



## **Mediating Role of Identity Styles and Learner Autonomy in Writing Ability**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the relation between EFL (English as a foreign language) learners' autonomy, their identity styles, and their writing ability and it aims to show which independent variables have higher predicting power on variances in writing. To this end, 60 Iranian university EFL students at the language center of the researchers' institution were selected to participate in this study. The results of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and regression analysis on participants' answers to learner autonomy and identity styles questionnaires and their writing performance indicated that all identity style types significantly correlate and predict learner autonomy and only commitment identity style could predict writing ability. Multiple mediation analysis indicated that the identity styles significantly mediated the effect of autonomy on writing. The findings can provide insights to operationalize autonomous learning, learner-centered learning and individualized learning. The implications and suggestions for future direction of research are discussed in the light of limitations of the study.

**Keywords:** Writing Ability, Learner Autonomy, Identity Styles, Individualized Learning, and Learner-Centered Learning

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## **Introduction**

The paradigm shift from teacher directed to learner centered education has affected both education and research exuberantly and education practitioners and researchers have been trying to shed lights on a better account of how learner variables move learning mechanism forward. Teachers and classroom instruction are no longer a dominant learning drives. With a focus on learner and various artifacts in today's emerging advancements, our understanding of varied means and factors that moderate the learning results (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016) among which learner autonomy and identity are the most inspiring ones (Celep, 2000) maximizes learning opportunities we create and learners' utilizing them (Benson, 2001). As major concepts in psychology, learner identity and autonomy are most universally studied construct in social sciences having impact on every aspects of human social and psychological growth (Razmjoo & Izadpanah, 2012).

Learner autonomy is defined as learners' taking the responsibility of learning at all stages of objectives setting, controlling learning processes and setting evaluation criteria (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Learner autonomy is not something stable or constant but variable according to the interaction and negotiation with the facilitating environment. It is "a capacity that learners possess and display to various degrees in different contexts" (Benson, 2013, p. 123). A much related concept to learner autonomy is learner identity style which varies from person to person as each individual has his unique way for directing life path and decisions. Fraser-Thill (2011) refers to identity as a person's characteristics which make him/her an individual. It means that each person needs to understand not only his/her needs but also his/her preferences, characteristics, weaknesses, and strengths.

Supported by Vygotskian sociocultural theory, language is one of the artifacts by which identity is formed with connection to social context (Vygotsky, 1980) and continuous process of interaction between self-awareness and contextual variables (Erikson, 1994). Learner autonomy is also formed with learners moving from inter-subjectivity (what learners can do with the scaffolding of others) to intra-subjectivity (what learners can do without assistance), and language plays a critical role in this transformation of mind (Bruner, 1997).

One of the language related entities that go well with learner autonomy and identity is writing ability. It goes well with the above mentioned constructs because learners exhibit variability in their writing because of various social and cognitive factors affecting their performance (Myles, 2002). Writing has long been a challenging skill to develop for many Iranian EFL learners (Naghdipour, 2016). Part of this difficulty lies on holding a product based approach; still many educational systems practice it throughout the country, which gives no special instruction on how to write and assessment of which is based mostly on accuracy of language (Badger & White, 2000). With the paradigm shift towards learner centeredness, investigating how learner variable, their identification and measures can help better direct and regulate learners' L2 writing practice is of prime importance. There has been much research on the relation between learner autonomy and writing (Shangarffam & Ghazi Saeedi, 2013; Bazrafkan & Bagheri, 2014) and on the

relation between identity styles and language learning in general (Shahsavari, 2014; Zarrinabadi & Haidary, 2014).

Very few studies have engaged with mapping out the relation between identity and L2 literacy (Razmjoo & Izadpanah, 2012) and it is largely gone unnoticed and the ones exploring the possible relation are narrow in scope since they focused on components such as grammar, vocabulary, and the skill of reading (Razmjoo & Neissi, 2010). Besides, how entrance of other learner variables such as learner autonomy into the equation may moderate the possible relation between the two is remained untouched. Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the relation between learner identity styles, learner autonomy and writing. Since most of the studies in this account are correlational in nature and unable to determine which learner variable (autonomy or identity) predicts or mediates the other one, this study takes a step ahead and investigates which identity style has a predicting power on the degree of learner autonomy and writing ability and whether learner autonomy and writing ability are mediated by identity styles.

This study is organized in the following way: a) the rationale for considering learner identity, autonomy and writing is delineated, b) the method in designing and conducting the data collection and analysis is mentioned, and c) results are discussed and suggestions for future research direction and implications are provided in the light of the limitations of the study.

### **Literature review**

According to Brown (2008), the origins of learner-centered approach is rooted in a constructivist theory in which learners learn more by doing and experiencing rather than by observing. Learner autonomy is a multidimensional construct encompassing various characteristics including learners' awareness of their capacity, their awareness of learning processes, their wiliness to collaborate with others, and reflection and evaluation of the decisions made (Chuk, 2003). The change in learner role from being passive and reactive one to an autonomous learner requires teacher roles to be changed from transmitter of knowledge to advisor and mentor (Elizondo, 2013).

Research on learner autonomy is mainly correlational in nature seeking if other individual attributes correlate with learner autonomy or causal studies investigating how learner autonomy can be improved. Ghafoori and Javanshir (2015) examined the relationship between Iranian male and female EFL learners' autonomy and their critical thinking ability and language proficiency. The results indicated that there is a positive correlation between both male and female EFL learners' amount of autonomy and their critical thinking. The relation between learner autonomy, their learning strategy use preferences, and their language proficiency were also investigated (Elizondo, 2013). The results indicated that cognitive, metacognitive, and social learning strategy use mediate learner autonomy and in turn language achievements.

Few studies investigated how different variables affect learner autonomy and its development. The effect of transcription and reflective practice on improving

learner autonomy was investigated (Cooke, 2013) and the results indicated that transcription and reflective practice foster noticing, driving force for language acquisition, which allows learner to incorporate self and peer evaluation and feedback. Murphy (2008) investigated how distance language course materials support the development of critical reflection and autonomy on the basis of theory derived criteria and interview with learners. According to him, the key to automatization is critical reflection and self-assessment, metacognitive strategies, and interaction and collaboration. Autonomy as one of the learner variable is not a stable and constant factor and the degree of it might be mediated by other individual variables. Regression analysis in the study by Ghorbandordinejad and Ahmadabad (2016) indicated that foreign language classroom anxiety significantly mediates the relation between learner autonomy and language achievements of Iranian third grade English language learners. Inozu's (2011) qualitative interview data suggests that learner variables such as students' negative attitude towards classroom practices, dissatisfaction with learning tasks, and lack of motivation affected learner autonomy of Turkish students learning English. Missing from the analysis in relation with autonomy is universally studied learner variables construct: learner identity.

Identity styles are defined as general dispositions of individuals in different social situations which predispose individuals to act and react in certain way (Xu, 2009). These predispositions "are inculcated in early childhood experience, structured in an individual's social conditions, are durable through the life history of the individual" (Xu, 2009, p. 300).

Berzonsky (1992) introduced an identity styles inventory according to which learner identities divided into three types: information orientations, normative orientation, diffuse orientations, and commitment. Learners with information orientation style are self-reflective and think about processes and evaluate information. They are open to new experiences and try multiple solutions for a problem. On the other hand, individuals with normative orientation rely on the expectations and values set by other people specially the authorities such as teachers and parents; normative people show low tolerance for ambiguity and individuals with diffuse orientation defensively avoid problems and procrastinate the issue of decision making and are less aware of their cognitive potential and less able in psychological processing.

Various studies have explored how identity styles can regulate and control learning in general and language learning in particular. Shamsavar (2014) investigated the relation between willingness to communicate and identity styles. The study indicated that the large extent of the variations in willingness to communicate could be explained with variations in identify styles. Among identity styles, information orientation style was the most determining variable for willingness to communicate among advanced EFL Iranian learners. In line with this study, another study by Zarrinabadi and Haidary (2014) investigated the relation between willingness to communicate measured on multidimensional measures of willingness to communicate, communication apprehension, and self-perceived communication competence and identity Styles. The results indicated there is a

significant correlation between informative and normative styles and willing to communicate communicative competence.

Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, and Goossens (2005) examined relationships between constructs based on two perspectives on the development of self-governance, namely self-determination theory and Berzonsky's (1990) identity style model. Theoretically predictable relationships are found between the three causality orientations defined by SDT (autonomous, controlled, and impersonal) and the three identity styles proposed by Berzonsky (informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant) in a sample of Belgian late adolescents. "An autonomous causality orientation is positively related to an informational identity style and negatively related to a diffuse-avoidant style" (Soenens et. al., 2005 p. 427). A controlled orientation is positively associated with a normative identity style, and an impersonal orientation is positively related to a diffuse-avoidant identity style. Participants' gender does not moderate these relationships.

Mohamadi and Mokhtari (2016) conducted a research on investigating the relationship between identity styles, and writing skills of Iranian intermediate female EFL learners. The results indicated that individuals with informative orientation styles had better reading and writing ability. In addition, Razmjoo and Neissi (2010) found a significant positive relation between Iranian EFL learners' informative and normative identity styles and language proficiency and a negative correlation between diffuse avoidant identity style and language proficiency level. Hejazi, Shahraray, Farsinejad, and Asgary (2009) also found a significant relation between informative identity style with the academic achievements and normative and informative identity style correlate with academic achievement through the mediation of self-efficacy.

Research on the relation between identity and L2 literacy is narrow in scope since very few studies explored the relation (Razmjoo & Izadpanah, 2012) and those tapping the relation focused on components such as grammar, vocabulary, and the skill of reading (Razmjoo & Neissi, 2010). In addition, despite the contribution they make to the field, almost all of them are correlational in nature. Hence, determining which of the variables, identity or L2 literacy, accounts for variances is problematic. Besides, how entrance of other learner variables such as learner autonomy into the equation may moderate the possible relation between the two is remained untouched. Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the relation between learner identity styles, learner autonomy, and writing. This study takes a step ahead and investigates which identity style has a predicting power on the degree of learner autonomy and writing ability and whether learner autonomy and writing ability are mediated by identity styles.

The present research explores if there is any relation between identity styles, learner autonomy, and writing skill and if this relation is moderated by either of the variables. To achieve these objectives, the following research questions are set to find the answer.

1. Is there any relation between identity styles, learner autonomy, and writing ability?

2. Which identity style can predict higher learner autonomy and writing ability?
3. Do identity styles mediate learner autonomy and writing ability?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 60 Iranian university EFL students at Islamic Azad University, Karaj district, Iran. The sample was both male ( $n = 21$ ) and female ( $n = 39$ ). Although more than 78 students voluntarily participated in the study, 60 non-randomly selected participants from different classes of the university were included in the study to assure randomization and minimize potential sources of errors. The university EFL students varied in age from 20 to 29 years old (Mean = 24.5) and they had the same native language which was Persian. To have homogeneous participants in terms of writing ability, the participants' first performance of their second task of IELTS (International English Language Testing System) was rated and participants whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected to participate in the study.

### **Instrumentations**

#### **Learners' Autonomy Questionnaire**

The learner autonomy questionnaire of O'malley and Chamot (1990) whose psychometric properties of alpha reliability were approved in several other studies (Zhang & Li, 2004) was employed to investigate participants autonomy level (Appendix A). The questionnaire had two parts of 32 questions with the first part having 11 questions and the second part 21 questions on 5 point Likert scale. The questionnaire was a Likert-type scale coded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) at part I. Those learners' responses that were considered "always" received five points and those learners' responses that were considered "never" received one point. At part II, the participants' choices in the questionnaire were the scores from 1-5 for choices from A to E. The questionnaire measured and determined the participants' autonomy with a maximum possible score of 100. Participants were instructed to answer by choosing the closest answer to their beliefs and their attitudes or ideas in 30 minutes.

#### **Learners' Identity Styles Questionnaire**

In order to specify the identity styles of the EFL university students, the identity styles Inventory (Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory) was given to the participants (Appendix B). The questionnaire consisted of 40 items and the participants were asked to fill the questionnaire in accordance with what extent they agree with the questionnaire's statements. The questionnaire was a 5 Likert-type scale coded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me) on identity types of 1) diffuse-avoidant scale (ten items: e.g., "I try not to think about or deal with problems as long as I can"), 2) normative style (nine items: e.g., "I've

more-or-less always operated according to the values with which I was brought up”, 3) informational style (eleven items: e.g., “when making important decisions I like to have as much information as possible”), and 4) commitment style (ten questions: e.g., “I have a definite set of values that I use in order to make personal decisions”). Those learners’ responses that were considered strongly agree received five points and those learners’ responses that were considered strongly disagree received one point. Psychometric properties of Alpha reliability (0.701) and convergent validity have been provided in Berzonsky (1990, 2003).

### **The Writing Task**

Participants were asked to write the second task of IELTS. This task required participants to write on a topic in 45 minutes. Students had prior essay writing experiences. Teachers selected the topics on the basis of students’ answers to topic familiarity questionnaire. The teacher brainstormed about the topic and students were asked to write within the classroom time limit.

### **Procedure**

Participants were invited to answer autonomy and identity style questionnaire. They were assured that their answers would be confidential and only would be used for research purposes. Giving directions by the researcher about the questionnaires and answering them by the students took approximately 25 minutes. Having administered the questionnaires, the researcher asked students to have the writing task. Classroom instruction and brainstorming on topic were conducted by the teachers. The scoring procedure was analytic with IELTS’ 9 band score rating.

### **Design of the Study**

The present study is a quantitative and correlational research. The variables were examined to determine if they were related and, if so, the direction and magnitude of that relationship were measured (Tavakoli, 2012). Besides, regression analysis was utilized to investigate which independent variables of identity styles and learner autonomy can predict variances in writing. In addition, mediation analysis was used to investigate if the relation between autonomy and identity styles with the writing ability is mediated by either of them.

### **Data Analysis**

The objectives of the present study are twofold; first to probe any significant relationship between identity styles and writing ability and autonomy, and second to probe identity style can predict higher writing ability and autonomy as stated in the aforementioned research questions.

The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and linear regression which assume normality of the data. As displayed in Table 1 the absolute values of the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their standard errors were lower than 1.96. These results suggested that the assumption of normality was retained.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality Assumption

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis			
		Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Autonomy	38	-.135	.383	-0.35	-.433	.750	-0.58
Informational	38	-.325	.383	-0.85	-.466	.750	-0.62
Normative	38	.713	.383	1.86	.438	.750	0.58
Diffuse	38	-.721	.383	-1.88	.318	.750	0.42
Commitment	38	.017	.383	0.04	-.838	.750	-1.12
Writing	38	.146	.383	0.38	-.338	.750	-0.45

### The Relation between Identity Styles, Learner Autonomy and Writing Ability

To answer the question if there is any relation between identity styles, learner autonomy, and writing ability, the researchers reviewed the results of Pearson correlation in Table 2. The results indicated that a) the informative identity style had significant correlations with autonomy ( $r(36) = .897, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size) and writing ( $r(36) = .679, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size), b) the normative identity style had significant correlations with autonomy ( $r(36) = .761, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size) and writing ( $r(36) = .685, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size), c) the identity style of diffuse had significant correlations with autonomy ( $r(36) = .810, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size) and writing ( $r(36) = .578, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size), and d) the identity style of commitment had significant correlations with autonomy ( $r(36) = .846, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size) and writing ( $r(36) = .693, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size).

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlations; Identity Styles with Writing and Autonomy

		autonomy	writing
Informational	Pearson Correlation	.897**	.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	38	38
Normative	Pearson Correlation	.761**	.685**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	38	38
Diffuse	Pearson Correlation	.810**	.578**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	38	38
commitment	Pearson Correlation	.846**	.693**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	38	38

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



Since a single statistical analysis was repeatedly used to probe a single research question, the Bonferroni's correction method should be applied before making any conclusion regarding the rejection or support of the null-hypothesis. The Pearson correlation was run six times; that is why the new alpha value will be  $(.05 / 6 = .0083)$ . Since all of the probabilities displayed in Table 2 were lower than .0083, it can safely be concluded that there is a relation between learner autonomy, identity styles, and writing ability.

### **Predicting Power of Identity Styles in Writing Ability and Autonomy**

Two separate linear regressions were to predict writing ability and autonomy by using the identity styles.

**Autonomy.** The results of regression analysis (Table 3) indicated that the regression model converged after four steps. The informational style was the first to enter the model to predict 80.5 percent of autonomy ( $R = .897, R^2 = .805$ ). The commitment style increased the prediction to 85.5 percent on the second step ( $R = .925, R^2 = .855$ ). The diffuse style entered the model on the third step to increase the prediction to 87.3 percent ( $R = .935, R^2 = .873$ ). And finally, the normative style increased the prediction to 89.5 percent on the last step ( $R = .946, R^2 = .895$ ).

**Table 3.** Model Summary<sup>e</sup>; Predicting Autonomy through Identity Styles

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.897 <sup>a</sup>	.805	.799	6.183	
2	.925 <sup>b</sup>	.855	.847	5.406	
3	.935 <sup>c</sup>	.873	.862	5.122	
4	.946 <sup>d</sup>	.895	.883	4.726	1.753

a. Predictors: (Constant), informational

b. Predictors: (Constant), informational, commitment

c. Predictors: (Constant), informational, commitment, diffuse

d. Predictors: (Constant), informational, commitment, diffuse, normative

e. Dependent Variable: autonomy

The Durbin-Watson index of 1.75 was higher than one and lower than three indicating that the errors were not correlated, an assumption that should be met when running regression. The results of the ANOVA test of significance of regression model (Table 4) ( $p = .000$ ) indicated that the regression model at four

steps enjoyed statistical significance. Thus, it can be claimed that identity styles significantly predicted autonomy.

**Table 4.** ANOVA<sup>a</sup> Test of Significance of Regression Model

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5670.764	1	5670.764	148.332	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1376.288	36	38.230		
	Total	7047.053	37			
2	Regression	6024.107	2	3012.053	103.057	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	1022.946	35	29.227		
	Total	7047.053	37			
3	Regression	6155.135	3	2051.712	78.211	.000 <sup>d</sup>
	Residual	891.918	34	26.233		
	Total	7047.053	37			
4	Regression	6310.101	4	1577.525	70.640	.000 <sup>e</sup>
	Residual	736.951	33	22.332		
	Total	7047.053	37			

a. Dependent Variable: autonomy

b. Predictors: (Constant), informational

c. Predictors: (Constant), informational, commitment

d. Predictors: (Constant), informational, commitment, diffuse

e. Predictors: (Constant), informational, commitment, diffuse, normative

The regression coefficients displayed in Table 5 can be used to build the regression equation. For example, the regression equation for the final step would be:  $\text{Autonomy} = -3.39 + (\text{informative} * 1.261) + (\text{commitment} * 1.311) + (\text{diffuse} * .678) + (\text{normative} * -.972)$ .

**Table 5.** Regression Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.682	4.159		1.606	.117
	informational	2.004	.165	.897	12.179	.000
2	(Constant)	-2.709	4.530		-.598	.554
	informational	1.360	.235	.609	5.795	.000
	commitment	1.005	.289	.365	3.477	.001
3	(Constant)	-4.722	4.385		-1.077	.289
	informational	1.007	.273	.451	3.694	.001
	commitment	.933	.276	.339	3.384	.002
	diffuse	.532	.238	.225	2.235	.032
4	(Constant)	-3.395	4.077		-.833	.411
	informational	1.261	.269	.564	4.681	.000
	commitment	1.311	.292	.477	4.489	.000
	diffuse	.678	.227	.287	2.993	.005
	normative	-.972	.369	-.324	-2.634	.013

a. Dependent Variable: autonomy

### Writing.

The results of regression analysis (Table 6) indicated that the regression model converged on one step to predict writing ability of the participants. The commitment style was the sole predictor of writing to predict 48 of students' performance on the test ( $R = .693$ ,  $R^2 = .480$ ). The other identity styles did not enter the model because their prediction was negligible.

**Table 6.** Model Summary<sup>a</sup>; Predicting Autonomy through Identity Styles

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.693 <sup>b</sup>	.480	.466	2.726	2.387

a. Predictors: (Constant), commitment

b. Dependent Variable: writing

The Durbin-Watson index of 2.38 was higher than one and lower than three indicating that the errors were not correlated, an assumption that should be met when running regression. The results of the ANOVA test of significance of regression model (Table 7) ( $p = .000$ ) indicated that the regression model enjoyed

statistical significance. Thus it can be claimed that identity style of commitment significantly predicted writing.

**Table 7.** ANOVA<sup>a</sup> Test of Significance of Regression Model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	247.295	1	247.295	33.285	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	267.469	36	7.430		
	Total	514.763	37			

a. Dependent Variable: writing

b. Predictors: (Constant), commitment

The regression coefficients displayed in Table 8 can be used to build the regression equation as follows; Writing = 2.152 + (commitment\*.515)

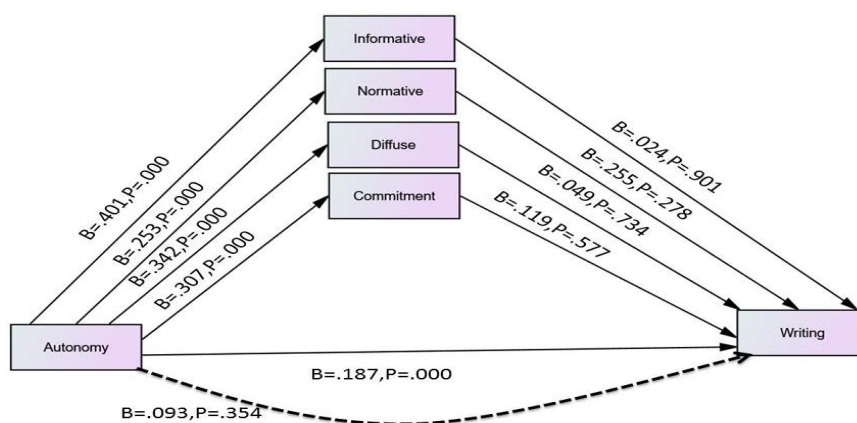
**Table 8.** Regression Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.152	2.284		.942	.352
	commitment	.515	.089	.693	5.769	.000

a. Dependent Variable: writing

### Moderating Role of Identity Styles on Writing Ability through Autonomy

Using the Preacher and Hayes (2008) multiple mediation method, a regression analysis was run to predict EFL learners' performance on the writing test through their autonomy while mediated by four identity styles Model 1 and Table 9.



**Model 1.** Effect of autonomy on writing mediated by identity styles

First, it was found that autonomy significantly related to the informative style ( $B = .401, t = 12.17, p = .000$ ), normative style informative style ( $B = .253, t = 7.02, p = .000$ ), diffuse informative style ( $B = .342, t = 8.27, p = .000$ ), and commitment style informative style ( $B = .307, t = 9.51, p = .000$ ) (Output 4.19).

The results also indicated that informative style ( $B = .024, t = .124, p = .901$ ) was not significantly related to writing, normative style ( $B = .255, t = 1.10, p = .278$ ) and was not significantly related to writing, diffuse style ( $B = .049, t = -.342, p = .734$ ) was not significantly related to writing, and, finally, commitment style ( $B = .119, t = .563, p = .577$ ) was not significantly related to writing.

Autonomy – prior to the mediation of the identity style – significantly contributed to the subjects’ performance on the writing ( $B = .187, t = 5.77, p = .000$ ); however after mediated by the four identity styles, the autonomy lost its significant contribution to writing ( $B = .093, t = .939, p = .354$ ) (dotted line). Thus it can be claimed that the identity styles significantly mediated the effect of autonomy on writing.

**Table 9.** Autonomy on Writing Mediated by Identity Styles IV to Mediators (a paths)

	Coeff	se	t	p
Informative	.4015	.0330	12.1792	.0000
Normative	.2533	.0360	7.0286	.0000
Diffuse	.3425	.0414	8.2742	.0000
Commitment	.3074	.0323	9.5171	.0000

**Table 20.** Direct Effects of Mediators on DV (b paths)

	Coeff	se	t	p
Informative	.0246	.1982	.1242	.9019
Normative	.2554	.2314	1.1037	.2780
Diffuse	-.0499	.1457	-.3421	.7345
Commitment	.1191	.2114	.5632	.5772

**Table 11.** Total Effect of IV on DV (c path)

	Coeff	se	t	p
autonomy	.1874	.0325	5.7723	.0000

**Table 12.** Direct Effect of IV on DV (c’ path)

	Coeff	se	t	p
Autonomy	.0933	.0993	.9395	.3545

The KR-21 reliability indices for the autonomy, informative normative, diffuse and commitment were .88, .91, .73, .88 and .87, respectively (Table 13).

**Table 13.** Descriptive Statistics; KR-21 Reliability Indices

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	KR-21
Autonomy	38	55.84	13.801	190.461	0.88
Informational	38	24.53	6.176	38.148	0.91
Normative	38	21.05	4.597	21.132	0.73
Diffuse	38	23.42	5.839	34.088	0.88
Commitment	38	25.08	5.016	25.156	0.87

The inter-rater reliability for the two raters who rated the subjects' performance on the writing test ( $r(36) = .93, p = .000$ , representing a large effect size) (Table 14) indicated significant agreement between the two raters.

**Table 14.** Pearson Correlation; Inter-Rater Reliability

		WRR2
WRR1	Pearson Correlation	.938**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	38

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

## Discussion

This study was an attempt to investigate the relation between identity styles, learner autonomy, and writing ability. The results indicated that there is a strong correlation between the three constructs. All identity styles correlated and predicted learner autonomy. Besides, identity styles could predict learner autonomy and writing ability. Among four identity styles, only commitment style could predict writing ability. In addition, the relation between learner autonomy and writing ability is mediated by identity styles which means that excluding identity styles, learner autonomy correlated with writing ability but as identity styles were entered into the model, learner autonomy' significant relation with writing ability was mediated.

The results of the study corroborate with the findings of the study by Shangarffam and Ghazi Saeedi (2013). Their study indicated that there is a strong correlation between learner autonomy, writing in first language, and writing in second language in two types of educational settings; task and content based instructions. Similarly, the findings are supported by Bazrafkan and Bagheri' (2014) study which indicated that learner autonomy has a significant relation with writing ability and critical thinking. In addition, the results of this study corroborate with the study of Ghafoori and Javanshir (2015) as far as learners' autonomy is concerned.

Their study also indicated that learner autonomy correlates with writing ability of EFL male and female learners.

Considering identity styles, the results of this study on the relation between identity styles and writing ability are in line with those of the study by Mohamadi and Mokhtari (2016) which suggests that identity styles correlated with reading and writing ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The results also agree with the results of the study by Shahsavari (2014) in which the relation between identity styles and willingness to communicate is established. Since writing is a way to communicate, it might be logical to assume the results of this study corroborate with those of Shahsavari (2014). The findings of this study also confirmed those of a study by Soenens et al. (2005) in which the relation between self-governance (learner autonomy) and self-determination (identity styles). Razmjoo and Izadpanah (2012) also affirmed a relation between information processing identities and second language literacy. The results of this study also corroborate those of Cotterall (2011) who investigated the relation between learner autonomy and learner identity of doctoral international students. The study indicated that learner autonomy and learner identity styles are so interwoven that investigation of one without taking the other into account will be incomplete. The ecological perspective of self-identity encompasses his history, present action, and his future projection. This suggests a dynamic interrelation between learner identity and learner autonomy. It shows how one plans, progresses, and evaluates the self is rooted in the identities shaped with corroboration with social and cognitive factors (Lier, 2007). The results of this study are in line with those of Masoumzadeh and Ardebil (2016). Their study indicated that there is a significant relation between learner commitment as identity style, learner autonomy, and writing ability of Iranian EFL learners.

## **Conclusion**

As the results suggest, since identity styles can predict the writing ability and lessen the positive role learner autonomy has on writing, the findings of the present study can help teachers and learners to acknowledge learner differences and their strength and weakness, and manage them to maximize learning opportunities. The findings can also help researchers to operationalize autonomous learning and learner-centered learning and provide applicable techniques and strategy to individualized learning such as positive teacher talk, self-talk, and student need-responded instruction (Zhou, 2016). Besides, as language teachers we should identify what factors make learners become better learners among which identity of learners is confirmed by this research to have significant role (Ertürk, 2016).

Despite the interesting findings, this study has certain limitations. Limited number of participants may jeopardize the generalizability of research. Besides, the main measure of writing ability was a product-based evaluation. Therefore, research is needed to investigate how writing skill developed through process-based approach towards writing is mediated by the role of identity styles.

Besides, Norton (2000) suggests identity styles are externally mediated and internally integrated. Therefore, research is a need to investigate how other artifacts

mediate identity styles and their relation and effects on academic achievements. In addition, as Norton (2000) puts it, “language learning is not a neutral practice but highly political one” (p. 7). It means social psychology of education needs to be taken into account. Research requires taking the ideology and philosophy practiced by education policy makers, at large scale, and teachers and practitioners, at local scale, into account (Warriner, 2010), which means to find research designs such as ethnography, by which educational systems develop in ideology and theory but are left behind to progress in practice. For example, since Iranian students are exposed to teacher directed and text and lecture based education, the general predisposition that they shape may not accommodate and go well with new advances in education such as computer assisted language learning (Öztok, 2016). As suggested in literature, teacher identities need to be taken into account, since teacher identities can play roles in learner identity mediation and teacher optimism for change and management of the consequences of the change (Reeves, 2009; Hejazieh, Lavasani, & Mazarei, 2011; Jingnan, 2011; Van Galen, 2017).

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