

# ESL Teacher's Professional Identity in English Language Teaching

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## Abstract

The current paper is a small-scale study on the core elements of professional identity (PI) issues among English as a second language (ESL) teachers. The study highlights the significance of professional identity, and the compromise and transformation ESL teachers undergo during their careers. Qualitative exploratory research methodology is applied in the investigation involving five ESL teachers. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to explore the potential factors that have impacted English teachers' professional identity. The study revealed the impact of top-down policy implementation, the significance of professionalism, unstructured overseas educational setup, and workplace challenges on the professional identity of English teachers. The findings of the study highlighted several key areas that had a positive as well as a negative impact on the PI of ESL teachers. ESL teachers' adherence to their individuality and teaching philosophy in spite of facing different challenges, time and teaching experience of ESL teachers, culturally diverse working environment, and teachers' evaluation system emerged as positive factors in PI development. However, the study also drew special attention to ESL teachers' PI primarily getting affected by the imposition of a central policy system on ESL teachers, ignoring ESL teachers' voices without taking their feedback into consideration, lack of awareness to foster positive professional relationships among peers and working in the overseas broken educational system. The study concluded that ESL teachers need their independent professional space to utilize their teaching capabilities and share their experiences to have an influential professional identity. However, due to the small number of participants a larger study would be better in unfolding in detail the causes behind the professional identity crises of ESL teachers.

**Keywords:** ESL teaching, professional identity Issues, TESOL critical issues, teacher effectiveness

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, professional identity has been evolving, and now it has emerged as a central topic in educational research. Professional identity can be defined as the relatively stable ways in which professionals see themselves in terms of who they think they should be – i.e., self-image – and what they do – i.e., role (Chreim, Williams, and Hinings 2007; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann 2006). It is also generally perceived that professions and professionals have faced challenges to their autonomy such as the validity of their professional status, professional voice, and subject matter competency. These challenges went far beyond mere discussion which ultimately led to restructuring the professional identity of educators in their teaching careers.

In educational and applied linguistic research, professional identity has attracted widespread attention in order to draw together the social and personal natures of developing as a teacher. Overseas English language teaching has burgeoned in the last few decades across different parts of the world, and it has put ESL teachers into diverse confrontational professional, and cultural situations. The contextual factors which impact the PI of English language teachers observed by Wenger (1998), believed that teacher identity develops depending on the environment one finds himself/herself in. The aspect of identity construction which is generally agreed upon by identity researchers is the active nature of individuals' relationship with the environment, that is, the agentive character of identity development (Beijaard et al., 2004). A coherent and positive sense of professional identity serves as the linchpin of teacher development, teaching efficiency, teaching satisfaction, teacher commitment, etc. (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

According to the literature, PI is not a stable entity; it cannot be interpreted as fixed or unitary (Coldron & Smith, 1999). Teachers are in a constant process of change due to the context they live in. Coldron and Smith

(1999) pointed to the tension between agency (the personal dimension in teaching) and structure (the socially 'given'). They believed that teachers are socially legitimated and they have to redefine their identity. Furthermore, studies on non-native teacher identities have shown that identity construction is influenced by sociocultural context (Elyas, 2016). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) proposed that in order to understand teachers, we should bring into consideration their professional, cultural, political, and individual identities. Also, the teacher's sense of self as a teacher experiences historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural influences. Cooper and Olson (1996) pointed to the fact that professional identity is multifaceted. There are several factors that impact them which influence their identity. Consequently, due to these aspects, the construct of professional identity has gained important status in the English language community.

Following this line of research, this study aims to investigate the PI of ESL teachers in terms of its significance, the impact of contextual factors, and the transformation process. A study on the crisis of ESL teachers' PI is needed to explore the causes that affect their PI as a result of the impact on the environment.

### *1.1 Rationale of the Study*

Based on the (Giroux,2005) "transformative intellectuals" concept, a teacher's professional identity has largely been influenced by the level of the teaching pedagogy, academic system, and practical experience as an academician. It is perceived that most of the teachers do not correctly identify their professional identity, or they no longer transform their knowledge to the learners due to the influence of the policies set by the system they work with. An environment where there is the dominance of policies and imposition of restrictions negatively impacts on the PI of ESL teachers. So, teachers need to define their roles and understand their strengths and weaknesses to effectively deliver their lessons and carry out their duties with enthusiasm. Also, teachers need to address the professional challenges they encounter in their working settings. Therefore, considering the concept of "transformative intellectuals" by Giroux, this study is conducted to focus and reflect the causes of catastrophes in ESL teachers' professional needs.

### *1.2 Significance of the Study*

In any education system, teachers are the backbone of the teaching and learning, and their professional identity has a significant impact on their performance. The impact of teacher's PI not only affects their personalities, but it also has an impact on the learner's academic outcome. In teacher education and professional development, scholars have agreed that teacher identity in TESOL is vital to identify best practices (Cheung et al., 2015). The importance of PI for an ESL teacher provoked my interest to undertake this study. Also, my personal experiences as an English teacher with peers, institutional influence and impact of academic and non-academic system encouraged me to explore on the PI of the ESL teachers. Therefore, this study aims to focus on ESL teachers' professional identity (PI), which has affected their resilience, commitment, and effectiveness as language teachers. The study entails three main areas to explore in the English language teacher's PI. First, the importance of professional identity for an ESL teacher to become an effective and efficacious teacher. Second, the compromise that an ESL teacher makes on the professional identity due to different factors at work and the program followed in institutes where they have worked previously and are working at present. And lastly, the transformation that ESL teachers undergo in their professional identity over time due to the impact of contextual settings of the workplace.

From this short introduction, it seems that the PI of ESL teachers is a legitimate area of research that can contribute to a better understanding of the ESL teachers' work circumstances and the potential factors that have not been fully explored yet. Therefore, I decided to explore the professional identity tensions of ESL teachers, and how different factors laid an impact on their PI construction and growth. Thus, in view of the paucity of research in this field, I decided to explore it.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

Following are the questions employed in this study to investigate the role of PI in ESL teachers.

- (1) How significant is the role of PI for ESL teachers to become effective teachers?
- (2) How is ESL teachers' PI compromised during their teaching experiences because of various contextual factors?
- (3) How does ESL teachers' professional identity experience transformation overtime during their teaching experiences in general and in the Saudi context?

#### *1.4 Review of the Literature*

Identity is people's concept of who they are, of what sort of people they are and how they are related to others (Gee, 2000). Beijaard et al. (2000) stated, "teacher identity is an understanding and acknowledgement of what it feels like to be a teacher in today's schools, where many things are changing rapidly, and how teacher cope with these changes" (p. 109). This definition further stated that teachers' professional identity "involves a personal part of the teacher's professional identity because teacher identity is a profoundly individual and psychological matter; it concerns the self-image and other image of particular teachers" (p.109). Professional identity is linked to the concept of profession and of the professional (Munoz Palm, 2008, p. 113). And a professional is a person who has completed a program of rigorous initial preparation involving specialized knowledge as decided by the profession, and who has been approved by the profession as a registered practitioner with the right to exercise autonomous, professional judgment (Hooley, 2007, p. 50). However, in teacher education, it cannot be so simplistically defined since researchers and teacher educators perceive professional identity differently which generally depends on how they view reality.

Professional identity to some researchers is a continuous process where the personal and professional selves of teachers are gradually merged into oneself resulting in the becoming and being of a teacher (e.g. Goodson & Cole, 1994; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; and Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). To others, however, professional identity is simply how teachers describe themselves as an occupational group or how teachers perceive the roles they play or the characteristics of their profession (e.g. Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; and Gaziel, 1995). The third group of researchers conceives professional identity as made up of many sub-identities that come alive as teachers narrate the story of their lives in order to make sense of their personal and professional selves (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 1990 and Connelly Clandinin, 2000). However, there is not a unanimously agreed definition of professional identity. Professional identity is an area that has not been much researched in higher education (Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan 2013).

Scholars share the view that professional identity (PI) is important in the education sector (Marcelo, 2009, and it is not static (Henkel, 2000), but rather a dynamic process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences (Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan 2013). Thus, academic identities are influenced by individual values and beliefs, as well as by institutional culture and positioning (Billot 2010, 713). Moreover, teachers' professional identity implies both a cognitive psychological and a sociological perspective: people develop their identity in interaction with other people (sociological perspective) but express their professional identity in their perceptions of 'who they are' and 'who they want to become' as a result of this interaction (cognitive psychological perspective) (Bejaard, 2006). And from a socio-cultural viewpoint, teacher professional identity has been regarded as both the product of external influences on the teacher and a process representing the dynamic interaction between agency and structure (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Marcelo (2009, p. 9-10) highlights four revised characteristics that are relevant to shaping a teacher's professional identity. First, professional teacher identity is an evolutionary process that goes under the interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences. In this perspective, the professional teacher identity is continually being defined and redefined. Second, professional identity is not global in character. Indeed, the conduct of professional teachers depends on the environment or context, or local particularities to which they are responding. In other words, teachers—as a professional group—are not homogenous; they differ considerably. Third, closely related to the second characteristic, professional teacher identity is a function, or a result, of sub-identities that are not necessarily related. Fourth, professional identity is instrumental in making teachers motivated, committed, satisfied, or in short, making them good teachers. However, the rapidly expanding body of research suggests that language teachers' practices are shaped in complex ways by their mental lives, which emerge from their personal experiences (e.g., personal history, language learning, teacher education experience, family life, etc.) and external contexts (e.g., professional context, policy environment, cultural beliefs, etc.) (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). In nutshell, the construction, deconstruction, and/or reconstruction of teacher professional identity is an ongoing and contextual process, which involves teachers' cognitive development, emotional changes, and behavioral responses, as teachers accept, reinforce, downplay, or challenge the external reforms that are ascribed to them (Golombek & Doran, 2014).

The above discussion reveals the significance of PI and several essential aspects pertaining to it. And this study focused on the factors behind the construction and deconstruction of English language teachers' PI. The key factors which emerged from this investigation were related to the curriculum followed by the institute, the workplace environment of the English teachers, the professional behavior among colleagues, and managerial decisions imposed on them by the institutes where they have worked throughout their careers up till now.

The research was conducted under the umbrella of interpretivism reflecting on the teachers' professional identity in English language teaching. It is characterized by the terms such as naturalistic, constructivist as well as a qualitative methodology (Grix, 2004; Crotty, 2003). Qualitative research is a threefold puzzle: the situations are fluid, behavior evolves over time and individuals are unique and non-generalizable (Cohen et al., 2007). The interpretative paradigm emerged in contradiction to positivism. Grix describes positivism and interpretivism as "binary poles" because they can be seen as opposites for positivism seeks objectivity while interpretivism believes in subjectivity, understanding, and the agency of the individuals who construct their social world (Grix, 2004). Interpretivism assists in getting a closer picture of the study, particularly in the form of interviews and observation, unlike positivism which merely deals with numerical data.

Moreover, the subjective nature of interpretivism may bring forward unexpected aspects of the investigation due to direct contact with the participants. Therefore, my study will give a subjective look at ESL teachers' experience of identity development, exploring their teaching experiences in their professional life and the challenges they face at work.

## 2. Method

To understand the factors which, influence a teacher's professional identity and changes it over the course of time, a qualitative exploratory research method was adopted. Qualitative studies are about how individuals give meaning to their lives, how they interpret what they experience, and doing research to explore their points of view, events, phenomena, and values (Merriam, 1988). Therefore, qualitative exploratory research methodology was used to examine the problem closely and subjectively, as it is considered more profound and rewarding because it does not give generalizable results. Thus, this methodology was adopted to analyze the factors which impacted ESL teachers' PI. Reflections of ESL teachers' experiences were conducted using semi-structured interviews. Five face-to-face interviews with English language teachers were done to identify in detail the undiscovered elements behind English language teachers' PI issues.

### 2.1 Participants

The participants recruited for the investigation were four native and one non-native English language teacher who had adequate English language teaching experience and related academic qualifications, and they were at different stages in their careers. Purposive and convenience sampling was used to have variety in responses as the teachers involved in the program have work experience in different geographical and cultural settings apart from Saudi Arabia. The participants worked in a variety of universities in the Middle East, Asia, and North America. Also, all the participants had relevant master's degrees except for one participant who had a bachelor's degree in another field, and one was a Ph.D. degree holder. In addition, the participants had worked overseas, home country, and currently, they are serving as English language teachers in a public university in a preparatory Language Program (PYP) in Saudi Arabia. Table 1 given below has further details of the participants.

Table 1.

No.	Participants	Qualifications	Teaching Experience	Nationality	Age	Gender
1.	Brian	MA	15	American	40	Male
2.	Maria	PhD	30	Sudanese	50	Female
3.	Clara	MA	20	American	45	Female
4.	Sally	MA	11	Canadian	36	Female
5.	Nadia	BA	10	American	28	Female

### 2.2 Instrument

To explore teachers' opinions about teachers' professional identity in the workplace and other contextual aspects of English language teaching, I opted for semi-structured interviews. According to Punch (2009), the interview is the most prominent tool for data collection in qualitative research. It is very good for "assessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (p. 175). Therefore, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted, and five English language teachers participated in it. I chose participants based on their nationality and prior and present workplace experience to explore deeper the issue of professional identity and the transition they have undergone while working in different professional settings. To illustrate, the impact of professional identity on participants lives over the time, and how it transformed them as professionals was explored especially while working in Saudi Arabia.

### 2.3 Procedure

As a qualitative researcher, following interpretivist paradigm, I desired to explore the construct of professional identity through the experiences of the participants sharing their work practices while working in different settings. The five participants were interviewed face to face for approximately 30-40 minutes at a quiet place according to their convenience. All the interviews were given in the English language, the interview questions were written according to the purpose of the research. The main questions were prepared ahead of time, but the interview allowed me to ask spontaneous questions to make a profound understanding of the study.

The conversations were recorded on a password-protected device. All the information from the interviews was then transcribed to understand the views of each participant. To transcribe the data, I used an online transcribing paid platform known as “Trint”. Each of the interviews was uploaded on the Trint website and automatically transcribed. After the transcription, I listened to the entire interview again to confirm the information shared by the participants. And where the transcription was unclear and out of context, I checked the transcripts back and forth against the original audio recordings for accuracy. Meanwhile, I also generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them. As I transcribed the interviews, I looked through each individual interview for points that participants seemed to dwell on and analyzed to identify common codes and to discover any new, emergent codes. From the salient comments marked in transcripts, I used them for generating themes and also to conceptual issues of my study.

In the next phase of data analysis, I reviewed and refined my themes. I reviewed at the level of the coded data extracts and read all the collated extracts for each theme in order to achieve a coherent pattern. The outcome of the refinement process enabled me in the data analysis process to obtain themes aligning with the research goals of my study. During the data analysis process, I had anticipated themes that were outlined in the literature review; however, I always remained observant and open to new and unanticipated themes and concepts from the study. After this I defined and further refined the themes by going back to collated data extracts for each theme and organized them into a coherent and internally consistent account. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). After the whole process, three major themes were extracted and discussed in depth following the research of the study.

### 2.4 Ethical Considerations

To obtain consent each participant was given an information letter about the general nature of the study and an accompanying consent form to sign. The letter promised anonymity, which in the context of this study means that no data will be reproduced in any way that will make the participant easily identifiable, and all participants will be assigned pseudonyms. This procedure was also explained to each participant in person before data collection.

### 2.5 Authenticity and Reliability

Authenticity and credibility are demonstrated through the ability of the researcher to report the situation through the eyes of the participants and obtain data that are rich, deep, honest, and through the careful sampling, appropriate choice of methods, and appropriate statistical treatment of data (Cohen et al., 2007). Because research is context-bound, comparability and transferability replace generalizability as criteria for external validity (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, to gain authenticity and reliability, semi-structured interviews are used, and for the credibility of the study, an experienced colleague was involved to read the interview questions.

## 3. Results

Thematic analysis of data revealed that several contextual and institutional management-related factors affected ESL teachers’ professional identity development in different ways. In this regard, three main themes emerged: the role of PI and effective ESL teachers, compromise on ESL teachers’ PI, and transformation in ESL teachers’ PI.

### 3.1 Theme 1: Role of PI and Effective ESL Teachers

To become an effective ESL teacher, the study indicated the influence of different professional aspects on ESL teachers’ PI. Feedback, observation, and survey emerged as positive indicators of PI growth. According to Clara students’ feedback helped her to improve her performance and abilities. The participants said: “Finding out how students perceive my teaching and how effective they find it from their feedback and surveys has been invaluable in helping me to hone my teaching and classroom management skills”. She stated that the surveys on her teaching have significantly enhanced her professional identity. Nadia also shared similar views in this context. She said, “Receiving observations from supervisors as well as reading students’ comments from surveys taken in class have directly shone a light on aspects of my teaching that were effective”. All three participants

have shared a positive experience to improve in their PI.

Another important theme obtained from data analysis was autonomy and collaboration with co-workers from professional perspectives. Brian said, "Autonomy is something that is prized. It is the space a teacher must create excellence and try solutions in their teaching. Collaboration is the space of sharing ideas, learning from others, and nurturing collective success, and my sense of autonomy and collaboration has assisted in my PI growth." Moreover, Clara also stated autonomy as a positive factor in enhancing her PI. She said: "opportunity to teach abroad, creative teaching, and autonomy escalated her experience as a teacher. I believe autonomy has a key role in my PI progress". The interviewers stated that by having autonomy, teachers can perform well and improve their teaching skills, but unfortunately, teachers are never involved in the decision-making process despite being qualified and knowledgeable. Teachers expressed that they need some degree of autonomy in their job context to make changes in learners' needs and promote motivation and their own effective PI development. One of the significant results that emerged in the study is the teaching philosophy and individuality of ESL teachers. Clara mentioned her strict adherence to her teaching philosophy. She said, "My teaching philosophy, at its heart, remains the same no matter where I teach. Having said that, I do my best to adapt to whatever institution I work in".

Another participant reported about her individuality which she follows in her teaching regardless of any situation. However, she did not show satisfaction with the course structure which she has to follow. Similarly, Maria stated, "I do my best to individualize my teaching where I can, but overall, I have to follow a curriculum which is the antithesis of how I was taught to teach". The interviewers' experience in terms of their teaching philosophy and self remains intact and it doesn't influence their PI negatively.

An important theme that emerged from data analysis was the impact of top-down educational policy on teachers' professional identity development. Two of the participants shared negative views that influence their PI. According to Sally's experience, she reported that institutional policies influenced her professional aspects. She had faced restrictions, which hindered her performance, but her teaching skills remained consistent. Also, Nadia indicated her limitation as a teacher in teaching overseas. She believed that various programs where she worked had been pedagogically broken, and she had really worked hard to address her students' language needs while adapting to the curriculum imposed by the institute. The interviewees' experience revealed that teachers were bound to follow and implement the decisions and policies of the upper institutional management into practice without having the right to challenge the appropriateness of prevailing rules and principles. The findings of the study revealed that the room for questioning the appropriateness of the current policy was not possible. Critical thinking and creative knowledge construction is the basic requirement of teaching to convey knowledge, but it was not applicable due to the enforced guidelines set by the centralized policy system. To summarize, the participants shared dissatisfaction with the institutional policy system which influenced their professional identity.

### *3.2 Theme 2: Compromise on ESL Teachers' PI*

The findings of the study indicated several factors that affected ESL teachers and their PI was compromised. One of the participants indicated the system limitations imposed on her that had a negative impact on her PI and compromised her PI. Sally expressed that she does not have the freedom to show her teaching abilities and skills where she can implement principles due to the limitations set by the system. They expressed that institutional support is necessary for teachers to deliver their knowledge and skills, however, due to the rules and policies imposed on them the chances of successful knowledge transfer remain severely in deficit.

Different teachers indicated different factors that affected their professional identity, and they had to compromise in their PI. One of the interviewers stated that the lack of technological acquaintance in teaching practices had affected her PI. Clara said, "Technology has done a lot to reform English education, but sometimes I feel like something is lost in the classroom environment. I feel a bit like a "robot" teaching, and I didn't use to feel this way in the 80s and 90s. So, I would say that technology has affected my professional identity adversely". Another participant also stated that his lack of technological acquaintance hinders his teaching process and affects his PI. She expressed that the unavailability of technological training put her in a bad situation and she faced stressful and embarrassing situations in front of the learners impacting her PI.

The study findings also highlighted the importance of professional identity on teachers' personalities because of the negative influence of their peers. Sally stated, "Sometimes colleagues don't deal with you in professionally, so it affects your skills and personality. And the professional interaction between colleagues can escalate or sabotage the professional identity of a teacher." Another participant reported another critical factor that had a negative impact on his professional identity. He shared that respecting differences is professionally important

instead of challenging others' views. I think for professional growth it is of utmost importance to have a collegial working environment.”

The findings of the study highlighted system limitations, lack of technological knowledge, and peer influence as the main factors that led ESL teachers to compromise their PI.

### 3.3 Theme 3: Transformation in ESL Teacher's PI

Experience and professional identity are interlinked, and they grow teachers in different ways. Sally stated her professional growth quite clearly. She said, “I didn't learn a lot of things in the beginning as a teacher, and with time and experience I learned a lot about my teaching skill, teaching method, teaching style, and knowledge about my subject matter”. Nadia expressed positively about improvement in her professional identity. She said: “My teaching style has grown progressively less casual with experience, and I am able to adapt to any context.” The findings of the study revealed a unique journey of transformation in the PI formation of the participants. Two of the participants indicated positive views about change in their professional identity over time. Sally said, “My professional parameters, teaching style, and methods over time got positive and improved with time”. Nadia also added to the positive changes in professional identity over time and said, “I would say that I've definitely become more confident in my teaching abilities and classroom management skills which has certainly been an improvement”. The participants stated that their PI has improved with time and experience.

Brian reported a positive transformation in his professional identity due to his exposure to cultural diversity in the Middle East. He expressed, “Absolutely. I've loved and loved the balance of cultural inputs and the engaging way that even expats exist in the Middle East. It challenged me to be a better person, teacher, and leader. I'm always given to considering how fortunate my experience has been because of others”.

Furthermore, two of the participants expressed a negative transformation in their professional identity during their teaching experience. According to Maria, “I think I've gotten better at choosing battles, which I think is a positive thing. I mean, there's so much overseas that's so broken and so you just have to decide, or kind of do triage about what do I really need to focus on, try to fix, or what's really the most important here”, and Clara stated that, “my career in TEFL which started thirty years ago has not been a straight path—it has had many twists and turns”.

Learners' approach emerged as another significant theme in the study. Maria indicated a negative experience with her PI due to the learners' approach. She mentioned her unpleasant experience with the learners. Initially, she was welcoming to students in her teaching career, but later on, she became stricter due to their behavior and lack of interest in academic duties. To sum up, the participants of the study shared different experiences that had an impact on their PI.

## 4. Discussion

The current study examined the effect of different factors at work on an ESL teacher's professional identity development. The study contributed to the professional identity of ESL teachers who have worked in different countries and are currently working in Saudi Arabia. They have shared viewpoints about their professional identity from multiple perspectives that indicated how different factors impact their PI. The professional identity of ESL teachers is an important parameter, and its construction is a continuous and complex process that takes place when teachers interact and deal in different professional settings. PI is subject to a continuous learning process where personal history, social interactions, and psychological and cultural factors influence identity formation (Lamote & Engels, 2010).

The study has highlighted the main contributing factors that are influential in having an impact on the professional identity of ESL teachers. The ESL teachers' individuality is an essential theme that emerged as a positive factor from this investigation and revealed significant evidence associated with the PI transformation. The participants have revealed their personal adherence to their teaching philosophy. Some of the teachers strongly adhere to their teaching ideology regardless of changing contextual factors. According to Kreber (2009), teacher identities are shaped by a dynamic interaction between personal theories of teaching and perceptions of self (e.g., perceived self-concept and self-efficacy), which are both influenced by social and occupational contexts. It is also in line with another study.

According to that study professional identity refers not only to the influence of the conceptions and expectations of other people, including broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should know and do but also to what teachers themselves find important in their professional work and lives based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds (Tickle, 2002).

Additionally, another positive result from the findings of the study revealed the impact of experience and time on

the ESL teachers' PI transformation. The modern self, according to Giddens (1991), "is not something that is given but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (p. 52). A socio-cultural framing of identity describes it not as fixed, but as an ongoing process of becoming (Beijaard et al., 2004). The result on how experience and time positively enhanced the PI experience of ESL teachers is in line with the study of Coldron and Smith. Professional identity is more likely to be regarded not as fixed or unitary but rather multiple, fragmented, and prone to change (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Smith, 2007). It is clear from the studies that the role of time and experience is significant in the PI transformation of ESL teachers.

Cultural diversity is also another prominent finding of the study. One of the participants reported that he enjoyed professionally establishing himself in culturally diverse teaching settings and maintained his PI which is in line with a study by Johnston (1999) who believed that expatriate ESL teachers embrace diversity and seek out new voices and new cultural values. The study indicated the positive influence of cultural diversity on ESL teachers' PI.

Also, the study drew positive attention to teachers' evaluations to reflect on teachers' PI. Teachers felt positive about the feedback they receive from students and supervisors. It helped them to think positively about themselves and added to their PI construct. The teachers indicated that they felt motivated and encouraged which added to their PI construct.

Furthermore, the study also indicated that there are areas that are fundamental to understanding teachers' PI to avoid any damage to the PI of ESL teachers. One of the major themes that are drawn is the teachers' professional identity getting affected by the limitations set by the institutional central policy system. The participants revealed their professional feedback has been unheard of and the managerial decisions have been imposed on them which had a negative impact on their professional identity development. According to Cuban words, they are viewed as "technical" rather than "moral" agents in their profession. Cuban (1988) describes the technical teacher as one who "matches the needs of large organizations impelled to provide standardized services to many students" (p. 3). In other words, to have productive and competent ESL teachers, it is essential to consider their professional voice and improve the curriculum. The findings are also congruent with a study done in an Iranian context. The study concluded that the existence of a highly centralized educational policy restricted teachers' autonomy in their occupation. (Bahram et al., 2019). Hinnant-Crawford (2016) also reported, restricting teachers' autonomy makes them lose their confidence to make a change and view themselves as implementers more than creators of education policy and this reduces the value society members. Current educational policies that are generally made by unspecialized individuals do not consider the contextual shortcomings of each teacher's teaching contexts. To achieve this, it is important to focus on having well-established professional protocols and make changes. The outcomes of the study contributed to our understanding of the significance of a conducive professional environment in supporting teachers to improve their professional identities. Also, the participants of the study shared another key factor that negatively influenced on PI of the ESL teacher is peer cooperation and understanding. The study indicated that the peer relationship is significant to have positive outcomes on the PI of the ESL teachers, and it not only impacts the teachers' personalities but also a difficult and unhealthy work environment. The participants expressed a lack of opportunity to express themselves and share their professional concerns.

And lastly, another important result that is revealed from the study is ESL overseas teaching experience. The study indicated a potential impact on the PI of the ESL teacher due to the overseas educational environment. The influence of the change of environment on teacher identity is an issue that also has been noted by Wenger (2010), who argued that teacher identity alters depending on the environment one finds himself/herself. Teachers suffer from an identity crisis when they migrate from one environment to another (Sarasa, 2016). The impact of overseas teaching experience is indicated as a critical experience in this study. The findings highlighted how the overseas education system had a negative effect on their PI.

## 5. Conclusion

This research offers an opportunity to examine those factors, which have an impact on the ESL teacher's professional identity construction. The present study attempted to investigate the importance of PI on ESL teachers, the compromise ESL teachers endure in PI development, and the transformation they experience in their teaching practices. The study revealed several positive factors that had a positive influence on PI of the ESL teachers, however, the study specifically emphasized certain negative factors too.

Among the positive factors ESL teachers' adherence to their individuality and teaching philosophy, the impact of ESL teachers' time and experience, working in a culturally diverse environment, and ESL teachers' evaluation remained a dominant factor in PI development.



On the other hand, the critical highlights of the investigation indicated ESL teachers need their own professional space to make use of their teaching abilities to enhance their professional identity. The limitations they encounter due to the central policy implementation system must be eradicated so teachers can share their skills freely and benefit learners and the institutes.

Additionally, a professionally approachable work environment is important as it would provide a conducive environment for ESL teachers to share their experiences. Thus, it is important to focus on key factors that have undesirable impacts on ESL teachers' PI. Also, ESL teachers' professional collaboration needs to be addressed, so ESL teachers avoid unnecessary peer pressure and work productively. The study also revealed the overseas educational system plays an important role in affecting their PI.

Taking ESL teachers' identity crises into consideration, it is necessary to address enforced policy implementation, considering teachers' voice peer influence, and thorough reflection on the overseas broken education system to avoid negative impact on ESL teachers' PI. In this study, the use of a small number of ESL teachers has limited the generalizability of the findings. For future research, conducting a longitudinal study and examining the effect of different factors, in the long run, can provide a clearer picture of the impact on teachers' professional identity development. Applying mixed method studies and doing surveys can also prove helpful in understanding factors having a negative impact on ESL teachers' professional identity.

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### Interview Questions

- (1) What professional aspects of job have greatly influenced your teaching beliefs and performance? Please explain how they have influenced you.
- (2) Please explain the most critical experiences, including tensions and reforms, you have lived through in your teaching career and your learning? How have they affected your professional identity?
- (3) What are the factors that have affected your teaching philosophy?
- (4) In the past, what type of teacher did you think you were and how are you today? Are you satisfied as you have grown as a teacher?
- (5) Has your professional identity changed over the time? Did it change to positive or negative? How?
- (6) Do the reasons that you initially had in mind for becoming a teacher still exist? Can you elaborate on them.

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