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*Research Paper*

## **Investigating Iranian TEFL Ph.D. Candidates'**

Professional Identity Development in the Course of their  
Doctoral Education

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### **Abstract**

The current study investigated the Iranian Teaching English as a Foreign language (TEFL) Ph.D. candidates' (TPCs) professional identity development during the TEFL Ph.D. education program (TPEP). Applying a mixed-method design, the current study used two kinds of instruments: a four-point, Likert-scale, a researcher-made questionnaire on TPCs' professional identity development, and the semi-structured interviews. First, the survey was mailed to 80 university instructors. Then, to yield an in-depth understanding of how TPCs develop their professional identity, TPCs with more than 10 years of intensive experience were asked to participate in the interview. Following the quantitative data analysis, the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using descriptive qualitative content analysis techniques. The results indicated that the majority of the participants believed that TPEP caused them to gain social legitimation from their community of practice, to get socialized to their global community, and raised their social status; therefore, they believed that not only professional but also personal development took place. Furthermore, it developed their pedagogical

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knowledge; however, it created small changes in the likelihood of TPCs' career advancement and led to a small increase in their job satisfaction and security. The findings of the study can have some pedagogical implications for teacher education programs in that they can be used to emphasize their strengths, eliminate their weaknesses, and incorporate ample opportunities for TPCs' reflection on their current and aspiring professional identities and improve their performance in classes.

**Keywords:** TEFL Ph.D. Candidates, Professional Identity Development, Community of Practice

It is widely acknowledged that satisfying reforms within postgraduate education programs which, in turn, result in productive academic outcomes, can be achieved by the investigation into Ph.D. candidates' experiences and the incorporation of those experiences (Gholami, Alinasab, Ayiewbey, & Nasimfar, 2019) into a new professional identity. A standard hypothesis assumes that there are various factors affecting Ph.D. candidates' academic lives in an interactional manner. Those factors include Ph.D. candidates' personal alongside occupational and social concerns (Gholami et al., 2019) during professional identity development. Furthermore, preparation for a Ph.D. life appears to be a vital transition stage in Ph.D. candidates' academic lives. Previous studies (Pyhältö, Toom, Stubb, & Lonka, 2012) on the doctoral experience suggested that Ph.D. candidates confront various challenges and difficulties during this developmental change. The body of literature acknowledged those transition problems the Ph.D. candidates encounter. For instance, it has been reported that attrition rates among Ph.D. candidates range from 30% to 50%, depending on the country and discipline (Pyhältö et al., 2012). Therefore, a bulk of studies emphasized the importance of settling the challenges faced by the Ph.D. candidates, consequently making improvements in postgraduate education programs (Son & Park, 2015).

Many university teachers are making efforts to become qualified researchers and excellent teachers. This happens through learning whose essential constituent is identity development. According to Farnsworth, Kleanthous, and Wenger-Trayner (2016):

If a really important part of learning is the shaping of identity, then one key implication for education is that you cannot give people knowledge without inviting them into an identity for which this knowledge represents a meaningful way of being (p. 8).

The past decade has witnessed a surge of studies on English teachers' identity, which sheds important light on these teachers' complex experiences in their situated institutional and sociocultural contexts. In the last decade, teacher identity emerged as a separate research area (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

Also, having to cater to English as a Foreign language (EFL) learners' needs and challenges, in-service EFL teachers' work is uniquely demanding, and they play a significant role in EFL learners' education. Therefore, their preparation for this challenging job in TPEP matters in their professional growth (Caihong, 2011). Moreover, the period of doctoral education is especially important because adaptations to one's sense of self are more likely to arise when one is transitioning to a new role (Cast, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; as cited in Colbeck, O'Meara, Austin, 2008). According to Austin and McDaniels (2006), gaining an identity as a professional scholar is an essential assignment for a doctoral student.

However, there is a paucity of research on the practice and experience of doctoral study in higher education institutions. There is very little research that focuses on the transition to postgraduate study particularly, despite an abundance of literature exploring other educational transitions (Tobbell &

Donnell, 2013). The limited investigation into the TPCs' requirements and challenges during identity reconstruction in the context of Iranian higher education implies a need for both higher education providers and other postgraduate stakeholders to identify and consider the difficulties and challenges of TPCs and make compensating improvements, accordingly. The primary objective of the present study is investigating the conceptions of TEFL Ph.D. candidates regarding changes in their professional identity during their doctoral education, and the secondary aim is exploring the important factors in changing their professional identity from TEFL Ph.D. candidates' points of view. The findings of the present study could contribute to the related literature by providing insights into the offerings of TPEP to Iranian TPCs' identity formation in different ways. It presents insightful results that, if taken into consideration, can improve the quality of TPEP in Iranian higher education. The results of this study may help teacher educators to become more familiar with TPCs' conceptions and expectations, which guide their actions more effectively. Moreover, teacher education practices may incorporate ample opportunities for TPCs' reflection on their current and aspired teacher identities.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The present study draws on Wenger's (1998) social theory of communities of practice, which emphasizes individuals' self-identification and negotiation as they search for access and membership to professional communities and participate in their activities (Yazan, 2014). Many researchers (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014; Yazan, 2014) acknowledged the potential of Wenger's Communities of Practice theory for understanding, analysis, and explanation of adults' experiences in educational transitions. Furthermore, Wenger's (1998) social theory of

communities of practice, which represents a sociocultural perspective, has been quite influential in understanding how language teachers shape their professional identities (Sutherland, Scanlon & Sperring, 2005).

Considering that TPEP is included among the communities of practice for TEFL Ph.D. candidates, it is vital to exploit the community of practice framework to investigate TPCs' transition experiences. Therefore, using this theoretical framework, TEFL Ph.D. candidates' conceptions regarding their professional identity changes and important factors changing their professional identity are explored in terms of learning, participation in practices and identity.

Communities of practice emerged from Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on participation as learning. In their work, learning is perceived as participation in social communities of practice. More specifically, learning is described as embedded in wider social practices, which are formed through following any kind of activity over time and interact to create valued practices within a given community; in fact, learning is a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed. "On entry to a given community, learners are legitimate peripheral participants and with experience (may) become full participants with the attendant identity shifts" (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007, p. 315).

Lave and Wenger (1991) explain that communities of practice are groups in which we are either core or marginal members and are so pervasive and informal on which we rarely focus. Concentrating on them allows us to rethink, expand, and deepen our perceptions. Communities of practice are related to the learning components of meaning, practice, community, and identity (Wenger, 1998; as cited in Graven, Mellony & Lerman, Stephen, 2003).

Identity formation resulting from participating in and learning from the practices of a community is another topic that is initially investigated in Lave and Wenger (1991) and further clarified in Wenger's (1998) later work. Wenger stated that as people participate in a community of practice, they acquire new knowledge, and simultaneously their identities or their sense of who they are, change. As Wenger (1998) indicated, the recognition of one's capability as valued by the community is an important source of professional identity development (Smith, Hayes, & Shea, 2017).

To operationalize the theory, research questions, questionnaire items, and interview questions were generated relying on Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, consequently, answers obtained from those questions were influenced by the theory. Furthermore, interpretations were filtered through the lens of the theoretical perspective (Kilbourn, 2006; as cited in Smith et al., 2017).

### Literature Review

The following section presents a review of the relevant previous research studies on the identity development of teachers and Ph.D. candidates conducted by Iranian researchers.

#### Teacher Identity

Teachers should be mindful of their "self," which is merged in their professional identities, values, and beliefs (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Furthermore, teachers' professional identity development has been considered as a component of professional development by several researchers (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 2005; Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Palmer & Christison, 2007). Teacher identity constantly changes because of cultural, social, contextual, and educational factors (Ponte & Chapman, 2008). Also, teachers'

identity development has been a growing and inspiring research area in applied linguistics.

In the Iranian context, teacher identity has also attracted some authors' attention. For instance, Abednia (2012) designed and taught a critical teacher education course to seven Iranian EFL teachers and explored how they formed their professional identities. The results indicated that taking part in critical pedagogical courses resulted in major changes in teachers' professional identity development. Also, through this course, EFL teachers experienced identity reconstruction and internalized the transformative and utopian vision of teaching EFL as part of their teacher identities and considered "ELT as a tool for individuals' mental development, social transformation, and emancipation" (p. 713). Specifically, there were three major transformations in their professional identities: from adherence to dominant ideologies to critical autonomy, from no/instrumentalist orientation to a critical/transformative orientation to teaching, and from a technical and linguistic perspective to an educational perspective of foreign language education. Finally, Abednia's (2012) study contributed to the foreign language teacher education literature by indicating how a teacher education course could lead to transformations in teachers' evolving identities, and by bringing a critical lens into the discussion of EFL teacher identity formation.

In another study, Ahmadi, Samad, and Noordin (2013) studied EFL in-service teachers' discourse socialization through field-noted observations, audio-recorded interviews, written reflections, and group discussions. The results of the data indicated that interactions with more experienced teachers especially helped them to shape their identities and made them feel legitimate members of their community of practice. Moreover, the study revealed that professional identity development is affected by prior learning, teaching experiences, knowledge obtained from dialogical interactions through

academic discourse practices, and real fieldwork experiences. Another point indicated by the results is that the contextual factors, especially public school policies, can hinder teachers “adopting and embracing pedagogical practices in harmony with their conceptual images of modern ways of learning and teaching a foreign language” (p. 1767). Also, it was evident from the findings that “the process of in-service teachers’ identity formation was a non-stop reciprocal interaction between factors including prior learning and teaching experiences, knowledge obtained from academic discourse practices and their real fieldwork experiences” (p. 1768).

### **TEFL Ph.D. Education Program as Communities of Practice**

Gholami et al.'s (2019) study, considering TPEP as a community of practice and utilizing an ecological model framework, conducted a cross-sectional study to investigate how TPCs and Ph.D. graduates’ lives were affected in different stages of the TPEP. To achieve this, ten TPCs or graduates, representing early, mid, and completion phases of the program were interviewed to qualitatively gain their views regarding the program. It should be stated that the recognition of a variety of identities adopted by group members, which is a significant aspect in the community of practice framework, was the focus of their study. The results indicated that multiple interrelated and simultaneous factors shaped TPCs’ identities. The most noteworthy elicited themes included satisfaction with teacher educators, dissatisfaction with academic procedures, and challenges related to the TPCs’ private lives.

It should be mentioned that investigating the contextual aspects of learning facilitates understanding this complex process. Moreover, understanding teachers and trying to obtain a clear sense of their professional identity development is the key to understanding the process of learning and



teaching (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). The complicated nature of TPCs' professional identity development is tied to a wide range of social and contextual factors such as studying and working environment; therefore, it seems necessary to investigate how TPCs develop their professional identity in different contexts.

Although there exists reasonable literature on professional identity, there is a rather small body of literature concerning the notion of professional identity among TPCs in the context of Iran. Furthermore, in the literature, there are several modes of participation and interaction in the community of practice; however, in this study, it has been argued that TPCs shape their professional identities by participating in and access to the general community of practice, gaining public recognition (social legitimation) from their community of practice, and getting socialized to the global community of practice. Specifically, in the present study, one part of the community of practice participation was implemented through a social media platform such as Telegram.

Furthermore, most previous studies explored TEFL Ph.D. candidates (Gholami et al., 2019) and teachers' professional identity either totally qualitatively (Abednia, 2012; Izadnia, 2016) or totally quantitatively without considering teachers' voices (Khany & Malekzadeh, 2015; Mofrad, 2016).

As stated earlier, different issues of Ph.D. programs and postgraduate candidates have been extensively explored. Moreover, those studies have been limited to merely one among various factors affecting doctoral education, including instruction and supervision within programs. A limited range of studies has examined the transitional process in which Ph.D. candidates were involved (Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit, 2008; Tobbell, O'Donnell, & Zammit, 2010).

The literature review also indicated that there is a dearth of research investigating Ph.D. candidates' perceptions and expectations of the program to which they applied (Gholami et al., 2019). Thus, it is desirable to perform further surveys to obtain an in-depth comprehension of TEFL Ph.D. candidates' conceptions towards changes in their professional identity during their TPEP and TPCs' conceptions regarding important factors in changing their professional identity.

### Research Questions

Utilizing a mixed-method design, this study triangulated the data to provide more profound insights into professional identity's realistic position among TPCs. More specifically, this study primarily aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1. What are the conceptions of TEFL Ph.D. candidates regarding changes in their professional identity during their education?

RQ 2. What are the conceptions of the TEFL Ph.D. candidates regarding important factors in changing their professional identity?

### Method

#### Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which began with a quantitative strand and then a second qualitative strand was conducted to further explain and support the quantitative results (Creswell, 2015). In the first phase of the study, which was quantitative, the data were collected via a self-developed and piloted questionnaire, which was conducted online. Then, following the first phase of the study, to achieve a bulk of in-depth information, the second phase was qualitative and semi-structured interview

questions were used to extract data from participants. It should be mentioned that for the qualitative part of the study, 10 TPCs, both male and female, were selected according to a convenience sampling and were interviewed. More specifically, triangulation of data was applied to provide more in-depth insights into (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018) the conceptions of TEFL Ph.D. candidates regarding changes in their professional identity during their education.

### Participants

The present research, which is part of a broader study on the identity formation of a number of TPCs, was conducted in one of the largest teacher education programs. The participants of the study included 80 Iranian TPCs (40 females and 40 males in an age range of 35 to 44), with 3 to 15 years of teaching experience in universities, gathered through simple random sampling. They included TEFL Ph.D. candidates.

It should be stated that 11 participants refused to answer the questions fully and 9 refused partially. All incomplete, unreliable, and late responses were excluded from the study, leaving 60 valid responses. Table 1 below describes the respondents' gender, qualifications, years of experience, and employment status.

**Table 1**  
*Demographics of the Questionnaire Participants (N = 60)*

Variables		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	25	42.4%
	Female	34	57.6%
Qualification	PhD		
	Student/candidate	60	100%
Teaching experience (Years)	11-15	48	81.4%
	6-10	6	10.2%
	3-5	5	8.5%
Employment Status	Part-time (50-90% of full-time hours)	32	53.3%
	Part-time (less than 50% of full-time hours)	14	
	Full Time	14	23.3%

### Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study.

#### *Researcher-made Questionnaire*

To collect quantitative data, a self-developed and piloted questionnaire was administrated online. It was a four-point, Likert-scale, researcher-made questionnaire on professional identity. The first part of the questionnaire was on demographic information and other parts dealt with perceived impacts of professional development activities and job satisfaction. It sought to represent the important characteristics of TPCs' professional development and to provide a nuanced understanding of their professional identity development, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

Survey questions were selected from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2008) principal teacher questionnaire developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) which required 30 minutes to complete in this study. The TALIS survey fairly represented the important characteristics of teachers' professional development examined by research. TALIS is a survey that provides data on teachers, teaching, and learning environments for researchers and policymakers (Doğan & Yurtseven, 2018). TALIS 2008 also proved to provide a nuanced understanding of teachers' professional development, beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

In this study, to determine the content and face validity of the questionnaire, a panel of 3 scale experts, who were familiar with the construct that the questionnaire was designed to measure, were consulted and their comments led to the modification of a few items. The questionnaire and interview questions were therefore revised and developed considering their beneficial feedbacks. This questionnaire had 19 categories, including 57 sub-items. Four starting items included demographics.

Another important factor in increasing the reliability and validity of this study was piloting the questionnaire and interviews using a sample of 30 people similar to the target sample of the main study to check questions for clarity and ambiguity and to confirm the ability of these methods to collect the required data (Dorneyi, 2007). As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) stated, the main goal of the piloting phase was to boost the practicability, reliability, and validity of the questionnaires.

Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the internal reliability and to measure the degree to which the items in the questionnaire were related. Table 1 shows the reliability statistics of Cronbach's Alpha, which is .82 and can be considered as high reliability. Cronbach's Alpha has a

maximum value of 1 and a minimum of 0; values closer to 1 indicate a strong relationship between the items of the questionnaire (Dorneyi, 2007). The results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2.

*Reliability Statistics for the Questionnaire*

Cronbach's Alpha	Alpha	
Based	on	
Standardized		
Cronbach's Alpha Items	N of Items	
.825	.823	53

Finally, the questionnaire's constructive validity was checked by the researcher through confirmatory factor analysis. All factor loadings were higher than .50 which is considered a large effect size.

*Semi-structured Interviews*

Since based on the explanatory sequential design, quantitative data needs to be further explained and supported by qualitative strands, a series of semi-structured individual interviews were also conducted with ten TPCs. The interviews were face to face and included a series of questions related to participation in professional development activities. The major themes investigated in the qualitative phase were for example (a) being a researcher as a new identity; (b) identity challenge; (c) guided reflective practices enhancement; (d) community attachment; (e) social prestige; (f) changing expectations.

## Procedure

First, a professional development questionnaire in a google form was made available to TPCs; the web-based application generated reports that could be exported into Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Data for the study were analyzed using SPSS 20.0 software program (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). The descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages of categorical variables, the means, and the standard deviations of numeric variables were calculated.

Then, semi-structured interviews were arranged to learn more about how teachers were experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. More specifically, to conduct the qualitative strand, ten TPCs were selected from those who completed the survey to take part in the discussion. The interview, which was in English, lasted for about one hour; it was recorded, and later transcribed. Then, the qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative content analysis techniques (Creswell 2012). The unit of analysis for coding purposes was all the responses to each of the ten questions. The transcripts were read many times by the researcher and were coded. Then, member checking was done to prove the trustworthiness of the data. Because much qualitative research involves observation by multiple observers, Ary et al. (2018) suggested interrater agreement methods for assessing dependability (reliability). Consequently, the researcher of the present study randomly selected a transcript and asked an expert in the field to code the selected transcript based on the descriptive qualitative content analysis techniques (Creswell, 2012). He was free to add other codes he might identify. After the completion of the coding process by the expert, the results were compared to the original transcript to determine whether both coders' labels match. The results showed that most of the extracted codes by the expert agreed with the original codes that were extracted by the researcher. Furthermore, the independent investigator examined the relationship between the research

questions and the data and the level of data analysis from the raw data through interpretation (Creswell, 2014). As a result, the dependability (reliability) was confirmed, and it was at the appropriate level ( $r=.9$ ). Then the researcher extracted the categories, subcategories, and the main themes from the coded transcripts.

### Results and Discussion

*RQ1: What are the conceptions of TEFL Ph.D. candidates regarding changes in their professional identity during their education?*

#### Quantitative Phase

Table 3 below displays the frequencies, percentages, and Std. Residuals for the respondents' answers to the ten items of the fourteenth section of the questionnaire which targeted the amount of change TPEP caused in Ph.D. candidates' professional identity during their education.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that most of the respondents, i.e. 58.3% believed that TPEP moderately created "opportunities for professional development activities." The second item of the 14th section of the questionnaire targeted the effect of TPEP on carrier advancement. The results indicated that most of the respondents, i.e. 45% believed that TPEP created small changes for "carrier advancement." The third item of the 14th section targeted the effect of TPEP on public recognition from the principal or colleagues. The results indicated that most of the respondents, i.e. 48.3% believed that TPEP created large changes in "public recognition."



Table 3.

*Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residual; Impact of TPEP on PCs' professional identity*

		Amount of Change				Total
		None	Small	Moderate	Large	
Opportunities for professional development activities	Count	4	13	35	8	60
	%	6.7%	21.7%	58.3%	13.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.6	.0	3.0	-2.7	
Career advancement	Count	8	27	17	8	60
	%	13.3%	45.0%	28.3%	13.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	1.2	3.8	-.9	-2.7	
Public Recognition	Count	1	13	17	29	60
	%	1.7%	21.7%	28.3%	48.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.9	.0	-.9	1.9	
Change in work responsibilities	Count	2	11	13	34	60
	%	3.3%	18.3%	21.7%	56.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.4	-.6	-1.8	3.0	
Role in school development initiatives	Count	15	13	25	7	60
	%	25.0%	21.7%	41.7%	11.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	4.2	.0	.8	-3.0	
Knowledge of Instructional Practice	Count	0	7	30	23	60
	%	0.0%	11.7%	50.0%	38.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-2.3	-1.7	1.9	.6	
Handling Students' Discipline and Behavior	Count	10	15	9	26	60
	%	16.7%	25.0%	15.0%	43.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	2.0	.5	-2.7	1.3	
Teaching Improvement	Count	2	8	20	30	60
	%	3.3%	13.3%	33.3%	50.0%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.4	-1.4	-.3	2.2	
Teaching students with special needs	Count	6	13	14	27	60
	%	10.0%	21.7%	23.3%	45.0%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.3	.0	-1.6	1.5	
Emphasis placed on Improving Test Scores	Count	5	11	33	11	60
	%	8.3%	18.3%	55.0%	18.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.1	-.6	2.5	-2.1	
Total	Count	53	131	213	203	600
	%	8.8%	21.8%	35.5%	33.8%	100.0%

The fourth item of the 14th section targeted the effect of TPEP on the amount of change in work responsibilities. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents, i.e. 48.4%; i.e. 21.7% moderate +56.7% large, believed that TPEP created large changes in their “work responsibilities”.

The fifth item of the 14th section targeted the effect of TPEP on the amount of change in the school development initiatives. The results indicated that most of the respondents, i.e. 41.7% believed that TPEP had a moderate change in their “school development initiatives.”

The sixth item targeted the effect of TPEP on the amount of change in knowledge and instructional practices. The results indicated that the majority of TPCs (88.3%; i.e. 50% “moderate” +38.3% “large”) believed that TPEP caused a moderate or large change in their “knowledge of instructional practices.”

The seventh item targeted the effect of TPEP on the amount of change in handling students’ discipline and behavior. The results indicated that most of the respondents, i.e. 43.3% believed that TEFL Ph.D. had a large change in their “handling students’ discipline and behavior.”

The eighth item of the 14th section targeted the effect of TPEP on the amount of improvement in TPCs’ teaching. The results indicated that the majority of them (i.e. 83.3%; i.e. 50% “large” +33.3% “moderate”) believed that TPEP had a large or moderate effect on the “improvement in their teaching.”

The ninth item of the 14th section targeted the effect of TPP on teaching students with special learning needs. The results indicated that the majority of TPCs (45%) believed that TPEP had a large effect on their “teaching students with special learning needs.”

Finally, the tenth item of the 14th section targeted the effect of TPEP on changing the amount of emphasis TPCs placed on improving their students'

test scores. The results indicated that most respondents (i.e. 73.3%; i.e. 18.3% “large” +55% “moderate”) believed that TPP had a moderate or large effect on the “emphasis placed on improving test scores.” The above findings are represented schematically in figure 1 below which displays the changes in TPC’s professional identity development.

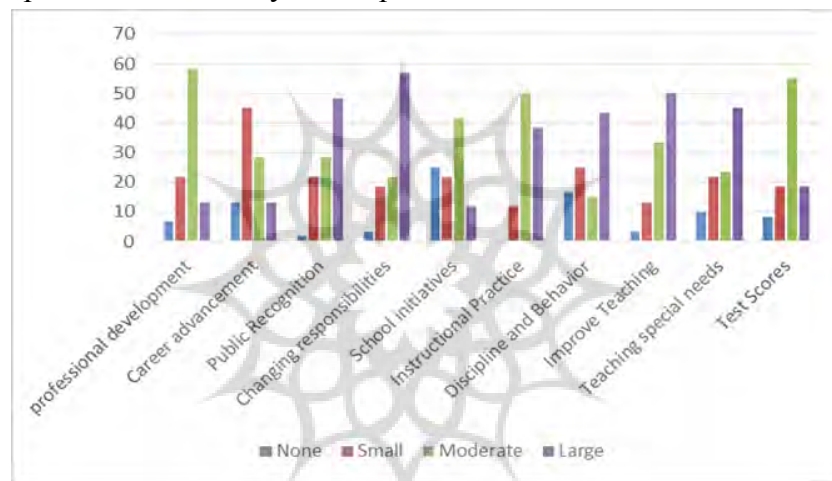


Figure 1.

*The conceptions of TPCs Regarding Changes in their Professional Identity During their Education*

### Qualitative Phase

The major themes emerged as the data were reviewed and coded according to qualitative content analysis techniques (Creswell, 2012). The categories, subcategories, and main themes are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.

*The Conceptions of TEFL Ph.D. Candidates Regarding Professional Identity Development During their Education*

Categories	Sub-categories	Main themes
New identity	Constructing a new professional identity as a researcher and practitioner	Being a researcher as a new identity Identity challenge
	Identity negotiation as a self-confident teacher–researcher	Productive identity changes Self-perception as a researcher
Professional development	Consolidating and refreshing teaching methods and approaches	Reflective teaching and learning practices Teaching as a lifelong learning process
	Expanding the Ph.D. candidates' self-knowledge through reflective practices	Conceptualization of research experiences Practical Theories development
		Guided reflective practices enhancement
Community of practice	TEFL professional communities' socialization	Community attachment
	Observing Ph.D. education in wider ethical, social, cultural, and global contexts	Externally oriented reflection Social reflection

***New Identity***

**Constructing New Identity as a Researcher and Practitioner.** Most of the candidates believed that the TPEP helped them construct a new identity as a researcher, and before this program, they did not almost do any

research on English teaching and learning, and the TPEP forced them to be a researcher in the field. TPC5 noted:

Ph.D. courses were the more research-based procedure of my life. During this course, I've learned how to conduct research. This program shaped my professional identity as a researcher.

He believed that TPEP helped him to be a researcher and TPEP is the most research-based program which he has ever had in his academic life. TPC7 in this regard pointed out:

During my Ph.D. courses, I had the opportunity to make a connection between my experiences, teaching practices, and theoretical foundations of those practices. I should say that I have found a change in my identity from being a mere teacher to a teacher-researcher.

She stated that this program had a revolutionary change in her identity, and during this program, she found herself as a researcher, and this program made the chance to improve her experience, teaching practice, and theoretical foundation of those practices. As a result, she could develop her identity as a practitioner, too. The participants noted that TPEP entailed productive identity changes in their academic endeavors.

Caihong's (2011) study also found four types of positive professional identity change (i.e. productive change, additive change, subtractive change, and split change) among nine in-service TEFL Ph.D. candidates. Teachers demonstrated discipline-focused, multi-leveled, and achievement-oriented professional identities. Labeling a teacher as a representative of a specific type of identity shift was difficult. However, different TPCs demonstrated different focuses at different levels of professional identity. Reviewing the studies concerning the identities of university teachers, Van Lankveld,

Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset, & Beishuizen (2017) found that identity growth might be different for university teachers making the transition from Ph.D. student to lecturer since they need to integrate the teaching role with other roles such as that of the researcher or practitioner. The results of the reviewed studies indicated that roles like teaching and research were mixed; some academics perceived themselves as researchers who teach, while others saw themselves as blended professionals who bring teaching and research together in pursuit of learning. They concluded that the teacher identity is built on other identities, including those of a researcher, or intellectual, academic, and professional.

**Identity Negotiation as a Self-confident Teacher–researcher.** Some participants believed that by starting the TPEP, their voice was better heard by their colleagues, Ph.D. holders, their students, and professors. They noted that Ph.D. was the main factor to develop their self-confidence in research and in teaching through identity negotiation. TPC2 in this respect stated:

The most significant positive influence was the increase in my self-confidence and self-efficacy as a teacher-researcher. I see myself as a better teacher and more knowledgeable researcher. So, it has increased my teaching and research self-efficacy.

She strongly maintained that the TPEP had a critical role in his professional identity development. She believed that this program had an extraordinary effect on her research ability, and it could largely enhance her self-confidence and self-perception as a researcher and as a university instructor. She maintained identity negotiation in the Ph.D. context leads to more recognition from the society and academic system.

The findings support the results of Edwards and Burns's (2016) study which indicated that the development of a strong teacher-researcher identity is correlated with teachers' sense of agency to learn more about research, take control, make decisions, and follow their goals, and career advancement involving engagement with action research, all of which contributed to their growth and self-identification as researchers. However, to attain agency as researchers, teachers also needed to negotiate relationships with managers and colleagues, which was correlated with their recognition as researchers within their workplace.

#### **Identity Conflicts as the Result of Ph.D. Program Participation.**

Identity conflict was one of the problems of the TPCs during this program. As they stated in their interviews, they could not get along with the swift changes in their academic behaviors as they started the Ph.D. courses. They noted that the demanding tasks and assignments were at first intolerable. Along with the heavy assignments, they were required to conduct research and write some papers for every single semester. Consequently, they experienced identity conflicts through the completion of Ph.D. courses. TPC1, who is a proficient university instructor, stated:

I only remember one instance that we had with one of the professors back in the first term when the teacher was too strict and I guess it was really annoying for everyone in the class and, to a considerable extent, because the assignments he was giving to the students were too much to bear and he was asking like "to write an article with 15 references based on one specific topic." I don't think it is possible to do the ultimatum within the specified timeframe. When I asked other classmates, I felt they were going through the same negative emotional experience and identity conflicts.

He thought that conflicts in the identity came from the multidimensional roles that they were assigned during the TPEP. Simultaneously, they fulfilled the demanding assignments as a student, undertook some research as a researcher, and taught the courses in their host universities as a teacher and lecturer. So, it was bewildering and led to the identity challenge in that period.

Also, Yuan's (2019) study, through a systematic and rigorous process of literature analysis, identified the major themes of identity conflicts of nonnative English teachers at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual levels. More specifically, identity conflicts caused by limited contextual support and under contextual constraints, identity conflicts arising from role changes, and identity crisis leading to teacher attrition were the major findings in the research papers. He asserted that owing to the complex and fluid nature of teacher education and language teaching contexts, teacher identity change is inevitably non-linear and full of challenges and conflicts. Therefore, he considered it is vital to investigate whether and how language teachers adopt different identities at changing points of their professional career and how they cope with the possible identity conflicts (such as between the teacher and researcher) over time. He concluded that if EFL teachers are provided with contextual support to resolve, negotiate, and balance diverse and potentially conflicting identities, they can change their identity conflicts into a critical source of spontaneity, creativity, and growth. However, practical implications on ways to help nonnative English teachers construct strong and adaptable identities cannot be realized without systematic, ongoing inquiry into the nature and construction of teacher identities.



### *Professional Development*

#### **Consolidating and Refreshing Teaching Methods and Approaches.**

Most of the participants believed that the TPEP consolidated and refreshed their teaching methods and approaches knowledge. They elaborated that learning to reflect on teaching and emphasizing cooperative learning approaches have been among the contributions of TPEP. The results showed that there was a correlation between TPEP and knowledge increase and understanding of instructional practices. It is justifiable on the grounds that TPCs realized that having passed Ph.D. courses, they learned to use 'cooperative learning approaches' which are included among 'the instructional practices' (Downey, 2000). In this regard, TPC5 stated:

Before entering this program, drawing on the theories that I have studied before, I used teaching styles and strategies that were not reflective, critical, and practical. Now having passed teacher education classes, I emphasize having collaborative classes that are based on reflective practice.

Also, TPC5 noted that reflective teaching and learning is the product of this course. During this course, he could learn how to teach based on reflective practices and how to teach reflective learning in his classes. Thus, he could enhance the guided reflective practices during his professional development in TPEP. TPC2 addressed her professional development and pointed out:

In my case, when I entered the Ph.D. program, I was already practicing different aspects of the teaching program like methods, techniques, strategies, etc. But my knowledge about these aspects was not enough, and sometimes I wasn't sure whether the techniques or methods that I had taken were true or not. Even I didn't know the reasons for the philosophy of practicing a method or technique, but

the Ph.D. program indeed clarified these aspects of the teaching profession. I could refer to various scientific articles and experimental research and compare them with my own experiences and finally, you know, extract the advantages and disadvantages of my own teaching methods.

During this program, she could learn how to refer to scientific articles and research to solve her teaching problems and consolidate her knowledge and teaching and learning philosophy. She believed that this course taught her teaching is a lifelong learning process. "Learning can happen in every moment of my teaching," she said.

**Expanding the Ph.D. Candidates' Self-knowledge through Reflective practices.** Most of the candidates noted that they could expand their self-knowledge and self-consciousness during TPEP. TPC2 asserted:

Through the completion of this program, I've learned how to control my classes, to become a better manager of the classroom, to deal with the role of the hidden curriculum, to deal with learners' needs. So, I deal with the practice and theory of teaching simultaneously, and these two consciously or unconsciously helped me to find a sort of identity.

He maintained that he could develop his self-knowledge and self-consciousness through reflective practices during this program; consequently, he developed his professional identity dealing with the practice and theory of teaching.

In the literature on teacher candidates' identity, reflection is widely considered as a critical process in the development of teacher professional identity (Korthagen, 2004; Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010) and a

means by which teacher candidates build their own learning through interaction among their prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences (Lin, Hmelo, Kinzer & Secules, 1999). More specifically, Korthagen (2004) argued that the core reflection technique helps student teachers to consciously navigate their own development in tandem with their personal identity because core reflection entails questioning and reshaping a person's identity.

### *Community of Practice*

**TEFL Professional Communities' Socialization.** Socialization is the process that happens in the TPEP for every TPC. The participants of the present study maintained that they socialized with the new community, which is TPEP context; also, they asserted their socialization with the global TEFL communities of practice. TPC2 in this respect noted, "I think this program affected me in different ways. I got socialized to the community of EFL or TEFL experts in Iran or perhaps abroad." He stated that through this program, he could connect and get familiar with the internal and external ELT communities of practice that gave him a sense of community attachment. It is also indicated that most TPCs realized this kind of attachment to TEFL professional communities. For example, TPC3 mentioned, "And I feel like I'm kind of attached and more recognized to my field of study."

Many studies (e.g. Leshem, 2007; Wisker, Robinson & Shacham, 2007) asserted that communities of practice have proved to facilitate the understanding and development of students in postgraduate education. According to Leshem (2007), the cohort-based communities of practice can be catalysts for PCs to realize Ph.D. programs' conceptual frameworks, which are identified to be the key part of the Ph.D. thesis, and yet their scope and nature are seldom elucidated in full in the literature. They are clarified because

these difficult conceptualizations can become the specific focus for informal attention and tutorial discussions within Ph.D. communities of practice.

### Quantitative Phase

*RQ2: What are the conceptions of the TEFL Ph.D. candidates regarding important factors in changing their professional identity?*

Table 5 and figure 2 below display the frequencies, percentages, and Std. Residuals for the respondents' answers to the five items of the eighteenth section of the questionnaire which targeted the effect of previous teaching experiences and TPEP on the development of TPCs' professional identity development. The results indicated that almost all (98.3%) of them (70% agree +28.3% strongly agree) believed that 'Teaching experiences' have developed their teacher identity.

The results indicated that 85% of the TPCs believed that "Teacher educators' feedback" has enhanced their teacher identity.

The third question of this section targeted the effect of "pedagogical skills" acquired during TPP on the development of their professional identity development. The results indicated that most of them (81.6%) believed that "pedagogical skills acquired during TPEP" have developed their professional identity development.

The fourth question of this section asked the opinion of the TPCs concerning the correlation between "Informal dialogue with classmates on teaching improvement" with professional identity development, and the majority of them (86.6; i.e. 63.3% agree +23.3% strongly agree) believed that it led to professional identity development.

Finally, the last question of this section targeted the effect of "classroom discussions" on the development of their professional identity development. The results indicated that the majority of TPCs (83.3%; i.e. 65% agree +18.3%

strongly agree) believed that “classroom discussions” have enhanced their professional identity development.

Table 5.

*Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residual; Sources of professional identity development*

		Agreement				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Effect of teaching Experiences on professional identity development	Count	0	1	42	17	60
	%	0.0%	1.7%	70.0%	28.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.3	-2.1	.4	1.2	
Teacher educators' feedback	Count	0	9	41	10	60
	%	0.0%	15.0%	68.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.3	1.1	.2	-.7	
Acquisition of effective Pedagogical skills from Ph.D.	Count	3	8	38	11	60
	%	5.0%	13.3%	63.3%	18.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	1.1	.7	-.3	-.5	
Informal dialogue on Teaching improvement	Count	1	7	38	14	60
	%	1.7%	11.7%	63.3%	23.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.5	.3	-.3	.4	
Classroom discussions	Count	4	6	39	11	60
	%	6.7%	10.0%	65.0%	18.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	1.9	-.1	-.1	-.5	
Total	Count	8	31	198	63	300
	%	2.7%	10.3%	66.0%	21.0%	100.0%



Figure 2.

*The conceptions of the TPCs regarding important factors in changing their professional identity*

Furthermore, table 6 below displays the frequencies, percentages and Std. Residuals for the TPCs' answers to the two items of the fifteenth section of the questionnaire which targeted the effect of TPEP on their job satisfaction and security. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents, i.e. 51.7% believed that their job satisfaction had a small increase.

Table 6.

*Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residual: Impact of TPEP on Job Satisfaction and Security*

		Amount of Change					Total
		Large Decrease	Small Decrease	No change	Small Increase	Large Increase	
Job Satisfaction	Count	2	9	9	31	9	60
	%	3.3%	15.0%	15.0%	51.7%	15.0%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.3	1.2	-.6	-.3	.4	
Job Security	Count	3	3	13	34	7	60
	%	5.0%	5.0%	21.7%	56.7%	11.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.3	-1.2	.6	.3	-.4	
Total	Count	5	12	22	65	16	120
	%	4.2%	10.0%	18.3%	54.2%	13.3%	100.0%

The results also indicated that most of the respondents, i.e. 56.7% believed that their job security had a small increase. It should be noted that 21.7% of respondents believed that their job security did not change. Figure 3 below represents the amount of change in job satisfaction and security.

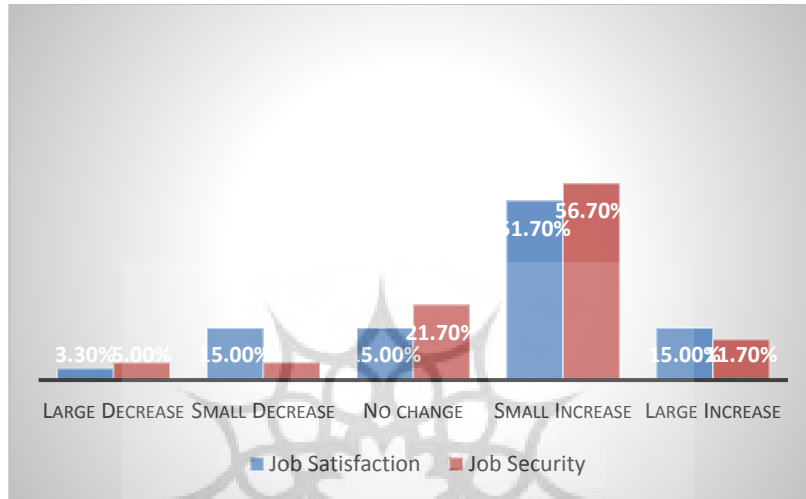


Figure 3.

*The conceptions of the TPCs regarding the amount of change in job satisfaction and security*

### Qualitative Phase

The major themes emerged as the data were reviewed and coded according to qualitative content analysis techniques (Creswell, 2012). The categories, subcategories, and main themes are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7.

*The Conceptions of the TPCs Regarding Important Factors in Changing Professional Identity Development*

Categories	Sub-categories	Main themes
Affective factors	1. Motivating factors	1. Self-efficacy increase 2. Self-esteem reduction 3. Changing expectations
	2. Ph.D. candidates' prior expectations	4. Small increase in job security and satisfaction



Categories	Sub-categories	Main themes
Cognitive factors	1. Expanding critical consciousness	1. Academic literacy
	2. Escalating self-awareness	2. Reflective learning
	3. Enhancing Pedagogical knowledge, dispositions, and skills	3. Reflective teaching
		4. Conceptualization of classroom experiences
Social factors	1. Social and academic prestige	1. Social positions
	2. Social reflections with other classmates and professors as opportunities for learning	2. Social reflections
	3. Ph.D. education as a transition period	3. Academic etiquette
		4. Changing worldview
External factors	1. The quality of the Ph.D. program	1. Professors' quality
	2. The demands of the course	2. Course responsiveness
		3. University facilities
		4. Paper publication

### *Affective Factors*

**Motivating Factors.** The participants of the present study talked about motivating factors in the offered TPEP. One of these motivating factors is self-efficacy increase. Some participants realized that the increase of their self-efficacy, especially the research self-efficacy, during TPEP was correlated with increasing job responsibilities and changes in those responsibilities.

I believe that technical knowledge improvement and the increase and change of job responsibilities and roles have contributed to my teaching confidence and research self-efficacy.

In the same vein, other TPCs believed that the increase of assessment and classroom management knowledge have enhanced their self-efficacy and professional identity.

I think my classroom management, assessment, and technical knowledge improvement have contributed to my teaching confidence and self-efficacy and have boosted my professional identity.

On the other hand, two TPCs stated that their teaching self-efficacy decreased during TPEP and one of the TPCs elaborated that when job dissatisfaction continues, a sense of self-efficacy would be replaced with self-inefficacy. Therefore, one of the demotivating factors during TPEP was self-efficacy fluctuations.

Ravandpour's (2019) study also concluded that continuing professional development enhances teachers' self-efficacy significantly and this will also be effective for their students. The results indicated that all the subscales of continuing professional development are positive, significant indicators of self-efficacy: reflecting, collaborating, decision-making, and updating. Caena (2011) also argued that teachers' self-efficacy is significantly correlated with teachers' professional development opportunities that can develop expertise and personal competencies levels.

**Ph.D. Candidates' Prior Expectations.** Most PCs realized that there was a negative mismatch between their expectations and their real experiences in the TPEP, especially regarding the gap between theory and practice.

For example, two participants noted that:

- Well, this Ph.D. program was not actually what I had really expected to be. Although I only meant to be close to the academic setting, I just arrived at a conclusion I never needed to go through university and study Ph.D. courses to be close to an academic setting. And I am sorry for doing that. And if ever I had the chance to go back, I would never attend this program and I would pursue you know education in a place rather

than university like my study room at my home. The reason is that none of the courses were a productive procedure to give me full insight into my teaching career. And it was all about some theoretical things I had already known before attending this program and I can say nothing special was added to my existing knowledge.

- My reasons for getting Ph.D. are still the same. However, to some extent whatever happened during the Ph.D. program turned out to be somehow contrary to my expectations, you know. They conflicted with my initial expectations. But my reasons still exist. I expected it can somehow show me how to fill the gap between theory and practice, like a TTC course.

This negative mismatch in the expectations may be due to the fact that candidates do not enter Ph.D. study, which requires a developmental process, with 'doctoral-level thinking,' and what this process might involve is not often investigated by candidates (Kandiko & Kinchin, 2012; as cited in Holbrook, Scevak, Bourke, Cantwell, and Budd, 2014).

Similarly, Holbrook et al. (2014) explored the match between initial expectations of doctoral candidates in relation to satisfaction in a way that expanded insights into both, and particularly emphasized that because Ph.D. candidates' well-being is important, their expectations should not be ignored. Their study revealed frequent stories of negative mismatches in the expectations that extended into reduced self-efficacy, depression, and unwelcome change in behavior. They asserted that owing to the major changes in cognitive development and the consequential emotional experiences that Ph.D. candidates undergo, there needs to be an emphasis on how Ph.D. candidates can be supported in their learning to identify and manage problematic expectations. They concluded that if Ph.D. candidates'

expectations are accomplished, then Ph.D. candidates tend to be more satisfied with the program and are less probable to drop out (Holbrook et al., 2014).

Also, the results indicated that a small increase in their job satisfaction and security discouraged TPCs. The qualitative data revealed that this dissatisfaction can result from the lack of monetary rewards for effective EFL teachers and practitioners and that they are less likely to become a member of TEFL faculty after graduation. For example, TPC4 mentioned:

I am satisfied that it led to professional development. However, I am dissatisfied because it didn't bring me job security, stability, and satisfaction considering my social status.

Also, explaining about discouraging career advancement, TPC1 mentioned:

In the beginning, I thought continuing education would bring me job satisfaction, and having job stability, and career growth, but it was pure speculation because many employees have considered me overqualified. Furthermore, there are no monetary or non-monetary rewards for effective teachers in my country.

The findings support the results of the previous studies on the correlation between job satisfaction, security, and professional identity development. Carrinus (2011) concluded that teachers' professional identity development results from teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers based on their interpretations of their continuing interaction between the person and context, and is displayed in teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, occupational commitment, and self-efficacy. According to Day (2002), teachers' sense of PI agrees with these constructs.

### *Cognitive Factors*

**Expanding Critical Consciousness.** Also, some TPCs stated that their teacher educators' constructive and even critical, non-verbal feedback shaped their identity. Also, having passed Ph.D. courses, they received constructive feedback from their students and members of their community of practice, and their insights and beliefs about teaching have changed; consequently, they emphasize collaborative learning, which is one of the components of teaching practices in their classes.

The results of this study confirmed many studies like Tang and Chow (2007) in which teacher educators' communication of constructive feedback played a vital role in TPCs' professional identity development. More specifically, the main difference is that prior studies provided observation feedback which was provided in class observations and practicum. However, in this study, most participants stated that they did not participate in 'observations to other academic contexts' and all of them asserted that they did not attend any 'practicum.'

Lamote and Engels's study (2010) also indicated that the feedback given by the experienced counselors would influence the students' sense of self-consciousness by enriching reflective processes, giving assurance they can accomplish assignments related to teaching or, alternatively, convincing them that they can't accomplish them.

Finally, the fact that discussion with classmates increased TPCs' critical thinking and improved their problem-solving strategies supports the findings of Fazio (2009) and Zhang, Lundeberg, and Eberhardt (2011) who found that group discussion and sharing ideas had a significant effect on teachers' professional identity development.

**Escalating Self-awareness.** Furthermore, most TPCs believed that the escalation of self-awareness was the contribution of conceptualizations of classroom experiences and reflection on teacher educators' and classmates' critical feedback. This quote exemplifies that learning about one's own strengths and weaknesses raises the development of self-awareness as part of identity construction (Stenberg, 2011). TPC3, for example, stated:

My classmates' and Teacher Educators' feedbacks, especially the critical ones, and their critical thinking helped me to think about my weaknesses and strengths. I found that avoiding perfectionism and utilizing summarizing strategies I had learned before entering Ph.D. could be the key to my success. I found that I am so strict while studying and tried to enjoy studying.

This confirmed the findings of Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, and Turunen's (2016) study that highlighted the impact of feedback from different sources on the development of self-awareness and teacher identity in the practicum. They concluded that supervisors' evaluations cannot be replaced by peers' observations, which do not involve the expert-novice relationship that occurs between a supervisor and a student (Smith, 2005; as cited in Körkkö, et al. 2016).

**Enhancing Pedagogical Knowledge, Dispositions, and Skills.** The findings indicated that TPEP taught the TPCs the different assessment methods and had a positive influence on their assessment literacy. The TPCs explained how learning to reflect on teaching and keeping reflective diaries has contributed to their professional identity development in the field of assessment and teaching. It should be mentioned that assessment literacy is another component reshaping TPCs' professional identity. More specifically,

EFL teachers' assessment literacy is one of the requirements of professionalism to assess students' performance more effectively (Esfandiari & Nouri, 2016). For example, TPC5 stated:

I learned more about formative and summative assessment during the Ph.D. program; I gained mastery over judging my students' final exam results.

In the same vein, this finding was empirically supported by Babaii and Asadnia's (2019) study which highlighted the significance of reflective practices, as another critical dimension of teachers' professional identity development, in developing EFL teachers' assessment literacy. They emphasized that by reflecting on language assessment research and practice, teachers increase their autonomy and feel empowered to have their own agency in the language assessment process.

Furthermore, having passed the Ph.D. courses and practical experience with classroom teaching again caused a shift: TPCs are now focusing more on student involvement than maintaining order in the classroom. It may be because they believe that Ph.D. courses have caused a large change in their "handling of student discipline and behavior." Among the candidates realizing the improvement of their class management skills, TPC8 stated, "I think my classroom management and technical knowledge have improved. Now I make a better rapport with my students." This observation can be justified on the grounds that during the courses, the candidates had the opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct their beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge and learned more about 'reflective teaching' which helped them to know how to interact with students in different situations and how to consider their needs.

Therefore, acquiring more pedagogical knowledge and skills during TPEP has contributed to their professional identity development. In addition,

TPCs stated that acquiring effective pedagogical skills from TPP has affected their professional identity development. The finding is justifiable because the Ph.D. candidates stated that they had gained: 1) knowledge of classroom management, 2) knowledge of teaching methods, 3) knowledge of classroom assessment and 4) structuring skills which are the components of general pedagogical knowledge (Voss, Kunter & Baumert, 2011; König, Blömeke, Paine, Schmidt & Hsieh, 2011).

Lamote and Engels (2010) found that TPCs developed a more student-centered view on teaching throughout their teacher education; however, practical experience with classroom teaching caused a shift in TPCs' approach: they focused less on maintaining order in the classroom, on the subject matter, and on the long term educational qualification targets, and their self-efficacy decreased. It was inevitable because the TPCs were novices and during the first stages of teacher education, TPCs should have been confronted with the complexity of practice (Lamote & Engels, 2010). More specifically, according to Sünbül (1996), classroom management can be a problematic area for teachers who are new in their profession. Being experienced and having professional knowledge can play an important role to solve this problem. Ünal and Ünal's (2012) study revealed that "years of experience" plays a significant role in teachers' beliefs on choosing their classroom management style. Therefore, classroom management is a skill that can be gained through training and necessarily through many years of experience in the field (Bosch, 2006). More specifically, achieving this skill is impossible without gaining experience. During the interview, the TPCs acknowledged that their classroom management and technical knowledge improvement contributed to their teaching confidence and teaching self-efficacy. This observation is justified on the grounds that they were experienced teachers entering the TPEP; in addition, professional development during TPEP facilitated the



mastery of classroom management. Finally, the results of the present study confirm Yazan's (2014) findings in which the participants, comparing their teaching approach before entering the MA program and their teaching during their education in the MA program, emphasized the contribution of growing pedagogical knowledge to their confidence as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers.

### *Social Factors*

**Social and Academic Prestige.** Some participants assumed that entering the Ph.D. course could change even the manners of the colleagues and the students in the workplace, and other persons in the field accept you and your words since they know you as a Ph.D. candidate or Ph.D. holder. Furthermore, all of them mentioned that they have gained social legitimation from the principals, colleagues, and society and raised their social status and are now regarded as a scholar. For example, they mentioned:

- I think it gave me a kind of character that others accept me as an educator. The positive influence was a kind of mental satisfaction.
- They do change your colleagues', your friends', and the society behavior towards you as a Ph.D. student and Ph.D. Holder. First, it's a matter of prestige. Second is that when you say something, they will listen to you more deeply and will accept you into society better than before dealing with Ph.D. courses because they think you had gone through some stages and you got your Ph.D., and you had studied harder.

Therefore, better public recognition contributed to their professional identity development. For example, TPC9 stated, “When I became a Ph.D. candidate, I was treated better by the people and considered a scholar and an expert.” In other words, other professional community members' thoughts and sayings about them or their perceptions of others' thoughts were important for the social legitimation of their teaching identity (Wenger, 1998). According to Coldron and Smith (1999), their self-identification derives from their social legitimation and access to “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) through their interaction with others in their professional setting. Therefore, another common thread across the findings was the indispensable nature of the individual and social dimensions of identity formation, which led to self-growth. These identity changes were considered as productive self-developments. TPC3, for example, stated:

Ph.D. courses have opened my horizon and had positive effects on my research ability. Being a Ph.D. student, I found more recognition from society and university system and these two reasons now made me feel more valuable about myself as a university teacher. And through the identity negotiation, I feel like I'm kind of attached and more recognized to my field of study.

**Social Reflections with Other Classmates and Professors as Opportunities for Learning.** Some participants believed that social reflections during the TPEP with their professors and peers made valuable opportunities for reflective learning. This externally oriented reflection pushed them to develop their professional identity along with passing the Ph.D. courses. The TPCs stressed teacher educators' feedback, informal dialogue with classmates on teaching improvement in the Telegram, and classroom discussions have enhanced TPCs' professional identity. More

specifically, the community of practice implemented through a social media platform such as Telegram and participation in and access to the general community of practice was an influential factor for TPCs' professional identity development. The participants elaborated that it fostered their reflection on their classroom practices and presented them with new opportunities for working collaboratively. For example, TPC4 stated:

And social media such as telegram could really help to develop collaborative teaching and professionalism, it could really facilitate the way we learn.

Also, TPC5 noted:

In these communities, we had the opportunity of exchanging our ideas regarding teaching English. When you are teaching, you may pay attention to something from just one perspective, but when you discuss it with others, they give you some other comments. And they see that situation from another perspective, or they have some other ideas that help you to teach, let's say just grammar from different ways or they have very brilliant suggestions about teaching different modules. So, I think these communities helped me a lot. I think it was good. It could be better than this, but it wasn't bad.

Furthermore, one of the participants stated that in their community of practice, he helped with clarifying Critical Discourse analysis theories and philosophical principles for his classmates with which they had many problems.

It is important to note that four TPCs argued that there was no collaboration on part of their colleagues and their classmates, and they

strongly believed in collaborative learning and the power of cooperation in their community of practice.

Likewise, Guevara and Olmedo's (2016) study demonstrated that community of practice implemented through social networking site was an opportunity that raised EFL teachers' professional development. Their data revealed that active participation in the community of practice affected positively teachers' empowerment of the role, it increased the reflection on their classroom practices, proved them the benefits of working collaboratively, and finally stimulated the integration of ICT in their classrooms.

Also, the findings of Assen, Koops, Meijers, Otting, and Poell (2018) suggested that engaging in a dialogue, in which teachers discuss their experiences and articulate identity positions, stimulates teachers to reflect on their teaching behavior from an external awareness position and enables them to synchronize their multiple identity positions. In addition, it stimulates them to develop their identity as a teacher and to change their teaching behavior.

According to Smith et al. (2017), "When reading about an idea does not make it clear to an individual, peers who have a better grasp of it may become a source for the individual's understanding through conversation, a form of participation" (p. 212). Therefore, this finding is in line with the participation dimension of Wenger's (1998) theory because Lave and Wenger (1991) perceive learning as participation in social communities of practice.

**Ph.D. Education as a Transition Period.** Some participants viewed TPEP as a transition period and acknowledged that TPEP caused some changes in their attitude toward teaching and research. For example, two TPCs noted:

- Well, to some extent, yes. In fact, the Ph.D. program has changed my worldview about teaching. It helped me understand that teaching is not just transferring knowledge. It is also teaching how to live, how to express emotions, etc. It also helped me understand that the students do not just receive the knowledge. They also learn behavior, ethics, mutual understanding, and the like; therefore, my professional identity has been changed slightly over Ph.D. Program.
- Now I recognize the societal obligation of the profession to generate research and appreciate the importance of research for the growth of TEFL profession.

To present a conceptual framework for studying the effects of professional development on teachers and students, Desimone (2009) suggested that effective professional development can lead to teacher learning and changes in worldviews, attitudes and beliefs, and consequently changing teacher practices. Ideally, change in practice contributes to enhanced student achievement.

### *External Factors*

**The Quality of the Ph.D. Program.** Most TPCs affirmed that lack of practicum and internship opportunities was the fundamental reason for their dissatisfaction with the course because participation in practicum could have filled the gap between theory and practice. As a result, the offered courses are not responsive enough to TPCs' needs. One of the TPCs stated, "One of the drawbacks of our program was that neither at MA nor at Ph.D. level, we didn't have a practicum." On several occasions, TPCs criticized that the Ph.D. courses were mostly theoretical and of little practical help. This theoretical

dominance can also be related in part to the lack of practicum. Such participants expressed their views as follows:

- None of the courses were presented as a productive procedure or to give me full insight into my teaching career. I mean, it was all about some theoretical things I had already known before attending this program and I can say nothing special was added to my existing knowledge.
- It gave us mostly the theoretical dimension of our career.
- But regarding the practice, I expected more. You waste a lot of time on theories that you have studied before, and nothing existed to fill the gap between theory and practice.

Körkkö et al.'s (2016) study emphasized the importance of practicum in the development of teachers' professional identity and teacher training. Their study revealed that the practicum sessions formed an essential ground for professional identity development because, during the practicum period, they gained feedback on their professional identity and were directed to reflect on their professional identity and growth; student teachers' practical theories were therefore developed through reflection in their practicum. Furthermore, personal and professional identities were developed concurrently in dialogue with members of the school community such as teachers and pupils. As a result, the students' actual identity or self-perceptions as teachers, which comprise part of their practical theories, strengthened and expanded.

**The Demands of TPEP's Courses.** Most of the participants of the study maintained that the demands of the TPEP courses such as publishing requirements were very influential in shaping their professional identity during TPEP. The successful publication of academic journal articles is an

essential achievement for TPCs seeking to establish themselves in their profession (Mason, 2018; Bakhshi, Weisi, Yousofi, 2019). However, it posed several significant challenges for them (Bakhshi et al., 2019). They stated that they were discouraged at professional development prospects because publishing an article in Iranian journals is very difficult for TPCs. For example, TPC2 mentioned:

One of the most challenging issues was dealing with rejection since the peer-review process can be extremely long. When I received my first rejection, I was devastated. The paper had gone through many drafts, and so I was naively expectant of a positive outcome. With a low acceptance rate, I don't feel too upset, but I do want to get it polished. Also, with the increasing workloads for established educators, it is essential to better regulate the supervisors' workloads to allow them to be able to contribute actively to the education of effective Ph.D. students.

In the same vein, Mason's (2018) study about publication challenges faced by PCs in Australian universities indicated that the total time from submission to publication of the published papers included in the thesis was between 99 days and 386 days, with an average of 215 days. Also, Lobo and Poyatos Matas (2010) asserted that publishing during candidature can also assist in the retention of doctoral students, which is important because attrition rates in Australia are already high. Finally, Lee and Kamler (2008) and Robins and Kanowski's (2008) study suggested that successful publication during candidature can help build students' resilience, benefiting from earlier and more regular feedback. In this regard, Bakhshi et al. (2019, 2020) concluded that one of the challenges of TEFL Ph.D. candidates is paper publication in which the result of the present study is in line with their findings.

### Conclusion and Implications

The results showed that TPEP led to identity reconstruction and changed TPCs' identity in practice which improved their pedagogical knowledge and led to gain public recognition from their community of practice and to achieve a high personal accomplishment, get socialized to the global community, and raise their social status; therefore, not only professional but also personal development took place. Furthermore, because TPEP impacted on teaching attitudes, their teaching styles and strategies became more reflective, collaborative, critical, and practical, and their self-efficacy and self-confidence increased. However, TPEP was not able to fill the gap between theory and practice because of the lack of practicum and observation visits to other academic contexts. It is necessary for curriculum developers to try to remove this constraint. Furthermore, a small increase in their job satisfaction and security, which was considered a negative mismatch in their expectations, was among the demotivating factors; consequently, if this situation continues, the current self-efficacy would be replaced by self-inefficacy. Therefore, policymakers and course designers, considering these limitations, can take steps to provide career-building supports and overcome the shortcomings. The factors that facilitated changes in their professional identity were considered being: critical consciousness expansion, self-awareness escalation, pedagogical knowledge enhancement, social reflection with teacher educators and classmates, informal dialogue with classmates on teaching improvement, classroom discussions, and pedagogical skills acquired during TPEP.

The present study presented insightful results which, if taken into consideration, can improve the quality of TPEP in Iran and can help to increase EFL teachers' job security and satisfaction. Otherwise, as the findings indicated, the participants came to recognize that having a Ph.D. degree would not secure professional career opportunities.



Finally, in addition to its contributions, the limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. One limitation of the present study is due to the nature of TPEP in Iran, which does not include a practicum. Observational data could have been collected from practicum, which could enhance the findings of the present study. This is one of the limitations of the present study, which is beyond the control of the present research. The generalizability of the findings to other different sociocultural settings should be, therefore, done cautiously. It capitalizes on how TPCs are forging their identities as teachers only in the context of an in-service TPEP. It does not observe how the TPCs handle the demands and weaknesses when they are required to make modifications in their teaching identity specifically in the context of educational reform. Further studies can consider the required modifications in the higher education system.

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