreover, Amjad's narrative resonates with Barcelos's (2015) study emphasizing the dynamic and multifaceted nature of emotions as she describes her emotional turmoil, physiological responses, and cognitive struggles during her graduate studies and echoing Barcelos's argument that emotions constitute a significant dimension of identity formation and power structures.

Lastly, Nora's recounting of negative emotional experiences within the academic realm unveils the complexities and challenges often faced by researchers:

> “I tried to fix things more than what was required of me to reach something perfect but then it turned out it didn't fit what I used in the research. Some professors ask for more than what's supposed to be or ask for it late…… I get angry at myself, if something specific is neglected or if I procrastinate and can't complete the task as required”

Nora reflects on instances where her initial enthusiasm turned into dismay upon realizing errors in her work which highlights the vulnerability of researchers when faced with unexpected outcomes, leading to emotions of frustration and self-doubt.

It can be observed through Nora's narrative that her self-doubt and frustration reflect deeper insecurities intertwined with her identity formation within academia, aligning with Barcelos' (2015) assertion that emotions are performative as identities. Furthermore, Nora's acknowledgment of feeling disappointed and frustrated due to neglected tasks or procrastination highlights the complexities of emotion, where emotions are multifaceted and dynamically intertwined with cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects (Barcelos, 2015; McIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Additionally, Nora's narrative aligns with McIntyre and Gregersen's (2012) multidimensional view, where emotions encompass feeling, arousal, purposive, and expressive components as well as the notion that emotions surpass mere states, emerging from complex interactions between individuals and their environment (McIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Finally, Nora's narrative echoes discussions on the interrelationship between emotions and identity by Barcelos (2015) and Bradshaw (2023) emphasizing the mutual influence between emotions and identity and highlighting how emotional reactions shape and are shaped by evolving identities.

### 4.2.3 Emotional Resilience and Identity Development

Sana's narrative embodies the growth that can arise from embracing the challenges of self-discovery exemplified by the transformative power of perseverance and resilience in shaping one's sense of identity:

> "I can see and feel the evolvement and development that has happened to me emotionally and mentally. The most prevailing feeling that I feel is that I matter more than before because I have worked on myself, and this is linked to the feeling of being proud of myself and how much I have achieved and how much I have been through, and the things that I came over..... the disappointments, the failure, and pressure by being more patient and more tolerant of failure."

Throughout her narrative, Sana acknowledges her perseverance and resilience in navigating the challenges she has faced, including disappointments, failures, and pressures rather than allowing them to define her showcased by her patience, tolerance of failure, and self-awareness:

> "Today I tolerate myself and I am much more kind to myself when I mess things up, for example, in the first assignment that I had as a graduate student in an academic writing course, the whole assignment was bad. I was shocked at my performance … as time went on, I became humbler and I became aware of the fact that it is okay to fail, because the more you fail, the more you learn."

Sana's narrative demonstrates the subjective experience of emotions, aligning with McIntyre and Gregersen's (2012) emphasis on the feeling component of emotions, for instance, she describes feeling a sense of pride and a sense of self-worth leading to a positive emotional experience because of emotional resilience. Furthermore, Sana's narrative embodies the

purposive aspect of emotions outlined by McIntyre and Gregersen through a goal-directed approach by actively working on herself and embracing her learning experiences. Additionally, Sana's recognition of the importance of self-compassion and resilience in the face of academic challenges reflects an understanding of how emotions are expressed and influenced by social interactions, resonating with McIntyre and Gregersen's emphasis on the expressive component of emotions. Moreover, Sana's narrative showcases not only her emotional resilience but also her evolving identity as a learner and academic, reflecting Barcelos's (2015) perspective on the interplay between emotions and their performative role in shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves in her description of her resilience story.

Secondly, Amjad's narrative reflects a journey of self-discovery and resilience amidst academic and emotional challenges:

> "I realized that indeed I needed psychological treatment to understand myself more. I consulted a behavioral therapist, and I understood what I was going through. After I understood what the problem was, it went smoothly. Since I knew myself, knew my feelings, and knew what I wanted and my goal I managed things easily."

Through therapy, Amjad gains insights into her identity, emotions, aspirations, and priorities which armed her with newfound self-awareness in navigating academic pressures with resilience, demonstrating a holistic approach to success that integrates emotional well-being with cognitive skills highlighting the importance of prioritizing mental health in academic pursuits. Thus, Amjad's transformation embodies the transformative power of self-understanding, resilience, and seeking support in overcoming adversity:

> "Indeed, I feel at ease. I understood myself, I understood my feelings. My feelings now are positive. I feel things have become clear. I understand how to deal with

> myself, even if I experience feelings of fear and worry, I grab a paper and pen, and I write what's on my mind. I start with what's bothering me the most to deal with my feelings."

Additionally, Amjad's narrative highlights her journey of emotional resilience and self-discovery within the context of her academic pursuits:

> "I truly felt I challenged myself and surpassed fear. I defeated all the negative emotions I felt during my upbringing. I knew my worth and recognized my skills. Previously, I used to see myself as less capable, and inferior among students. I felt inadequate. But when the second term came after behavioral therapy, I truly felt that I was capable."

Amjad's narrative reflects the multidimensional nature of emotions outlined by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) through her description of understanding herself, her feelings, and her goals through psychological treatment, involving subjective experiences (feeling component), physiological changes (arousal component), goal-directed behavior (purposive component), and social expression (expressive component). Furthermore, Amjad's narrative resonates with MacIntyre and Gregersen's distinction between emotions, moods, and temperament as she experiences negative emotions like fear and inadequacy, which could be considered specific emotional reactions (emotions) to her academic challenges as well as her ability to confront and overcome negative emotions suggesting a stable predisposition (temperament) for resilience. Moreover, her narrative highlights the performative role of emotions in shaping individuals' perceptions and actions which reflects Barcelos's (2015) discussion on the contextual nature and dynamic process of emotions demonstrated by her active engagement with her emotions in seeking support through therapy and adopting coping strategies.

Lastly, Nora's narrative provides a window into her emotional resilience amidst the challenges of graduate studies:

> "I mostly try to ignore the negative feelings that might make me delve deeper into the idea. I'm starting to adapt to the situation. I feel like I'm not as anxious as before. These feelings may be because of the new experience and comparing ourselves to others, like you don't compare yourself at your beginning to others' ends. When we see someone, for example, publish a paper…..., we feel a sense of pressure."

Nora's acknowledgment of her attempts to set aside negative emotions showcases an awareness of mood regulation, resonating with McIntyre and Gregersen's (2012) conceptualization of emotions as brief reactions to specific events, distinct from the more enduring experiences of moods. Furthermore, Nora's narrative of resilience and growth amidst academic challenges and pressures aligns with McIntyre and Gregersen's perspective that emotions play a crucial role in facilitating adaptation and coping strategies in response to life's challenges. Additionally, Nora's narrative reflects the interrelationship between emotion and identity as highlighted by Barcelos (2015) as she grapples with emotional struggles while shaping her identity within the academic context noting that emotions constitute a significant dimension of identity.

### 4.3 Agency and Graduate Students Identity Development

Addressing the second research question, this section explores the narratives of Saudi graduate students offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between agency and identity development within higher education contexts. Through the experiences of Sana, Amjad, and Nora, we delve into the multifaceted dynamics of autonomy and agency that shape their academic identity development.

### 4.3.1 Sana's Agency and Identity in Higher Education

Sana's narrative highlights the complex dynamics between agency and identity development as she grapples with the pivotal decision of balancing her educational pursuits with potential employment opportunities since this decision not only shapes her immediate trajectory but also plays a significant role in her identity development:

> "One of the most significant challenges I faced was choosing whether I get employed or that I dedicate my full time to studying. I was offered a job opportunity, in a governmental position, which is rare. However, after thinking about it, I withdrew from it and decided that since I am studying, I will dedicate my time fully to studying in the future. ….....So, this was one of the toughest challenges. The job was not related to my specialization, it's an administrative job, ….....so I feel that this decision will shape who I am for the rest of my life. Also, I noticed more than one student went through the same thing and left their jobs, ….....so I feel it's an important decision, that you leave a job and choose to study, it defines who you are."

Sana's narrative reflects her exercise of agency as a graduate student in applied linguistics, resonating with Huang and Benson's (2013) understanding of agency in applied linguistics research as a dynamic, co-constructed relationship with society that involves the attribution of relevance and significance to actions within social contexts, for instance, her decision-making process regarding employment and education exemplifies this dynamic interaction, as she navigates societal expectations and personal aspirations.

In addition, Sana's future career choices showcase her exercise of agency within her educational journey and her conscious and self-directed actions, reflecting Huang and Benson's (2013) perspectives on autonomy as a sense of mastery over the learning process

and agency as self-aware reflective actions. Furthermore, Block's (2009) emphasis on the interplay between structure and agency in identity research aligns with Sana's narrative since her decision-making process is influenced by broader socio-cultural and institutional factors as well as personal considerations, emphasizing the need to consider both individual agency and external constraints in understanding identity development within applied linguistics contexts.

Secondly, Sana's narrative highlights the nuanced dynamics of agency and empowerment experienced by graduate students in navigating their academic environment:

> "I mean, for example, in assignments, there isn't much, initiative, …. I mean, there are some instances where we are given some degree of initiative to express ourselves and give our opinions, but this point isn't emphasized enough. …...On the other hand, in terms of, bigger things, like decisions that are made, …...I mean, they usually come from higher authorities. ……We aren't given the opportunity to change or even give our opinions on the matter. …...Sometimes, the selection of major decisions is not all up to us."

Sana's experience of limited agency in assignments and academic decisions, suggesting a discrepancy between perceived and actual agency resonates with Huang and Benson's (2013) discussion of agency as a dynamic, co-constructed relationship within societal contexts, emphasizing its continuous negotiation. Additionally, the distinction between agency and autonomy in language education (Huang & Benson, 2013) sheds light on the nuances of Sana's experience and her frustration at the lack of opportunities to provide input reflecting the tension between autonomy and agency, where students may desire more control over their educational experiences. Moreover, Sana's narrative resonates with Block's (2009) view on

the ambiguity surrounding agency in identity research and its interplay with social constraints exemplified by the influence of hierarchical structures in academia on her engagement in decision-making processes.

Thirdly, Sana's narrative sheds light on the challenges of asserting her independence and autonomy within the academic environment:

> "Frankly, we have the freedom to speak in classes, to oppose the professor, to express our ideas and theories, etc. But in terms of agency, for example, if the professor objects to a certain law or a specific method, I don't see it adequately present for graduate students …. For example …... You feel that when you complain or something, your complaint will be drowned …... It won't make much difference, and this greatly affects the student. There is no flexibility at all in schedules or lecture times. Even when a student is employed, there's no assumption that there are evening or online classes…. I see that the professor has significant control over the student in an unjustified way."

In her narrative, Sana emphasizes the significance of agency and autonomy in decision-making and overcoming academic challenges, revealing a discrepancy between the theoretical perception of agency and its practical implementation, for instance, despite the actual efforts of encouraging graduate students to express their thoughts and ideas, they often find it very challenging to question some academic issues or practices which can affect the identity and agency of graduate students.

Furthermore, Sana touched upon the lack of support in addressing graduate students' complaints and problems and its significant impact on their academic autonomy, sense of agency, and identity development. It can be observed that Sana's frustration with the lack of

agency reflects Huang and Benson's (2013) perspective on agency involvement in actions and being mediated by social, cultural, and contextual factors. Moreover, Sana's narrative highlights the impact of agency on graduate student identity within academic contexts which aligns with Huang and Benson's (2013) view of the agency and autonomy influence on identity formation and development.

Finally, Sana reflects a profound engagement with the notions of agency and identity development within the context of her graduate studies:

> "For instance, some of the courses I see are beyond what we're supposed to study. … instead of those, there are better courses available and more closely related …... I mean, we're tired of the system where you, as a student, must study everything……... If we were allowed to express our opinions, it would give us confidence in ourselves and make us feel good. …. The most important thing we learn as Saudi graduate students is that you take responsibility for your learning. So, I feel like we're changing, you know, we feel more responsible than ever."

Sana stresses the need for changes in the curriculum and the empowerment of graduate students in expressing their opinions, showcasing her agency in advocating for improvements within her academic environment, questioning the relevance of certain courses, and suggesting alternatives. Additionally, Sana emphasizes graduate students' responsibility in taking ownership of their learning highlighting the critical role of agency in academic identity development and suggesting that this self-directed approach can promote a sense of agency in shaping academic identities within higher education contexts.

It can be noticed that Sana's proactive stance towards curriculum reform reflects Huang and Benson's (2013) assertion of agency as a dynamic, co-constructed relationship within social

contexts. Moreover, Sana's advocacy for self-directed learning resonates with Bradshaw's (2023) definition of agency as an intentional authority within local contexts.

Furthermore, Huang and Benson's discussion on the agency's role in identity research further contextualizes Sana's narrative, highlighting the interplay between agency and identity.

### 4.3.2 Amjad's Journey of Agency and Identity Development

Amjad's narrative on her lack of confidence in her decision-making abilities highlights a common issue among many graduate students:

> "Before I got behavioral therapy …I didn't feel capable of making decisions….. After I underwent behavioral therapy, I became in control of the situation…. I gained control over my decisions … over the things I wanted… I was completely satisfied and content."

Amjad undergoes a profound shift following her behavioral therapy, gaining insight into her emotions, desires, and goals which enabled her to assert control over her academic trajectory and become more autonomous. It can be observed that Amjad's narrative reflects Huang and Benson's (2013) study on agency in applied linguistics, in terms of the dynamic and contextual nature of agency where agency is not an inherent trait but rather emerges from a complex interplay of social, interactional, cultural, and institutional factors exemplified by Amjad's experience of undergoing behavioral therapy, showcasing this dynamic process, where external intervention contributed to her sense of agency and control over her academic trajectory. Additionally, Huang and Benson's distinction between agency and autonomy provides a framework for understanding Amjad's narrative, for instance, her decision to seek support and behavioral therapy reflects her self-aware reflective actions within social

contexts (agency) and her eventual sense of control and satisfaction showcases her mastery over the learning process (autonomy).

Furthermore, Amjad's experience of undergoing behavioral therapy resonates with Block's (2009) call to recognize the interplay between structure and agency, as external intervention can facilitate her autonomy and control over her academic trajectory as well as his critique of the ambiguity surrounding the definition of agency in identity research, highlighting the importance of defining agency within the context of applied linguistics to understand graduate students' experiences and identity development.

Secondly, Amjad emphasizes the importance of graduate students' active engagement in shaping their academic experience and identities through their sense of agency:

> "It's about giving students the autonomy to choose …...whether to take two midterm exams or one …. or even engage in discussions with professors about their ideas and have them taken into consideration…. I feel like this aspect has indeed been considered by the university and faculty members…. There's been attention to giving students some independence to decide what they want."

In her narrative, Amjad advocates for students' active engagement in decision-making processes, for instance, giving them choices and considering their opinions regarding assessment methods and curriculum design to support them in initiating positive changes within academic changes. Moreover, Amjad's advocacy for students' participation in decision-making reflects Huang and Benson's (2013) view of agency as actions shaped by contextual factors and resistance to dominant discourses.

Furthermore, Amjad's narrative of students shaping their academic journeys aligns with Huang and Benson's view of agency as a foundation for autonomy development, indicating a reciprocal relationship between agency, identity, and autonomy.

Thirdly, Amjad emphasizes the importance of setting clear expectations and supportive teaching methods, highlighting the value of theoretical and practical applications in enhancing graduate student learning experiences:

> "What I'd like to change as a graduate student within my environment, …. first and foremost, would be to provide academic guidance tailored to each group of students. …...Students need an academic advisor they can communicate with, discuss their problems with, and have these issues taken into consideration…. I needed that at the beginning of the semester…. I also like things to be clarified…. I want to know what the professor expects and what I should accomplish…. It's difficult when a student is told they're required to do something without clear guidance on how to do it…. This can lead to confusion and wasted time."

Amjad's narrative reflects her desire for clearer expectations and academic guidance which resonates with Huang and Benson's (2013) assertion of agency through social, interactional, cultural, and institutional factors as it acknowledges the need for support and guidance within specific social and institutional frameworks. Additionally, Amjad's emphasis on clarity and communication with professors reflects her agency in seeking understanding and guidance within her educational environment, reflecting Bradshaw's (2023) conceptualization of agency as intentional authority to make choices and act within local contexts.

Moreover, Huang and Benson (2013) discuss the interplay between agency and autonomy, noting that agency plays a role in individualized learning experiences, for instance, Amjad's

desire for clear expectations and mentorship can be seen as her exercise of personal agency and her sense of autonomy.

Finally, Amjad's narrative and reflection on her academic journey, particularly during her final semester as a graduate student, provides valuable insights into the concept of agency and the capacity to act autonomously and make decisions:

> "I try to enjoy the journey, meaning, at this stage, I have truly realized that I must enjoy the journey…. In the past few days, it was all about getting good grades, pressure, and trying to make everything perfect…. I wasn't enjoying the journey…But this semester, I tried to work passionately…Every day, I wake up deciding to be happy and truly feel that I am now on the finish line …and that I must enjoy the journey."

Throughout her narrative, Amjad describes feeling constrained by external pressures and expectations, particularly regarding academic performance and achieving certain goals like obtaining good grades where this focus on external validation may have limited her sense of agency since her actions were primarily driven by external factors rather than her intrinsic motivations or desires. However, Amjad undergoes a significant shift in perspective as she recognizes the importance of embracing the present moment and finding joy in the process rather than on external markers of success, reflecting a deeper sense of agency as she takes ownership of her experience and actively chooses to prioritize her well-being and happiness. Additionally, Amjad's narrative exemplifies Block's (2009) emphasis on the interplay between individual actions and social constraints as she navigates her academic journey, balancing personal aspirations with external expectations, ultimately asserting her agency in defining her experience. Moreover, Huang and Benson (2013) highlight the interplay

between agency and autonomy in language education, suggesting that agency may serve as an initial stage for autonomy development, with personal agency fostering increased autonomy over time, for instance, Amjad's intentional decision to prioritize joy in learning and embrace the present moment reflects agency and autonomy in her academic journey. Furthermore, Block (2009) highlights the challenge of maintaining the centrality of both structure and agency in identity research demonstrated by Amjad's narrative as she navigates her academic journey, negotiating between her aspirations and the societal expectations placed upon her as a graduate student where her ability to reflect on her experiences and make choices that align with her values highlights the transformative power of agency in shaping her identity as a learner and a graduate student.

### 4.3.3 Nora's Academic Agency as a Graduate Student

Nora's reflection on her academic journey unveils a profound narrative of agency development throughout her graduate studies:

> "But to make decisions on my own and to have the freedom to fix the things on my mind, …...I didn't feel capable of doing it until the end of the term…... But when I had the freedom to fix more things, I learned from more things…... The biggest challenge I faced throughout the master's program in general, from the beginning until now, was the writing style, the same way of writing……. I felt that academic writing improved my writing overall."

Nora's reflection on her agency as a graduate student where she describes her journey of gradually asserting independence and agency within the structured environment of her graduate program, aligns with Huang and Benson's (2013) view of agency as a co-constructed aspect of social and societal contexts. Additionally, Nora's experience of facing

challenges such as academic writing and gradually overcoming them demonstrates her agency in navigating her academic journey, reflecting Huang and Benson's conceptualization of agency as self-aware reflexive actions within social contexts.

Furthermore, Nora's narrative illustrates how her experiences with agency shape her perception of academic success and personal fulfillment, emphasizing the profound implications of agency for identity construction within the context of graduate studies as highlighted by Block (2009), view of the interconnectedness of agency and identity formation and development.

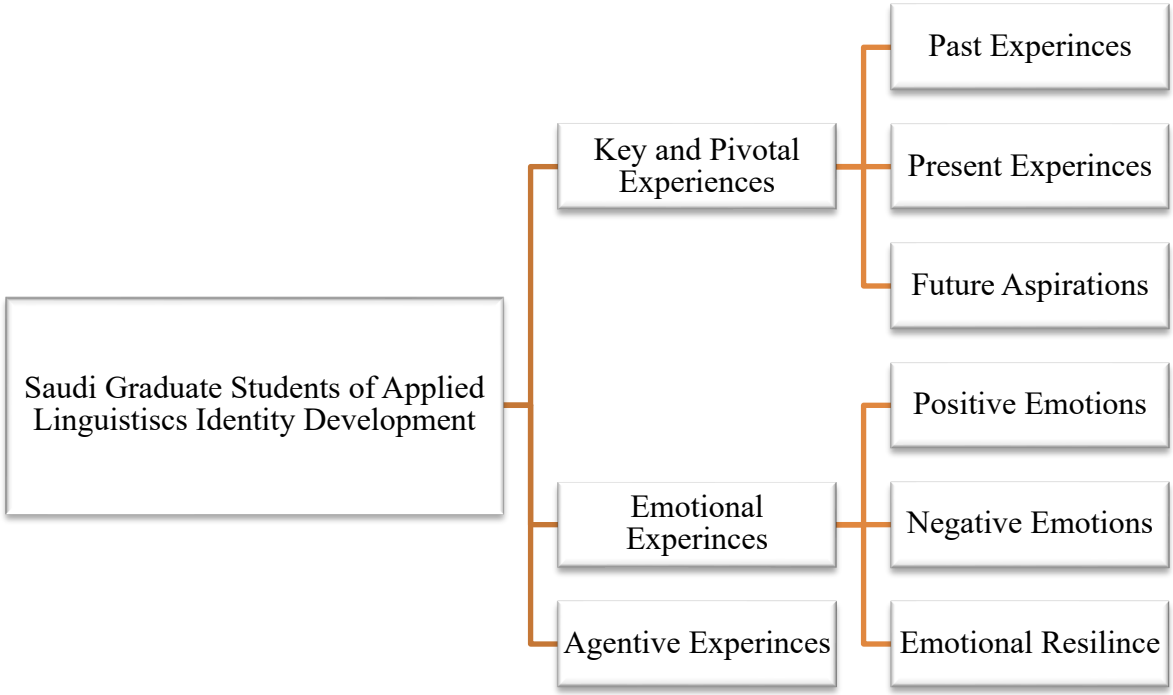



Figure 2 Key Themes and Findings

# CHAPTER FIVE

# CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics through their lived experiences to grasp the dynamic nature of identity development, emphasizing that identity is not static but continuously shaped.

Through analyzing interview transcripts, thematic findings emerged, highlighting key experiences across time and others related to emotional and agentive experiences.

In this chapter, I will conclude the main findings and discuss them, outline the major contributions, address the implications and limitations, and finally offer recommendations for future research.

## 5.1 Findings Summary

To answer the first research question on the key experiences shaping the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics across the past, present, and future, there were three main themes related to their past experiences, present experiences and current roles, and finally their future identities and aspirations.

Firstly, the narratives of Sana, Amjad, and Nora demonstrate the profound impact of past experiences manifested in early childhood and educational experiences on Saudi graduate students' current and future academic trajectories.

Secondly, the narratives highlight the complex interplay between time management, reading habits, and multiple roles and responsibilities faced by postgraduate students and showcase their reflections on their current roles and responsibilities as graduate students.

Lastly, the narratives of Sana, Amjad, and Nora on their future identities and aspirations exhibit a proactive stance toward their academic and professional development, reflecting their commitment to being part of the applied linguistics academic community.

Overall, the first main theme emphasizes the significance of early experiences, current roles, and future aspirations in shaping the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics.

Answering the second research question on the interrelationship between emotional experiences and identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, there were three main themes; positive emotional experiences, negative emotional experiences, and emotional resilience that were discussed in relation to their identity development.

Firstly, positive emotions such as satisfaction, fulfillment, enjoyment, excitement, and pride were reported among other positive emotions to play a critical role in shaping graduate students' identity development. On the other hand, negative emotional experiences demonstrated by negative emotions such as frustration, disappointment, fear, guilt, shame, sadness, anxiety, and anger caused by setbacks and challenges were shown to have an impact on graduate students' self-perceptions and sense of identity.

Lastly, there is a narrative of emotional resilience among graduate students, demonstrating a remarkable capacity to navigate academic challenges through coping mechanisms and strategies such as self-awareness, self-reflection, practicing self-compassion, taking therapy, and seeking help and support from others.

Overall, the narratives capture the complex interplay between emotional experiences and identity development among Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics and highlight the

importance of emotional resilience in navigating academic challenges to promote students' well-being and academic success.

Finally, answering the third research question on the agentive experiences of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics particularly in terms of the challenges they face and their exercise of agency in their responses to these challenges sheds light on the dynamic relationship between agency and identity development within higher education represented by the three themes of Sana, Amjad, and Nora narratives.

Firstly, Sana's narrative highlights agency in navigating societal expectations and defining her path and its impact on her identity development as a graduate student, demonstrated by her choice to prioritize academic pursuits over job opportunities. Secondly, Amjad's journey to autonomy showcases her sense of agency in gaining control over her academic trajectory through behavioral therapy, highlighting the agency's role in overcoming internal struggles and external pressures and shaping her identity as a graduate student. Lastly, Nora's narrative emphasizes the importance of academic freedom and supportive academic environments in promoting agency and identity development. Overall, these narratives reflect the significant role of agency in shaping the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics.

### 5.2 Major Contributions

Research on Saudi graduate students' identities in relation to emotion and agency in applied linguistics contributes significantly to existing knowledge.

Firstly, it showcases the complexity of identity formation and development by highlighting the various factors shaping Saudi graduate students' identity development. Secondly, the study examines the interrelationship between emotional experiences and identity

development among Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics, highlighting the significant impact of positive and negative emotions and emotional resilience on graduate students' perception of themselves and their sense of identity within academic settings. Thirdly, it addresses the challenges Saudi graduate students face in applied linguistics, emphasizing the role of agency in identity development within higher education where challenges are presented as opportunities for graduate students to exercise agency in shaping their identities.

Overall, this research on Saudi graduate students' identities in relation to emotion and agency in applied linguistics contributes significantly to our understanding of the complexities involved in identity formation and development in the Saudi higher education context and addresses the emotional well-being and agency of Saudi graduate students to promote their holistic development and success in navigating academic challenges.

### 5.3 Implications

This study has significant implications for applied linguistics, particularly in shaping pedagogical practices and guiding future research directions.

Firstly, understanding the influence of past experiences on Saudi graduate students' identity development, demonstrated by early childhood and educational experiences, can inform educators about the critical importance of these early experiences in shaping their current academic trajectories and future aspirations and motivate them to introduce some interventions to promote positive academic identities, for instance, establishing mentorship programs to provide guidance and support to students as they navigate their academic and professional journeys as graduate students in applied linguistics.

Secondly, acknowledging the multiple roles and responsibilities faced by postgraduate students highlights the pressing need to support students in balancing their academic responsibilities with other obligations by providing customized and personalized academic support services and resources, for instance, time management workshops or flexible study arrangements.

Thirdly, recognizing the transformative journeys and evolving perspectives of graduate students, demonstrates the importance of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that promote reflection and self-discovery since integrating these reflective practices within the curriculum or offering opportunities for experiential learning can facilitate graduate students' exploration of their identities and aspirations within the field of applied linguistics.

Finally, graduate students' proactive stance toward their academic and professional development highlights the importance of fostering a culture of self-directed learning and continuous improvement within the discipline since encouraging students to set academic and career goals, engage in professional development activities, and seek out networking opportunities can empower them to take ownership of their learning and future paths in applied linguistics.

Overall, these findings showcase the importance of creating supportive learning environments that acknowledge the diverse experiences and aspirations of graduate students in applied linguistics and address the needs of students at various stages of their academic journey to promote their holistic development.

### 5.4 Limitations

This study aimed to deeply explore Saudi graduate students' identity development in applied linguistics through their self-descriptions by employing a merged research design of a

multiple case study and a narrative inquiry and Sideman's set of three interviews to provide participants with sufficient opportunity to share their thoughts, reflections, and experiences. Throughout these interview sessions, the researcher prioritized providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and identities over providing quantifiable or generalizable conclusions.

There were some notable limitations of this study in terms of its sample size, data triangulation, and limitations related to its cultural context.

One notable limitation of this study is the small sample size of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics who are involved in the study at the university where the research was conducted which affects the study's potential to generalize its findings, a concern particularly emphasized in quantitative research paradigms rather than qualitative ones. While quantitative researchers prioritize "meaning in the general" and consider "sample-related variation," qualitative researchers like the author of this study prioritize the preservation of individual narratives and meaning-making processes. Secondly, the absence and lack of sufficient triangulation in data collection and data analysis, which involves cross-verifying findings using multiple methods or sources to enhance the credibility and validity of research outcomes, primarily relying on a single interpretation of the interview data, represents another notable limitation of this study, raising questions about the robustness of the interpretations drawn solely from interview data.

Finally, the study focuses on the identity development of graduate students in applied linguistics within the specific cultural context of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, certain sociocultural norms may not be fully understood by readers from different cultural backgrounds, highlighting the critical importance of incorporating diverse voices,

perspectives, and experiences to enrich the understanding of applied linguistics graduate students' identity development, particularly in an international and global context.

In short, this study faces limitations related to sample size, triangulation, and its cultural context, thus, recognizing and addressing these limitations is critical for future research on identity in applied linguistics.

### 5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on the identity development of Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics holds promising avenues for exploration. Firstly, broadening the sample size and diversity of participants would enrich the depth and applicability of the findings since a larger and more diverse sample could provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing identity formation and development within the target population.

Moreover, enhancing the data triangulation through various data collection and analysis methods would improve the rigor and validity of research findings since incorporating different data sources, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis can enable the researchers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts present another significant area for future research where researchers can uncover valuable insights into the interplay between culture and academic identity development of graduate students in applied linguistics. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the identity development trajectory over time can offer a longitudinal perspective on how identities evolve throughout the academic journey. This is considered a critical and promising area of investigation for future researchers on graduate students' identity formation and development in applied linguistics.

In addition, intervention studies aimed at supporting the emotional well-being and identity development of graduate students in applied linguistics represent another avenue for future exploration that can gain insight into the best practices for promoting graduate student success and well-being in higher education settings. Finally, investigating the role of institutional support, such as mentorship programs and mental health services, represents an important area to address in future research. Researchers can offer a more holistic perspective on identity development by integrating diverse theoretical frameworks and methodologies. By addressing these areas in future research, scholars can advance our understanding of how emotions, agency, and sociocultural factors intersect to shape the identity development of graduate students in applied linguistics.

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## Appendix I

## Interview Consent Form

**Research Title:** Saudi Graduate Students Identities in Relation to Emotion and Agency in Applied Linguistics: A Narrative Multiple Case Study

**Researcher Name:** Ghaida Mosfer Alqahtani

Please indicate your agreement by initialing the box(es) corresponding to the following statement(s):

- I confirm that I have read and comprehended the provided information sheet and have had the opportunity to seek clarification by asking questions about the study.
- I consent to participate in this research project and authorize the utilization of my data solely for study purposes.
- I acknowledge that my involvement in this study is voluntary, and I retain the right to withdraw at any time without any legal consequences.

Data Protection: I acknowledge that any information gathered about me during my participation will be securely stored on a password-protected computer and will be exclusively utilized for the purposes outlined in this study. Additionally, all files containing personal data will be anonymized.

Name of participant (print name):

Signature of participant:

Date:

## Appendix II

### Participant Information Sheet (Online interview)

**1. What does the research entail?**

As an MA student at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, I aim to investigate how Saudi graduate students construct and develop their identities in relation to emotion and agency within the Saudi higher education context. I seek to understand the interplay between your situated identity as a graduate student and your self-perceptions and how they are influenced by emotion and agency.

**2. What are the advantages of participating?**

Participating in this study will provide valuable insights for future Saudi graduate students in applied linguistics. Additionally, your involvement can help identify and address the concerns of Saudi graduate students regarding their experiences.

**3. Is my participation confidential?**

This research adheres to the university's ethical guidelines. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and stored securely on a password-protected computer to ensure confidentiality.

**4. Where can I find more details?**

For additional information, please feel free to contact (ghaidamosfer@gmail.com).

## Appendix III

## Interview Sample Questions

The following questions were adapted from Chung's (2023) and Mansouri's (2020) studies:

### First Interview (Past and Present Identity)

This interview aims to explore the participant's decision to become a graduate student in applied linguistics as well as their perceptions of their current roles and responsibilities.

1. Thinking of yourself as a graduate student currently, could you describe the key experiences from the past that influenced your decision to pursue a graduate degree in applied linguistics?
2. What do you think about yourself as a graduate student of applied linguistics? Is there any distinctiveness of being a graduate student in applied linguistics compared to other fields?
3. Could you describe your roles and responsibilities currently as a graduate student?

### Second Interview (Emotions and Agency in relation to Identity)

This interview aims to explore the participant's emotions and agency in relation to their identities:

1. How do you feel about yourself as a graduate student and your professional self currently? Can you describe the moments when you strongly identified as a graduate student? What factors contributed to this feeling?
2. Can you recount the emotional experiences you had in your post-graduate journey?

This includes moments of joy, excitement, surprise, anger, overwhelm, distress, frustration, sadness, etc. Do you have any specific incidents you'd like to share?

3. To what extent did you exercise or were permitted to exercise autonomy and responsibility as a graduate student?
4. What has been the greatest challenge of being a graduate student in this field and how did you overcome it?

**Third Interview (Future Identity)**

This interview seeks to delve into the key experiences influencing participants' decisions to continue their identity development within the applied linguistics community in the future.

1. How do you envision your role within the applied linguistics community in the future?
2. What aspects of being a graduate student in applied linguistics do you believe motivate you to persist or progress in this domain? Can you provide a specific experience that illustrates this?
3. Could you reflect on any shifts in your identity as a graduate student in applied linguistics that have occurred during or after the interviews?