



University of Tehran press

A comparison of two groups of pre- and in-service teachers' discursive construction of their professional identities: Inclination toward change or constancy?



Farzaneh Dehghan*

Assistant Professor, Amirkabir University of Technology Tehran, Iran
Email: f_dehghan@aut.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring how teachers discursively construct their professional identity inclinations during their everyday interactions and talks with others. For this purpose, the three dilemmatic lenses of professional identity construction proposed by Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin (2011) was used. These three controversial lenses include agency versus control, difference versus sameness and constancy versus change. In order to gather data, 5 experienced teachers and 5 teacher-students (all females) took part in semi-structured interviews and follow-up personal contacts with the researcher. All the content was transcribed for the purpose of content analysis. The iterative analysis of the content revealed that more experienced teachers believed that their identities as a teacher were controlled by the world and not by themselves (control vs. agency) while the majority of teacher-students believed that they could initiate new transformations in their classrooms. Moreover, both groups asserted that their identities were constructed as more similar to other colleagues or their own teachers (sameness) rather than different by following a fixed routine in their daily career (constancy) in contrast to changing their practices according to the particular needs of the context (change). Informed decision-making based on awareness can help agency and initiation against dominant discourses empowered by the context.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 11 December, 2021
Accepted: 24 May, 2022
Available online:
Autumn 2022

Keywords:

Teachers' Professional
Identities; Identity
Inclinations; Discursive
Construction; Competing
Discourses; Dominant
Agency Teachers'

DOI: 10.22059/JFLR.2022.335255.918

Dehghan, F. (2022). A comparison of two groups of pre- and in-service teachers' discursive construction of their professional identities: Inclination toward change or constancy?. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 12 (3), 288-307.

* Assistant Professor of Amirkabir University, got her BA, MA and PhD from Shiraz University in TEFL. Her research interests are teacher education, discourse analysis, CAE and academic reading/writing.

1. Introduction

Teachers' professional identity and its construction have been a topic of interest for many researchers during the recent years ([Crumpler & Handsfield, 2020](#)). Teachers' professional identities can be defined in terms of their self-images and the way this sense of self is achieved, maintained and developed in and because of their careers. These self-images influence their practices and commitments in the classroom. In a broader sense of the word, teachers' professional identities can also be defined in terms of their roles in the society or what the society expects them to do. These expectations influence teachers' performances in the classroom and determine what is or is not important to them. As a result, it also influences their conceptualization of professional development. Professional identities are, then, constructed, negotiated and represented in career, culture and society. It combines personal, social and professional ways of becoming and being a teacher ([Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004](#)).

From a constructivist view, becoming a teacher is in essential an identity formation process ([Danielewicz, 2001](#)) in which, besides teachers themselves, many other parties are also involved. These parties include society, culture and the educational system. From a discursive point of view, professional identities are regarded as deeply embedded in the discursive practices of the individual and the social ([De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006](#); [MacLure, 2003](#)). As [Danielewicz \(2001\)](#), states, "discourses are powerfully constructive of identities because they are inherently ideological. Many discourses are not only various; they are also

hierarchical' (p. 11). Accordingly, teachers' professional identity can also be viewed as a process which is constructed through their discursive practices with involved stockholders inside their community, the dominant discourses in the related organization of education and the overall social milieu ([Moore, 2004](#)). In these definitions, discourse is not just linguistic interaction or utterance, but also multimodal and ideological. The constructive role of discourse in building teachers' professional identity has been considered in many researches and studies; however, what has been scarcely researched is examining the constructive role of discourse in different identity inclinations. In other words, the discursive construction of professional identity through everyday communications may lead to the construction of different identity inclinations in teachers. These different identity inclinations can be examined based on different dilemmatic lenses of professional identity construction ([Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011](#)). This is the gap that the present study aims to fulfill.

Research objectives and questions

Teachers' professional identity and its construction is influential both on their actual performance in the classroom as well as on their professional development. Using a discursive approach to identity construction, the present study aims at investigating the formation of professional identity inclinations of a group of Iranian English language teachers and teacher students through their daily discursive practices they are involved in. In other words, this study tries to focus on the construction of differing identity inclinations as a result of being discursively constructed. Regarding

these objectives, the present research aims at answering the following questions:

1. Regarding the dilemmatic lenses of professional identity construction proposed by Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin (agency/control, difference/sameness, change/constancy), how can teachers' different discursive practices with other parties (including their own teachers as students, colleagues, principals, parents and students) lead to the construction of different dilemmatic identity inclinations?

2. In the discursive construction of professional identity, what similarities and identities exist between experienced teachers and teacher students?

2. Background: Teacher's professional identities

Working on the area of professional identity and development, an important question to be asked is what is meant by professional identity or identities. Different definitions of identity are proposed looking at it from social and cultural ([Cummins, 1996](#)), positional or professional ([Clarke, 2008](#); [Danielewicz, 2001](#)), diachronic and discursive ([Zhang, 2015](#)) perspectives. Teachers' development of their professional identity is defined in terms of a long-term goal and growth path regarding their understanding of both their teaching (their professional career) as well as of themselves as teachers (their professional identities). These two aspects are completely interrelated as identity specifies the way a person understands his/her relationship to the social world, how this connection is socially

constructed in different contexts and how the person deals with the possibilities for the future. In addition, professional identity is different from professional development ([Salimi, Mostafai & Najar, 2016](#))

Previous studies on the study of professional identity from a discursive perspective ([Bamberg, De Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011](#); [Devos, 2010](#)) have posited that professional identities like personal identities develop as the manifestations of different discourses that assign particular social values to different human practices. These discursive perspectives of identity construction view "discursive practices as the sites for identity formation processes" ([Bamberg, De Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011](#), p. 189). That is, examining how teachers negotiate different discourses and ideologies that impact their professional work is needed to understand their positioning and identities ([Handsfield, Crumpler, & Dean, 2010](#); [Hunt, 2018](#)). A discursive approach to teacher professional identities proposes that individuals in a particular community are exposed to different competing discourses from which they can choose. These choices are consequential in forming a particular identity in a profession ([Ticknor, 2014](#)).

Moreover, these discourses are empowered by different parties with whom a teacher interacts in their daily practices. As a result, from their first experiences in a classroom (even as a learner), teachers are involved in a continuous, long-term discursive process which has direct ramifications for the image they construct of themselves and their career. This could be in line with a situated learning theory according to which professional identity is defined in

terms of how individuals (re)construct their selves and roles according to different cultural and social settings. This study is based on this view that identity is constructed and reconstructed through different discursive practices individuals are involved in. More specifically, the study draws upon the three lenses of navigating or managing identity dilemmas proposed by [Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin \(2011\)](#), namely, agency and control, sameness and difference, and constancy and change. Each of these dilemmatic identity construction categories raises empirical questions. This means that individuals involved in an identity construction process face different ambiguities (dilemmas) and choices which they have to choose from according to what different languages or particular discursive practices offer to them.

Agency and control refer to the question of constructing the world or being constructed by the world or whether the person (I-as-subject) constructs the world around them or whether this person (me-as-undergoer) is constructed or shaped and controlled by the world ([Bamberg, De Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011](#), p. 178). Sameness and difference between the individual and others deals with the question of the self-other relations and the way individuals navigate their sense of self as integrated in and/or differentiated from others. The third identity formation dilemma, constancy and change, can be argued to be specifically related to the teachers' professional development. According to [Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin \(2011\)](#), the question of constancy and change or inertia and action can be raised as,

... how we can claim to be the same in the face of constant change and how we can

claim to have changed in the face of still being the same-and what degree of continuity and development are necessary to develop and maintain a sense of self as unitary (p.178).

As was mentioned, agency and control are identified as the spirit of being able to construct (or shape/control) the world versus being constructed (or shaped and controlled) by the world or being able to initiate changes in this world (I-as-subject) versus accepting the world as it is (me-as-undergoer) ([Bamberg, De Fina, & Schiffrin, 2011](#)). From this viewpoint, teachers as agents of change. This change can range from social transformations and justice regarding a critical perspective up to educational changes and reforms at a classroom level. This agentic role of teachers has attracted a lot of attention in recent years (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2017). An agentic identity is an active risk-taker and initiator of change, while a control identity can be regarded as inactive, impassible and conservative. In case of teachers, this agency refers to the degree of their investment and active involvement in their classroom practices ([Imants & Van der Wal, 2020](#); [Quinn & Carl, 2015](#)).

These three domains of analysis which are defined as navigation situations wherein different inclinations of identity construction are discursively performed are used as the basis of data analysis in this study. However, it is worth mentioning that these differing dilemmatic lenses are not true dichotomies or either-or identity types; but rather they are just analysis frameworks which show teachers' constructing identity inclinations toward each of these extremes. Overall, from a discursive perspective, professional identity is the image that

teachers have of themselves related to their profession and the way this sense of self is constructed and developed through discourse toward each of these contrasting identity inclinations or tendencies. Therefore, considering the fact that the discursive construction of these identity inclinations is not tackled in previous studies, the present study wants to explore the question of how a group of English language teachers and teacher-students discursively construct aspects of agency, change and difference of their identities.

3. Method

Research design

This study is a long-term qualitative research which is carried out with the purpose of examining the teachers' discursive construction of their identity inclinations. For this purpose, [Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin's \(2011\)](#) identity model including three dilemmatic lenses of professional identity construction of agency/control, difference/sameness and change/constancy were utilized. Data gathering was done over a five-month period and using an iterative data analysis approach simultaneously with the data gathering procedures and stopped as data saturation was satisfied.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, 5 English language teacher-students and 5 experienced language teachers at state schools (all females) were invited to take part in the study. They were chosen based on convenience sampling. It is notable that the number of early participants invited was 18 (10 experienced and 8 student teachers). However, data gathered from 5 participants at each group who continued their interviews

and contacts to the end of the research project was used for data analysis and those of others were deleted mostly because of incomplete participation.

The 5 final, pre-service teacher-students were studying at a teacher training university (age range 22-24). At the time of this research project, they were at the last year of their four-year academic career and had no formal teaching experience at state schools except for the practicum where they had to attend a state junior or senior high school for certain hours per week. During these hours, they attended real classes, observed them and helped teachers in their daily classroom chores. They were required to report to me as their university professor about their observations and practices in the classroom. At the end of the academic year, they were supposed to teach one lesson in the observed class.

Five other final participants of this study were in-service, experienced English language teachers who had B.A. (3) or M.A. (2) degrees and were teaching at state schools. They had teaching experiences from 5 to 15 years with an age range of 28-37. I got acquainted with these teachers while teaching at an in-service course where I taught as the instructor.

It must be noted that before starting this project, consent was taken from all participants for observing ethical issues. They were assured that all the transcribed interviews and personal communications would be only for the purpose of research and their identity and information would remain confidential with the researcher.

Instruments and data collection

The main instruments used in this study were semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, online textual discussions with the researcher and the practicum reports teacher-students sent to me during their observation period in the language classes. All interviews and discussions were conducted in Persian to ensure intelligibility. The duration of each interview depended on the questions raised, however it usually lasted from 20 to 45 minutes. The number of interviews was 3 over a period of 5 months. The personal contacts between the participants and the researcher were conducted on the platform of an online, text-based social networking application. The duration range of these discussion sessions was from 43 to 66 minutes. The questions were mainly about their daily practices in the classroom (teachers), their memories of language learning at schools, what they thought about the role of society and organizations of education in determining their professional career, the role of school staff, colleagues, students and parents in this regard, etc. Some questions were designed beforehand based the needed content, but mostly they emerged during the the interviews and personal contacts based on participants' answers and the objectives of the research. Teacher-students had also practicum reports to be used as another source of data analysis in this study.

Data analysis procedures

The interviews were transcribed and added to the set of data gathered from online textual discussions and reports. The collected data was analyzed using an iterative data analysis procedure based on [Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin's \(2001\)](#) identity. It is

notable that data was analyzed as two separate set for teacher-students and practicing teachers. Then these data pieces were categorized according to the framework's three domains of identity formation, namely, agency/control, sameness/difference, and constancy/change. The procedure for data codification was to find the specific features related to an identity pattern and then to assign it to each of the 6 dilemmatic identity themes. At this stage, according to [Attride-Stirling's](#) thematic network (2001), first, all the key and micro pieces of themes within the texts which were related to the role of discourse in identity-making decisions were identified (basic themes). Then these basic themes were categorized into the three main frameworks of the study (agency and initiation or lack of it, being similar to others or preferring difference, initiating change or repeating previous routines) as organizing themes. Finally, these themes were categorized according to the main dilemmatic dichotomies in each category (inclination toward each of the two extremes in each category) (global themes). Texts were analysed by a second coder to satisfy the consistency or stability of the codings by providing her with enough information on coding technique. For this purpose, similar codings were assigned 1 and different codings were assigned 0 and then inter-rater reliability index was calculated to be 0.73, which verifies that the codification was dependable or trustworthy. Table 1 showcases samples of the codification process.

Table 1: Samples of identity categories' codification process

Global themes	Organizing themes	Extracted samples (basic themes)
Agency	The agentic, initiative role of teachers, initiation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>I think teachers are key factors in turning the classroom environment into the best or the worst situation for learning.</u> 2. <u>You can promote your ... and making yourself better and better.</u> 3. <u>But, I kept some of my techniques.</u> 4. <u>However, I did not pay attention to them [colleagues]</u>
Control	A belief in every change comes from top down.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>A supportive society or organization of education encourages you to innovate.</u> 2. <u>You cannot deny the importance of the higher-level parties in promoting teachers' professional competence.</u> 3. <u>.. as long as there were no complaints from the students and their parents.</u> 4. <u>Sometimes the society not only does not support innovation and change but also inhibit it</u> 5. <u>The Ministry and organizations of Education are the key factors in the formation of the professional career of teachers</u> 6. <u>I did not see that support in the higher level frameworks, which is needed to propel me in my career</u>
Difference	Teachers are able to create a change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>They can create a lively, enthusiastic situation</u> 2. <u>found out how a teacher can make a difference.</u> 3. <u>If you want to be a different teacher, everything starts from yourself.</u>
Sameness	Follow what is accepted; be similar to others. Opposing difference and change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>She asked me to follow what was accepted there.</u> 2. <u>but I had to reconsider some techniques</u> 3. <u>Next year, I decided to 'be more like them' in my teaching</u> 4. <u>still they told me not to waste my time.</u> 5. <u>Any new change needed a lot of fighting and I did not have the power for this huge investment</u>
Change	Change in a positive way; not following fixed routines	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>I decided to be a language teacher like her</u> 2. <u>But, I don't know; things [her ideas for being different] may change if you are teaching in an unexpected situation.</u>
Constancy	Follow a fixed routine.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Things we are learning in the university are not always helpful in a real classroom</u> 2. <u>A constant lesson plan was the best policy</u> 3. <u>They seemed to be dissatisfied with everything and asked me to do this and that</u>

	4. <i>then we have to ... become similar to others and stick to a required, familiar and permanent routine which bothers neither you nor others</i>
--	---

In order to ensure the credibility of the present research, control by members, gathering data over a long time interval as well as triangulation procedures were utilized. For this purpose, two of the final participants from each group were asked to re-examine their own transcribed texts, and announce if they agree with the content (or if they opposed to it). In addition to interviews, data was also collected through online text talks and teacher students' weekly reports from their observed classes. In order to ensure the transferability of the present research, coding was accurately performed by two coders, and as mentioned above, the correlation coefficient between the codes of the two evaluators was used as a transferability indicator. In order to improve the reliability, as previously said, triangulation and documenting all data were used using repeated data collection method. Finally, all available data was collected and transcribed in writing to be available for rechecking if required.

It should also be reminded that the use of the framework of the [Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin \(2011\)](#) as the theoretical model of this research was due to the fact that the purpose of this study was not to find a variety of identities or their categories, but to find how discursive practices (in interacting with others) may lead to teachers' tendency or inclination toward each of the ultimate identity extremes identified in that framework.

4. Findings

The iterative analysis of the content showed an inclination toward control in the

experienced teachers and toward agency among teacher-students. In other words, as the teaching experience of the participants increased, there was a growing tendency toward the control end of the professional identity continuum. Before presenting the results, it is notable that the included quotes are representative of the entire sample as examples to demonstrate certain identity inclinations. A teacher-student (TS1) who had spent her practicum in 4 different schools and observed classroom practices of 4 different teachers (but herself had no direct teaching experience in a state school classroom) maintains that,

I think teachers are key factors in turning the classroom environment into the best or the worst situation for learning. They can create a lively, enthusiastic situation wherein students are better involved and more motivated. (Interview)

TS1 remembers how she loved English as a junior high school student because she had an English language teacher all three years of her junior high school, who had encouraged her to study English. Eventually, she had decided to become an English language teacher at that time,

She used to tell me that I would be a good language teacher and I wanted to believe it. I decided to be a language teacher like her, even her manners and clothing, way of speaking and her pronunciation in English. She was a mentor and a real role model. (Online discussion)

Here, the sameness factor is working in the professional identity construction of this prospective language teacher. This influence

had been so powerful that it even determines the future career of a person and more importantly, the way that this professional identity is constructed. TS1 also compares this teacher with other teachers she had the same course in the following years at the senior high school,

But, when I went to senior high school, everything changed. The English teachers there were very different; the classes were boring and demotivating. I always compared them and their classes with my ex-teacher and her classes and found out how a teacher can make a difference. (Interview)

Another teacher-student (TS2) talked about her experience in the observation classroom in practicum and the teacher of that observed classroom,

Then, after she had felt my surprise at what was happening in the classroom, she stopped me after the class and said that things we are learning in the university are not always helpful in a real classroom. (Practicum report)

I asked her whether she was impressed by that teacher's comment and whether she predicted that one day she would think and behave like her when she would be a language teacher herself. Her answer was negative although she agreed that things might change in future.

I don't think that what she said had any effect on my future as a teacher. But, I don't know; things may change if you are teaching in an unexpected situation; for example, very remote or deprived parts of the province or to very weak students. Maybe in these extreme cases, I will have to reconsider my studies at the university. (Online discussion)

Regarding the extent to which the dominant discourses of the society, culture and organization of education are effective in the formation and development of teachers' professional career, the teacher-student respondents had controversial ideas. Two of them (TS1 and TS3) defined professional development in terms of independent, self-oriented development and assigned little role to the organizational culture of the society in this regard (maybe due to the fact that they were teaching at private language institutes at the time of this research. TS3, for example, contended that development depends on the person themselves:

If you want to be a different teacher, everything starts from yourself. You can promote your professional development by studying more and more, teaching in private language institutes and advancing your skills. (Online discussion)

Others were not so clear or certain about it. TS5 quotes some of her relatives' comments (who were teachers) about organizational professional development programs as being formal, not practical, useless and a waste of time. She asserts,

I don't know whether those in-service courses are really useful to teachers or not. But I have heard from my mother and other relatives and friends who are teachers that these courses do not help them learn anything new and if they do, it is very rare. (Online discussion)

Nevertheless, she believes that social and organizational cultures are important in shaping the path they are going to take in their professional career,

A supportive society or organization of education encourages you to innovate and

be better every day while a disheartening and conservative culture –whether of society or organization- makes you just repeat. (TS5, Interview)

The five experienced language teachers provided with richer data as they had a lot of daily interactions with many different parties. The analysis of the data granted with four discursive orientations for this group's inclination toward control rather than agency. These include two direct, i.e. colleagues and school administrators, and two indirect discursive agents, i.e. students and parents.

Teacher 1 (T1), who had 3 years of experience, had started her career with an associate degree of English language teaching and later continued her education for a B.A. degree in an in-service educational program for teachers. She had taught at private English institutes before she entered her associate degree studies. She had had a good level of proficiency and later, continued her M.A. studies at a state university in the field of TEFL. Due to her teaching experience in private institutes, at her entrance into the state school teaching, she decided to be as energetic as she had been in her private institute classes. However, she encountered some problems: it seemed that students were not satisfied with these radical changes,

The first signs of these dissatisfactions came from the school principal. She told me that there were some complaints by several students. They had told the school administrators that they did not learn English the way I was teaching or that they learned English very well the previous years but not that year. (Interview)

The next objection came from a colleague in the same school,

She asked me to follow what was accepted there. 'You will face problems.' I believed in what I was doing, but I had to reconsider some techniques which, in their views, were 'appropriate' for private language institutes and not for a state school. (Interview)

These comments and opinions led to the reconsideration of T1's goals and plans in her career. She decided to remove some parts of the teaching techniques she used in the first year and follows a routine schedule and became more and more similar to her more experienced colleagues. The discursive power of social parties was to the degree that she finally came to the conclusion that following a constant and similar routine had fewer troubles.

Next year, I decided to 'be more like them' in my teaching. This was difficult at first, as I also taught at language institutes and things were very different there. But, I kept some of my techniques: I still spent a lot of time making flashcards or drawing pictures or handmade objects for the following day's classes and still they told me not to waste my time. However, I did not pay attention to them as long as there were no complaints from the students and their parents. (Interview)

The issue of constancy and change is also mentioned by these teachers. T2, who started her career in state schools with an M.A. degree, refers to the way that her students' comments in the early years of her teaching career made her reconsider her methodology:

Maybe they knew that I was a novice teacher. They seemed to be dissatisfied with everything and asked me to do this and that. For example, I did not believe in memorizing bilingual vocabulary lists and I did not ask

my students to do so; however, after a few sessions, they urged me to ask them these lists as they asked me, 'how do we know that we have learned new vocabulary?' (Online discussion)

She had to include what they wanted in the following sessions. It was important for her to see that her students were satisfied with what she was doing in the classroom. These comments affected her decisions for the future of her professional career:

A constant lesson plan was the best policy. Any new change needed a lot of fighting and I did not have the power for this huge investment. (Online discussion)

Regarding the role of the dominant discourses of society, culture and organization of education in the formation and development of their professional career, this group of experienced teachers had more harmonized ideas. Five of them defined their professional career in terms of other-oriented, prescribed and managerial development and assigned a great role to the culture of the society and the organization of education. Only one teacher, T1, regards teachers' professional career not as an either-or, but rather as a two-way, interactive process for which both teachers themselves and the institution (Ministry, Organization and even school administrations) have been responsible and influential,

You cannot deny the importance of the higher-level parties in promoting teachers' professional competence. Sometimes the society (I mean Ministry of Education, Organization of Education, school administrators and parents), not only does not support innovation and change but also inhibit it; then we have to change all our

program, become similar to others and stick to a required, familiar and permanent routine which bothers neither you nor others. (Online discussion)

Similarly, T1 asserts that teachers mostly do not regard in-service courses provided by the Organization of Education influential in developing or changing their professional identities. They perceive it as something that comes from above, while the formation of professional identities is mostly dependent on a culture of support and encouragement. T4, a teacher with 12 years of experience, believes that it is the whole system which determines the quality of the components,

The Ministry and organizations of Education are the key factors in the formation of the professional career of teachers. I wanted to create some new changes in my classroom and normally, I faced some objections, first on the part of students and parents and later from school administration and organization of education. But, the point was that I did not see that support in the higher level frameworks, which is needed to propel me in my career by making it a necessary part of the professional career of every teacher. (Interview)

T4, a teacher with 12 years of experience, believes that it is the whole system that determines the quality of the parts,

The Ministry and Organizations of Education are key factors in constructing teachers' professional career. I wanted to create new changes in my classroom and faced some opposition, first on the part of students and their parents and then by school administrators, the officials and master teachers from the Office of Education. At

school, they told me that the result would be the same in either cases. But the point was that I did not observe the needed support from the higher order frameworks, which I think is necessary for my development in this career or making it an important part of being a teacher. (Interview)

The two other respondents of the teacher group had also a similar idea about professional identity: if it starts and is supported from higher order authorities, they will have change and innovation.

5. Discussion

A discursive perspective toward professional identities maintains that teachers' professional identities are constructed in discourses which are presented through language (Clarke, 2008). Different competing discourses are available to individuals via language, in which this career-related sense of self is constructed. In this study, these competing discourses are examined in three lenses of identity navigation, i.e. control vs. agency, difference vs. sameness, and change vs. constancy. In other words, language is the medium through which these competing discourses are manifested, reconstructed and propagated. Some of these discourses are more powerful and therefore, become dominant and more probable to be adopted by individuals (Moore, 2004).

The results of this study indicated how the interactions that language teachers had from their first encounter with a foreign language might have strengthened their inclination toward one of these dilemmatic professional identity construction ends. The fact that the two groups of participants (teachers vs. teacher-students) had different tendencies toward either of these extremes indicates how

teachers' interactions and talks with different parties at different levels may have caused each groups direction to a particular discourse, which constructs the individual's identity in a certain way. There seemed to be a gradual increase in their conservatism as teachers' experience increased and they encountered the dominant discourses in their career. The comparison of the results of the two groups showed that more experienced teachers believed that their identities as a teacher were controlled by the world and not by themselves while teacher-students believed that they could initiate new transformations in their classrooms. Moreover, both groups similarly agreed on the degree to which their identities were constructed as more similar to other colleagues or their own teachers (sameness) rather than different in terms of trying innovative methodologies (difference) by following a fixed routine as the best approach in forming their daily career (constancy) in contrast to changing their practices according to the particular features of the context (change).

The idea that identity construction is a situated social process has received substantial attention by researchers. From this perspective, these results are in line with the idea of identity formation in practice and the idea of identification (Wenger, 1998). As he believes, "identification is the investment of self in building associations and differentiation in a sense, that we identify, or are being identified, as belonging to socially organized categories and roles" (p. 188). This sense of belonging brings about a sense of equilibrium or comfort zone which protects the individual from criticism and isolation. Social identity theories identify the concept

of social identity in terms of group membership. From a discursive point of view, however, the inclination toward sameness/control, constancy/change and agency/control is a gradual process constructed through competing discourses a language teacher is exposed to and chooses from during their learning/teaching lives ([Sachs, 2001](#)). This choice may depend on either the power of certain competing discourses ([Chamberlain, Scales & Sethi, 2020](#)), the effect of personal features or individual differences or an interaction of both. This interaction is an area of research which can be explored in more details by interested researchers. In addition, this brings us to the important topic of teachers' decisions about professional development ([Schoenfeld, 2011](#)). How these decisions may be constructed discursively and what are their sources can be *investigated* by future research.

Another finding of this study is about the role of the dominant discourses of society, culture and organization of education in the formation and development of teachers' professional identities. While the teacher-student participants assigned less important role to external factors, experienced teachers showed a greater tendency toward more conservative forums of identity formation, i.e. control, sameness and constancy. This may be due to the power of dominant discourses in society, culture and institutes, through which interactions contribute to the enactment of certain socially-situated, career-related identities ([Moore, 2004](#)). Individuals in particular professions utilize the social language enacted and enforced by these

discourses to express who they are within their career.

As was mentioned, though dominant discourses are definitely powerful in constructing certain identities, teachers' informed decisions coming from critical awareness and insight ([Dehghan, 2022](#)) can be an important factor for change. Transformations occur when insightful individuals start to make decisions against the dominant discourses. This is not possible unless they are aware of other possible discourses ([Alsup, 2008](#)). Teacher empowerment process includes strengthening professional knowledge base, reaching to a higher teaching efficacy, and promoting decision-making in order to create a more innovative teaching environment. This is done through self-awareness, motivation-provoking and collaboration process helping teachers to promote their sense of power, self-confidence and self-efficacy. Being aware of how discourses can form their identities is the first step in the way of change and difference. Though some believe that innovation and problem solving come from insight, the role of experience, awareness and knowledge is not deniable. Through awareness raising, teachers will be able to move over dominant discourses and perform transformative changes in their classrooms.

The results of this study confirmed many previous studies which have focused on the topic of teachers' discursive construction of professional identity ([Zhang, 2015](#); [Ticknor, 2014](#)). However, the results of this study added to the dimensions of the issue by examining the discursive construction of specific identity inclinations.

This study used a particular theoretical framework to examine the professional identity inclinations; however, other research can use exploratory research designs and grounded theory approaches to explore other professional identity inclinations. In addition, the effects of each of these professional identity inclinations on students' learning as well as their relationship with other teacher traits such as innovation, reflection and self-efficacy can be examined by future researchers.

6. Conclusions

This study tried to explore how two groups of inexperienced teacher-students and experienced EFL teachers discursively constructed their professional identities during their everyday interactions with other parties. Based on [Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin](#)'s three dilemmatic domains of identity (agency/control, sameness/difference, and constancy/change) as the theoretical framework of the study, the iterative analysis of the content revealed that the construction of teachers' professional identities was mediated through the interactions and talks they had with their own teachers, colleagues, master teachers, supervisors, school administrators and even students and their parents (indirectly). The results showed that as the experience of teachers increased, they increasingly regarded their identities as being controlled by the world and not by themselves (control vs. agency) in a growing conservative way; however, teacher-students more believed that they could initiate new transformations in their classrooms ([Jalali, Maghsoudi & Khomeijani, 2020](#)). Moreover, both groups similarly agreed on the degree to which their identities were constructed as more similar to

other colleagues or their own teachers (sameness) rather than different in terms of trying innovative methodologies (difference) by following a fixed routine as the best approach in forming their daily career (constancy) in contrast to changing their practices according to the particular needs of the context (change). Informed decision making based on awareness can help enactment against dominant discourses empowered in particular contexts.

Finally, it must be noted that many identity formation frames are available which pay attention to many other aspects of teachers' professional life such as risk-taking, self-efficacy, reflection, self-determination, etc. It is believed that many aspects of teachers' professional career can be subcategorized under the very general dilemmatic lenses of agency/control, difference/sameness and change/constancy. Further research can be carried out to explore more into different teacher attributes and how they are related to these general identity tendencies or more specific categories of teachers' professional identity.

References

- [Alsop, J. \(2008\). *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. doi: 10.4324/9781410617286.](#)
- [Attride-Stirling, J. \(2001\). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 1\(3\), 385-405. doi:org/10.1177/146879410100100307.](#)
- [Bamberg, M., De Fina, A., & Schiffrin, D. \(2011\). Discourse and identity construction. In S.J. Schwartz et al. \(Eds.\), *Handbook of identity theory and research* \(pp.177-199\). Berlin: Springer](#)

- Science+Business Media. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_8.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 107-128.
- Biesta, G, Priestley, M. & Robinson, S. (2017). Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teachers' talk for teacher agency. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 49(1). 38-54.
doi: 10.1080/00220272.2016.1205143.
- Chamberlain, R., Scales, P., & Sethi, J. (2020). Competing discourses of power in teachers' stories of challenging relationships with students. *Power and Education*, 12(2), 1-18. doi:10.1177/1757743820931118.
- Clarke, M. (2008). *Language teacher identities: Co-constructing discourse and community*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Los Angeles: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Crumpler, T. P. & Handsfield, L. J. (2020). *The complex development of preservice and in-service teacher identities across space and time*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Danielewicz, J. (2001). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- De Fina, A., Schiffrin, D., & Bamberg, M. (2006). Introduction. In A. De Fina, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp. 1-23). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dehghan, F. (2022). Teachers' perceptions of professionalism: a top-down or a bottom-up decision-making process? *Professional Development in Education*, 48(4), 705-714 doi: 10.1080/19415257.2020.1725597.
- Devos, A. (2010). New teachers, mentoring and the discursive formation of professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(5), 1219-1223.
- Handsfield, L. J., Crumpler, T. & Dean, T. R. (2010). Tactical negotiations and creative adaptations: The discursive production of literacy curriculum and teacher identities across space-times. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45(4), 405-431.
- Hunt, C. (2018). Toward dialogic professional learning: Negotiating authoritative discourses within literacy coaching interaction. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 52(3), 262-287.
- Imants, J. & Van der Wal, M.M. (2020). A model of teacher agency in professional development and school reform. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(1), 1-14, doi: 10.1080/00220272.2019.1604809.
- Jalali, M., Maghsoudi, M., & Khomejani Farahani, A. (2020). Investigating EFL student-teachers' possible self within the Iranian teacher education context. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 10 (3), 498-511. doi: 10.22059/jflr.2020.300748.725.
- MacLure, M. (2003). *Discourse in educational and social research*. Maidenhead: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, A. (2004). *The good teacher: Dominant discourses in teacher education*. London: Routledge.
- Quinn, R. & Carl, N.M. (2015). Teacher activist organizations and the development of

- professional agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 745-758.
doi: 10.1080/13540602.2015.1044331.
- Richards, J. C. (2017). Teacher identity in second language teacher education. In G. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research* (pp. 139-144). New York: Routledge.
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16, 149-161. doi: 10.1080/02680930116819.
- Salimi, E.A., Mostafaie, M. & Najar, R. (2016). Past, present, and aspirational identity of English language teachers: Teaching experience and its influence on professional identity. *Journal of Foreign Language Research*, 6(2), 303-320. [in Persian]
doi: 10.22059/jflr.2017.209863.271.
- Schoenfeld, A. H. (2011). *How we think: A theory of goal-oriented decision making and its educational applications*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ticknor, A. S. (2014). Negotiating professional identities in teacher education: A closer look at the language of one pre-service teacher. *The New Educator*, 10(4), 289-305.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2007). Complexities of identity formation: A narrative inquiry of an EFL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(4), 657-680.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Zhang, C. (2015). Discursive construction of Chinese language teacher identity. In F. Dervin (Ed.), *Chinese educational migration and student-teacher mobilities* (pp. 129-143). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
doi: 10.1057/9781137492913_7.