

# Professional Identity Construction in Becoming an NNEST

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## Abstract

This study investigated the professional identity construction of NNESTs (Non-native English-speaking teachers) in Taiwan. The research paradigm was rooted in poststructuralism, which emphasizes subjectivity and exhibits the multiple, unstable, and non-linear properties of identity inquiry. Participants comprised two male and two female in-service English teachers from public and private senior high schools, whose teaching experience ranged from 10 to 15 years. The findings were as follows: in constructing their professional identity, NNESTs resorted to the integration of multiple selves, interpretation and reinterpretation, social negotiation, and agency operation. Moreover, various factors were found to influence the development of NNESTs' professional identity. The internal factors were personal belief, prior experience, emotion and disposition, teaching efficacy, instrumental goal, non-native status, and motivation, whereas the external factors were student attitude, professional community, subject attributes, educational policies, and perceived expectation. The study not only illuminates NNESTs' professional identity development but also contributes with theoretical and pedagogical implications.

**Keywords:** Non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST), Poststructuralism, Professional identity

## 1. Research background

Teacher identity is complicated, and teachers of different subjects deserve to be respectively examined. The professional identity of an English language teacher is complex in that English teachers' curricular practices involve the target foreign language not only as a teaching medium, but also as a learning goal. Previous scholarly inquiries on teacher identity have tended to treat the professional identity of subject teachers and general teachers as holistic concepts. Few studies have investigated teacher professional identity as a single subject (Krzywacki, 2009; Ye & Zhao, 2019). However, the professional identity of English language teachers deserves meticulous consideration. Apart from the attributes of English as a subject, English language teachers tend to encounter paradoxical dilemmas that teachers of other subjects seldom encounter. For instance, English teachers are often confronted with Native Speaker Fallacy (Phillipson, 1992), which results in both non-native English teachers and learners pursuing such ideal language proficiency as native-like accents in the language teaching and learning process (Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Jenkins, 2005). Additionally, non-native English language teachers in Asia sometimes lack confidence in their own language teaching and even deem themselves less competent than native English speakers (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2008; Shin & Kellog, 2007). The implicit sense of inferiority in non-native English language teachers may contribute to their experiencing an identity crisis, which underscores the need to construct a sound, professional identity so that they can assert legitimacy in their jobs as teachers.

Given that the development of teachers' professional identity plays an indispensable role in how they become teachers (Korthagen, 2004; Timostuk & Ugaste, 2010), this study aims to illuminate the points of view of non-native English language teachers and their understanding of their own professional identity. Furthermore, a teacher's identity is considered pivotal to understanding how language teaching is practiced in the classroom (Varghese, Morgan, & Johnston, 2005). Exploring language teachers' professional and individual identities will enable these teachers to be better comprehended in terms of who they are, how they become who they are, and why they become who they are so that they can transform themselves into critical practitioners of English curriculum.

In brief, this study will delve into the professional identity of non-native English teachers who teach in senior high school, concentrating on its construction and influencing factors. Through this investigation, non-native

English teachers' legitimate professional role in teaching foreign language can become better established, and the discourse on professional identity can be further enriched in a local context. Specifically, this study intends to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do NNESTs (Non-native English-speaking Teachers) negotiate and develop their professional identities in the teaching process based on their past experience and the present context?
2. What are the influencing factors (internal and external; societal and cultural) that appear to construct and develop the professional identity of NNESTs?

## **2. Studies on English Teachers' Professional Identity**

### *2.1 Poststructuralist Approach to Professional Identity*

In addressing identity formation, poststructuralists emphasize the process of how identities are constantly in the process of being re-defined and becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Resorting to the notion of becoming in identity construction, poststructuralists highlight the dynamic, non-linear, incomplete, and unstable nature of identity. They do not conceptualize the notion of identity as having an innate core value or fixed property. Rather, the instability and contradiction in identity are readily observed. Thus, identity formation is regarded as an ongoing process that is usually socially negotiated and constructed (Johnson, 2006; Morgan, 2004; Toohy, 2000; Watson, 2006).

Poststructuralist perspectives on identity indicate that the social formation and the representation of subjectivity are determined by time and space. According to this perspective, subjectivity is socially constructed under particular political and cultural backgrounds and abounds in uncertainty and contradiction. The question derived from such a viewpoint centers on how subjectivity is constructed and how identity is engendered. Based on these assumptions, Melucci (1996) maintained that in the process of identity formation, "different parts of the self," "different times of the self," and "different settings or systems to which each of us belongs," are being negotiated. On top of that, the poststructuralist approach to identity also recognizes the importance of agency and continuum in identity. For example, Beijaard et al. (2004) focused on the aspect of agency and indicated that identity is developed through individual activity. From this perspective, identity is regarded as a shifting concept rather than being stable or individual. Poststructuralist researchers also place the discontinuous, multiple and social properties of professional identity at the forefront. In terms of the discontinuous nature of professional identity, Danielewicz (2001) noticed that an individual's multiple and often conflicting identities are constructed and reconstructed, reformed or eroded, added to or expanded in unpredictable states. Rodgers and Scott (2008) considered teacher identity to be shifting and unstable by nature. Regarding the notion of multiplicity, both Alsup (2006) and Sutherland and Howard and Markauskaite (2010) demonstrated the presence of different 'identities' or 'sub-identities' in their work. As for the idea of the social nature of one's identity, Palmer (1998) found identity to be an interactional product of inner and outer forces, the latter being closely associated with social influence. Cohen (2010) also stated that a teacher's professional identity could be established through negotiation in collaborative exchanges, where colleagues played a major role in its formation.

As is demonstrated, a teacher's professional identity consists of a set of particular beliefs. Moreover, it is deemed the most important matter by teachers (Vogt, 2002), pervading their lives, personal and professional alike. The question of "Who am I?" turns out to be an open-ended one, engendering volatile possibilities in individual teachers.

### *2.2 NNESTs' Professional Identity in Asian Context*

Given the increase in scholarly inquiries into the construction of professional identity of EFL (English as a foreign language) learners over the past decades, studies in the Asian EFL context are still booming. In many Asian countries, the dichotomy between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) non-native English-speaking teachers enhances the advantages of the former and highlights the deficiencies of the latter. Below is some research regarding English teacher's professional identity in the EFL context.

A case study associated with in-service EFL teachers' identity was conducted by Tsui (2007) in China. The major framework of her study drew on Wenger's (1998) social theory of identity formation, a dual process composed of the identification and negotiation of meanings. The subject's stories demonstrated two prominent properties of identification: reificative and participative. The former referred to the inclusion and exclusion of membership in different communities, whereas the latter acknowledged the indispensable role of participation or nonparticipation in any social practice or sociocultural environment that involves teaching and learning. Moreover, Tsui detected the struggle among multiple identities within the subject himself, i.e. the identity conflicts resulting from the interplay of identification and meaning negotiation.

Further studies on the professional identity of EFL teachers were conducted by Wang and Lin (2014) and Chien (2016), in which the authors of both studies focused their attention on the professional identity construction of pre-service English teachers in domestic contexts. Wang and Lin (2014) inquired into the impact of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) on pre-service non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). The findings indicated that the participants were confronted with contradictory and competing discourses due to the presence of NESTs. The formation of NNESTs' professional identity was made possible only by interpreting and uniting these discourses. The authors also recommended that teacher education programs incorporate teachers' "non-native" status into the resources to foster a positive professional identity. On the other hand, Chien (2016) investigated the construction of pre-service teachers' professional identity in a northern city in Taiwan. Two major findings were established from Chien's study. First, the pre-service teachers' professional identity was dynamic and its development took place in a social context. Second, the pre-service teacher participants' identity construction was closely associated with their authority source and their self-practice.

Liao (2017) targeted the perspectives of two Taiwan-educated English teachers on their identities as legitimate teachers at a post-secondary educational institute in Taiwan. Liao showed that it was the participants' vigorous agency that enabled them to acquire the highly valued, near native-like English proficiency, which served as a prerequisite for achieving pedagogical success in their English education. Despite their sound self-image as English teaching professionals, however, both participants were reluctant to challenge the prevalent concept of the NESTs' superiority. Nor did they claim ownership of the English language. In the end, the study emphasized the need for teacher education programs to equip pre-service teachers with proper language competence and enhance NNESTs' strengths. The study also recommended the cultivation of a good sense of agency among NNESTs to empower their status as legitimate and confident English educators in teaching.

The above literature review indicates that the formation of teachers' professional identity involves not only how they perceive their professional lives as teachers, but also how they identify with the target language, i.e. the universal language of English. Furthermore, the non-native status may obfuscate the identity issue in EFL teachers, particularly with the introduction of NESTs for cooperative teaching. More importantly, as a major subject, the English language receives considerable attention from both teachers and pupils, which may exert some influence on the perception of EFL teachers. To date, some inquiries have been undertaken to explore the professional identity of EFL teachers from primary school (Vogt, 2002) and post-secondary school (Chien, 2012), but the professional identity of EFL teachers in middle school through a poststructural scope is scarcely touched upon. Intuitively, their professional identity seems to be socially constructed and little questioned. However, professional identity varies from person to person, not to mention among EFL teachers with some teaching experience. To bridge the gap in the investigation of NNESTs' professional identity, this research will focus on in-service EFL teachers who teach in senior high school.

### 3. Research Method

The goal of this study is to investigate teacher's professional identity rooted in teachers' personal subjectivity and its interrelation with socio-cultural contexts. As the formation of a teacher's professional identity is a dynamic and fluctuating process, the poststructuralist approach is suitable as it can be applied in inquiries into self-concept or identity. The qualitative tendency that delves into self-concept by focusing on meaningful interpretation behind phenomena can best achieve the research purpose here. Of the numerous qualitative approaches, narrative inquiry has been extensively employed in exploring the development of teacher identity (Clandinin, 2013). In Chase's (2005) definition, "a narrative makes the self (the narrator) the protagonist, either as actor or as interested observer of others' actions ... narrative discourse highlights the uniqueness of each human action and event (pp. 656-657)." By telling their own stories, teacher participants are reconceptualizing their identities and imagining their professional lives (Clandinin & Huber, 2005). Since narrative inquiry emphasizes the unique events and actions of the narrator as a protagonist (Chase, 2005), all the unique experiences and anecdotic stories regarding one's learning and teaching experience are augmented.

In this study, the duration of participants' teaching careers ranges from 10 to 15 years. Teachers with less than a decade of teaching experience tend to be labeled as novice or beginning teachers whose narratives are another story and constitute a different scholarly arena. Those who have taught for over 15 years might have lost their motivation or commitment and thus take their teaching job less seriously (Bloom, 1988). A profile of the participant teachers (all identified by pseudonyms) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the participants

Name	Sex	Age	School(s) served	Teaching experience	Hometown
Rosa	F	40	A public senior high school in Yunlin County	11 years	Yunlin County
Jansen	M	41	2 public senior high schools in Miaoli County and Yunlin County	15 years	Chiayi City
Jenny	F	36	A private comprehensive high school in Changhua County	12 years	Changhua County
Vincent	M	45	A private comprehensive high school in Hsinchu City	15 years	Hsinchu City

The primary concepts in the narrative inquiry consisted of three categories in chronological order: Past, Present and Future. In the *Past* section, specific attention is dedicated to their learning experience and process of becoming English teachers. The *Present* section focuses on participants' teaching practice and their professional identity for the time being. In the *Future* section, more attention is placed on the direction of their future professional development. The core concepts and sample questions of the narrative inquiry in each phase are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Core concepts and sample questions in the narrative inquiry

	Past	Present	Future
Core concepts	Learning experience, Process of becoming	Teaching practice, Professional identity	Prospect of professional development
Sample questions	<i>How did you learn English in middle school? What were the English teachers like when you studied English? In your English learning experience, what impressed you the most?</i>	<i>How do you teach English now? What is a professional English teacher to you? How do you use different teaching materials in your class?</i>	<i>Will you adjust or change your teaching style in the future? Why or why not? What challenges do you anticipate in your teaching career?</i>

The narrative inquiry was conducted throughout one school year, which is deemed long enough to encompass the teacher participants' overall workload. Each participant took part in the narrative inquiry for at least three sessions.

In accordance with research ethics, firstly, written consent to participate in the study was obtained in advance from all participants. Secondly, participants' privacy was prioritized in data collection and analysis, and their identities were anonymized. Thirdly, since the narrators are the owners of their life stories (Atkinson, 1998), the participants were entitled to make any corrections, modifications, and even deletions, to their narratives, which were transcribed. All the texts were double-checked by all participants, which enabled them to reconfirm the authenticity of their narratives.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Rosa: A Conductor Sparking Student's Potential

Rosa has been teaching in School A, which is also her alma mater, since she became an official teacher (Ro070920). While she was a student, Rosa had a conscientious English teacher who constantly paraphrased articles in English during class. For Rosa, the ability to paraphrase in English was a conspicuous beacon that signaled the English teacher's professional ability (Ro070920; Ro122820). In both high school and college, Rosa did well and acted as a responsible language learner.

In the initial stage of teaching, Rosa was confronted with “praxis shock” (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002), perceiving a gap between her expectations of her students’ English proficiency level and their real English proficiency level. Despite that, Rosa made some personal endeavors in her professional development. First of all, she participated in a test-designing project devised by the LTTC (Language Training and Testing Center). She contributed self-designed questions and was granted a reward, which was a great enhancement to her professional confidence (Ro122820). Moreover, she acquired a Teacher Professional Development certificate in the first few years of her teaching career (Ro122820). Not all her colleagues acquired such a certificate, and she was glad to receive it (Ro122820).

Rosa referred to some metaphors to describe her role as an English teacher. In the past, Rosa had regarded herself as an orchestra conductor (Ro122820). As a conductor, she was managing to spark each of her student’s potential and innate talent. After years of teaching, she referred to the analogy of a relay race to describe students’ English learning, reporting that she was “*getting rid of an unnecessary sense of responsibility*,” and “*came to realize that I am just one of the stops in their learning process*” (Ro122820). Her importance as an English teacher has diminished over time, and so has her responsibility. On the other hand, the language knowledge involved a lot of usage which required double-checking. Therefore, the preparation of each lesson took a great deal of time, and it turned out to be tedious work (Ro081720).

The most challenging part of the teaching job for Rosa consisted in the students per se. For her, the students’ attitudes towards learning were pivotal. Student attitude played a decisive part in determining how much effort she would make.

Overall, Rosa remained fond of teaching. Reflecting on her teaching career over the years, she said, “*I feel quite lucky because English is my interest... It is a combination of interest and ability*” (Ro070920). Regarding her future professional development, Rosa repeatedly revealed her desire to form a study group with colleagues. She said, “*When I’m off work, I really feel like speaking some English... not all about job, but just find someone to practice with*” (Ro122820). In addition, she used online materials for self-study. As she put it, “*I subscribe to some YouTube [channels], yeah, about English learning... I like it pretty much*” (Ro122820). A further prominent vision for Rosa’s personal development concerned active involvement in a professional community. She had applied for the recruitment of Seeded Teachers and had already been admitted to the English Education Resource Center (Ro012021). The upcoming experience as a Seeded Teacher will enrich her lived stories as an English teacher in the foreseeable future.

### 3.2 Jansen: A Sheer Utilitarian Teacher Targeting Scores

Brought up in Chiayi County, Jansen had never had his mind set on becoming a teacher since he was young. For him, English was merely a subject that helped him score high at school; it was not his lifelong goal (Ja073020). While English was not a lifelong interest to Jansen, he did well in middle school in all school subjects. Notwithstanding the good grades in middle school, Jansen was confronted with a huge “gap” that was difficult to “cross” when he entered the English department in college (Ja072320). Jansen constantly mentioned that he had been labeled as an “*opportunist learner*” by many of his high school teachers (Ja072320; Ja073020). Being an opportunist learner did not mean that Jansen gained little English professional knowledge. His experience of studying abroad in the USA proved the contrary. After teaching for a few years at School B, Jansen pursued an MA degree at Austin University in the USA, where he realized that the solid foundation from college helped him outperform his peers (Ja072320).

From the very beginning, Jansen did not identify with the teaching job (Ja073020). However, he chose to accept the teaching role, even though he was “*faking*” (Ja111120). A core characteristic of an English teacher’s professional perception for Jansen consisted in the subject knowledge. In his opinion, the English subject was the most challenging in that there are most likely to be unpredictable questions popping up in class (Ja122220). He always introduced himself by saying, “*I am not a native speaker of English... So if I speak something wrong, it’s pretty natural*,” showing his professional vulnerability to his students from the very beginning (Ja111120; Ja122220).

Jansen had scored high in all the major subjects when he was in middle school, and he expected his students to achieve the same results (Ja073020). “*If you don’t have English tendency and you just want to score high in the English subject, [I can show you] what you can do*” (Ja111120). When students took his word for it, he believed they could score high. On the other hand, to uphold professional ethics, Jansen dared not “*gu fu*” (fail to live up to someone’s expectation) his students, even though he was plagued by occasional exhaustion from work (Ja111120).

For Jansen's part, not only the curriculum guidelines but also the newly-devised tests presented a challenge for his teaching. As a test-oriented teacher, he often referred to tests: "*The tests used to be easier to control, but now knowledge per se is too complex... it is difficult for you to prepare [for the tests]*" (Ja111120). With the implementation of new curriculum guidelines, the contents in *Scholastic Ability Test* are different from those of the past, and Jansen had noted that (Ja111120).

Too much pressure concerning his students getting good grades was a major source of job exhaustion for Jansen. Consequently, he was thinking of applying to the *Teacher Transfer Among Schools* (Ja122220). In the meantime, he was actively preparing for the teacher recruitment tests. He was determined to transfer to another school where there was a less demanding workload; i.e. he was seeking a comfort zone (Ja122220).

### 3.3 Jenny: A Vigorous Big Sister Versus Salary Thief

Jenny was born in a small town in Changhua County from a blue-collar family. As the oldest daughter, she had endeavored to conform to familial expectations and tried her utmost to land a job that her parents could be proud of (Je111820). As a perfectionist, she had given her undivided attention to all aspects of life (Je111820; Je111820). Having a two-year-old child to take care of, she still insisted on signing up for an MA program at a national university. She found it necessary to acquire a higher educational degree to prove as well as upgrade herself (Je111820).

The English teachers from middle school had exerted significant influence on Jenny's career choice. With their inspiration, she attended a department of applied foreign language at a university, where she persisted in her dream to become an English teacher, which was a "*tian zhi*" (a career that somebody is destined to pursue) (Je111820). After graduation, she quickly landed a teaching job at School C.

Jenny expected English teachers to be equipped with a certain level of competence in terms of their language skills, which had to be transformed into effective performance when teaching students. In addition, Jenny placed emphasis on students' grades as well. On a personal level, Jenny compared her role of English teacher to that of a big sister, someone who lit the fire for others. "*After you spark their interest, how they will continue to burn is their own business*" (Je112720). In the meantime, Jenny expected to be able to introduce the fun of the English language to her students, for she firmly believed that "*it's a beautiful art*" (Je112720). Performing her duty as a teacher would win her students' recognition. The constant fear of being labeled as a "*salary thief*" prompted her to take on more responsibility at work (Je112720; Je112720).

Jenny had had a great deal of experience in dealing with NESTs at work, and she noticed that some of them were not competent at teaching. With little professional ethics, these incompetent NESTs appeared to be not only arrogant but also irresponsible, wielding their cultural superiority in the local EFL context.

With more than a decade of teaching, Jenny found that she had become better at handling English teaching. She also took advantage of new technology in keeping track of her working progress as well as students' learning progress. She became familiar with the students' levels, which made her detect their learning problems more easily. For Jenny's part, she expected to be able to maintain her language skills by taking more language proficiency tests in the future (Je013021).

When the interview with Jenny took place, she had been struggling with her academic studies in graduate school for some time. Nonetheless, the experience of continuing in-service studies was worth the effort. As she put it, "*[I] finally feel like returning to learning, so I retrieve my own momentum*" (Je013021). When speaking of career plans for the future, she did not conceal her intention to transfer to a public school, yet she had yet to make up her mind to take action. When there was little promising prospect at School C, she would prepare to job-hop (Je013021).

### 3.4 Vincent: A Philosopher Succumbing to Reality

In his mid-forties, Vincent had been working at School D in Hsinchu City, where he served as a homeroom teacher for 15 consecutive years, when the interviews took place. He chose to teach at private school for practical reasons. In the first place, most students at School D were cooperative and obedient. Additionally, salaries in private schools are comparatively higher than those in public schools. Most importantly, the atmosphere in the English teaching team was benign and supportive, which was why he was able to teach at School D for over a decade (Vi011321).

Concerning his educational background, Vincent is atypical in the English-teaching profession. He majored in architecture in his freshman year at college and then transferred to the foreign language and literature department in his sophomore year. While attending graduate school, he majored in philosophy. After getting an MA degree in philosophy, he furthered his philosophy studies by going to France. Vincent did not complete the PhD

program abroad, however, owing to financial difficulties (Vi011321). He was a philosopher who ended up succumbing to reality (Vi011321). At each educational stage, according to Vincent, there were always important teachers setting good role models for him and he benefited greatly from their styles (Vi011321).

In the first few years, Vincent was confronted with huge amounts of workload. The initial teaching experience was precious; it enhanced his ability to develop diverse teaching materials for all kinds of courses, especially when authorized textbooks were not available (Vi012821).

When Vincent was asked about the characteristics of a professional English teacher, he specified three properties: judging students' levels and setting proper goals for them, showing concern for students, and embracing changes. Concerning some of the imperative missions as a professional English teacher, Vincent also specified three aspects: improving students' grades, seeing the world through English, and encouraging students to speak English. On a general level, Vincent expected his role of English teacher to be as diverse and interesting as possible.

After teaching for over a decade at the same school, Vincent found himself in a balanced state in his teaching career. In speaking about his future plans, he had the idea of forming a baseball team on campus, as he was so attached to this sport that he played it often (Vi021121). The rationale behind the plan was simple: encouraging students to engage in intercultural communication in English with foreign students (Vi021121).

In addition to his dream of forming a baseball team on campus, Vincent referred to some foreseeable challenges ahead of his professional career, mainly derived from the new *2019 Curriculum Guideline*. He specifically pointed out the dilemma that students would encounter: less time could be dedicated to drilling basic language skills. As for prospective development in his profession, with a significant amount of workload from school timetable, he only hoped that the school could assign fewer class periods to him. He was yearning for more flexibility from work so that he could spend more time "*packaging the course*" (Vi021121), through which he could obtain greater sense of achievement and become more content with his teaching efficacy and pedagogical performance.

The emerging themes derived from each participant's professional lives are illustrated in Table 3:

Table 3. Emerging themes in each NNEST's narrative inquiries

Participant/Period	Past	Present	Future
Rosa	Responsible learner	Role change	Forming study group
	Significant others	Job burnout	Professional community
	Proficiency test Praxis shock	Student attitude Subject attributes Professional development	
Jansen	Opportunist learner	Subject knowledge	Educational policies
	Lack of motivation	Professional vulnerability	Transferring school
	Foreign MA degree	Test-oriented teaching	Test-oriented teaching
Jenny	Significant others	Self-proving mindset	Bilingual policy
	Perceived expectation	Technology device	Self-actualization
	Obvious aptitude	In-service training Proficiency test	Job-hopping
Vincent	Multiple expertise	Test-taking skills	Tight schedule
	Significant others	Teacher efficacy	Forming a baseball team
	Heavy workload	Submissive students Friendly workplace	New curriculum guideline

### 3.5 Representation of NNESTs' Professional Identity

Enlightened by Jansz (1991) and Beijaard et al. (2004), both of whom resorted to the visualization of personal identity based on the quadrant conception, this study argues that the NNESTs' formation of a professional identity involves a self-value pursuit characterized by a constant definition of what is publicly and privately significant to English teaching. Figure 1 illustrates the panorama of all the NNESTs' professional identities and their relative location in different quadrants.

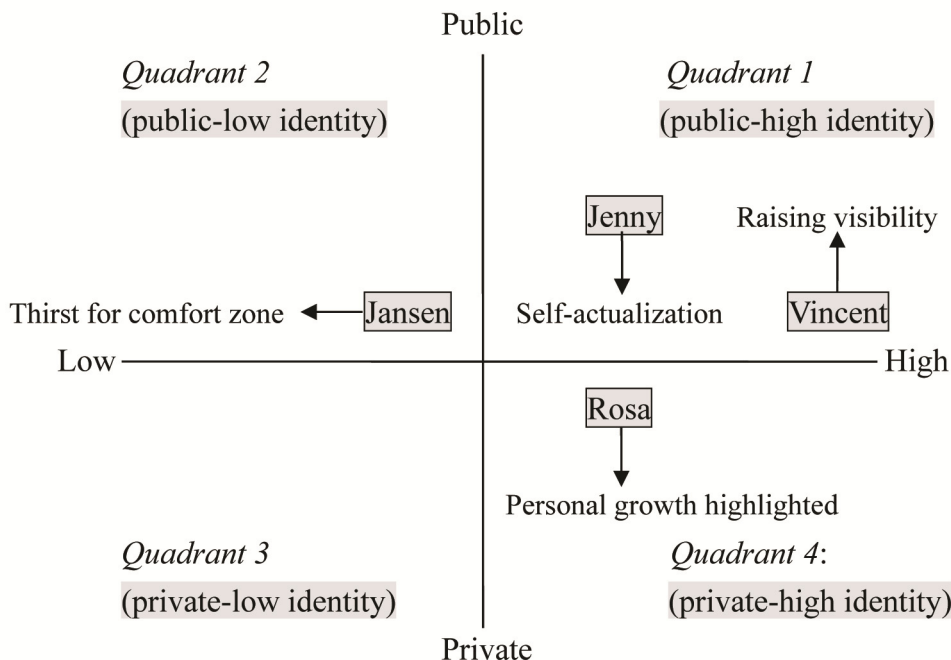


Figure 1. Representation of NNESTs' professional identity

In this figure, the horizontal line represents a continuum of high vs. low ends of professional identity. The vertical line divides the representation of professional identity into public and private domains. Each participant, located in different quadrants, represents their professional identity in distinct ways: public-high identity in *Quadrant 1*, public-low identity in *Quadrant 2*, private-low identity in *Quadrant 3*, and private-high identity in *Quadrant 4*.

In *Quadrant 1*, Vincent represents his relatively high professional identity in the public domain, surviving the demanding working environment with self-perceived teaching efficacy. His prospective identity is targeted at raising public visibility by forming a school baseball team for the school he serves, thus moving upward. In the same vein, Jenny falls into *Quadrant 1* as Vincent does. She represents high professional identity with her agentic and self-demanding professional identity in the public domain. Her self-actualization through in-service training at graduate school is hard to ignore, however. Hence, her prospective identity development is expected to move downward, aiming at a more private domain.

*Quadrant 2* represents a public-low professional identity, which is where Jansen is situated. Sticking to an instrumental goal in his English teaching, Jansen demonstrates his professional identity to pupils in the public domain. Nonetheless, with constant remorse from having chosen the English subject and entering the teaching profession, his self-concept as an EFL teacher falls on the low-identity end. His desire to transfer to another school prompts him to move leftwards toward the lower end of identity in his future development. In Rosa's case, falling into *Quadrant 4* of private-low identity, her distancing from the public domain is readily perceived, and the more conspicuous part of her professional identity development consists in pursuing personal professional growth outside of work, thus pushing her prospective identity downward to the private domain.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Professional Identity Development of NNESTs

From a poststructuralist perspective, the construction of a teacher's professional identity invariably concerns the incorporation of different selves through meaningful interactions with others (Cooper & Olson, 1996). The 'multiple selves' in the NNEST participants either compete or cooperate with one another in constructing their



professional identities. In Rosa's case, the immediate work environment comprised two selves: an EFL teacher from a student's perspective vs. alumni from her previous teacher's perspective. The alumni identity enabled her to accustom herself to the work environment as well as the identity of an EFL teacher within a short period of time. In Jenny's case, the multiple selves comprised three roles: an EFL teacher, a novice caretaker, and a graduate school student. The duties of these different roles appeared to compete with each other, squeezing her limited amount of time and causing her to be swamped with endless work. Yet a closer examination of her narrated lived experiences indicates that she relished handling all the tasks demanded by each identity. In an attempt to strike a balance among the diverse obligations to shape her professional identity, she was striving to integrate and conjoin her personal and professional selves (Day, et al., 2006).

The formation of a teacher's professional identity also lies in the 'interpretation' and 'reinterpretation' of one's lived experiences (Cooper & Olson, 1996), engendering a dynamic, unstable, and sometimes contradictory essence within the individual self. Take Jansen's learning experience as an illustration. In middle school, his capacity for scoring high on paper-and-pen exams led him to believe that he could meet the academic requirements of the English department when he attended college. Out of his expectation, though, the learning obstacle at college came out as unprecedented. The adversity in college discouraged Jansen from pursuing a teaching career even after he had acquired teacher's certificate. However, the rigorous training at college facilitated his retrieval of confidence in subject knowledge during another period: his experience studying abroad in the USA. A more recent fluctuating point of identity development took place when Jansen served at the current school, where he was overwhelmed by intense anxiety owing to the demanding school culture. As his narrated experiences suggested, the professional identity construction was an ongoing process of making meaning of these personal experiences at different phases of life.

A further aspect of the development of NNESTs' professional identity worthy of mention is the role of social context, which entails the teachers' culture and their interaction with others (Diniz-Peieira, 2002; Sakui & Gaies, 2002). As the data revealed, the participants' self-understanding was materialized in the narrated stories through which events were comprehended in relation to one another (Ricoeur, 1991). Deemed socially negotiated and constructed, the development of NNESTs' professional identity takes into consideration interpersonal relationships and the work environment. In Vincent's narratives, for instance, both his interaction with colleagues and the overall work environment exerted a substantial influence on the shaping of his professional identity. As for the English teaching team at his school, all the EFL teachers were fond of sharing information and teaching materials with one another, engendering a friendly and encouraging teacher culture. Under that circumstance, Vincent continued to push himself to keep up with his colleagues by trying up-to-date technology and offering new courses in their Alternative Curriculum. The positive atmosphere even served as one of the major motives for Vincent to persist for a long time, despite the heavy workload from school bureaucrats.

Apart from depending on the social circumstances where their identity was constructed, the construction of the NNEST participants' professional identity in their narratives exhibited vigorous agency, which was indicative of the cohesive link between identity and their teaching (Parkison, 2008). The narrative perception of identity tends to contribute to the full realization of the dynamic and agentic aspects of identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Throughout the participants' teaching careers, as the data demonstrated, there was always something to achieve, providing an imperative site of agency in professional identity formation. For Rosa's part, despite job burnout from work and her self-perceived diminished role as an EFL teacher, she still managed to participate in the professional community of English Education Resource Center and become a Seeded Teacher. Moreover, the agentic operation of the NNEST's construction of a professional identity in Jenny was hard to disregard, as reflected in by the in-service training she underwent in pursuit of a decent degree. According to Lauriala and Kukkonen (2005), self-concept formation comprises three dimensions: the actual self, the ought self, and the ideal self, each interacting with one another. Jenny's self-perceived discrepancies among the three selves evoked some inferiority from within and she was determined to bridge the gap by investing in her English proficiency development in graduate school. On the other hand, Vincent's sense of agency was mainly materialized through his personal emphasis on self-efficacy in the teaching practicum. At all costs, he would manage to raise students' English grades, a typical instrumental goal that school authorities, parents, and teachers valued in high school. Both his full cooperation with other colleagues and active participation in the curriculum design were beneficial to the development of his professional identity.

Following the four general principles of professional identity construction, i.e. multiple selves, interpretation and reinterpretation, social nature, and agency, the development of the NNEST's professional identity is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Development of the NNEST’s professional identity

Developing theme	Supporting example(s)
1. Multiple selves	Rosa’s changing role, Jenny’s personal and professional selves
2. Interpretation & reinterpretation	Jansen’s learning obstacle at college and studying abroad experience
3. Social nature	Vincent’s professional community
4. Agency	Rosa’s engagement in personal growth, Jenny’s pursuit of a master’s degree, Vincent’s attenuation of self-efficacy

4.2 Factors Influencing the Professional Identity Development of NNESTs

In this study, 12 factors were identified to have played a part in shaping the professional identity of these NNESTs and were individual as well as contextual. The individual factors included: (1) personal belief (e.g. L2 learning and teaching); (2) prior experience (e.g. significant others); (3) emotion and disposition; (4) teaching efficacy (e.g. getting good results); (5) instrumental goal (e.g. test-taking skill); (6) non-native status; and (7) motivation. On the other hand, the contextual factors were (8) student attitude; (9) professional community; (10) subject attributes; (11) educational reform and policy; and (12) perceived expectation (e.g. administrative monitor).

Drawing on the classification of influencing factors that impacted the formation of a teacher’s professional identity, the factors established in this study could also be categorized on the basis of their nature, as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Influencing factors of NNESTs’ professional identity

Participants	Influencing factors	Types of influencing factors
Rosa, Jansen, Jenny, Vincent	Personal belief	Internal & Individual
Rosa, Jansen, Jenny, Vincent	Prior experience	Internal & Individual
Rosa, Jansen, Jenny, Vincent	Emotion and disposition	Internal & Individual
Rosa, Jansen, Jenny, Vincent	Teaching efficacy	Internal & Individual
Jansen, Jenny, Vincent	Instrumental goal	Internal & Individual
Rosa, Jansen, Jenny	Non-native status	Internal & Individual
Jansen, Jenny	Motivation	Internal & Individual
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>		
Rosa, Jansen, Jenny, Vincent	Student attitude	External & Contextual
Rosa, Jenny, Vincent	Professional community	External & Contextual
Rosa, Jansen	Subject attributes	External & Contextual
Jansen, Jenny	Educational policy	External & Contextual
Jenny, Vincent	Perceived expectation	External & Contextual

(Compiled by the researcher)

To better illustrate the construction of NNESTs’ professional identity in a given educational context, the following model is proposed, incorporating all the factors that were identified in this study. Some factors emerged more than once in the model and affected the NNEST’s professional identity to a greater extent.

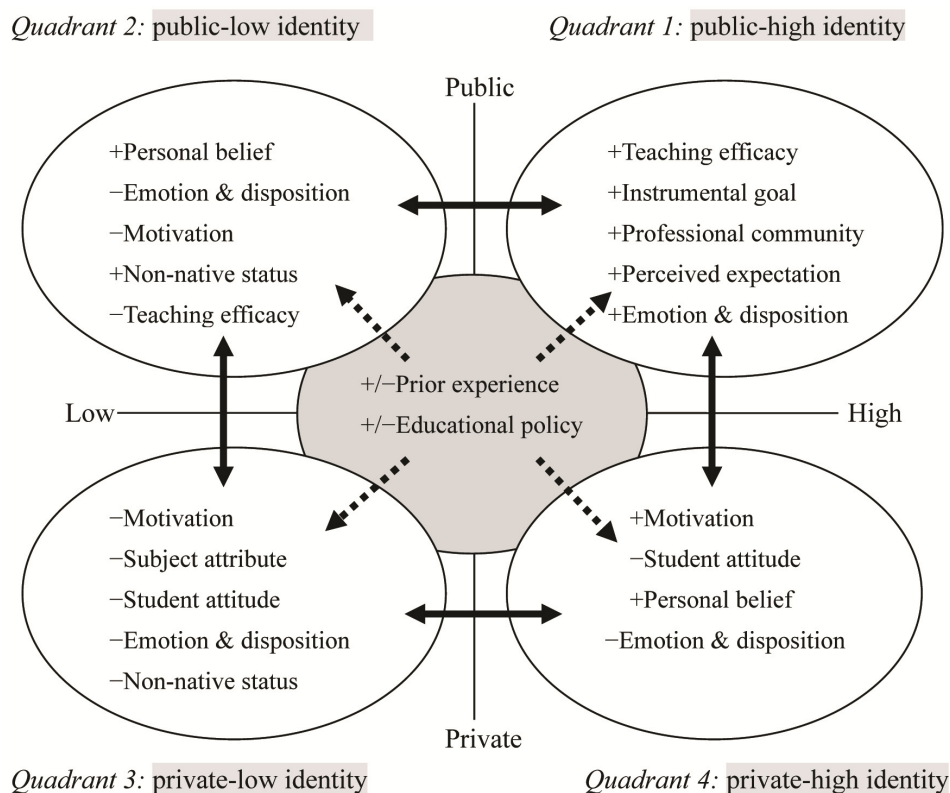


Figure 2. A Model of factors influencing NNEST professional identity

The proposed model in Figure 2 resonates with that of Figure 1, which summarizes our findings. As the diagram indicates, the 12 factors are located in different quadrants and affect the construction of NNESTs' professional identity. Some factors are identified in more than one quadrant because of their more potent influence than the others in shaping NNESTs' professional identity. All the factors in each quadrant are marked with either a plus or minus sign to indicate their properties, with "+" denoting the positive attribute and "-" the negative attribute.

Starting from *Quadrant 1*, some of the factors, mostly contextual ones, including "teaching efficacy," "instrumental goal," "professional community," "perceived expectation," and "emotion & disposition," tend to contribute to constructing public-high identity. To develop public-high identity, an NNEST's teaching efficacy is underscored to boost his or her confidence and improve students' grades. The instrumental goal is specific, i.e. having L2 learners master the test-taking skills in learning English. Professional community is amicable for each NNEST member within it to be mutually supportive. The perceived expectation is foregrounded so that NNESTs may prompt themselves to attain desirable outcomes, and the NNEST's emotion and disposition have to be positive most of the time.

What constitutes a public-low identity within NNEST in *Quadrant 2* is "personal belief," "emotion and disposition," "motivation," "non-native status," and "teaching efficacy." In this quadrant, the personal belief accentuates the L2 learner's academic performance, making the NNEST a vigorous practitioner on the outside. Nonetheless, as a consequence of job burnout, the emotion is generally negative, and the motivation to engage in EFL teaching is low. The non-native status in NNEST serves as a distinctive strength rather than a stumbling block to foreign language teaching. Moreover, the NNEST's teaching efficacy is not prioritized for the purpose of disconnecting one's commitment at work from the pupils' academic performance.

In *Quadrant 3*, the factors that shape private-low identity among NNESTs involve "motivation," "subject attributes," "student attitude," "emotion and disposition," and "non-native status." Intuitively, the motivation to proceed in one's teaching career is relatively low. When compared with other school subjects, the English subject attributes do more harm than good, demanding a great deal of time and effort to double-check usage and to prepare lectures. Student attitude is prone to be recalcitrant, strangling an NNEST's commitment to EFL teaching, and the NNEST's emotion and disposition are negative. The NNEST's non-native status poses a menace to his or her perception of being an EFL teacher, bringing about frequent feelings of professional inadequacy.

In forming a private-high identity located in *Quadrant 4*, the influencing factors are “motivation,” “student attitude,” “personal belief,” and “emotion & disposition.” The motivation to be a competent EFL teacher remains high. However, student attitude might be unruly, which takes its toll on the NNEST’s dedication to the teaching career. The personal belief of the NNEST that foreign language functions as a useful tool leads him or her to be serious about EFL teaching. Yet given the dissatisfaction with some on-site conditions, the NNEST’s emotion and disposition are typically negative.

In the center of the diagram are the neutral factors of “prior experience” and “educational policy,” which exert either a beneficial or detrimental influence on the formation of the NNEST’s professional identity. NNESTs’ prior experience is an elusive factor, so the interpretation or reinterpretation of it may engender diverse impacts on shaping the NNEST’s professional identity. On the other hand, there is further flexibility in educational policy, namely the *2030 Bilingual Country* language policy and the new *2019 Curriculum Guideline*. From inside out, the four unidirectional arrows indicate that these neutral factors are apt to penetrate into any of the four quadrants and become prominent factors in shaping the professional identity of NNESTs. Additionally, the bi-directional arrow signs between the four quadrants imply the transferability, the dynamics, and the fluidity of these influencing factors.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the NNEST’s professional identity from a poststructuralist perspective, resorting to the concept of becoming through narrative inquiry. On the basis of becoming process, the meanings of the NNESTs’ status quo and the prospective development were constantly re-defined, contributing to the recurring themes of NNESTs’ professional identity development: multiplicity, discontinuity, and the social nature (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The concluding remarks are listed in what follows.

### 5.1 Conclusion

(1) The development of the NNEST’s professional identity is characterized by four processes: integration of multiple selves, interpretation and reinterpretation, social negotiation, and operation of agency.

Each NNEST participant was found to have been obliged to tackle their multiple selves and manage to achieve a delicate equilibrium among them. In the process of constructing their professional identity, the NNEST participants were interpreting and reinterpreting their lived stories and personal experiences, leading up to the sometimes fragmented and discontinuous selves in their teaching careers. The pursuit of their professional identity also incorporated interpersonal mediation, making social negotiation a prominent theme in the formational progress. Lastly, the operation of the NNESTs’ agency proved to have pervaded the construction of their professional identity. Such was the participants’ agency that the restriction from the societal structure was trespassed, either in a positive or negative manner, in the public or private domain.

(2) Assorted individual and contextual factors were intertwined in fashioning the development of NNESTs’ professional identity.

The myriad of influencing factors recognized in the formation of NNESTs’ professional identity substantiated the dynamic, shifting, and unstable aspect of such a process, as was demonstrated through the proposed models in this research. The individual factors included personal belief, prior experience, emotion and disposition, teaching efficacy, instrumental goal, non-native status, and motivation. The contextual factors were student attitude, professional community, subject attributes, educational policy, and perceived expectation. These individual and contextual factors, shuttling between different quadrants, exerted either a positive or negative influence on shaping NNESTs’ professional identity. Henceforth, the same factors were identified in more than one quadrant. The forming process of NNESTs’ professional identity was dynamic and unstable, for each NNEST was prone to move in a certain direction, depending on which factors or forces were absent or present.

### 5.2 Research Implications

(1) From a theoretical perspective, it is imperative to focus on NNESTs in conducting professional identity research for the distinctive theoretical constructs derived from this participant group to be established.

In contrast with many previous studies on general teachers’ and pre-service EFL teachers’ professional identity development, this study accentuated the professional identity among in-service NNESTs with considerable teaching experience. As the results and discussion have demonstrated, the professional identity of these NNESTs demonstrated distinctive properties and hence demanded scrutiny in the professional identity research field. In constructing professional identity, for instance, the NNEST participants were found to have conjoined multiple selves in respective manners. Through self-narration in narrative inquiry, their multiple selves were substantiated. Additionally, as the anecdotic events in NNESTs’ lived experience had undergone both

interpretation and reinterpretation, the meanings of their narrated stories were not as straightforward as they might have appeared on the outside. Only through constant interpretation and reinterpretation could the true meaning behind their lived stories become better illuminated. Similarly, the social negotiation of NNESTs' professional identity construction implied that the importance of interpersonal interaction with other teachers, the teacher culture, varied settings, and experiences could scarcely be underestimated. In other words, the professional identity of NNESTs is mediated and negotiated through social contexts. Lastly, the operation of agency also played a central part in shaping the NNESTs' professional identity. In each of their lived experiences, the NNEST participants in this study bore some important goal to attain, be it personally or contextually relevant.

- (2) From a pedagogical perspective, in-service training should be targeted at maintaining public-high professional identity by foregrounding positive factors and removing negative ones.

As the proposed quadrant chart indicated, an NNEST is located in a certain position, representing one of the four possible professional identities: public-high, public-low, private-low, and public-low. Ideally, NNESTs are equipped with a public-high professional identity in their professional life, being "high involvement teachers" in their teaching career (Yee, 1990). NNESTs with either a public-high professional identity or a private-high professional identity are prone to suffer from negative emotion from work, as was indicated in Jansen's and Rosa's narrated experiences. To this end, the myriad of factors that contribute to the construction of NNESTs' public-high professional identity have to be put to the forefront of teacher training.

On a fundamental level, substantial endeavor should be dedicated to sustaining teaching efficacy in NNESTs, which is directly linked to their positive identification with the teaching career. To enhance teaching efficacy in them, NNESTs should be provided with comprehensive in-service training that encompasses all language skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In terms of instrumental goals, there are two directions for NNESTs to follow. On the one hand, they are expected to perceive the English language as a means of communication. On the other hand, NNESTs are expected to heed test-taking skills in their practicum. Bearing either direction in mind, an NNEST is more likely to dedicate additional exertion to the professional career. Regarding professional community, the significance of environmental influence on an NNEST's professional identity is self-evident. A professional community can be established inside or outside of one's work environment. The prerequisite is that NNESTs are invited to be genuinely immersed in such a professional community, rather than displaying superficial participation, so that they can truly benefit from the immersion. Additionally, the factor of perceived expectation is typically linked to school norms, which are beyond the control of ordinary teachers. To cultivate NNESTs' public-high professional identity, school authorities should take responsibility for creating an encouraging work environment that promotes collaboration and reciprocity. Above all, given the close connection between emotion and the construction of one's identity, NNESTs' emotion and disposition should be persistently attended to in constructing their professional identity.

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