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“Teachers as conflict managers”: mapping novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ professional identity conflicts and confrontation strategies

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Abstract

Teacher professional identity has been widely investigated in second/foreign language (L2) research in the past decade. However, the identity conflicts that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers with various teaching experiences face in their profession has been mostly neglected. Moreover, the way such conflicts shape L2 teachers’ identity and are resolved is yet under-explored. To fill these voids, this study scrutinized novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ perceptions of professional identity conflicts, their influence on identity construction, and confrontation/management strategies. To this end, 30 EFL teachers (15 novice, 15 experienced) were recruited to attend a semi-structured interview and complete a narrative frame. The results of content and thematic analysis obtained by MAXQDA software revealed that both novice and experienced teachers mostly faced identity conflicts because of “teaching philosophy/ideology mismatch” and “mismatch between personal and professional self”. Novice teachers also recurrently posed interference with “clothing and physical appearance” as a source of conflict, while experienced teachers believed “unequal power relations at work”, “imposed policy mandates”, and “traditional syllabus and testing” had produced conflicts. These conflicts affected teachers’ identity construction by influencing novice teachers’ emotional and inner world, but experienced teachers’ pedagogical performance and interpersonal communication. To confront the conflicts, the participants suggested different strategies such as “negotiating conflicts with others”, “avoiding conflicts”, and “suppressing conflicts”. The study discusses the findings and their implications for L2 teachers and educators regarding common identity conflicts and resolutions.

Keywords: EFL teacher, Novice teacher, Experienced teacher, Professional identity conflicts, Narrative frame

Introduction

Recently, studying teacher identity (TI) has become a vibrant line of research in education (Beijaard et al., 2004; Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2021, 2022). Identity is a major part of teachers’ professional learning (Beijaard, 2019) since it exerts profound effects on the

quality of instruction (Yazan, 2018). It is believed that the key factor to teachers' professional development is to understand their identity and the contributing factors to their identity development (Kaya & Dikilitaş, 2019). TI has been described as multifaceted, fluid, and bound to various factors (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2023; Fairley, 2020) including "the nature of the educational institution, teacher colleagues, school administrators, their own students, and the wider school community" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 186). In general, these factors affect and direct language teachers' identity construction process (Golzar et al., 2022).

TI construction is a dynamic process mediated by numerous factors that are both personal and external (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Yuan, 2021). Personal factors pertain to teachers' individuality, background, experience, beliefs, and perceptions, while external factors relate to their contextuality, culture, and socio-economic states that influence who they are as teachers (Beijaard et al., 2004; Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2021).

Research indicates that these factors overlap; and sometimes lead to identity conflicts (Tajfel, 1981). Identity conflict has been defined as "the aggregation of sub-identities linked somewhat like a chorus; in this metaphor, some of these sub-identities are more central than others" (Eslamdoost et al., 2020, p. 1). Since individuals form different identities in relation to their profession, personality, family, and social status, there are times that they face conflicts and even paradoxes among such a hub of identities (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2019; Gholamshahi et al., 2021). As a case in point, teachers may experience identity conflicts when they are forced to behave in a certain way that runs counter to their personal identity. This largely depends on the centrality, dominance, and saliency of a particular sub-identity compared to others (Daniels, 2015; Yang et al., 2021a, 2021b). In this sense, the concept of conflict can be seen as the result of opposing forces, such as teachers' perceptions of professional self, occupational commitments, sense of self-efficacy, and institutional constraints (Eslamdoost et al., 2020). In simple words, teachers' professional identity conflicts concern different conflicts and challenges that appear when teachers' beliefs, values, experiences, and expectations are at odd with their assigned professional role. Such conflicts may happen at different teaching, testing, and curriculum levels.

It is widely known that teachers routinely face challenges resulting from internal factors, including their cultural background and personal beliefs, and from external factors including student expectations and circulating policies (Fairley, 2020). One factor that could intensify experiencing identity conflicts is the career stage of teachers (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). In this regard, research (e.g., Derakhshan & Nazari, 2022; Nazari et al., 2023) has shown that novice teachers may experience a wide range of identity conflicts in their career, especially those related to their emotions. However, how novice teachers' identity conflicts concur with or differ from those of experienced teachers has received little attention.

This line of research also demonstrates how teachers, as active agents in the process of constructing their identity, constantly confront problems regarding the adaptation, adoption, or rejection of external mandates that result in different tensions (Golzar et al., 2022; Kayi-Aydar, 2015), conflicts (Eslamdoost et al., 2020), paradoxes (Nias, 1989), dilemmas (Lampert, 1985), and challenges to teachers' self-image (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). These challenges are likely to influence different aspects of language

teachers' profession, practice, and educational standards (Nazari et al., 2021). However, little research has investigated the professional identity conflicts of novice and experienced EFL teachers, and the ways these language teachers confront and manage such conflicts. To address this gap, this study analyzes how Iranian novice and experienced EFL teachers experience identity conflicts and the strategies they use to manage such conflicts.

Literature review

Language teacher identity

The origin of language teacher identity (LTI) dates back to teachers' years of learning as students and student teachers (Freeman, 2013). This construct is dynamic and complicated requiring a shifting view of TI (Nazari et al., 2023). LTI is defined differently relative to the lens through which it is viewed (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). For example, Beijaard et al. (2004) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that the nature of TI makes it hard to capture its inclusivity in single-sided definitional terms. Varghese et al. (2005) view LTI and its construction as multifaceted which is prone to change and conflicts. Moreover, Yazan (2018) argued that LTI develops under the impact of five drives, namely beliefs and perceptions of self, institutional expectations and social positioning, the fluidity of TI, the role of social interactions and communities of practice (COP) in the (re)construction of LTI, and finally teachers' emotions as identity shapers. Additionally, language teachers' constant comparison of self with their past alongside their life trajectories are strongly tied to their identity construction and perceptions during social interactions (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2022; Ye & Zhao, 2019). According to the ecological perspective to TI and activity theory (AT), a language teacher's perception of self is the outcome of several factors at different levels (personal, contextual, socio-political) and the collaboration and negotiation among COP members (Cross, 2018; Engeström, 1987). These theoretical lenses support the dynamic, shifting, and situated nature of LTI in light of social communications and interactions (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019). In these post-structural views of TI, LTI is a construct residing at the interface of one's personal and professional life (Yazan, 2018).

Teacher professional identity

L2 teachers' professional identity has lately evolved into a separate research area (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2019; Yazan, 2018). Vast research on teaching and teacher education has placed a great emphasis on the significance of TI (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). In the literature, teachers' professional identity is distinguished by two viewpoints. The first one is practical and views professional identity as a resource for teachers to understand themselves in relation to others and their surroundings (MacLure, 1993). The second viewpoint is more theoretical and considers professional identity as an analytic lens to better comprehend the process of becoming and being a teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teacher professional identity refers to "teachers' self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and position themselves (and are positioned by others) in social contexts" (Yazan, 2023, p. 185).

Professional identity is not a fixed concept, instead, it is “a continually changing, dynamic, active and ongoing process” (Pillen et al., 2013, p. 242) that is developed over time as one gains more experiences (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2019; Norton & De Costa, 2019). Professional identity is also influenced by the teacher’s own personal characteristics and professional contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004; Olsen, 2010). Teacher professional identity researchers argued that the term is differently understood by people and highlighted its diverse aspects (Yazan & Linfahl, 2020). They also used different terms for the concept including self-image, self, and multiple identities (Beijaard, 2019).

Teacher professional identity conflicts in L2 education

Given the complexities involved in L2 education, most English language teachers may encounter numerous professional challenges in their work when developing their identities, which influence their professional practice (Gholamshahi et al., 2021; Richards, 2023). They may encounter a multiplex of internal struggles (Leeferink et al., 2018) and emotional conflicts in sociocultural, pedagogical, and institutional localities (Golzar et al., 2022; Yang et al. 2022). Institutional tensions are experienced when teachers attempt to endorse innovations in teaching and improve language programs (Yuan, 2018). Teachers also face tensions when there is a mismatch between their social identities and institutional experiences (Nazari et al., 2023). Fairley (2020) has mentioned some external tensions such as “student expectations, administrative mandates, national educational policies, societal norms, political and economic agendas, parental expectations, curriculum constraints, and resource constraints” that come to (re) shape teachers’ self-perceptions (p. 7). Moreover, Gholamshahi et al. (2021) argued that identity conflicts influence teachers’ pedagogical performance, instructional management, institutional relationships, and communication with others. Relatedly, Golzar et al. (2022) referred to Afghan L2 teachers’ professional tensions. They stated that teachers had tensions when they faced large heterogeneous classes, heavy workload, and were professionally and emotionally challenged to incorporate educational technology into their lessons. Sometimes, L2 teachers’ identity conflicts arise from their workplace climate, personal philosophies and ideologies, and institutional forces regarding teaching methodology and even clothing (Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2021). The mismatch between personal beliefs, agency, and others’ expectations is also a source of identity conflict (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Loo et al., 2017; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Moreover, favoritism, bias, and prejudice have been reported to cause TI conflicts (Phiri, 2022).

Some researchers also reported on novice teachers, who faced challenges in aligning their identity standards with their institutional experiences (e.g., Derakhshan & Nazari, 2022; Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Karimi & Mofidi, 2019). As pinpointed by van Rijswijk et al., (2016, 2018), the initial years of teaching are accompanied by numerous emotional fluctuations due to institutional localities, school cultures, dealing with individual student differences, and conventional norms of effective teaching as well as negotiating cultural, social, and political factors (Farrell, 2016), which require novice teachers’ adaptability (Farrell, 2016; Mann & Tang, 2012). Moreover, when novice teachers’ personal identity is not in line with their professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), their perceptions of being a teacher may change as they move from teacher education programs to actual classroom practice (Beijaard et al., 2004; van Rijswijk et al., 2016). It should be noted that EFL teachers’ professional identity conflicts might materialize

in their actual classroom practices, relationships, classroom management, pedagogy, and assessment. For instance, if the teacher strongly believes in learner and learning-oriented approaches to teaching and assessment, but the institute and curriculum force him/her to adhere to norm-referenced testing and traditional teaching methods, several identity conflicts pop up in the teacher. Moreover, if a teacher favors positive rapport with learners in the classroom, while the schools' policies strictly demand authoritative classroom management strategies and relations, he/she is more likely to experience tensions and conflicts to his/her professional identity (Kaya & Dikilitaş, 2019).

Professional identity conflicts management: concepts and measures

Since teaching English in EFL contexts is laden with conflicts and contradiction, teachers have to work in an environment, which is known as a conflict-prone zone (Kennett & Westaway, 2011). They have to continuously strike a balance and move toward an equilibrium between personal identity and professional identity (Salinas, 2017). They usually face paradoxes and conflicts from which they have to choose. For example, some requirements and desires at school may run against reality, but they have to obey the institutional policies (Kozminsky & Klavir, 2010).

Another source of conflict is that teachers have different obligations to different stakeholders, whose constant criticisms and complains create a fertile soil for a wealth of conflicts (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018). To fight these conflicts and keep up the quality of their teaching, EFL teachers need convenient conflict management strategies. L2 teachers and educators can establish a discourse community in which they have equal power relations with principals to defend their personal beliefs and ideas (Trent, 2012). Drawing on social psychology, Hirsh and Kang (2016) proposed a mechanism for identity conflict management and confrontation in which they argued that teachers could confront their professional identity conflicts via (1) suppressing a conflicting identity, (2) augmenting a dominant identity, (3) avoiding an identity conflict, and (4) integrating conflicting identities. In another study, Phiri (2022) asserted that teachers could take advantage of dialogue, compromise, and collaboration to manage conflict in schools. They also suggested the schools to fairly promote teachers' positions based on merits and adopt policies that mirror gender equality and interpersonal respect. Operationally, the concept of teacher identity conflict management/confrontation strategies can be described as various techniques that EFL teachers employ to recognize and fight against multiple tensions between their personal values, beliefs, and ideologies and external forces and policies enacted by schools and stakeholders.

Regarding the measurement of conflict management, which is a daunting endeavor, different theoretical terms have been widely used in quantitative studies including 'conflict level', 'conflict severity', 'conflict centrality', and 'level of resolution' (Steinberger & Magen-Nagar, 2017). Based on these cores, when the level and extent of an identity clash or conflict is high and demands more cognitive efforts to be resolved, the teacher experiences more professional tensions to his/her self-image. So far, the construct of teacher identity conflict management has been mostly assessed via questionnaires. However, qualitative instruments have rarely been used to deeply and accurately gauge EFL teachers' conflict management process. Researchers can use interviews, observations, narrative approaches, and reflective practices to obtain teachers' experiences and perceptions of this under-explored construct in L2 education.

Previous research

There is a wide range of research on possible conflicts encountered by teachers in their professional identity development. For example, Olsen (2010) in his work on the development of TI, stated that one student teacher faced tension about adapting her personal experiences with the professional aspects of teacher education. Trying to adapt her personal conceptions of teaching with the professional ones she learned was challenging for her. In another study, Pillen et al. (2013) examined professional identity tensions encountered by 182 novice teachers during their professional identity development, and their experienced feeling and coping strategies. They stated that these tensions are the result of a mismatch between the personal and professional side of becoming a teacher. They claimed that these conflicts include the teachers' struggles between what they desire and what is in reality. Most of the novice teachers tried to cope with their conflicts by talking with their significant others or by looking for a solution themselves. Karimi and Mofidi (2019) investigated the identity construction of two teachers and found that they faced challenging conditions in negotiating their identities. In a narrative inquiry study, Hung (2018) examined the identity conflicts and confrontations strategies of six teachers in Taiwan and Finland. The results showed that the teachers had different identity conflicts during teaching. They maintained to solve such conflicts by resorting to their core identity or even reconstruct a new one. Moreover, Kudaibergenov and Lee (2022) ran a study on 20 Korean EFL teachers' professional identity tensions using reflective journals. They found five sources of identity tension and conflict. Particularly, they reported to experience tensions when they had to balance their academic and professional identities; felt incompetent, but expected to show expert knowledge; over-relied on colleagues to teach English; had difficulty in engaging and persuading learners to study; and treated other than a professional teacher. Moreover, in the context of Iran, Eslamdoost et al. (2020) examined the professional identity conflicts of EFL teachers and analyzed how conflict-making instances in the context of Iran contribute to TI (re)construction. They argued that teachers in the Iranian context are likely to be presented with both political and personal conflicts. Likewise, Goktepe and Kunt (2021) reported how Turkish beginning language teachers developed their identity when they face tensions.

Despite the widely accepted importance of identity in teachers' professional development, little research has investigated the professional identity conflicts of novice and experienced EFL teachers. This gap merits more scholarly attention because novice and experienced EFL teachers may experience dissimilar identity conflicts and correspondingly use different confrontation strategies. As one gains more teaching experiences, he/she learns how to deal with conflicts. Many conflicts considered critical and intervening at the beginning of teaching English among early career teachers, may be resolved as they become experienced. However, this line of thinking has been overlooked in L2 contexts. Most of the current studies are limited to the conceptualization and measurement of teachers' professional identity in general. Few studies have delved into teacher identity conflicts in EFL settings, which have just focused on their contribution to teacher identity development (e.g., Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2021). Yet, the detection and confrontation strategies of such identity conflicts have remained unclear, especially in terms of teaching experience level. To fill these voids, this qualitative study used an interview and a narrative frame to unveil the ways through which novice and

experienced EFL teachers experience and confront professional identity conflicts in Iran. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What professional identity conflicts do novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers experience?
2. How do professional identity conflicts influence novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' identity construction?
3. How do novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers confront professional identity conflicts?

Method

Participants and research context

Using a convenience sampling technique, the researchers recruited 30 Iranian EFL teachers with different teaching experiences to this study. First, an invitation text was written and shared in social media applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, and Eita) with EFL teachers working in Tehran. After a week, 15 novice and 15 experienced teachers agreed to participate in both phases of the study. Particularly, we used a cut-point of five years of teaching experience to classify the participants to novice (less than five years) and experienced ones (above five years). The rationale for this classification was the theoretical proposition that rookie teachers have 3 to 5 years of work experience with a low pedagogical confidence in themselves, while experienced teachers possess a stronger identity and show confidence in their teaching given their experience level, which is above 5 years (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2019; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The recruited teachers belonged to both genders (males = 12, 40%; females = 18, 60%) and reported to have MA and Ph.D. degrees in applied linguistics, English translation, and English Literature (Table 1). Additionally, their age ranged from 23 to 48 years old. The researchers informed the participants of the nature, goal, and importance of the study as well as the

Table 1 Participants' demographic profile

Demographics	No. (%)
Age	
23–28	5 (16.66%)
29–33	8 (26.66%)
34–38	10 (33.33%)
39–43	3 (10%)
44–48	4 (13.33%)
Gender	
Male	12 (40%)
Female	18 (60%)
Academic Degree	
MA	18 (60%)
Ph.D	12 (40%)
Major	
Applied Linguistics	15 (50%)
English Translation	7 (23.33%)
English Literature	8 (26.66%)

proximal time required to fulfil the expected tasks. They were also ensured of the anonymity of their identities and their freedom for non-participation and withdrawal from the study at any time without further explanation. At the outset of the study, a written consent was collected from the respondents before proceeding to interviews and narratives ("Appendix A").

Instruments

Semi-structured interview

To obtain EFL teachers' perceptions of professional identity conflicts, a semi-structured interview was carried out with all the participants. It was conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded, and in quiet rooms in the participants' working institutes. The interview was composed of two parts ("Appendix B"). The first one collected background information of the participants. The second part had four questions that asked them to explain the definition of teacher professional identity and identity conflicts in L2 education. Moreover, the interviewees were petitioned to clarify the impact of such professional identify conflicts on their pedagogical practices and how they confront such aversive tensions. The interview questions and answers were in English given the high self-reported proficiency level and academic qualifications of the participants, who majored in English-related fields. Each interview took about 20–25 min. To keep the data for later analysis, the interviews were audio-recorded using a smartphone.

Narrative frame

A researcher made narrative frame was used to capture novice and experienced EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences of professional identity conflicts. Previous research corroborates that narrative frames are effective tools to capture one's thoughts, beliefs, philosophies, ideologies, actions, and identities (Barkhuizen, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2021). The employed narrative frame rested on Barkhuizen and Wette's (2008) scheme that highlights supervision and direction for the respondents to put into picture a comprehensive and vivid image of their emotions and experiences.

In particular, the researchers asked the participants to fill in an English narrative frame that revolved around their perceptions and real experiences of professional identity conflicts in L2 education. Furthermore, the participants were required to share a real experience of a situation that included a professional identity conflict, how it affected their identity, pedagogy, and feeling as well as its management/confrontation strategy ("Appendix C"). Before completing the narrative frame, the researchers told the participants how to answer each designated part shown in dotted lines. It is noteworthy that, for designing the frame, the researchers consulted with some well-known L2 scholars, who had done different qualitative studies on EFL teachers' identity through narratives in Iran.

Data collection procedure

In this qualitative study, the researchers took advantage of semi-structured interviews and a narrative frame to glean the needed data. First, they developed a set of

interview questions and designed a narrative frame in light of research objectives and theoretical foundations of TPI conflicts. Next, the validity and appropriateness of these instruments were ensured by three L2 research experts, who were university professors in Tehran. After obtaining and applying their comments on the tools, the researchers wrote an invitation message to be shared over social networking applications with EFL teachers. After a week, a total of 30 Iranian EFL teachers agreed to partake in the study (15 novice, 15 experience teachers). Next, the purpose of the study and data collection process were fully explained to the participants. Likewise, the researchers ensured that they had no conflict of interest with respondents, who explicitly stated to voluntarily attend the study with their identity remaining confidential. After taking these preliminary steps to adhere to ethical codes, the researchers arranged a time with the participants to conduct a semi-structured interview with them during non-instructional times. Moreover, a narrative frame was given to the participants to complete after the interview session within one-week interval. Both the interview and the frame were in English given the self-reported high proficiency level of the participants.

During the data collection phase, the researchers were in contact with the participants sending them reminders and further explanations regarding the way each phase is expected to be done. After around 2 months (from February 1st to April 1st, 2023) all the participants managed to attend the interviews and delivered their responses to the narrative frame. Given the high workload of the teachers, we showed more flexibility during data collection, especially for the in-person interview. Next, the researchers divided the interviews into three sets to be transcribed by each researcher. After a week, all the interviews were transcribed and a meeting was held to discuss the details and inconsistencies. Then the narratives were checked for spelling errors. Finally, the data of both instruments were sorted into two separate sets to be fed into the MAXQDA software for qualitative analysis.

Data analysis

After collecting the data from two sources (interview, narrative frame), the researchers used a combination of content and thematic analysis to disclose the participants' perceptions about identity conflicts and their confrontation strategies. MAXQDA software (v. 2020) was used to conduct the qualitative analysis in light of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. First, the data were transcribed and sorted by the researchers for a general familiarization with the data. Second, initial codes were extracted from the data after a deep immersion in the dataset. In doing so, the researchers created a codebook for both data sources, iteratively analyzed the transcripts and responses, and wrote memos. Third, the codes were constantly compared and contrasted to generate potential themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed again to make sure that they work in the context of extracts and entire dataset. This led to the production of a thematic map for later analysis. Next, the researchers defined and assigned names/labels to the final themes. Sixth, a scholarly report was provided to reflect the examples, interpretations, and iterative processes involved in the data analysis.

Furthermore, the researchers made some efforts to ensure the rigor and validity of the findings and interpretations. Specifically, they carried out member checking, peer debriefing, bracketing, and audit trialing to warrant the validity of the study. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) maxims of trustworthiness were ensured. For member-checking, the extracted codes/themes, transcriptions, codebooks, memos, and complementary notes were checked by the respondents. Then two analysts were invited to re-examine the codes and interpretations as a measure of inter-coder agreement. The results of Krippendorff’s coefficient illustrated a high degree of agreement between the two coders ($\alpha=0.97$). Regarding confirmability, an expert qualitative researcher was asked to audit trial all the steps took during data analysis. Furthermore, the researchers provided a thick description of the methods, participants, and context for future researchers to replicate the study, as a measure of dependability and transferability. Concerning reflexivity and positionality, the researchers were reflective during the data collection and analysis stages as they were EFL teachers in the same context. They were familiar with common identity tensions and conflicts in EFL settings. However, they bracketed their own beliefs, perceptions, values, and experiences from interpretations to make them credible. Throughout the study, they took the positionality of ‘data collectors’, ‘analysts’, and ‘insiders in collaboration with other insiders’ (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Despite these attempts, as the study was pure qualitative, it would be impossible to claim an absolute neutrality.

Findings

Novice and experienced EFL teachers’ professional identity conflicts

To answer this research question, the second interview question and the first part of the narrative frame were analyzed. The results of content and thematic analysis illustrated that novice EFL teachers mostly faced professional identity conflict due to “teaching ideology mismatch”, “clothing and physical appearance”, “teaching philosophy mismatch”, and “mismatch between personal and professional self” (Fig. 1).

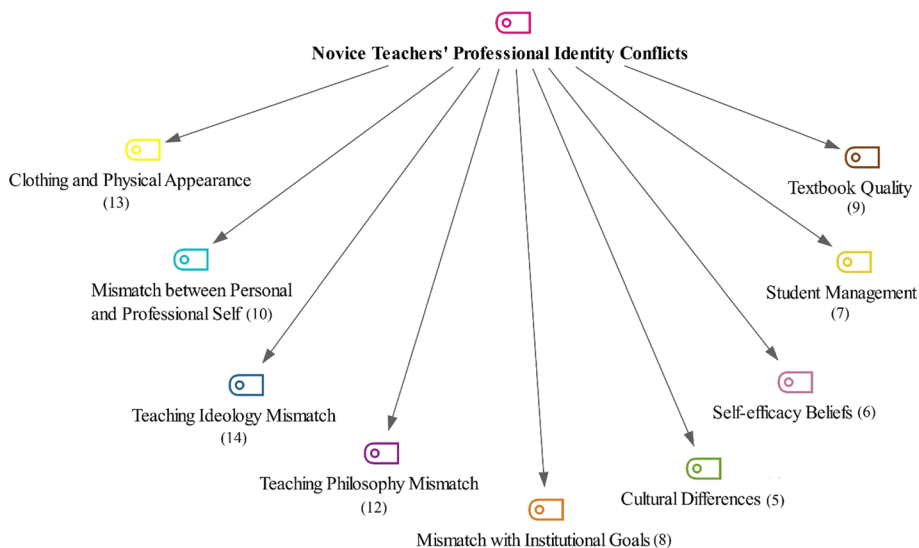


Fig. 1 Novice Iranian EFL teachers’ professional identity conflicts

In this regard, a participant argued “when I have a mismatch on teaching ideology and philosophy with the school or supervisor, my identity as a teacher is under pressure and tension” (Interview, T3). Another novice teacher also pinpointed “aligning self and professional identity is really daunting for me. For example, when someone forces me to wear a particular cloth or comments on my make-up, my professional and personal identities are in conflict” (Novice T6). In addition to these conflicts, novice teachers also frequently mentioned “mismatch with institutional goals” and “textbook quality” as other sources of professional identity conflicts. In their narrative frames, some respondents stated “mismatch between personal/professional goals as L2 teachers and institutional goals creates identity conflicts” (Narrative Frame, T5, T8, T13). Moreover, novice teachers considered “textbook quality” as a root of identity conflicts for EFL teachers. For example, T14 maintained “the quality of textbook offered by the school/institute is critical for identity construction and manifestation. If the book has a poor quality, the teacher faces several tensions to teach with it or not” (Narrative Frame, T14). “Student management”, “cultural differences”, and “self-efficacy beliefs” were also reported as sources of professional identity conflicts among novice teachers.

On the other hand, experienced EFL teachers mainly encountered identity conflicts when they had mismatches in their “teaching ideology”, “personal and professional identity”, and “teaching philosophy”. Furthermore, “power relations at work”, “imposed policy mandates”, and “traditional syllabus and testing” were recurrently posed by the participants, too (Fig. 2). As pointed out by experienced T13, “EFL teachers have a personal identity that is sometimes in conflict with the identity that is made and represented at work. One area of conflict is that we have to change or align our teaching methodology, style, philosophy, and even ideology to match what the school wants and this is really annoying and tense” (Interview, T13). Going even further, some teachers contended “the existing and dominant power-relations at work and policies that are imposed on us to teach or behave in specific ways are mostly at add with our professional identity and professionalism” (Narrative Frame, T11, T6).

Moreover, two themes equally appeared 8 times in the dataset, namely “mismatch between personal values and occupational commitment” and “institutional culture, climate, and structure”. In this regard, a teacher maintained “as EFL teachers, we have some personal values and occupational duties and sometimes these are contrary to each other” (Narrative Frame, T3). Likewise, T15 stated “teachers’ identity is affected

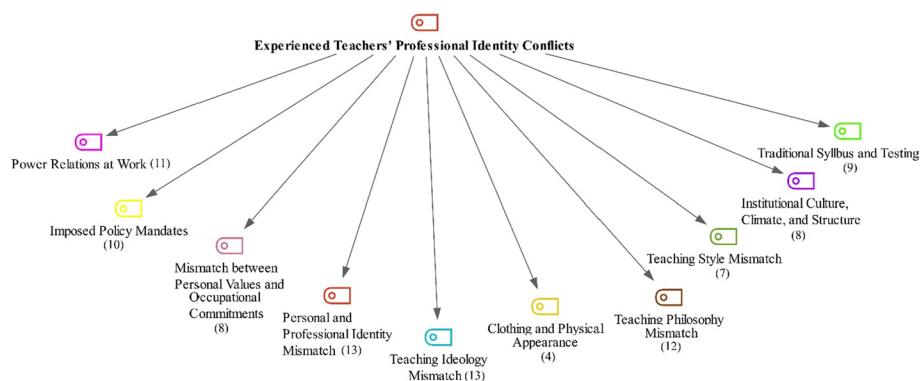


Fig. 2 Experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ professional identity conflicts

by macro-factors such as the overall culture, climate, and structure of the institute and workplace” (Interview, T15). The least frequent theme, however, was related to teachers’ “clothing and physical appearance” conflicts with the school. In support of this, one of the respondents mentioned “as adult and experienced teachers, we cannot bear someone else’s intrusion to our personal life like how we wear clothes or our physical appearance. Schools should just consider our knowledge not our faces” (Interview, T11).

To conclude, the results of this research question indicated that novice and experienced EFL teachers had faced several identity conflicts during their instruction. Novice teachers mostly had professional identity conflict due to “teaching ideology mismatch”, intrusion on “clothing and physical appearance”, “teaching philosophy mismatch”, and “mismatch between personal and professional self”. Quite similarly, experienced teachers regarded mismatches in their “teaching ideology”, “personal and professional identity”, and “teaching philosophy” as sources of identity conflict. However, they added “power relations at work”, “imposed policy mandates”, and “traditional syllabus and testing” to such conflicts. Another point of divergence was the higher importance of “clothing and physical appearance” for novice teachers. Moreover, novice teachers’ emphasis on “textbook quality” and experienced teachers’ frequent attention to macro-factors like “institutional culture, climate, and structure” were prominent differences between the two groups.

Identity conflicts and novice and experienced EFL teachers’ identity construction

The third interview question alongside the third part of the narrative frame were qualitatively analyzed to respond this research question. The results of analysis revealed that novice teachers’ professional identity construction was affected by conflicts in different ways (Fig. 3). Among the trajectories of influence, teachers’ “internal struggles”, “anxiety and stress”, “self-doubt”, and “confidence damage” were the most frequent venues that identity conflicts painted their picture on novice teachers’ professional identity. In other words, conflicts mostly affected the emotional and inner side of teachers’ self-image as EFL teachers.

In view of this emotional concern, T8 held that “the most dire consequence of identity conflicts on teachers is making them constantly struggle inside themselves what is correct and what is not” (Interview, T8). Moreover, one of the respondents explicitly

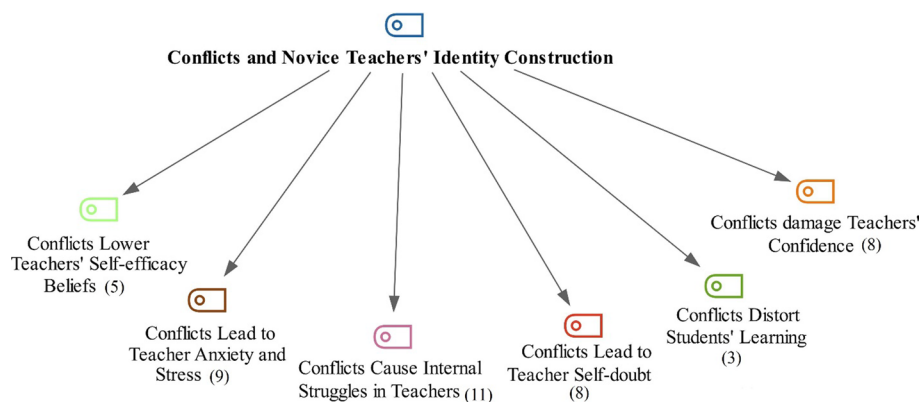


Fig. 3 The influence of conflicts on novice Iranian EFL teachers’ professional identity construction

declared “*identity conflicts and tensions in L2 contexts negatively affect teachers and produce stress, anxiety, self-doubt, and burnout in them. Such tensions also damage their self-efficacy and confidence in their teaching knowledge and skills*” (Narrative Frame, T 11). Likewise, T4 showed more concern about learning by stating “*although identity conflicts teachers first, the ultimate outcome is that students’ language learning is distorted given such tensions*” (Interview, 7).

On the contrary, experienced EFL teachers’ professional identity construction path was mostly affected by identity conflicts, which were posited to “lower teachers’ pedagogical performance”, “damage teacher-institute relationships”, and “cause ineffective interpersonal communication” (Fig. 4). In this view, T15 asserted “*identity conflicts and tensions first and foremost lower the quality of teachers’ pedagogical performance in the class*” (Narrative Frame, T15). However, other participants concerned more about the relationships, communications, and collaborations at workplace in light of such conflicts. For example, a teacher declared “*when teachers have conflicts considering their professional identity, their interpersonal communication quality and relationships with colleagues and school staff is negatively affected*” (Interview, T5).

Two other frequent themes concerned “the reduction of teacher agency” and “misalignment between imagined and practiced identities” of EFL teachers due to identity conflicts. In this respect, one of the participants held that “*the existence of several identity conflicts at work reduces teachers’ agency and autonomy to work and teach based on their own philosophy*” (Interview, T10). T4 elaborated more on this negative influence by stating “*in many cases, EFL teachers’ in Iran face a huge misalignment between their future (imagined) identity and what they have to practice and take in reality*” (Interview, T4). Another teacher also narrated his experience in such situations by mentioning “*I myself work in a private institute, where I have no agency to change the syllabus and teaching methodology and this is against my visions and missions of being a professional EFL teacher*” (Narrative Frame, T7).

In sum, the results of this research question revealed that novice and experienced EFL teachers’ professional identity construction trajectory is affected differently by conflicts. Novice teachers’ identity was more affected through the negative influence of conflicts on their affective and inner world. They mostly believed that their professional identity was influenced by conflicts in that they generated “internal struggles”, “anxiety and stress”, “self-doubt”, and “confidence damage” in teachers. However, experienced teachers

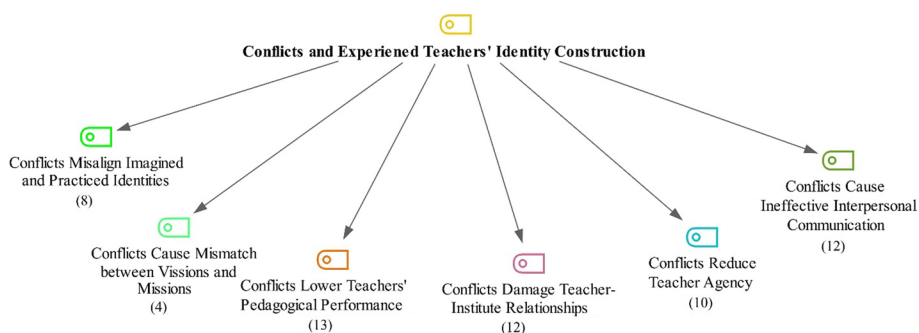


Fig. 4 The influence of conflicts on experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ professional identity construction

mostly held that identity conflicts affected their overall professional identity by “lowering pedagogical performance”, “damaging teacher-institute relationships”, and “causing ineffective interpersonal communication”. Additionally, they asserted that identity conflicts led to “agency reduction” and “misalignment between imagined and practiced identities” of EFL teachers.

Novice and experienced EFL teachers’ confrontation/management of identity conflicts

To respond to this research question, the last interview question and the last part of the narrative frame were examined. The results demonstrated that novice and experienced EFL teachers had only one shared confrontation strategy (i.e., negotiating conflicts with others) as depicted in Fig. 5. Except this, the participants used dissimilar strategies to confront/manage identity conflicts in their career. In particular, novice teachers recommended five strategies to confront conflicts. The most frequent ones included “negotiating conflicts with others”, “seeking support from others”, “avoiding conflicts”, and “adapting to conflicts”. Another extracted strategy was “seeking common ground to solve conflicts”, which was posed by five respondents.

In support of their strategies, some novice teachers held that “an effective strategy to face and solve identity conflicts is negotiating them with others and asking them for help” (Narrative Frame, T4, T6, T11). In addition to other-oriented strategies, some respondents mentioned “avoidance and adaption to conflicts” as useful ways to confront identity conflicts (Interview, T13, T15). Another teacher asserted “as a novice teacher, I usually seek common ground and interest with others to solve conflicts at workplace” (Narrative Frame, T7).

On the other hand, experienced teachers recommended four strategies for identity conflict resolution. The most frequent strategies were “negotiating conflicts with others”, “suppressing conflicts”, and “establishing a community with equal power relations”. Six teachers also maintained that “insisting on their voice to change managerial decisions” is a beneficial resolution strategy, too. Regarding these themes, one of the participants argued “negotiation of conflicts with colleagues and friends is the best strategy to solve them” (Interview, T4). Taking a strong position, T8 declared “my experience taught me suppressing conflicts is a good choice in some institutes” (Narrative Frame, T2). Moreover,

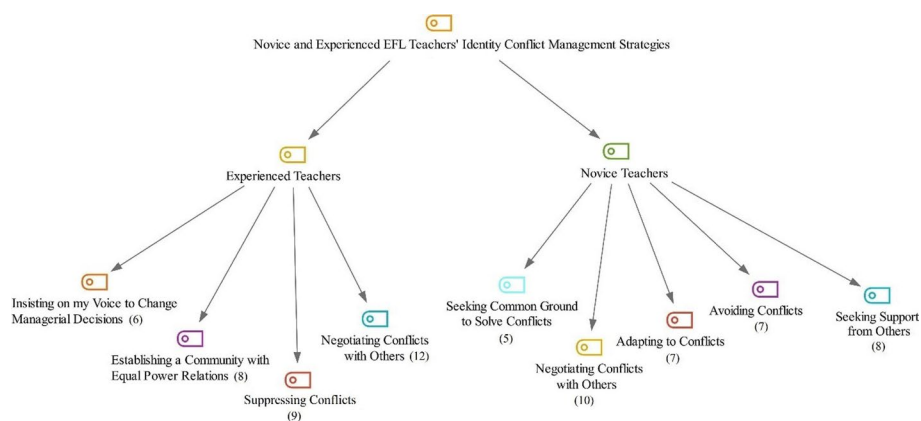


Fig. 5 Novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers’ conflict confrontations/management strategies

eight teachers called for “equal power relations” to resolve identity conflicts. For example, T9 held that “*teachers as conflict managers need to take a big step and establish a discourse community in which they have equal power relations with managers and other staff*” (Interview, T9).

In conclusion, in this research question, it was found that novice and experienced teachers had used different strategies to solve their identity conflicts. Novice teachers mostly suggested “negotiating conflicts with others”, “seeking support from others”, “avoiding conflicts”, and “adapting to conflicts”. On the other hand, experienced teachers declared that conflict resolution is better achieved by “negotiating conflicts with others”, “suppressing conflicts”, and “establishing a community with equal power relations”.

Discussion

This qualitative study set out to unmask novice and experienced EFL teachers’ perceptions of professional identity conflicts, their influence on identity construction, and employed confrontation strategies. The findings revealed that both novice and experienced teachers almost had similar professional identity conflicts in terms of “teaching ideology mismatch”, “teaching philosophy mismatch”, and “mismatch between personal and professional self”. This commonality is incongruent with previous studies that highlighted the difference between novice and experienced teachers’ identity conflicts (Nazari et al., 2023; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). This finding is also in dissonance with Daniels (2015), who argued that novice and experienced teachers face different identity conflicts in their profession depending on their role, vulnerability, agency, and pedagogical knowledge/experience. Additionally, the results diverge from Yuan (2021), who ran a study on teachers’ identity construction in Hong Kong and claimed that novice teachers encounter more identity conflicts because of their limited understanding of local teaching practice and educational culture as well as the interaction among several forms of identities that they enact.

However, it theoretically aligns with the post-structural and ecological perspectives of LTI, which consider it the outcome of several internal and external factors. Moreover, the findings are in line with prior research that regarded EFL teachers’ identity conflicts as the result of mismatches in their personal teaching philosophies and ideologies and what others expect them professionally (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2021; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). A probable explanation for this finding might be the participants’ comparable familiarity and knowledge of identity conflicts in L2 teaching in Iran. Both novice and experienced teachers seem to endorse the idea that teaching English in EFL settings is a conflict-prone zone (Kennett & Westaway, 2011). Another justification can be the dominant curriculum and language education policies in Iran that similarly contravene with ideologies, philosophies, and identities of EFL teachers regardless of their experience level.

Yet, this study evinced some points of divergence between novice and experienced teachers, too. Novice teachers highly emphasized on “interference with clothing and physical appearance” and “textbook quality” as triggers of conflicts, while experienced teachers regarded mismatches in “power relations at work”, “imposed policy mandates”, “traditional syllabus and testing”, and “institutional culture, climate, and structure” as sources of identity conflicts. This lends support to Yazan and Lindahl’s (2020) idea

that career stage of EFL teachers may determine the type and intensity of their professional identity conflicts. It is likely that teachers' identity maturation and sustainability had made them propose different conflicts. Since novice teachers are at the beginning of their career, they experience conflicts and problems that are solved for experienced ones. They highlighted conflicts related to clothing and textbook possibly due to their lower pedagogical expertise. However, experienced teachers underscored macro-level conflicts such as power relations, imposed policies, organizational culture, and testing perhaps because clothing and textbook conflicts had been resolved as they gained more experience. This echoes the dynamic and developmental nature of professional identity (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2019; Norton & De Costa, 2019).

In this study, it was also found that identity conflicts affected the overall professional identity construction of novice and experienced EFL teachers differently. Concerning novice teachers, conflicts had mostly exerted their impact on identity construction via teachers' affective and inner world. Particularly, they generated "internal struggles", "anxiety and stress", "self-doubt", and "confidence damage" in novice teachers. This is empirically supported by Pennington and Richards (2016) and van Rijswijk et al. (2018), who argued that novice teachers' professional identity construction is anchored to and intertwined with their emotions and emotional labors. Given their identity fluidity and open identity systems, novice EFL teachers might have assigned more saliency to the affective and inner aspects of conflicts. This interpretation complies with Steinberger and Magen-Nagar (2017), who posited that teachers' conflict centrality level varies based on their experiences. Novice teachers usually perceive higher conflict centrality levels that represent intense cognitive-emotional clashes between self and profession. This extrapolation, however, contrasts with previous studies (Song, 2016; Yang et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2022), which assert that identity conflicts influence experienced teachers' identity through their affective world, as well. In other words, the permeation of identity conflicts into one's professional identity system through emotions operates regardless of teaching experience.

Further, this study evinced that experienced teachers' identity construction had been affected by conflicts through their damaging effects on teachers' "pedagogical performance", "teacher-institute relationships", "interpersonal communication", and "teacher agency" as well as "misalignment between imagined and practiced identities". This finding agrees with those of Gholamshahi et al. (2021), who conducted a study on 42 Iranian EFL teachers' identity conflicts and their influence on their identity construction/configuration. They found that conflicts configured teachers' identity by affecting their pedagogical performance, instructional management, institutional relationships, and communication with others. Likewise, Ruohotie-Lyhty (2018) maintained that identity conflicts affect teachers' agency and agency is a vital component of identity construction and projection. The findings also accord with Barkhuizen (2016), who ran a narrative study on teachers' identity change over time. He asserted that several idiosyncrasies at work interfere with teachers' imagined (future) and practiced identities. A reason for these findings could be experienced teachers' concern for the practical, collective, and interactional aspects of identity. This might be, in turn, due to their higher interaction and participation in COPs compared to novice teachers. They have probably considered their identity construction as a social-interactional entity for which interpersonal

relations are necessary. Ecologically speaking, novice teachers seem to care for the personal side of their professional identity, while experienced teachers foregrounded its social dimension.

Another finding of this study was that that novice and experienced teachers had employed a range of strategies to solve their identity conflicts. Novice teachers mostly suggested “negotiating conflicts with others”, “seeking support from others”, “avoiding conflicts”, and “adapting to conflicts”. However, experienced teachers declared to utilize “negotiating conflicts with others”, “suppressing conflicts”, and “establishing a community with equal power relations” to solve identity conflicts. These strategies are partially in tune with Hirsh and Kang’s (2016) taxonomy of identity conflict confrontation in which they highlighted conflict suppression, conflict avoidance, dominant identity augmentation, and conflicting identities integration. Additionally, the finding concurs with Phiri (2022) and Trent (2012), who suggested L2 teachers to solve conflicts via collaboration and negotiation with others and establishing a discourse community with equal power relations. The point of departure between the groups was that novice teachers were more other-oriented and less tough in the face of conflicts by either avoiding from them or adapting to them. Conversely, experienced teachers showed more rigor and resistance by demanding equal power relations in the community and suppressing the conflicts. An explanation for this could be novice teachers’ weak and embryonic professional identity in which they are other-reliant and less agentive to question/resolve conflicts. In contrast, given several trial and errors, experienced teachers might have formed a strong and resilient identity in the face of conflicts. Another logic is that teachers’ professional identity fluidity and dynamism reduces as their experience increases. Usually, early career teachers are more obedient to identity shifts, but long career ones resist change and impositions. Hence, the centrality, severity, saliency, and resolution of their identity conflicts vary.

To sum up, it is imperative to bear in mind that the findings and interpretations of this study might be somewhat limited by some sources of uncertainty. Care should be taken to extrapolate the results. It is illogical to ascribe all the differences in teachers’ identity conflicts and their confrontation to “experience only” variations. The potential influences of socio-cultural, pedagogical, and psycho-emotional factors on teacher identity conflicts cannot be ruled out. Moreover, it is possible that the findings are biased due to the self-reported nature of narrative research and interview data. Finally, the reported identity conflicts and management strategies might not be reproducible on wider scales across contexts and countries.

Conclusion and implications

All language teachers experience different identity conflicts, which influence their identity development process. In this study, both novice and experienced teachers faced several identity conflicts with varying degrees and manifestations in their identity and practice. Drawing on their experiences, the participants employed a range of strategies to solve their identity conflicts. Based on the findings, it can be asserted that EFL teachers may go through different professional identity conflicts depending their teaching experience level. Likewise, their confrontation strategies to tackle such opposing forces differs in relation to their identity status and experience. Simply, it can be argued

that novice and experienced EFL teachers' professional identity is affected by numerous conflicts, whose intensity, confrontation, and share in shaping LTI varies in relation to teachers' experience level. There may be some overlaps in the typology of identity conflicts, but their management strategies and impact on teachers' identity construction varies from one teacher to another.

In light of the comparison between novice and experienced teachers' identity conflicts, this study provides a deep understanding for EFL teachers, teacher educators, language policy-makers, teacher education programs regarding TI construction, how such conflicts influence identity construction of the two groups, and how teachers of the two groups respond to these conflicts. Teacher educators could also give the teachers opportunities to discuss such conflicts, and then employ possible confrontation strategies. They can also offer professional training courses to teachers in which the typology, management, representation, and influence of common identity conflicts of EFL teachers are comprehensively taught to early-career teachers. This would make teachers aware to respond accurately to the same conflicts in their career. Moreover, language policy-makers may use this study as a starting point to revise their policies and plans in a way that LTI and identity conflicts are considered and represented in the curricula that they propose to the academia. Additionally, L2 teacher education programs may draw on the findings to incorporating professional identity conflicts and their confrontation strategies to help teachers better understand themselves, recognize the conflicts they face in their teaching context, and employ best strategies to solve their identity conflicts. They can prepare teachers and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for such conflicts, which are inevitable in the teaching process.

Despite these implications, this study acknowledges its limitations and invites future scholars to conduct further research on EFL teachers' responses to identity conflicts across larger samples to understand multiple aspects of identity construction. Future research can use mixed-methods research designs by developing new scales considering EFL teachers' professional identity conflicts alongside qualitative instruments (observations, focus groups, discussions, audio journals). The mediating role of other demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, university degree) and teacher-related factors (e.g., pedagogical expertise, reasoning, literacy, agency, emotional regulation, resilience, and identity status) in perceiving and managing identity conflicts is also a fresh line of research. Finally, eager researchers are recommended to unpack identity conflicts of EFL teachers in the context of L2 assessment, too. They can examine teacher assessment identity and identity conflicts together in a longitudinal study.

Appendices

Appendix (A) Consent Form

I hereby declare that I voluntarily take part in this research project. I allow the researchers to use my answers as long as my privacy is respected and my identity remains anonymous. The researchers assured that the data will be used only in this study and remain confidential.

- 1. Agree to participate in this study
- 2. Disagree to participate in this study

Appendix (B) Interview Questions

A Note: Dear respondents, please complete the items using **another color to type**.

Part A) Background Information

- 1. Age:.....
- 2. Gender:.....
- 3. Major:.....
- 4. Teaching experience:.....
- 5. Students' proficiency level that you are teaching:.....

Part B) Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Identity Conflicts

- 1. As an EFL teacher, how do you define professional identity in the context of L2 education?
- 2. Have you ever experienced any conflicts against your professional identity in L2 teaching? If yes, please elaborate on them.
- 3. What impacts such conflicts have on your teaching and professional identity construction?
- 4. How do you, as an EFL teacher, manage and confront such professional identity conflicts? Which strategies do you employ?

Appendix (C) Narrative Frame

With respect to the professional identity conflicts that you experienced during English language teaching, please kindly share a **real experience** with us:

One of the situations that I, as an EFL teacher, experienced professional identity conflict was when.....
.....This experience was very prominent because it caused me to feel..... It also influenced my teaching and professional identity byHowever, I confronted and managed such a conflict by.....

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Author contributions

All authors have materially participated in the research and article preparation. Additionally, all authors have approved the final article.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants. The participants provided their written informed consent to attend this study.

Consent for publication

The authors, hereby, give their consent for the publication of this article in *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*. We also affirm that the content of the manuscript is original and has not been published elsewhere. Moreover, the journal has a non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute the article in print and electronic formats. We understand that our names and affiliations will be published along with the article, and we agree to be held responsible for any ethical or legal issues arising from the publication of the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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