

The Motivational Self-System of Learners of Kurdish as a Heritage Language: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

The ongoing increase in the population of Kurdish as Heritage Language (HL) learners encouraged the present study to explore the learners' motivations as well as the influential factors on its development. Second Language Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) was adopted as the theoretical framework wherein, the subscales of the Ideal-self, Ought-to self and Motivational Intensity were explored. The study drew on a mixed-methods design in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with four undergraduate participants and a total number of 213 undergraduate Iranian learners of Kurdish participated in a survey. The qualitative results indicated that the interviewees had a positive experience of learning Kurdish in the classroom and were more enthusiastic to get engaged in the process of learning in the future. Furthermore, the quantitative results indicated that the participants more often pursued Kurdish in terms of the Ideal self and that learning Kurdish revealed to be an opportunity to fulfill the learners' wishes. It was also found that the male participants were propelled by stronger motivational force which was more probably due to stronger sense of identity among male participants.

Keywords

Heritage Language; Ideal Self; Ought-to Self; Motivational Intensity; Identity; Kurdish Language.

1. Introduction

Iran is a multiethnic and multilanguage country and “enjoys ethnic-linguistic diversity” (Asl 85). Furthermore, “Iran, having hosted various languages such as Persian, Azeri, Kurdish, Mazandarani, and Baluchi, is among the multilingual countries in the world” (Asl 83). Based on constitution, the government intended to allow the language of its minorities to be taught in public educational centers. This policy can help such languages to be officially recognized.

Aliakbari, et al. postulated that “linguists have distinguished three main linguistic groupings within Kurdish in Iran: “Northern Kurdish (“Kurmanji”), Central Kurdish (“Sorani”) and Southern Kurdish” (5). They have considered further variations and postulated that “there are strong cultural ties between speakers of Kurdish and speakers of Zazaki, Gorani and Hawrami, and there is considerable geographic overlap between these languages and Kurdish” (5-6). Yildiz and Fryer (qtd. in Rezaei and Bahrami (2019)

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offered that “Kurds in Central Asia are distributed in Turkey (15.7–25%), Iran (5–10%), Iraq (15–23%), and Syria (15%)” (81). Anonby, et al. (2019) alluded to the remarkable population of Kurdistan province of Iran which is “over 1.6 million” as well as the uniqueness of Kurdish as the main spoke language. These are sufficient reasons to reinforce the need to investigate its learners’ motivations (10). There have already been many unfulfilled attempts to recognize Kurdish as a language to be studied academically. According to Sheyholislami:

In 1997 the Azad University of Sanandaj offered, for the first time, two credits as part of the general/elective credits (18 out of 136 for BA) for one term. The second attempt to run courses on Kurdish language and literature took place in 1998–1999 in two universities in Tehran: Shahid Beheshti and ‘elm va San’at. (“Kurdish in Iran: A Case of” 35)

Sheyholislami added that these courses were extra-curricular activities that were given no academic value. It seems that Iran had “a limited, restricted and controlled tolerance towards non-Persian minority languages” (Sheyholislami “Kurdish in Iran: A Case of” 37). Even if there was a permission to institutionally establish Kurdish language; it was revoked later. However, the new policies have changed dramatically and Kurdish has become both a field of study and a means of instruction in public universities in Iran. In addition to the newly established Kurdish language and literature at University of Kurdistan, Iran has established Azeri Turkish language and literature in the faculty of Persian and foreign languages at University of Tabriz.

Similarly, Balochi Language and literature have already been taught in the University of Sistan and Balochistan. They have uploaded a post from Hamid Baloch, the chairman of the Balochi language department on the university’s website on February 22, 2019. He referred to mother tongues as a pivotal source in building identification, cultural and educational interaction between nations. Consequently, he intensified the need to foster mother tongue by the government. All these new establishments of minority languages in Iran are promising hints of the government’s language planning and an attempt to maintain and teach them to be widely recognized languages.

Kurdish is considered as a macro-language which consists of almost five dialect groups: “Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), Central Kurdish (Sorani), Southern Kurdish (Kirmashani/Faili/Kalhuri), Zazaki and Gorani/ Hawram” (Sheyholislami “The Language Varieties of the Kurds” 30), whereas the present study does not seek to elaborate on its different dialects but its learners’ motivation towards learning it as a whole will be scrutinized. Therefore, what is significant in the present study is the exploration of factors due to which learners become more enthusiastic to learn Kurdish

as a heritage language. Accordingly, the present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant factors or themes in learner's motivation to learn Kurdish as a heritage language?
2. Is there any significant difference between Kurdish learners' Ideal self and Ought-to self in learning Kurdish as a heritage language?
3. Is there any significant difference between Iranian male and female learners in their motivational intensity to learn Kurdish as a heritage language?

2. Literature Review

Different studies have discussed Language Planning and Heritage Language Learning (HLL). Kalan (2016) inspected that although plenty of benefits has already been confirmed for having "mother tongue-based education;" "politicians, public figures, and the media in a variety of political and historical circumstances" have presented documents against it (156). Henceforth, he criticized the following six arguments which are against mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Argument 1: A common language creates a united nation.

Argument 2: Dominant languages enjoy natural superiority because of their linguistic structure and historical privilege.

Argument 3: Languages with a long history of written text production are culturally superior to other languages

Argument 4: Students should adopt the language of success as a pragmatic move.

Argument 5: Mother tongue-based multilingual education is ideal but not practical.

Argument 6: Mother-tongue based multilingual education will cause separatism and political disintegration. (159-175)

Fortunately, recent language planning and policy in Iran does not support such socio-political arguments which are against minority languages. In a myriad of studies, Arabic, Chinese-American, Quichua, Canadian, Vietnamese, Arabic and Somali, HLL were investigated (Akmalia, et al. 2021, Chen, et al. 2021, King, 2000, Cummins, 1992, Yeh, et al. 2015, Dávila, 2017). Sheyholislami and Sharifi conducted a survey among the Kurds in Southern California. In fact, they investigated their study in the diasporic context of the US. Their research indicated that "language maintenance is important to both parents and their children. Both generations see language not only as a symbol of identity but a means of building and maintaining relations with each other" (94). Yilmaz (2018) inspected the way by which "language ideologies and identities are constructed, resisted and negotiated in classroom interactions" in London (196).

Kheirkhah and Cekaite's study conducted in Sweden examined "spontaneous interactions between parents and children and explore the family members' efforts to shape children's heritage language use and learning outcomes" (320). Again, conducted in Sweden, Cekaite and Evaldsson's study illustrated "how young immigrant children in multilingual playful activities with peers and adults engage with and explore heritage language forms" (abstract). Rezaei and Bahrami came up with mixed views towards Kurdish as the heritage language. That is "Some believed that Kurdish should be a source of pride and dignity but some others felt humiliated to be labeled as shahrestani (non-Tehrani) when in Tehran" (103).

Hornberger (qtd. in Ricento and Hornberger, 402), introduced a framework on Language Planning and policy for which he integrated the theories of the following scholars, "Ferguson (1968), Kloss (1968), Stewart (1968), Neustupny (1974), Haugen (1983), Nahir (1984), and Cooper (1989)". Nourzadeh, et al. inspected "the motivation behind learning Korean as an additional language (KAL)" (abstract). Their study revealed the desire to fulfill the ideal-self as the most significant and effective factor in increasing the learners' motivation. As a result, the already conducted studies were neither based on an integrative model nor had the students of the University of Kurdistan as their study population.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present research article offered an integrative model in which three theories including L2MSS, Language Planning and Heritage Languages were discussed. The interaction between these theories contributed to a better understanding and analyses of the conducted research. Dörnyei (2005, 2009) had been highly effective in studies investigating language learners' motivations and were frequently employed to develop questionnaires in this respect. Such a theoretical framework can effectively represent students' motivations. Dörnyei's L2MSS (qtd. in Mahmoodi and Yousefi) is made up of the following three dimensions:

1. Ideal L2 Self, which is the L2-specific facet of one's 'ideal self': if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the 'ideal L2 self' is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves.
2. Ought-to L2 Self, which concerns the attributes that one believes one Ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes.
3. L2 Learning Experience, which concerns situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success). (3)

In the distinction proposed by Dörnyei, the Ideal L2 was “concerned with hopes, aspirations, advancements, growth and accomplishments” and the Ought-to L2 regulated ‘the absence or presence of negative outcomes associated with failing to live up to various responsibilities and obligations’ (“The L2 Motivational Self-System” 18). In another study, Nourzadeh, et al. claimed that “the ideal L2 self has a promotion focus” (3); whereas “the Ought-to L2 Self has a prevention focus” (4).

Language Planning is an issue of paramount significance in sociolinguistic studies. Here, Iran is not an exception and the very act of permitting the minorities’ language to be academically taught is a language planning with some policies in the background. As notified in a conversation with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas in Kalan’s study (2016), “the right to education” (p. 42), which revealed everyone’s right to be taught through the medium of his/her mother tongue, with a more emphasis on “Kurdish-medium education” is highly emphasized (p. 42). In fact, the language policy adopted in Iran can be considered as a Heritage Language Planning. Regarding the relationship between language planning and language policy, Kaplan and Baldauf asserted that language planning “is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, group or system” (xi). In fact, Language Planning indicated “decisions made about the official use and recognition of languages can have a powerful impact on the long-term strength of a language” (Meyerhoff 108). In another study, Kalan (2016) argued that:

Policy makers could look at the economics of multilingual education through philosophies that value native cultures as important sources of knowledge, creativity, and morality; that regard students as individuals whose identities and self-defined existences are more valuable for society than their immediate profitability. (174)

It could be inferred that multilingual learners are valuable entities and sources of originalities related to culture, knowledge and morality. Modaresi (qtd. in Asl) maintained that “language planning activities can be directed at two main areas: “strengthening and developing Persian language on the one hand and strengthening and developing local languages and dialects, on the other hand” (85). The second of which was the issue of discussion in the present study.

In the context of Kurdish and other minority languages in Iran it is important not only to look at the constitution and the officials’ positions and attitudes towards minority languages and Persian, but also to examine the extent to which languages are used in a variety of domains, especially education. (Sheyholislami "Kurdish in Iran: A Case" 24)

Establishment of teaching any specific languages in the educational system can reinforce their strength and vitality. The very act of allowing Kurdish language to be academically taught secures it from a danger called “linguicide” or “language death (Weisi, 2021, Skutnabb-Kangas and Harmon, 2018, Chayinska, et al., 2022). Moreover, Meyerhoff claimed that vitality refers to the “likelihood that language will continue being used for a variety of social functions by a community of speakers, and we will see that vitality is influenced by institutional, social and demographic factors” (108). In the present study, the institutional support was a significant factor in making the Kurdish language a widely recognized language.

HLL is not an isolated and new phenomenon. Different terms were deployed to refer to this very concept which included, ancestral languages, immigrant minority languages, community languages, and native languages. Fishman divided HL into three categories including, indigenous, colonial and immigrant languages (81). Valdés, et al. postulated three main criteria to identify heritage language students with. According to her, the first group of heritage learners are raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken. The second group, speaks or relatively understands the heritage language and finally the third group of learners are to some extent bilingual in English and the heritage language (p. 38). In addition, Valdés described heritage language speakers as “L1/L2 users” who “fluctuate in their preference or perceived strengths in each language” (“Bilingualism, Heritage Language” 414).

Montrul posited that “heritage language learners are the children of families who speak an ethnolinguistically minority language” (3). She added that “heritage speakers usually enroll in classes which are “designed for students with cultural and linguistic ties to the language” (ibid). Kondo-Brown defined it as “a language regularly used in the home or community” (1). Campbell and Rosenthal described HL as “national resources” and “valuable assets” (166). The United State was not the only country which sought to revive and retain HLLs, such a tendency was associated with several reasons, one of which was the “increased recognition of minority rights (both civil and linguistic” (166).

4. Method

4.1. Design

The present study adopted a mixed-methods design in investigating the motivational self-system of learners of Kurdish. The data presented here were collected by semi-structured interviews and a developed questionnaire. The logic behind conducting interview before distributing questionnaires was to figure out their sense of attachments, the quality of their experience and motivational outcome, and to learn about the factors affecting their motivation to be a base for the descriptive phase of the research as well as to get assured

about the applicability of the questioner for the given participants in the next phase. The study, then, probed deep into the transcription of the interviews. Since, the learners aspired to become more proficient and were inclined towards perfectionism for a number of reasons and there were somehow some thematic differences between male and female learners, L2MSS questionnaire was distributed to measure the extent of respondents' motivation towards reaching idea-self and ought-to self as well the gender differences.

4.2. Participants

Two groups of participants were addressed. For the interview, four undergraduate students (3 females, and 1 male) in Kurdish language and literature from the University of Kurdistan constituted the sample. As for the survey, a total number of 213 Iranian learners of Kurdish as a heritage language from the University of Kurdistan, Iran served as participants. The sample included undergraduate Kurdish major students. The questionnaire's respondents were selected based on a convenience sampling procedure (Ary, et al., 2018). The participants consisted of both male ($N = 96$) and female ($N = 117$) Kurdish students and their ages varied from 19 to 26, with the mean age of 20.95 ($SD = 2.16$). The participants had already passed the national university entrance exam in order to get admitted to the university.

4.3. Instrumentation

A motivation questionnaire with three scales was used to collect the quantitative data, with the items developed based on doing both a literature review on the already constructed questionnaires on learners' motivations to learn a language as well as several questions in the form of an open-response items in a questionnaire. Here is the list of the articles, the questionnaires of which were employed as samples to develop the present study's questionnaire. They include; Lamb (2004), Coleman, et al. (2007), and Xu and Moloney (2014). Since all the participants could understand Persian Language, the present authors translated the items into Persian. After checking its validity and reliability, the questionnaires were submitted to the respondents and the interview protocols were developed based on the already conducted studies. In the present questionnaire (Table 1), the first two scales were meant to operationalize the distinction between the Ideal Self (9 items) and Ought-to Self (8 items) in language learning, and the third scale was to operationalize the motivational intensity of language learning (6 items).

4.3.1. Dimensions and Psychometric Properties of the Questionnaire Scales

As the first step, normality of the data, missing values, and outliers were examined prior to further analyses. Following that, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to assess the structure of the scales. The extraction technique and the rotation method were

principal component analysis and varimax analysis, respectively. Moreover, construct reliability as well as validity of scales were verified (Hair et al.).

As previously pointed out, the purpose of running EFA was to examine the dimension structure of the scales. From the very beginning of the study, the researchers evaluated the psychometric properties of the scales to see if they were adequate. That is, before conducting EFA, it was revealed that the Bartlett's tests of sphericity for the scales were significant ($p < .001$) and the Kaisere Meyere Olkin (KMO) index of sampling adequacy varied from 0.70 to 0.84. Following Hair et al., we set the eigenvalues at greater than 1 and standardized factor loadings above the 0.60. As illustrated in Table 2, three dimensions emerged for the motivation questionnaire. Table 2 indicates the retained items with no cross loadings. The HLL motivation questionnaire had a three-factor solution which accounted for 64.03% of the total variance. The first dimension demonstrated the Ideal self (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$), the second dimension was concerned with the Ought-to self (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$), and the third dimension was related to motivational intensity (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$).

Construct	Indicators	Factor loadings
Ideal Self	I can imagine myself using Kurdish effectively for communicating with the Kurdish people in different regions of Kurdistan.	.78
	I imagine myself speaking Kurdish with native speakers of its different varieties.	.81
	I imagine myself speaking Kurdish with other Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.	.76
	Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using Kurdish.	.73
	I imagine myself studying in a university where all my courses are taught in Kurdish.	.66
	I imagine myself writing formal Kurdish fluently.	.86
	I imagine myself reading formal Kurdish fluently.	.71
	I imagine myself being able to understand Kurdish varieties of other Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.	.64
	I imagine myself living and making friends in a modern community, using Kurdish.	.75

Ought-to Self	If I fail to learn formal Kurdish, I'll be letting other people down.	.67
	I study formal Kurdish because close friends of mine think it is important.	.83
	Studying formal Kurdish is important to me because other people will respect me more if I have the knowledge of Kurdish.	.79
	I consider learning formal Kurdish important because the people I respect think that I should do it.	.82
	Studying formal English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my peers/teachers/family.	.78
	Learning formal Kurdish is necessary because people surrounding me expect me to do so.	.80
	I have to learn formal Kurdish or else people's image of me as a smart student may become negative.	.86
	I should learn formal Kurdish or else people may think that I am a poor learner.	.65
Motivational intensity	Do you like the atmosphere of your Kurdish classes?	.76
	When I am in Kurdish class, I volunteer answers as much as possible.	.66
	When I have a problem understanding something we are learning in Kurdish class, I immediately ask the teacher for help.	.84
	When it comes to Kurdish homework, I work very carefully, making sure I understand everything.	.77
	If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra Kurdish assignment, I would definitely volunteer.	.74
	I actively think about what I have learned in my Kurdish class.	.69

According to the results depicted in Table 1, the factor loadings and the reliability coefficients of the scales were acceptable (Hair et al.). Convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al.) as the sub-types of construct validity are offered to evaluate the validity of the present study's variables which include ideal self, ought-to self and motivational intensity. Hence, a single-level confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the collected data. The results of CFA showed acceptable fit of the model ($\chi^2 = 94.36$, degrees of freedom = 48, $p < 0.001$, Comparative Fit Index = 0.95; Tucker-Lewis Index = 0.94; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = .04, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual = 0.05).

Table 2. Convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs.

Variable	Convergent validity		Discriminant validity		
	CR	AVE	Ideal self	Ought-to self	Intensity
Ideal self	.85	.63	.82		
Ought-to self	.89	.59	.23	.74	
Intensity	.91	.61	.33	.24	.69

Note: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted

These results in addition to those presented in Table 1 indicate that the criteria put forth by Hair, et al., were all met, suggesting the adequacy of the psychometric properties of the used scales.

4.4. Procedure

The present study began near the end of the first academic semester in January, 2022, a period in which Iran was still suffering from the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the students were out of university and accessing them was not convenient. In order to conduct the first phase, which was the qualitative section, the researchers asked the head of Kurdish Language and Literature department at UOK to introduce some of the top undergraduate students in Kurdish Language and Literature. Subsequently, four students were introduced and selected through this purposive sampling. After getting their phone numbers from their head of department, the researchers called them and asked to cooperate in conducting the study by answering some open-ended questions which were sent to their WhatsApp accounts in written form.

They cooperated well and the whole data were gathered after one week. The students shared their recorded voices via WhatsApp, the contents of which were fully transcribed and the themes were extracted and categorized in Table 3. The questions of the interview were almost developed based on Dörnyei and Otto's three phases of motivation to learn a language (qtd. in Alqahtani). They divided the action sequence process into three phases including "pre actional phase, actional phase, and post actional phase" (31). Since the participants in the present study were undergraduate students, their motivational reasons for studying and maintaining their HL could be well exemplified by refereeing to Dörnyei and Otto's first two motivational phases rather than the last one; accordingly,

their post-actional motivations could not be elaborated on here, in that it was not still actualized. Posing the interview questions, the first research question was synthesized into the following three questions when asked the interviewees; however, they were merged as one in the first research question.

- 1) What are the wishes/hopes, desires and opportunities that made you choose studying the Kurdish language?
- 2) Are the motivational stimuli for learning Kurdish internal, external or both? (Explain it please)
- 3) Has your degree of motivation been decreased, sustained or modified after being more engaged in studying the Kurdish Language?

There are two sets of questions in this study. The former set entails the research questions, while the latter one constitutes the interview questions. Three interview questions are merged and form the first research question. As for the quantitative section, the reliability and validity of the scales were examined and then reported to be adequate. The questionnaires were distributed via Telegram, WhatsApp and email in February 2022. After two months, 213 out of 260 questionnaires were filled and returned. Subsequently, they were analyzed to find the answers for the second and third research questions. The qualitative phase focused on the participants' motivational factors to study Kurdish as a HL, while the quantitative phase focused on the participants' L2 Ideal Self, L2 Ought-to Self, Motivational Intensity and different degrees of motivation for each gender.

5. Results

5.1. Qualitative Results

The interviewees answered the interview questions in details, they were eminently consistent in their answers and had also elaborated on their personal examples and experiences to make their answers more tangible. The following table offers the dominant themes that had already affected their motivation to start and continue learning Kurdish language academically.

Table 3. Factors affecting students' motivations towards learning Kurdish as a Heritage Language

Categories	Themes	Example Excerpt
1) Family Effect	Childhood, school and previous experiences, Parental enthusiasm	Nian: I was born in a family that familiarized me with Kurdish children story books.
		Adnan: I was born in a Kurdish family with Kurdish parents.
		Parvin: I have always been supported and motivated by my family to learn Kurdish.
		Sima: From early childhood, I have always been interested in reading Kurdish books.
		Sima: Before entering university and studying Kurdish as an academic field of study, I was familiar with Kurdish lexicography and spelling.
		Parvin: One of my uncles is a poet and his poems are in Kurdish. Whenever he reads me some versus or introduces me his new poems, I become more interested in learning Kurdish words in a poetic context.
		Parvin: My mother is a translator. She has already translated several books from Kurdish to Persian.
	Family priorities	Adnan: Since all my family members are interested in studying Kurdish books, I usually spend some days Reading Kurdish books especially Kurdish novels
		Sima: My husband is highly interested in studying the Kurdish language and he motivates more to study it academically.
		Parvin: Marivan, where my husband and I live now, speak Kurdish language with a thicker and more interesting accent than my own.
2) Intrinsic Motives	Lexical literacy and etymological curiosity	Adnan: I have always been interested in knowing more about Kurdish vocabularies and their etymology.

	Self-confidence	Adnan: the more I learn Kurdish, the more self-confidence and mental peace I get.
	and self-esteem	Adnan: the deeper I am engaged in the process of learning Kurdish, the more inner satisfaction I get due to being closer to my real being.
3) Geographical Area	Kurdish communities, cities and provinces	Nian: I have grown up in multiple Kurdish regional areas, all dominated by Kurdish people, language and culture. Adnan: my family and I have experience living in various Kurdish cities.
4) Language & Identity	Serving the mother tongue	Nian: I have always aspired to serve the Kurdish language in any possible way. Adnan: Although I was born in a family with Kurdish parents, I couldn't speak Kurdish fluently. It created a sense of estrangement with my mother tongue. Accordingly, I attempted to fill the gap that arose by the contrast between who I was in fact and who I represented to be by being only able to speak Persian.
	Cultural maintenance	Sima: I have always been enthusiastic to become informative about Kurdish history, its culture and celebrities.
	Self-identification, Belonging & Attachment, a way to escape anxiety	Adnan: Being away from language means being away from mother tongue and identity for me. Adnan: although I was spiritually engaged with the Kurdish language, I couldn't speak Kurdish and I was not able to use Kurdish idioms, I couldn't feel belonged, involved or included in family parties or gatherings. Henceforth, I was motivated to learn the language so that I could get the sense of belonging and avoid further bewilderment.
5) Extrinsic Motives	University Professors & Classmates	Nian: My university professors are one of the most significant sources of inspiration. They are knowledgeable and helpful. Parvin: I appreciate having Proficient Kurdish professors at university. They are always sources of inspiration and encouragement for me.

		Adnan: Through interacting with classmates of different dialects, I have been familiarized with various dialects and different Kurdish accents.
	Media	Nian: I used to watch Kurdish children's TV channels. Even now, I am always engaged in watching Kurdish channels and programs broadcasted from them.
	University	Adnan: Being provided with the opportunity to study the Kurdish language academically at University of Kurdistan has ostensibly increased my motivation.
	Social Networks	Nian: I have always been active through the social networking sites, and have done my best to follow Kurdish Telegram Channels.
	Kurdish Associations	Nian: I always do my best to attend the Kurdish associations either online or offline.
	Kurdish newspaper	Nian: I always read Kurdish newspapers so that I become more informative and be exposed to my mother tongue frequently.

5.2. Quantitative Results:

The present study sought to answer the first research question qualitatively through semi-structured open-ended interview questions; however, the answers to the second and third research questions were provided by analyzing the data collected via distributed questionnaires. Therefore, to address the second research question, a paired-samples t-test was performed to compare the scores on each variable (i.e., Ideal Self and Ought-to Self) for the same group of Kurdish language learners. The outcomes of the t-test revealed that a significant difference was observed between the mean of Ideal Self ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.89$) and that of Ought-to Self ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.78$) at the .05 level of significance ($t = 3.02$, $df = 155$, $n = 156$, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI for mean difference 0.09 to 0.42, $r = .74$), implying that the Kurdish learners' scores for Ideal self were substantially greater than their Ought-to self scores.

Table 4. Results for Kurdish learners for each variable

Outcome	Ideal Self		Ought-to Self		95% CI for Mean Difference	t
	M	SD	M	SD		
	4.09	0.89	3.83	0.78	0.09, 0.42	3.02**

To address the third research question, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores of Motivational Intensities for males and females. As indicated in Table 5, the Motivational Intensity scores were higher for the males ($M = 3.65$, $SD = .96$) than for females ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .83$) at a significant level [$t(154) = 4.61$, $p < 0.01$].

Table 5. Results for motivational intensity for males and females

Groups	M (SD)	t	Cohen's d
Male	3.65 (.96)	4.61**	.47
Female	3.17 (.83)		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

6. Discussion

The present study sought to answer three questions; thus, three sections are included in the discussion. First, the qualitative results reported in table 3 are scrutinized then the discussion will be directed in a way to investigate the results achieved for the second and the third research questions reported in tables 4 and 5 respectively. As is known, a learner's motivation is not shaped in vacuum. It is a collective entity that is itself affected by a variety of factors. The motivational sources could also be found in non-linguistic factors such as cultural and social ones. He claimed that "to the HL learner, an HL may provide valuable personal, familial, and national resources, or it can become a linguistic and cultural liability" (67). According to Ryan and Deci, (qtd. in Temples) "learners can be extrinsically motivated by factors external to the language itself such as academic achievement or others' desires or intrinsically motivated by enjoyment of the language learning process" (106). The same was true about the present study in which both intrinsic and extrinsic motives were found as influential factors in affecting learners' motivations.

Inquiring into the qualitative section (Table 3), the analyses of the interview data yielded the findings for the first research question which indicated that the participants in this study were highly motivated to learn Kurdish. Thereby, childhood, school, family, lexical literacy, etymological curiosity, self-confidence, Kurdish communities, mother tongue, cultural maintenance, identity, attachment, anxiety, university professors, classmates, media, social networks, Kurdish associations and newspapers were recognized as dominant factors affecting learners' motivations. All the aforementioned factors are what propel the individuals to become who they are, who they should be and who they aspire to become. Interviewees alluded to the role of their families in enhancing their motivation to study Kurdish as a HL. High influences of family on learners' motivation have been verified in other studies as well (Sun, et al. 2020; Melo-Pfeifer

2015; Yeh, et al. 2015). The significance of sense of belonging has also been observed in the interviews. Dávila articulated that “students and teachers alike articulated HL education as both a right and a necessity for maintaining ties to their immigrant communities in Sweden and to their countries of origin” (404). Similarly, one justification for the interviewees’ motivation to learn HL in the present study can be traced back to their tendency to acquire or keep the sense of belonging.

King revealed that “language ideologies of particular communities are critical to the success of both heritage language programs and language revitalization efforts” (167). In the same way, the interviewees avowed language ideology to be an influential factor in HLL (Jeon 2008; Leeman 2012; Lowther Pereira 2010). Lexical literacy and proficiency played significant roles in increasing learners’ motivation to study their HL. Schmitt emphasized that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (55). Here, multilingual learners are equipped with satisfactory level of lexical knowledge. “Policy makers could look at the economics of multilingual education through philosophies that value native cultures as important sources of knowledge, creativity, and morality; that regard students as individuals whose identities and self-defined existences are more valuable for society than their immediate profitability” (Kalan 2016, 174). That is, multilingual learners are valuable entities and sources of originalities related to culture, knowledge and morality. Most of the students had already been exposed to and were to some extent competent and literate in their heritage language. Moreover, Siridetkoon and Dewaele (2018) alluded to the fact that “learners will try to diminish the gap between their cultural self and ideal future self in order to reach the desired state of being a proficient user/speaker” (324). Such a transition towards proficiency was a common desire which was also observed in the present study.

In terms of the interviewee’s responses, media revealed to be another influential factor in HLL. Szecsi and Szilagyi confirmed that “media technologies can offer innovative ways for children to learn about the heritage culture, traditions, and norms” (278). Furthermore, Learning was more effective if there were “networks of people who engage in similar activities and learn from each other in the process” (Warschauer 120). Thus, sharing the same media channels and being provided with the opportunities to cooperate via social networks paved the way for an easier collective learning. The results for the second research question (Table 4) demonstrated that the Kurdish learners’ scores for Ideal self were substantially greater than their Ought-to self scores. Such findings were in line with the following studies. (Khaleghizadeh, et al. 2020; Nourzadeh 2020). However, Doiz and Lasagabaster’s study indicated the prevalence of the ideal-self over ought-to self for teachers not students. In another conversation with Jim Cummins, again in Kalan’s study (2016), Cummins reported that:

One can be a Kurdish one can be a Kurdish speaker and a Farsi speaker at the same time. And one can be full citizen of Iran while speaking a minority language and advance within the society. speaker and a Farsi speaker at the same time. And one can be full citizen of Iran while speaking a minority language and advance within the society. That's the ideal. (p. 86)

Accordingly, being from a minority language should not become an obstacle but an escalating force to promote individuals within the society. Giving priority to reach a significant level of the ideal-self by learners indicated that they are striving for excellence. In fact, each of the 9 items included in the ideal-self scale in the present study, evaluated a particular aspect of the positive features learners aspired to achieve. Learners envision their future selves to acquire communicative skills, native like proficiency, career-related opportunities, as well as competency in understanding, speaking, reading and writing Kurdish. Knowing Persian, English and Kurdish language, the participants could be labeled multilingual learners. They are highly motivated to achieve the “ideal multilingual self” (Henry 548).

They are confident about their ideal future selves; hence, their anxiety decreases to a great extent (Bensalem and Thompson 2022; Thompson and Khawaja 2016; Dewaele, et al. 2008). The higher the learners' achievement in HL is, the less their anxiety becomes (Botes, et al. 2022). Since learning Kurdish language is a choice for these students, they enjoy it (De Smet et al. 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014). In fact, “growing up in homes and communities in which the grandparents and parents continue to speak their native or Heritage Language (HL), the children develop some degree of HL Proficiency” (Campbell and Rosenthal 166). The more languages a person knows, more proficient they will become.

Kalan (2016) proved that “teaching through the medium of students' mother tongues increases academic success;” in addition, he elaborated on “the tight connection between language and identity and hence the impact of the use of students' first languages on the process of learning” (p.155). In another study, Weisi (2013) argued that the more a child's mother-tongue is maintained, a better performance will be achieved when dealing with a foreign language. All these enumerations intensify the positive effects of multilingualism. Here, envisioning themselves to understand and speak to natives, the learners revealed high degrees of self-confidence.

In terms of the Ideal-self items of the present questionnaire, finding a future career for the respondents might require proficiency in Kurdish. Accordingly, as Dörnyei argued, “in our idealized image of ourselves we naturally want to be professionally

successful and therefore instrumental motives that are related to career enhancement are logically linked to the ideal L2 self” (“The L2 Motivational Self-System” 28). The aforementioned factors would probably account for the higher ideal self among the currently studied HLL.

The present study’s findings for the third research question (Table 5) indicating higher motivational intensity among male learners in comparison with female counterparts were in line with only Ludwig’s study (1983). A bunch of other studies suggest that women are generally more motivated than men in learning a second language (Chaffee, et al. 2020; Nourzadeh, et al. 2020; Abidin, et al. 2012; Lai 2007; Mori and Gobel 2006; Williams, et al. 2002; Baker and MacIntyre 2000; Wright 1999; Sung and Padilla 1998; Muchnick and Wolfe 1982).

With regard to the aforementioned findings, one should not be ignorant towards the existence of gender differences in Language learning motivation; however, there are some studies the findings of which announce a different finding. They suggest that in terms of motivation in learning a second language, males and females do not show significantly different results (Akram and Ghani 2013; Abu-Rabia 1997; Bacon 1992) It is also affirmed that “gender is a social construction” and it is an oversimplification to consider gender motivational differences as a fixed biological fact (Ehrlich 440). Hereby, dissimilarity between findings in various studies is due to the fact that gender is not an isolated and context free concept. Consequently, the results for such gender differences cannot be generalized.

Identity has been considered as an effectual factor in HLL. Higher motivational intensity among male learners was more probably due to the fact that they were more concerned with identity issues. That is, learners “enroll in heritage language classes in order to (re)claim their ethnic identity” (Leeman, “Heritage Language Education” 105). It is maintained that “the notion that there are multiple selves/identities, which are situated and contextually negotiated, contested, shaped, and reshaped, becomes central in the learning of a HL [Heritage Language] and HC [Heritage Culture]” (Hornberger and Wang. 2008). The role of identity in language learning has also been corroborated in other studies (Te Huia, 2017; Cenoz, 2009; Francis, et al., 2009).

7. Conclusion

As a mixed-methods study, the present research embodied qualitative and quantitative phases. The qualitative analyses attested the pivotal role played by a variety of factors affecting Kurdish undergraduate learners’ motivation to learn their HL. Among these factors, more priority was given to family, sense of belonging, ideology, proficiency, lexical literacy and media channels. Accordingly, the input provided by family and other external factors played a significant role in students’ motivational enrichment. The

interview participants did not want to lose their sense of attachment and belonging to the Kurdish Language.

Being multilingual, the learners were equipped with higher self-confidence, proficiency, enjoyment, motivation, competency and less anxiety levels. Anxiety in learners could be disempowered by being equipped with motivation. The process of learning was not straightforward. That is, the fluctuation between opposite feelings was more possibly to end by the victory of motivation over anxiety, as the former was observed to be more dominant in respondents' answers. All in all, the concurrence of these features escalates the movement toward ideal self for learners.

As for the correlation between motivational intensity and gender differences, the achieved result was in contrast with the stereotypical belief about gender differences in language learning motivation. The majority of the findings of the already conducted studies either confirmed significantly higher motivation for females than their male counterparts or showed significantly that there was no difference between gender and Motivational Intensity. Accordingly, the number of studies supporting the findings of the present study were rare. It was probably due to the simultaneous emergence of heritage language education and the growing rate of interest in identity and language learning. Male learners were more concerned with their sense of belonging and identity issues. Identity created a strong bond that propelled the learners to seek their real selves in the language and culture they were rooted in. Even in the interviews, the male respondent directly referred to identity as a salient factor increasing his motivation to learn Kurdish as a HL.

For students, HL was considered as a tool to reinforce their identity and sense of belonging within their communities. That is, all their attempts were directed in a way to propel them to gain more closure and exposure to their identity. They took it as a means of escaping anxiety, getting closer to their identity, becoming more literate, self-confident, communicative, and culturally informed. Accordingly, the frequency of speakers' speech in HLLs and their participation in associated with HLLs activities were worthwhile factors in developing learners' achievement and proficiency.

Finally, gender was a significant factor in determining the degree of Motivational Intensity in learning the heritage language. Dissimilarity between gender-based language learning motivational intensity could be due to different priorities for the learners in different contexts. That is why the findings in one context cannot be generalized to other ones. Here, higher motivational intensity for males is highly associated with stronger sense of identity claimed in the interview. Thereupon, the higher the sense of identity was, the higher motivation the learner had towards learning Kurdish as a heritage language and the majority of students were enthusiastic to get engaged in the process of learning in the future.

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