Contribution of English Textbooks to an EFL Curriculum and Teachers' Professional Identity:
The Case of Four EFL Teachers and a Private Language School in Iran

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Abstract: Driven by Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt's (2000) theory of Professional Identity (PI), this study aims to investigate teachers' perception of their PI in relation to the English textbooks they use in EFL classes. An in-depth interview with four Iranian EFL teachers and the school principal was conducted. The teachers' reports were employed to investigate their PI in relation to the textbooks they used. Furthermore, the school curriculum was analyzed through an interview with the school principal and examining the school documents. Content analysis of the interview data revealed that all the teachers viewed the content knowledge dimension of their PI reliant on the textbooks. Over the years, they had gained more autonomy in adapting the content or selecting more supplementary sources. Overall, the participants in this research highlighted the pivotal role of textbooks in the construction of their PI, most importantly in the formation of their content knowledge, and the least in the development of their pedagogical knowledge. The analysis of the school curriculum revealed a heavy reliance of many decisions on textbooks directly or indirectly. The findings in this study could provide more insights for curriculum developers, language school managers, teacher educators, and teachers who have a say in curriculum decisions when learning about the crucial role of textbooks in PI.

Keywords: Textbook, Professional Identity, Curriculum, EFL Teacher.

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Introduction

In English language teaching and learning curricula, the crucial role of textbooks has been highlighted in the literature along with many other components such as teacher knowledge and students' needs (e.g., Azizifar, Koosha & Lotfi, 2010). Textbooks provide the primary input for the content of the lessons, the skills and the language practices that the students take part in, and a foundation for the teachers' instruction (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011). According to Richards (2001), textbooks also serve as a form of teacher training by providing ideas based on which the teachers can plan their lessons. Hence, knowing how textbooks are used by teachers and how important they are in developing their professional knowledge and identity are questions, which along with other questions in the curriculum, need to be taken into educators' and curriculum developers' account (Richards, 2001).

The significant role of textbooks in language learning, however, has been undermined with the anti-textbook arguments after post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006). With a focus on the active role of learners in the ELT curricula, a relatively recent movement against textbooks emerged. The dogma movement which originated by Thornbury (2000) viewed overdependence on resources in the ELT classrooms, resorting to published materials and pre-planned lessons as barriers to the actual communication and learner-centered language education (Thornbury, 2000). They argue that there is a gap between learners' needs and learning styles and the materials which are prepared commercially for EFL and ESL courses (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Despite the controversial arguments against ELT materials and textbooks, commercial international textbooks in ELT programs and EFL contexts have maintained their significant role in the curricula. This is documented by many scholars in the international context (Richards & Mahoney, 1996; Tomlinson, 2001; 2012) and in Iran (Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2012; Ramazani, 2013; Raseks, Esmaeli, Ghavamnia & Rajabi, 2010). Systematic studies of textbooks, curriculum planning, and practice in Iran, however, are scanty (Atai & Mazlum, 2012). The existing studies on curriculum evaluation mainly targeted Iran's mainstream education and the new curriculum of state high schools (e.g. Rahimi & Alavi, 2017; Sharabian, et al., 2013). Given the existing gap, this study probes how four EFL teachers perceive their PI in relation to the textbooks they use. The present case study is, therefore, concerned with the international textbooks in a private language school in Isfahan, Iran, its ELT curriculum, and their role in teachers' professional identity. It explores four EFL teachers' perceptions about the key components of their PI (content knowledge,

pedagogical decisions, and didactical experiences) with regards to the international ELT textbooks in the curriculum of their working context.

Teachers' Professional Identity

According to Lasky (2005), the teacher PI is how teachers define their professional roles; it is a dynamic construct (Barrett, 2008) and can determine their effectiveness of behavior and performance in a classroom setting (Lerseth, 2013; Nguyen, 2008; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Beijaard et al. (2000) described teachers' identity primarily in terms of their professional role by asking teachers how they viewed themselves in three areas: content knowledge, pedagogical decisions, and didactical experiences. They defined PI in terms of "the teacher as a subject matter expert, the teacher as a pedagogical expert, and the teacher as a didactical expert" (p. 750). The subject matter or *content knowledge* was defined as the extent a teacher understands his/her own subject area. They argued for the need for more research on identity and teachers' subject matter knowledge.

Beijaard et al. (2000) defined a *pedagogical expert* as someone with an awareness of their students' needs, the funds of knowledge they bring to the class, the students' personal problems as well as societal issues and challenges which affect learning and teaching, someone who sets a good balance between his or her pedagogical side as well as the didactical side. Beijaard et al. (2000) explained that the traditional definition of *Didactical knowledge* was more related to teachers' knowledge to plan, instruct, and evaluate lessons and was later shifted to a more learner-centered constructivist view of teaching. This shift, according to them, affected teachers' perception of their PI which also included teachers' awareness of alternative instructional methods or technologies and their active choice of the methods that best fit the students' goals and topics. It dealt with teachers' engagement in students' personal problems. It is evident that the third significant aspect of Beijaard et al.'s (2000) framework pertains to teachers' reflection on their *didactical* experiences. This competence makes the teacher try to get engaged with students and know what is going on in their minds and what personal problems they may have. Teachers need to establish a good balance between the pedagogical side as well as the didactical side of teaching, which is the result of teachers' awareness of their students' needs and problems, the knowledge they bring to the class, and the broader societal issues on the way of learning and teaching (Beijaard et al., 2000).

After Beijaard et al.'s (2000) framework for PI, Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) maintained that the construct of identity was not defined adequately in teacher education

research. Bejaard et al. (2004, p.123) expanded on the previous ideas and considered four essential features for PI, that it is an ongoing process, consists of sub-identities that may or may not be in balance, involves agency, and implies both person and context (Bejaard et al., 2004). Agency in their expanded definition of PI refers to teachers' active role in the development of their PI. The last feature pertains to teachers' continuous negotiation between the contexts in which they work and their own teaching philosophies, styles, and preferences. Adapting and learning to work within this "teaching culture" is a part of becoming who a teacher is in their career, and this process starts as a person's identity begins in the early stages of their teaching career and continues developing throughout their professional lives. Bejjaard et al. (2004) called for a more consistent approach to what is meant by identity, PI, and teacher identity. Subsequent studies tapped at different factors in relation to PI.

Abednia (2012, p. 706), for instance, showed how an EFL teacher education course changed six Iranian EFL teachers' PI from "conformity to and romanticization of dominant ideologies to critical autonomy, from no orientation or an instrumentalist orientation to a critical/transformative orientation of teaching, and from a linguistic and technical view to an educational view of second language education". In his research, student teachers seemed to have a conformist and uncritical approach to the teaching methodology course materials, particularly the teachers' guides, while towards the end of the course they seemed to have redefined their perception of their PI, treating the schools' given rules critically, and constructing and valuing their own principles. His study showed that the course helped the teachers gain more confidence in didactic competence.

In another study, Motteram's (2016) thematic analysis of the teachers' responses to two membership surveys showed that teachers' PI was significantly influenced by their membership and belonging to globally-oriented teacher associations. Sifakis (2008) focused on three facets of EFL teachers' PI, that is, their roles as users, specialists, and custodians of English. He stated that these factors could have a role in preventing the teachers from integrating English as a Lingua Franca into their teaching. Xerri (2017) described his own PI as a teacher-researcher with the two personalities operating concomitantly but complementarily. Masoumpanah and Zarei (2014) reported on Iranian EFL teachers' strong sense of PI when teachers' pedagogical competence was considered, that is, they perceived their profession as a respectable job and they felt confident in their pedagogical competence when compared with native English teachers. They also showed that teachers' attitudes towards English proficiency (i.e. the subject knowledge in the current research) and pedagogical

competence in teaching English (i.e. the didactic expertise in this study and Beijaard et al., 2000), and their attitudes towards native-speaker teachers formed their PI. They showed that the teachers' formative years of experience and their students' preferences in learning English were primary factors that influenced their sense of subject competence.

English Language Teaching (ELT) Curriculum in Iran

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, the ministry of education adapted the curriculum by purging western culture from English textbooks seemingly with no systematic or theoretical framework (Ketabi & Talebinejad, 2009). The priority of education and school activities was given to the ethical and religious development of students based on Islamic education (Paivandi, 2012). In 1991, the second educational reform resulted in the seven-year EFL curriculum (K-6 to K-12) for junior and secondary high school levels designed based on learners' needs and theories and practices of SLA and Applied Linguistics (Ketabi & Talebinejad, 2009). However, Rahimi and Alavi (2017) noted that there were no syllabus documents, a record of needs analysis, or models for designing the program. The current English curriculum was modified in 2014 and consists of two series of course books entitled Prospect Series and Vision Series (for grades K7–K9 and K10–K12, respectively); however, both are used in the EFL curriculum based on a top-down educational model in which, according to Rahimi and Alavi (2017), the teachers do not have much control over the syllabus or curriculum.

Although the new teaching curriculum was based on an adapted version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and aimed to help junior and senior high school students respectively reach A2 and B2 levels of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015), there are still serious issues about the feasibility of the new curriculum. Limitations such as limited exposure to English, large class size, the school culture of placing more emphasis on repetitions and memorizations rather than communication, and the washback effect of the university entrance exam are the impediments on the way of the goals in CLT-oriented English curriculum (Anani Sarab, Monfared & Safarzadeh, 2016). Other studies (e.g. Firoozi, Razavipour & Ahmadi, 2019; Razavipour & Rezagah 2018) showed that the teachers in the new curriculum need training to develop their English aural/oral skills and higher-order thinking skills in assessing reading and listening comprehension. In other words, they need training in both the subject matter knowledge and pedagogy of assessment.

Ajideh and Panahi's (2016) findings on the contribution of the two new ELT textbooks

(i.e. Prospect and Vision series) to the development of students' intercultural communicative competence revealed the dominance of the home culture and non-western ideology in both 'pictures' and 'conversations' sections. In other words, they claimed that the two textbooks in the reformed national curriculum could not develop the students' intercultural communicative competence. Given the current limitations, there is a noticeable tendency among many Iranian students to learn English through the ELT curriculum of the private sector and English institutes, which sets primary aims in line with the communicative needs of students.

Although there are more than 7800 registered English institutes in Iran (including 4350 for females and 3450 for males) in addition to numerous unregistered ones, there is still a high demand for private English institutions (Iran Ministry of Education, personal communication, 16/09/2016 cited in Zarrabi & Brown, 2017). This study aims at investigating the perception of four EFL teachers' PI in the curriculum of a private language school rather than a state school for many reasons. First and foremost, the curricula in private institutes, including the school in the current study, are usually designed independently and by the school educational management board. They are more in line with students' needs, more successful and more accountable in selecting teachers, textbooks, programs, and extra-curricular factors (Aliakbari & Gheitasi, 2014). They choose ELT international textbooks from a wide variety of global ELT packages and series which are distributed worldwide.

Contrary to the private-sector ELT curriculum, nation-wide textbooks are developed and published by the Ministry of Education for curriculum in state schools (Gholami, Sarkhosh & Abdi, 2016). The aim of this study was more aligned with the private school curriculum not only for a larger variety of textbooks that teachers are exposed to but also their communicative goals and content. In the private sector, curricula and textbooks hit EFL and ESL learning to communicate internationally with awareness of cultural variations worldwide. While the aim in the state curriculum is to promote Islamic Iranian non-westernized identity, private institutes aim to enable learners to communicate in English, pursue education abroad, live abroad, travel to foreign countries, and take international examinations such as IELTS/TOEFL/GRE (Zarrabi & Brown, 2017). Given the prominence of cultural content, communication, and internationalization in global textbooks (Shin, Eslami & Chen, 2011), the researcher found the private institute curriculum more in line with Beijaard et al.'s (2000) definition of Professional Identity (PI) and the three underlying constructs of content, didactic, and pedagogical competence. This study aimed to explore if the textbooks and the selected private institute curriculum had any contribution to the interviewed EFL teachers' perception of PI.

The Role of Textbooks in Teachers' Content and Pedagogical Knowledge

Since the emergence of the communicative approach and the Dogma movement, which was initiated by Thornbury (2000) to liberate teachers from their dependence on materials, there has been a long-time debate over the helpfulness of textbooks. The movement aimed to return ELT to its roots using *learner-centered* and *materials-light* approaches. Regardless of the views of those who criticize the use of textbooks (e.g., Gray, 2000; Hutchinson & Torres 1994; Mukundan, 2009; Thornbury & Meddings, 2001), most language teachers continue to use them. For example, Tomlinson (2010) showed that 92% of the teachers used a book regularly. There are reports on the joint contribution of teachers' knowledge and curriculum materials to teachers' high-quality instruction (e.g. Hill, & Charalambous, 2012).

Proponents of textbooks argue that they are cost-effective and time-saving and provide learners with security, system, progress, and revision (Tomlinson, 2012). Many researchers have referred to the greater need to use textbooks for teachers in developing countries, as the quality of teacher preparation is comparatively lower. When teachers are ill-prepared, they are more likely to need the assistance of well-designed textbooks to set the parameters of instruction as well as to impart the base of school knowledge (Beeby, 2001; Read, 2011).

Opponents of textbooks, however, argue that textbooks can disempower both teachers and learners; they do not meet the users' needs and impose control and order on the class (Mukundan, 2009). Many also argue that "a textbook is inevitably superficial and reductionist in its coverage of language points. It imposes uniformity of syllabus and approach, and it removes initiative and power from teachers" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 67).

Despite the aforementioned problems, textbooks have a crucial role especially in contexts like Iran where English is used as a foreign language and there is a heavy reliance on them. The textbooks utilized in Iran's private language schools have not been adequately investigated; however, the available studies (e.g. Razmjoo, 2007) concur that contrary to the state schools, private language school's textbooks are more conducive to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles and they provide a major source of contact they have with the target language. While governmental schools have to provide learners with the local textbooks prepared by the Ministry of Education, private institutes use textbooks produced in countries other than Iran (e.g. texts produced in the United States or Britain). Although the role of teacher educators and peers has been documented in the literature as determining factors in the formation of teacher identity (e.g. Lerseth, 2013), the role of textbooks as a major

constituent of the teaching process and possibly contributing to the formation of teachers' PI has been less investigated. The available studies are mainly on the teachers' or students' reliance on or attitudes towards textbooks without studying their PI (e.g. Lee & Bathmaker, 2007) or PI in relation to other variables such as professional vitality and creativity (Khany & Malekzadeh, 2015). Some other researches focused on teacher attitudes towards their textbooks which varied depending on the teachers' experience and their view of the textbook's value in their teaching context (e.g. Tsui, 2003). Gray's (2010) interviews with 22 teachers showed teachers' subjective omission of the materials which they felt perpetuated cultural stereotypes. He reported that beginning teachers did not "have the confidence to challenge the authority of the textbook" (p. 7). Zacharias (2005), however, reported teachers' reverence of textbooks and their use of textbooks as scripts for their lessons.

What seems to be missing, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, is how teachers perceive their PI with regards to the textbooks which they have taught in their profession. To fill this gap, this study has been developed with the following two research questions:

1) How do EFL teachers view their PI (content, didactic and pedagogic knowledge) in relation to the textbooks they use?

2) How does the school principal view the school curriculum in relation to the textbooks?

Methods

This study used the qualitative approach and interviews to explore teachers' perception of their professional identity in relation to the textbooks they used as well as the school principal's views with regards to the curriculum.

Participants

From the 12 teachers who were selected based on non-random purposeful sampling and invited to participate in this study, four (one male and three females) volunteered to cooperate. The researcher ensured that the teacher participants had experienced teaching more than three global textbooks in private language schools and had at least nine years of teaching experience since the school changed textbooks every three years on average. As Table 1 illustrates, two of the teachers had Bachelor in TEFL and two had Masters in English Translation and TEFL. They had a mean teaching experience of 13 years and had taught seven textbooks on average in language schools. Teachers' age ranged from 26 to 34.

The selection of the school was based on the researcher's convenience and the teachers' and principal's willingness to cooperate fully in this study. The researcher had a decade of experience of cooperating with the school both as a teacher and as an educational assistant. Interviews were conducted by the researcher. The school principal was 46 years old with a master's degree in TEFL and an experience of 20 years managing her private school. At the time of the study, she was also a full-time teacher at the state school for 22 years.

Their consent for audio-recording the interview sessions was obtained orally and they were informed prior to the interview that their pseudonyms (T1, T2, T3, T4, & P respectively for the four teachers and the school principal) would be used to keep their identity anonymous to the readers, school management, and educational board.

Table 1. *Participants of the Study*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Academic Degree	Global Textbooks Series Taught
T1	Male	26	9	Bachelor	American File, New Interchange, Headways
T2	Female	37	15	Master's	Let's Go, Chatterbox, Adventures, Tiny Talk, Family and Friends, Interchange, World English, Touchstone, viewpoints, Passages, American File
T3	Female	32	12	PhD	World English, Touchstone, Family and Friends
T4	Female	34	16	PhD	Tiny Talk, Chatterbox, Headways, Interchange, Family and Friends, World English, Cutting Edge Touchstone, Passages, viewpoints, American file
P	Female	٤٦	*٢٠	Master's	NA

* The number shows the experience of managing the school.

Instruments

A semi-structured theme-centered interview with the teachers and one with the school principal (Appendix I) were designed in the current study. Interviews were conducted individually by the researcher and with the presence of an expert researcher which could reduce bias. The questions were open and were influenced by the three constructs underlying Beijaard et al.'s (2000) theory of PI and their questionnaire. They had operationalized PI and explored how secondary school teachers perceived their PI (prior to and during the study) as a subject matter expert, a didactic, and a pedagogic expert. In this study, the subject matter was operationalized as teachers' knowledge of four language skills, vocabulary, and grammar and how they updated each arena. This was more specific than Beijaard et al.'s (2000) definition of subject experts as knowledgeable teachers who do not make mistakes and keep pace with new developments. Themes that oriented teachers' didactic knowledge were knowledge to plan and execute teaching at the students' level, to teach in various ways, and to evaluate students' learning. The questions related to the pedagogical aspect of teachers' PI pertained to the social, emotional, and moral development of students, their knowledge to motivate students, to approach them positively, openly, and respectfully, and to identify signs of the students' involvement. The questions in the interviews with both the teachers and school principal were designed based on the three competencies of the theoretical framework and the main themes in Beijaard et al.'s (2000) questionnaire.

The high reliability of Beijaard et al.'s (2000) PI questionnaire has been reported by some researchers within (e.g. Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 in Mofrad, 2016) and outside the context of this study (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2000). The questions were checked with an expert researcher who ensured they mapped to the three constructs in Beijaard et al. (2000) and the main themes in their questionnaire. Moreover, she checked the coding process to ensure more consistent interpretations of the transcripts. With a more valid and structured interview, more reliable data could be obtained. This was crucial because the focus of the interview was not only on teachers' PI but also on textbooks.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the teachers and the school principal in 2017 (See Appendix 1). The teachers were asked to describe their role as a teacher in general and their subject knowledge, didactic, and pedagogic knowledge in particular, and whether they viewed each competence independent of or reliant on the textbooks they used over the years in their teaching profession. They were prompted by the interviewer and were asked to provide examples in their personal teaching experience. The school principal was interviewed about the curriculum objectives, evaluation, and other decisions in relation to textbooks. Each interview lasted 90 minutes and was conducted in English in the same school where the teachers worked. Prior to and after the interviews, the researcher had been given access to the available documents such as mid-term and final tests and students' needs analysis surveys. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in full for analysis.

Data Analysis

Like data collection, data analysis in this study was informed by the three categories in Beijaard et al.'s (2000) PI and conducted through a theoretical (deductive) thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is an approach that is also used in studies on education (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Theoretical thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis approach where coding is more theory-driven than data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher transcribed all interview verbals verbatim without attempting to precisely represent pauses, fillers, and vocatives as, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis does not require the same level of detailed transcription of both verbal and non-verbals in conversation or discourse analysis. The transcriptions for all teachers were collated for each question and based on the three overarching PI themes. The researcher first read through the transcripts several times comparing the data on each theme. According to Fox (2014), when categories for analysis are pre-selected, these should form the basis for the patterning of the data. In coding the teachers' transcripts, however, particular attention was paid to words, phrases, sentences, or segments that were related to teachers' identity in relation to textbooks. Key words such as personal pronouns were annotated especially when they were attached to textbooks. To answer the first research question, the aim was to know how similar patterns were identified for these codes and if the same patterns were observed for all the teachers. For instance when T1 compared himself with those without TEFL certificates and said: "We

learned how to teach better than other teachers and those initial trainings made a huge difference between us and them", the use of pronouns indicated the code of different PI, which was perceived to be superior in didactic knowledge.

The coding procedure to analyze the principal's interview transcripts and respond to the second research question focused merely on textbooks and their role rather than the principal's PI.

Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in the following findings.

Teachers' Perception of their Content Knowledge in Relation to Textbooks

All the participants reported that textbooks had a crucial role in the construction of their content knowledge and PI. They all pointed out that although they had learned a lot of English through teaching, they still relied on the textbooks, and if they had not had a textbook to use, they would not find themselves professionally qualified. T4, for instance, reported that she learned some cultural points from the conversations in the *Touchstone series* and the lexicon of baby talk from the *Tiny Talk series*. T2's excerpt from the interview clearly indicated how the first dimension of her PI was influenced by textbooks during her teaching years, "I feel more confident to teach with textbooks. It does not mean that I do not have this kind of knowledge but I am a non-native teacher and prefer to use the textbook as a reliable source of knowledge". She referred to the contribution that textbooks made to her pronunciation, for instance.

> I am sure about something, that I could improve my pronunciation to a large degree after I started teaching and through books like *Interchanges* and *Headways*. I had passed phonetics and phonology courses at the university, but had only learned rules in theory. These books teach pronunciation in practice; I had never worked on pronunciation this way until I had to teach pronunciation exercises in these books. I don't deny the influence that English movies and songs had on my pronunciation, but the pronunciation exercises in the textbooks made me practice myself to be prepared to teach them in the class.

T1 similarly referred to the role of textbooks as triggers to look for more information in supplementary sources for enhancing his linguistic knowledge.

> Before the classes when we prepare ourselves by referring to more materials, dictionaries, encyclopedias and online sources to learn more about the content we want to teach, we learn a lot of words. I usually try to find more words to give the students; the vocabulary in the book is never enough.

Unlike other participants, he did not see the textbooks as the first and foremost important factor in the construction of his PI; however, when he was asked about his perception of himself as a teacher without a textbook in the class, he admitted that he could not assume his identity independent from the textbooks, "That is the book which organizes everything in my classes and even out of the class."

T2 relied on textbooks and pointed out many advantages of textbooks most importantly as a benchmark. She indicated that she treated her students in various classes differently depending on the students' level of proficiency and their book content. Like T1, she was less certain about her world knowledge and related language for higher-level classes and relied on classroom textbooks and many supplementary sources, more noticeably dictionaries for enhancing vocabulary for prior class preparation.

Teachers' Perception of their Didactic Knowledge in Relation to Textbooks

The teachers reported that despite their linguistic knowledge of English, which had been constructed mainly and primarily through textbooks, their didactic knowledge as English teachers had been enhanced through a number of other factors. In other words, all the participants in this study indicated that textbooks had an impact, but not the sole role, on the formation of their didactic knowledge. They referred to some other factors in the construction of their didactic knowledge, such as their creativity, the teaching methodology of their own teachers and colleagues' recommendations of more efficient teaching methodologies, classroom observations of their colleagues, their own teaching experiences, professional trials and errors, and sample teaching videos.

The participants also highlighted that, unlike their content knowledge, they perceived the didactic aspect of their PI to be more independent from the textbooks or teachers' guides as they gained more teaching experiences. Besides this autonomy, they all agreed that textbooks could save their time in lesson planning. T3, for instance, mentioned the time efficiency of using textbooks referring to her own autonomy,

> Textbook makes my job much easier and more objective because they let me know what to teach, but I am not fully dependent on the textbook and can handle teaching different skills myself. I mean that I have this knowledge [teaching techniques and strategies] to do the job even without textbook…. My teaching style doesn't rely very much on the textbook, anyhow; I use lots of extra materials and the Internet in the class. But the book helps keep on the track.

T1 referred to university teacher training undergraduate courses like Practical Teaching

I and II and the school teacher training in-service programs when it came to his didactic knowledge. He believed textbooks had a supplementary role since they had teachers' guides with tips on how to warm the class up, implement every exercise, and assign homework in a stepwise fashion.

> Since we had teaching courses at the university besides the teacher training programs in this language school [mandatory in-service courses offered by the language school based on which promotions were assigned to teachers], I think we learned how to teach better than other teachers and those initial training made a huge difference between us and them.

As the above excerpt illustrates, T1 described himself as a graduate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This teacher referred to 'them' and 'other teachers' as less experienced with his justification that they are not graduates from TEFL but have learned English in language schools or other branches of English like Translation or Literature. When asked about the role of textbooks in enhancing his and their didactic knowledge, he indicated that non-TEFL graduate teachers relied on them more than him. He referred to his tendency to use his creativity in teaching techniques and stated, "Textbooks, even their teachers' manuals, limit us as if there is only one way of teaching to all students".

T4 similarly referred to her autonomy in teaching methodology as she was teaching English for more than a decade. She reported,

> I used to use [referring to the first year of her job] the textbook as the only source for teaching and used it all the time. Unlike my recent teaching, I didn't use to use the internet or other materials besides the book in my classes. I didn't know I could modify the parts of the textbook that did not fit my class. I have learned that over time. Textbooks are not the only source but can be a great source especially for novice teachers. It gives them a framework to work on and to get ideas. Now I know that it is the teachers' responsibility to provide what the textbook does not.

Teachers' Perception of their Pedagogical Knowledge in Relation to Textbooks

The teachers variously assigned the role of developing social, moral, and emotional states to the textbooks. T1 was hardly aware of the pedagogical aspect of his PI; he viewed his identity mainly from content and didactic knowledge and described his role in terms of pedagogical knowledge as the following excerpt illustrates.

> As a teacher, I try to update my knowledge of English, vocabulary, pronunciation and …. . I also do my best to teach in the best way. I don't think it is the job of a teacher to know his students' social, moral and emotional state. How could I know if a student has been through a family emotional conflict? It's hard, …let's say impossible, to understand every student's emotions.

T1 had hardly perceived the social, moral, and emotional knowledge of his own identity and tended to define his PI in terms of the first two categories. When he was asked about the role of textbooks in his PI to initiate change in the society and cause transformation, he did not have much to say except,

> Well, I have not thought about these features in me as a teacher; all I can tell you about myself is that I am kind emotionally, a sociable teacher and good tempered. This is something in my personality and I had them before I started teaching English. So, I don't think textbooks have had any role in my emotions, morality and social aspects even in changing society.

T2 and T3 were similar to T1 in assigning no significant role to the textbooks in the construction of social, emotional, and moral aspects of their identity as a teacher. They believed that textbooks did not have any information to teach them in that respect and that their primary role in the construction of their identity had been in what and how to teach, the two issues related to the first two knowledge areas of PI. T2, for instance, highlighted this point by comparing her emotional and social states in establishing a close rapport with students at two distinct proficiency levels.

> I feel more comfortable to be friendly with younger students who are at lower levels of language proficiency, children's classes I mean. The reason is, I believe, my confidence on my knowledge of English. In these classes, I am sure I know the answer to all their questions and this gives a good feeling to me. I think if books have any role in my positive feeling and closer, more intimate relationship with students, that role is indirect. Books teach me language and how to teach it, they improve my knowledge of English which gives me the confidence. The books have not helped me for advanced level students, though.

T3 claimed that she had reached the awareness at this dimension both about herself and her students. She described her identity as a teacher who was extroverted, could easily express her emotions, and established an intimate relationship with most of her students. She thought it was the identity developed in her through reflection, self-awareness, and her potential in public relations.

> I am a teacher with a high talent in identifying my students distinct learning styles, emotional states, religious and cultural backgrounds. I treat every student differently. For instance, if a student has low self-confidence my questions would help him raise his self-confidence. …. . I have improved this potential through my studies in psychology, trial and error in my interactions with students and thinking about how to treat everyone in the way his emotional states demand. The English textbooks which I have taught as an English teacher have never contributed to my emotional, social and moral states as a teacher. I am not much dependent on textbook and even feel more comfortable without textbook to

improve my own and my students' social, emotional and moral needs. There are times that I feel I know more than what is presented in the textbook.

T4 perceived the role of textbooks differently and signified their themes in having a major role in her social and emotional aspects. She attributed the lively, interactive atmosphere that she could create in some of her classes to the content and topics of the book lessons. She described that some books could compensate for the drawbacks in her PI regarding the pedagogical aspect. She compared two of her classes in which she was teaching different textbooks and referred to the class in which she taught 'Viewpoint' as boring. She described her students as usually passive listeners who were not as communicative as her class in which she taught 'Passages'. She showed how her PI was reflected in her classroom when the book could not compensate her serious, introverted personality which she viewed as a shortcoming in her profession. The following excerpt from her interview illustrates this:

> I believe, the textbook needs to and can compensate what you don't have as a teacher. I mean, I am not a conversationalist person with a sense of humor,…. When it is not easy for me to create a happier and more communicative atmosphere by myself, the selection of textbooks matters greatly. …. I should say I did try to find more creative ways to teach that book [viewpoint] and make the class more fun. But the problem was when I didn't enjoy the book and some of its topics, I was sure the students did not either…..I spend much more time preparing myself for the Viewpoint class and think about how to teach each exercise, what to do even what to write on the board. Still, I could see students quite different. It was crystal clear that they were not enjoying the class as much as the students in Passages.

Overall, T1, T2, and T3 had different perceptions about the role of textbooks in the construction of their identity. Contrary to T4 who assigned a major role of creating a friendly, lively, and interactive classroom atmosphere to the textbooks, the other three teachers reported that textbooks had made no contribution to the social, moral, and emotional dimensions of their PI. T1 had not achieved awareness about his identity, T2 considered students' proficiency level and accordingly the level of the textbook (i.e., textbooks for basic, elementary, intermediate, or advanced students) as a contributing factor to her PI. T3 accepted the need to have this competence in PI but assigned her competence to other factors, not textbooks. She even viewed her own identity as independent from the textbooks.

The School's Curriculum Analysis

The results of the curriculum analysis, mainly based on the interview with the school principal, answered the second research question. The curriculum of the school in this study was thoroughly examined with regard to the status of the textbooks since the aim of this research was to probe the influence of textbooks on teachers' PI. The school has been active in teaching English to an overall number of 23,500 students for more than two decades. It seemed that the textbooks and their hierarchy of CEFR levels informed major decisions made about teachers and students. The standardized international Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and textbook CEFR levels were employed for the school core decisions such as teacher employment and evaluation, the students' placement tests, and achievement ratings.

The teachers taught popular internationally-authored textbooks published, for instance, by Cambridge or Oxford University Press. The school provided the teachers with the textbooks, teachers' guides, workbooks, AVAs (Audio-Visual Aids), and other pedagogical tools. Figure 1 shows how textbooks and their status at the CEFR hierarchy were used as the useful benchmark against which the curriculum was developed and the students were placed in classes. The selection of textbooks for every level was based on the CEFR description, the publishers' mention of the book level, and the head teachers' consensus on the correspondence between school goals, teachers' capabilities, and the book content. Figure 1 illustrates the school curriculum based on CEFR levels and textbooks.
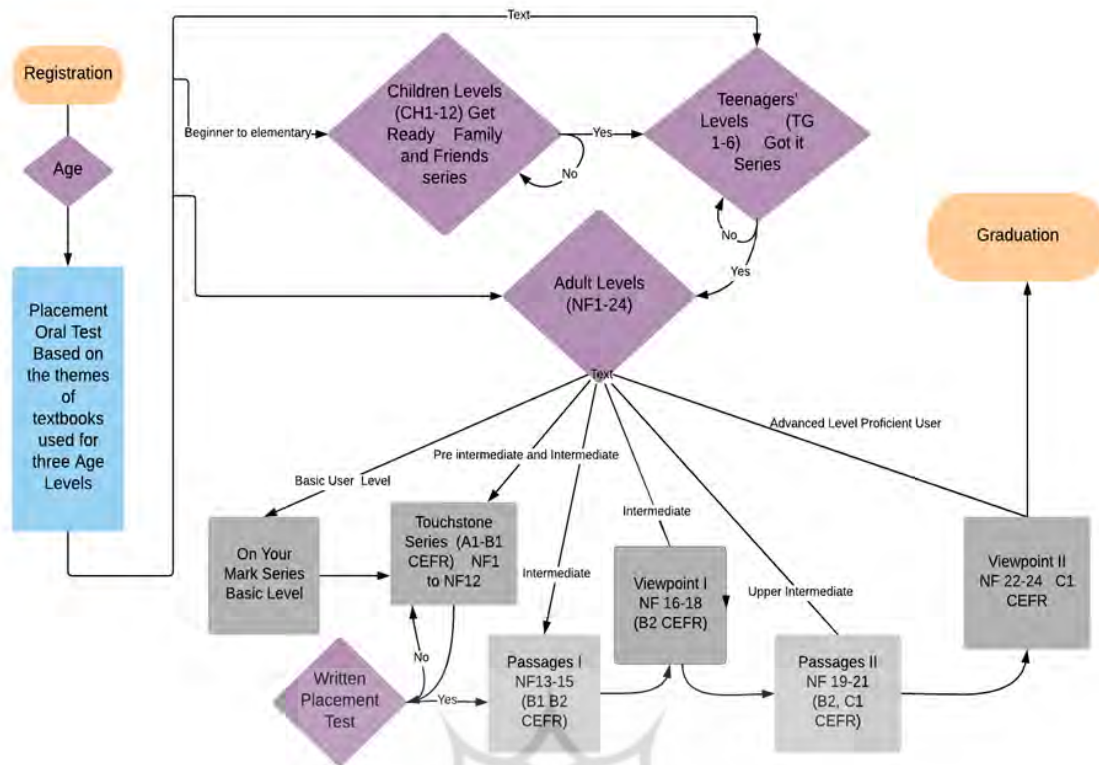
Figure 1. *The School-level Chart and Textbooks*

As Figure 1 shows, age was the first criterion based on which the students were placed at numerous classes in one of the three age groups: children, teenagers, and adults. Children- aged three to eight- were placed in one of the twelve CH courses; learners aged eight to fifteen were placed in one of the six Teenage (TG) courses, and finally adults older than fifteen were placed in one of the twenty-four NF courses. Every course (CH, TG, and NF) lasts two to three months and consisted of 40 educational hours.

Before the registration of every learner and as a placement test, an oral placement interview was run by one of the three educational head teachers who were all aware of the content and CEFR hierarchy of all the textbooks in Figure 1. The interview was heavily textbook-bound, and the themes and the difficulty level of questions in the oral test were determined based on the textbooks in various levels.

As Figure 1 shows, at the end of every course, the students would be permitted to attend the next level provided that they completed the course and obtained the required passing score (more than 70%). Students' assessment in every course is based on class attendance (10%), participation in classroom activities (20%), oral proficiency quizzes (40%), and final exam

(30%). In addition to this, there was a written placement test at the end of NF12 level, when Touchstone Series textbooks were completed. Passing this test allowed the adult students to enter the next Passages and Viewpoint levels which mainly corresponded with B2, C1, and C2 levels of CEFR (Figure 1). Cambridge's Touchstone Series (McCarthy, McCarten, & Sandiford, 2005) confirmed the school's hierarchy based on CEFR for the selected age as it claims to be "an innovative four-level series for adults and young adults, taking students from beginning to intermediate levels (CEFR: A1–B1)".   Overall, the entrance, progression, and graduation of EFL learners in the school were all guided by the textbooks and the CEFR levels. The teachers' recruitment and evaluation were similarly influenced by the textbooks. This was reflected in the principal's response,

> "Our teachers, unlike the state schools, do not need an academic degree in Teaching English or teaching experience in the first place; they need to be fluent and proficient user of English depending on the level of the textbook they are assigned to teach. If a teacher is at C1 level, he is able to teach Touchstone 4, for instance" [Touchstone 4, an upper-intermediate book at B level].

The interview with the principal as well as the analysis of the school recruitment documents showed that the school initially used an adapted version of the TOEFL paper-based test to evaluate the teachers' general competence of English structure, reading, and listening with the passing score of 90 out of 120. An oral interview with the successful applicants was subsequently conducted to evaluate their English oral proficiency as well as their didactic and pedagogic knowledge. B2 level of CEFR was reported to be the lowest standard for recruiting teachers at children and teenagers' levels; C1 and C2 were the standards required for teachers to teach at adults' levels. Having teaching experience or a degree in English was not an initial screening requirement but a plus.

The interview also showed that short-term learning outcomes and long-term objectives were guided by the content of textbooks and their hierarchy of CEFR levels. More specifically, performance standards or knowledge that the learners were expected to demonstrate at the end of each term were mastery of the book content. In response to the school curriculum goals and objectives, the principal said,

> The ultimate objective for all students is achieving advanced level of English Proficiency, i.e. C level of CEFR. The students' proficiency in English is determined based on the textbook. learning objectives for every level are expressed in terms of the communicative functions in the textbooks that students are supposed to master by the end of the course, in touchstone series for example, how to ask for directions, how to order a meal, how to have a conversation with the hotel concierge, the bank teller, the shop keeper, etc. Each term, the students are assessed through oral proficiency quizzes and final written exams which

are usually available in the teachers' edition and match the lessons in the book both in content and the level of difficulty. The pre-determined learning objectives in textbook packs, like those of many other language schools, are the standards to guide the whole curriculum objectives.

The goals set by Cambridge University Press (McCarthy et al., 2005) corroborated the above excerpt claiming that Touchstone, together with Viewpoint, presents natural language in authentic contexts, conversation strategies, and lots of pair and group work for students to personalize the language presented based on the Cambridge English Corpus.

Considering the role of textbooks in teaching methodologies, the school principal reported that various communicative activities were utilized by teachers, from whole-class teaching and teacher-directed class discussions to students' more autonomous cooperative (group or pair) works. "Teachers' manuals usually guide teachers' classroom pedagogical practices. We highly recommended them to run every class by developing lesson plans based on the teacher's editions." the school principal explained. Classroom activities focused on all four skills, although, speaking and listening were prioritized over reading and writing. The decision for this priority was based on the school's needs analysis survey which was run among all the students at the end of each semester to evaluate the program. The majority of the students needed proficiency in oral skills, which were not the focus at state schools. The principal claimed that her school aimed to compensate for this deficiency in the state sector schools.

To connect teachers to the international teacher community and update their professional knowledge, the principal reported that they benefited from Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) by inviting teacher trainers. Besides in-service teacher training programs, the school conducted local examinations based on the international textbooks (e.g., Harmer, 2012) for updating in-service teachers' pedagogical and linguistic competencies. Teachers' promotions and salaries rose mainly based on their participation in training programs and in-service exams.

Discussion

Although the dominance of textbooks and teachers' reliance on them, without consideration of the notion of PI, has been documented by many researchers, the literature has paid very limited attention to teachers' PI in terms of subject, didactic and pedagogic knowledge, and textbooks. The findings of this study revealed that the four participants concurred on the contribution of textbooks to their subject competence and to a lesser degree their didactic competence of PI. They admitted that they felt more confident as a teacher with textbooks, especially in their content knowledge. Teachers' reliance on textbooks is consistent with many studies (e.g.

Azizifar, et al., 2010; Kirkgöz, 2009; Richards, 2001; Richards & Mahoney, 1996) and in contrast to some (e.g. Ramazani, 2013).

Teachers report that their reliance on textbooks for didactic knowledge decreased as they gained more professional experiences. This is supported by Tsui (2003) who showed less experienced teachers' heavier reliance on their textbooks. This is probably in line with the shift in student teacher's PI in Abednia's (2012) research as the teacher training course could explain the participants' shift of attitudes toward textbooks from conformist and non-critical instruction textbook users to doubts about their relevance and usefulness. His participants' self-confidence in didactic competence increased as a result of the teacher training course.

The reports from the participants in this study were unable to demonstrate the Dogma ELT movement. Meddings and Thornbury (2009) similarly highlighted the core principles of Dogme as conversation-driven rather than materials-driven and focused on the language which emerged rather than on a pre-determined language syllabus. Contrary to this principle in the Dogma ELT movement, the teachers in this study highlighted the pivotal role of textbooks in their PI and particularly the formation of their subject and didactic competence. This can probably be justified by their lack of confidence in their proficiency (T2, for instance) or less teaching experience (T1 in this research). Teachers' more reliance on the subject and didactic knowledge on textbooks reflect what Mofrad (2016) reported about Iranian teachers in a different language school. While his research aimed at teachers' gender and work experience in relation to their PI (rather than textbooks), he used a similar theoretical framework and his findings on teachers' PI revealed that teachers identified themselves mostly as didactical experts, then as pedagogical experts, and least as subject matter experts.

This study revealed similar results to Macintyre and Hamilton's (2010) small-scale study when the crucial role of textbooks and their contribution to identity is considered. Despite our aim to explore teachers' PI, they investigated learners' responses to different mathematics textbooks focusing on the relationship between their perceptions of the curriculum and their identity. They searched for evidence of 'self' or interests relevant to the learners, with reference to the broad inclusion categories (gender, class, race, logic, expressiveness, and creativity). PI in the current study employed Beijaard et al.'s (2000) description of teachers' identity in three areas: content knowledge, pedagogical decisions, and didactical experiences. In their study, however, learners' identity was their interests represented within the textbook and curriculum content. Their findings revealed that textbooks contributed to patterns of inclusion and exclusion in mathematics education and the learners' participation and success. Dowling

(1996) had similarly viewed textbooks' influence on learners' aspirations for future employment as they had a bearing on learners' identity with mathematics.

The issue of the school curriculum and teachers' heavy reliance on the textbook in the current study is what Macintyre and Hamilton's (2010) referred to and reminded that many schools are accepting the themes and content of textbooks as the curriculum. Utilizing textbooks as a form of teacher training and providing ideas on how to plan and teach lessons is what Razmjoo (2007) referred to particularly about novice teachers and what Beijaard et al. (2004) referred to as didactic competence. Razmjoo's findings probably explain why teachers in this study showed their PI heavily reliant on particularly in the first years of professional experience.

The contribution of textbooks to teachers' PI and the school curriculum is not what has been favored by the governmental curriculum developers. They argue against using internationally authored textbooks in the Iranian EFL school curriculum since they are not adapted to the Islamic Iranian culture. Abdollahzadeh and Baniasad's (2010) content analysis of two imported textbooks showed that the extant ideologies in *Spectrum* and *True to Life* series represented particular ideologies and cultural values such as hegemony of English, sexism, and cultural stereotypes. In line with their research, Haddad Narafshan and Yamini (2011) showed that most of the Iranian teachers believed in the government's negative approach to English language education in general, owing to political and religious reasons. When the English curriculum in private language schools is considered, however, teachers are not very much concerned with teaching or raising awareness about these ideologies (Atai & Mazlum, 2012). This could probably be more attributed to the private schools' flexible curriculum and their policies which are made more internally by the school board rather than the central state-owned education ministry. The teachers' lack of awareness of their social role in this study (pedagogical knowledge) seems to be explained by Abednia (2012). English teachers' linguistic view and that they consider the sole aim of English language teaching as teaching the flesh and bones of ESL/EFL, not its sole. They view their responsibility as helping students master the language content rather than going beyond. They are unaware of or probably unwilling to fulfill the transformative educational promises such as awareness-raising and social change, helping people become critical thinkers and active citizens.

The crucial role of textbooks in the curriculum and in the formation of ideologies is better justified by Christian-Smith (1991, p. 50) who states that textbooks are not "neutral or interest-free", they are ideology-laden. Hence, teachers who teach textbooks are or become aware of

the ideological patterns in the textbooks. This awareness has a significant influence on their instructional decisions which is the didactic competence in PI and eventually their attitude about their role and identity as a language teacher.

Implication

The findings of this research provide insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, language school managers, and teachers as far as they have the power to decide about materials. This is more noticeable for the private sector in the Iranian English educational context since decisions about the selection of materials is made within these schools and by the head managers or the educational board. Being aware of the significance of their decision, curriculum developers and school managers would pay more attention to select appropriate textbooks which are more responsive to all competencies of teachers' PI.

The finding that teachers' subject knowledge of PI is reliant on textbooks more than the other two competencies highlights the need to develop materials and textbooks which incorporate themes and activities for improving all aspects of PI. Nevertheless, this signifies the need for teacher educators to reduce student-teachers reliance on the textbook by encouraging them to use other sources such as the internet and digital technologies.

The need can be more serious when novice teachers in EFL contexts are considered. Knowing the effect of textbooks more on novice teachers' perception of their subject, pedagogical, and didactic PI, teacher educators should ensure incorporating activities in teacher training courses that create more awareness on all aspects of PI. In these courses, more attention should probably be paid to the didactical and pedagogical aspects of PI since they can be acquired from textbooks to a lesser degree. By incorporating an understanding of teachers' PI into teacher education courses, student teachers can better be trained on the three areas of PI, that is, what they teach, how they teach, and to whom they teach.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that Iranian EFL teachers perceived their subject knowledge to be influenced by the textbooks more dominantly than their didactic and pedagogical knowledge. In other words, while the four EFL teachers in this study unanimously agreed on the crucial role of textbooks on their subject competence, they had conflicting opinions about their didactic and pedagogic competencies (i.e. the second and third dimensions of PI). Analysis of the curriculum in the language school in the context of this study also showed the

crucial effect of textbooks on the curriculum, in particular, students' placement tests and their progress to higher levels of language proficiency.

The findings of this study are limited in scope to only four participants; hence no firm generalization can be made statistically. Yet, if the need for more researches with larger samples of participants and quantitative data analysis is met, the results may be fostered to better understand the contribution that English textbooks make to the PI of EFL teachers.

Declaration

No Funding or research grants were received for the current study and it is not applicable to this research. The authors of this work declare no conflict of interest. All procedures followed in this work were in accordance with the ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all the five participants for being interviewed and the interview transcriptions being included in the study.

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Appendix I

Interview Questions from Teachers

Dear Teacher

The following are some questions for a research on teachers' professional identity in relation to textbooks. Given your invaluable experiences in teaching different textbooks, I would appreciate your description and viewpoints about your knowledge as an English teacher and its dependence on classroom textbooks. Your identity will remain anonymous and the ethical issues in this research will be considered.

Your Age …………….. Your Teaching experiences ………………Years

The international general English textbooks you have taught so far

………………………………………………………………………………………………

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In each of the following areas, how do you describe yourself as an English teacher with and without a textbook in the classroom? (In other words, in each area, please describe your knowledge and how it is dependent on/ independent from the textbooks; we are interested to know your definition of your identity as a teacher and how textbooks construct it.)

1. How do you describe yourself as a knowledgeable teacher in these fields with or without textbooks?

Your knowledge of vocabulary and grammar

Your reading skills

Your writing skills

Your listening

Your speaking skills

2. How do you describe yourself as a teacher in didactic knowledge of English with textbook and without textbook?

Your knowledge to plan and execute your teaching at the students' level

Your knowledge to teach something in various ways

Your knowledge to evaluate your students' leaning

3. How do you describe yourself as a teacher in pedagogical knowledge of English with textbook and without textbook?

Your knowledge to improve your students' social, emotional and moral development

Your knowledge to motivate students

Your knowledge to approach students being positive, open and respectful

Your knowledge to identify signs of students' involvement

Interview Questions from the School Principal

Dear Teacher

The following are some questions for a research on teachers' professional identity in relation to textbooks. Given your invaluable experiences as the school manager here, I would appreciate your description and viewpoints. Your identity will remain anonymous and the ethical issues in this research will be considered.

Your Age …………….. Your Teaching experiences …………………Years

Your management experience…………years

In each of the following areas, how do you describe your school curriculum?

How are the main objectives set?

How are students enrolled and placed in their classes?

How are the teachers employed? How are they assessed and promoted?

How is the English curriculum in your school evaluated?

How is the students' learning assessed during the classes and at the end of the term?

How do you describe the role of educational materials you use in this school?