



Iranian English Teachers' Implicit and Explicit Professional Identity

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Abstract

It is argued that teacher identity greatly influences teaching practices, teacher-student relationship, and professional development of teachers. In the current study, implicit and explicit professional identities of 117 pre-service and 127 in-service Iranian EFL teachers were explored in order to add to the growing literature on language teachers' professional identity. The participants were Iranian English teachers from Sistan and Balouchestan, Golestan, Qom, Khoozestan, and Tehran provinces, who were chosen via convenience sampling. Teacher Professional Identity Scale (TPIS) developed by Kao and Lin (2015) and Professional Identity Questionnaire (PIQ) by Abu-Alruz and Khasawneh (2013) were applied to measure the implicit and explicit professional identity of these teachers respectively. The participants responded to the questionnaires online. The results of t-test demonstrated that there is a significant difference between the average teachers' explicit and implicit professional identity indicators of these teachers. Besides, the average indices of explicit and implicit professional identity of in-service teachers were higher than the average indices of explicit and implicit professional identity of pre-service teachers. What is more, among indicators of implicit professional identity, instructional skills and knowledge and teacher's duties were the highest ones both in in-service group and in pre-service group. These results highlight the necessity of taking into consideration pre-service teachers' professional identity construction and development in teacher educational programs.

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Introduction

Teachers are surely the single most important factor in educational systems and students' academic life. Clearly, success of each educational system is dependent upon teachers' effective teaching (Burroughs et al. 2019). Given their central role, both society and schools hold diverse expectations of teachers (Ramirez & Wilkinson, 2016). What learners absorb may rely not only on the content knowledge or skills of their teachers (Banna et al. 2023), but also on the teacher's personality or on the personal rapport between the instructor and the learner (Brosh, 1996). Accordingly, teacher professional identity, which is linked to personality, has recently gained a global prominence in language teacher training (Alam et al. 2024).

Recently, research on identity, as one of the personality features, has obtained much more value than before in different fields of social sciences (Friesen & Besley, 2013). Shifts in politics, economy, and social structures have increased the importance attached to teachers' identity (Schepens et al. 2009). The field of teacher education and training has experienced numerous reforms, and the field of social science and identity is not exempt from such changes in the last fifteen years (Azizi et al. 2023).

An individual might have a number of identities on the basis of their family life, their profession, their culture, political interests, and religious background (Namaziandost et al. 2022). Identity is a constant-changing feature (Liu et al. 2021), which is generally considered as a unique set of one's own features when compared to other people (Pennington & Richards, 2016). That is to say, identity explains the self-conception of individuals about themselves and their conception about how other people see them. Professional identity in educational settings; however, is considered a complex and dynamic concept, balancing professional self-image and the supposed characters that educators have at their job (Coldron & Smith, 1999).

In the last two decades, teacher identity has become a major concern in education (Zhang & Wang, 2022), making it a focal point in teacher training (Beijaard et al. 2004). The shift from positivist to interpretive paradigms (Johnson, 2006) highlighted identity's role in teacher development (Friesen & Besley, 2013). Kanno and Stuart (2011) remarked that "the development of L2 teacher identity should be at the center of research and debate on L2 teacher education because it is the central project novice teachers engage in" (p. 250). This shows the central role of teacher identity in achieving educational goals. Barbour and Lammers (2015) stressed its multidimensional and multilevel nature. To top it all, complexity arises from interactions with learners, coworkers, institutions, and the stress of learning a second language (Abednia, 2012). According to Wang et al. (2021), teachers' identity comes in two forms: implicit identity includes internal attitudes and emotions, context-independent and resistant to sociocultural influence, while explicit identity refers to conscious attitudes shaped by socio-cultural contexts and social desirability.

There are several studies in the area of teacher identity in the Iranian context. However, what causes this research to be noteworthy and unique in comparison with the previous studies in the related literature is that an extensive amount of the research in the pertinent body of literature has explored explicit identity of EFL teachers (Zhu et al. 2019). In contrast, this study

investigates both implicit and explicit identity of EFL teachers in Iran. The purpose is to compare these two dimensions in pre-service and in-service teachers, revealing the factors important in each category and identifying areas needing improvement in teacher education.

Literature Review

The theoretical roots of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) lie in psychological, sociological, and postmodern perspectives. The psychological view is the older one, focusing on self-reflection and internal potentials. Here, TPI is seen as a cognitive concept as teachers define who they are (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). From a sociological view, identity is shaped by social, political, and economic forces (Cote & Levine, 2002), with context and relationships as key influences (Rojas et al. 2021; Yazan, 2018). Sociolinguists stress identity as constructed in social action (Omoniyi, 2006). Finally, the postmodern view emphasizes multiple, ever-changing identities (Rojas et al., 2021; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018). For example, Gee (2001) proposed a consistent “core identity” across contexts, while teachers reshape beliefs and roles through practice (Korthagen, 2004). Thus, it can be said that teacher identity changes from time to time, hence different between preservice and in-service teachers.

Regarding pre-service teachers' professional identity, Otondo (2021) noted that it begins in initial training but develops throughout professional life. This process is dynamic and interactive (Casanova-Fernández et al. 2022), and is closely linked to content knowledge, teaching beliefs, emotions, and professional experiences (Fahd et al. 2020). In-service teachers' identity has been examined through visible and invisible aspects of teaching (Castañeda, 2011). The visible part includes classroom communication, evaluation, material design, and task completion, while the invisible side involves beliefs, outlooks, and feelings. A full understanding of teacher identity requires both perspectives.

Research studies on professional identity of teachers have looked at the topic from different angles. In an attempt to categorize these studies, Beijaard et al. (2004) recognized three groups of studies: identity creation, features of identity, and teachers' narratives. Later research added four more groups: identity improvement through programs, links with other factors such as teacher success, questionnaire development, and online identity.

As an example of the first group, Castañeda (2015) examined the identity construction of six pre-service teachers. Various factors such as context, ideology, politics, and culture shaped their identities, and data from recalls, interviews, and blogs showed they constantly negotiated between forming their identity and societal constraints. Sarani and Najjar (2012) also compared English and Arabic teaching communities of practice, viewing them as potential curricula for newcomers.

In one of the studies belonging to the second group, Xiong and Xiong (2017) tried to identify the perceptions of teacher identity among Zhuangang (who instruct school subjects except English) and non-Zhuangang teachers. The results demonstrated that a significant difference existed between the opinions of the participants regarding their identities. Different views about being an English teacher and the gap in the second language proficiency were the reasons behind the participants' gap in identities. The researchers recommended that training programs

should be enriched by pedagogical theories, in a way that make teachers aware of the importance of their profession.

Yazan's (2018) study can be classified under the third group of studies. He introduced an instrument called critical autoethnographic narrative for identity-oriented courses. It required teachers be engaged in narrative writing during the course. It was argued that such kind of narratives can be utilized and adapted in various pre-service teacher education contexts. Such narratives had the potential to be used as a program-wide tool helping unheard voices of teachers be heard in the case of scholarly publication.

Among the studies of the fourth group, Haghighi Irani et al. (2020) aimed at developing pre-service language teachers via the implementation of a three-phase program. The program included engagement, study and activate phases. Triangulation of data was achieved via interviews, reflective essays, and microteaching. The results showed three conspicuous changes of the participants' identities including move toward commitment to modality, toward multi-dimensional understandings, and toward problem-solving abilities.

Derakhshan et al.'s study (2020) is an instance of the studies related to the fifth group. In this study, teachers of language institutes, university lecturers, and EFL learners took part. The aim was to identify correlation between professional identity and autonomy with language teachers' success. It was found that professional identity and autonomy had predictive power for teachers' success. Ghanizadeh and Abedi Ostad (2016) also examined the dynamic nature of teachers' identity regarding their demographic features. They demonstrated that perception of identity changed over time. In other words, teachers' perception toward professional identity was different in early years of teaching when compared with later years of their teaching. In a not dissimilar study, Gheitasi and Aliakbari (2022) investigated the factors influencing teachers' identity construction. Practical experience emerged as the strongest influence on teachers' identity construction, whereas peer learning and inspiration from other teachers played comparatively minor roles. Posada-Ortiz (2022) also showed the impact of reflective mentoring, communities, and imagined and practiced identities in identity construction process of pre-service teachers.

In the sixth group, Mahmoodarabi et al. (2021) designed and validated a 42-item questionnaire for measuring professional identity, reduced from an initial 61 items via factor analysis. Finally, researching online identity of teachers, Fallah et al. (2021) studied 35 EFL teachers in online classes. They found teachers' identities shifted during the transition online, with communities of practice supporting reconstruction and confidence.

The previous studies on professional identity mostly emphasized pre-service teachers (Chen et al. 2023). That is to say, in-service teachers' identity remained somehow underexplored. In addition, contrary to an extensive amount of the studies in the pertinent literature carried out in the developed societies of EFL education, developing contexts such as the Iranian EFL context need more attention (Fallah et al, 2022). Furthermore, scant studies have been carried out with regard to implicit identity of teachers. For instance, just Xu and Luo (2022) compared the implicit and explicit professional identities. However, the concern of their study was physical education teachers, not language teachers.

Purpose of the study

Against the background mentioned in former section, there is a need to gain a better understanding of the professional identity of teachers by examining EFL teachers' implicit and explicit professional identity. In fact, the chief aim of the present study is to measure the explicit and implicit identity of pre-service and in-service teachers in Iran. In order to fill the aforementioned gap in the literature of teacher identity, this study was carried out to provide answers to these research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' implicit professional identity?
2. Is there any significant difference between pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' explicit professional identity?
3. Is there any significant difference between EFL teachers' implicit and explicit types of professional identity?

Method

Research Design and Participants

The current study had a cross-sectional survey and descriptive design whereby the required data were collected from the participants in one time. For gathering the data, the two questionnaires, namely Teacher Professional Identity Scale (TPIS) and Professional Identity Questionnaire (PIQ) were validated and utilized in the study. The questionnaires were designed on Google Form platform.

Targeted population for this study were Iranian EFL teachers out of which 117 pre-service and 127 in-service EFL teachers responded to the two questionnaires online. The links of the questionnaires were texted to the participants. To choose the participants, this study utilized convenience sampling whereby the Iranian English teachers answered the questionnaires. Exactly 117 pre-service and 127 in-service teachers of Sistan and Balouchestan, Golestan, Qom, Khoozestan, and Tehran filled out the two questionnaires. The demographics of pre-service respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographics of the pre-service teachers*

Gender		Age					Academic year in B.A.			
Male	Female	< 20	20	21	22	> 22	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
34	83	17	23	46	29	2	53	22	37	5

Demographics of the in-service teachers are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: *Demographics of the in-service teachers*

Gender		Age					Education			Teaching experience				
Male	Female	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	Above 40	B.A.	M.A.	Ph.D.	Below 5	5-10	10-15	15-20	Above 20
39	88	20	31	42	27	7	55	67	5	39	14	26	12	36

Data Collection

Choosing data collection tools consistent with the methodology is essential, as it shapes the value and quality of findings (Taylor, Bogdan, & Devault, 2015). For data gathering in this study, the following instruments were applied:

1. **Teacher Professional Identity Scale (TPIS):** This instrument measures the implicit professional identity of pre-service and in-service English teachers. The questionnaire was developed by Kao and Lin (2015) and consists of 22 questions. It was chosen because it can assess latent notions of teacher identity. The questionnaire consists of six subscales: Self-Expectation (commitment to and evaluation of the job; 1–5), Teachers' Duties (responsibilities toward students, curriculum, and society; 6–8), External Influential Factors (perceptions of social interactions and school policy; 9–12), Pedagogy (teachers' behavior and relationships with students; 13–15), Instructional Skills and Knowledge (subject knowledge and delivery approaches; 16–19), and Teachers' Citizenship Behavior (devotion of additional efforts; 20–22). Implicit professional identity in this study refers to internal attitudes and intuitive emotions regarding teaching, largely context-independent and resistant to social desirability (Wang et al., 2021). TPIS components align with this definition (e.g., Citizenship Behavior and Pedagogy tap intuitive emotions; External Influential Factors addresses sociocultural resistance). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha was 0.86. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms. For content validity, eight experts judged construct, clarity, and relevance; all average validity indices exceeded 0.81. A pilot with 25 comparable respondents assessed stability: test-retest ICC = 0.88 and Kappa = 0.84. Thus, TPIS was deemed valid and reliable for this study.

Note on alternatives: The Implicit Association Test (IAT) has been used for implicit identity (e.g., Xu & Luo, 2022), measuring differential associations via response times. However, it was not used in this study due to operational complexity and documented limitations (weak capture of implicit attitudes, weak predictive validity, limited distinction between liking and wanting, and susceptibility to extraneous factors (Meissner et al. 2019). Its single-category variant likewise shows constraints (Karpinski & Steinman, 2006).

2. **Professional Identity Questionnaire (PIQ):** To measure participants' explicit professional identity, the PIQ captured explicit attitudes toward teaching. In Abu-Alruz and Khasawneh's (2013) research, a 25-item questionnaire was developed with four components: self-related, skill-related, work-related, and student-related identity (p. 431). Self-related covers commitment, collegial exchange, and staff relationships; skill-related addresses continuous learning, teaching skills, and professional growth; work-related includes curriculum involvement and policy awareness; student-related concerns flexible environments, trust, and tailoring to needs. Because the original instrument focused on higher-education faculty, the wording ("university" → "school"; "faculty member" → "English teacher") was adapted. Reliability met thresholds (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81; composite reliability = 0.75–0.88). Convergent validity was acceptable (AVE = 0.51–0.76). Both questionnaires were administered online to reduce cost and effort.

Data Analysis

As for quantitative part of the research, to assure normal distribution of the data collected via TPSI and PIQ, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. To analyze the responses given to TPIS and to check for the possible existing differences between the groups under study, independent-samples t-test was run. The responses were classified based on the six sub-scales of the questionnaire and then, compared between pre-service and in-service teachers. The procedure was the same for the responses given to PIQ.

To use the parametric statistics, the normal distribution of the data must be determined. Here, the results of the related test for each of the research variables are examined; and based on the results, the suitable test will be selected to investigate the accuracy of the research assumptions.

Table 3: Results of normality test

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig	Statistic	Df	Sig
Total Pre-service explicit professional identity	0.122	117	0.200	0.836	35	0.053
Total In-service explicit professional identity	0.151	127	0.052	0.451	35	0.195
Total Pre-service Implicit professional identity	0.118	117	0.933	0.903	35	0.051
Total In-service Implicit professional identity	0.145	127	0.962	0.962	35	0.265

According to the results of Table 3, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic takes a value which is not significant at the level of $p \geq 0.05$ for all the variables, so the distribution of the research variables follows the normal distribution.

Results

The first research question of the current study dealt with any significant difference between pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' implicit professional identity. First of all, the descriptive statistics of all the six subscales and the total implicit identity is given in the following table.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of implicit professional identity of teachers

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	Variance
Self-expression	pre-service	3.73	0.88	0.776
	in-service	4.10	0.69	0.479
Teacher's duties	pre-service	4.06	0.78	0.613
	in-service	4.46	0.51	0.263
External influential factors	pre-service	3.86	0.76	0.582
	in-service	3.72	0.68	0.465
Pedagogy	pre-service	3.93	0.67	0.456
	in-service	4.31	0.58	0.339
Instructional skill and knowledge	pre-service	4.15	0.77	0.596
	in-service	4.54	0.47	0.222
Teacher's citizenship behavior	pre-service	3.80	0.81	0.662
	in-service	4.24	0.55	0.309
Total Implicit professional identity	pre-service	23.56	3.71	13.77
	in-service	25.40	1.96	3.85

The information in Table 4 depicts the descriptive statistics of responses to the implicit professional identity questionnaire for pre-service and in-service respondents. Considering the use of a 5-point Likert scale, the average indicators of implicit professional identity of pre-service and in-service teachers are above the average level (meaning that their responses were either neutral, agree, or strongly agree on Likert scale). In simpler terms, the average score for all of the aspects is higher than 2.50, which is the average of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. It means that they have well-developed implicit professional identity in general. Among indicators of implicit professional identity, Instructional skills and knowledge and teacher's duties are the highest ones in in-service group and external influential factors and self-expression are the lowest ones in this group. In pre-service group, Instructional skills and knowledge and teacher's duties are the highest indicators of implicit professional identity and self-expression and teacher's citizenship behavior are the lowest indicators. The other thing to consider is that total mean of in-service respondents is higher than that of their pre-service counterparts. Hence, they have higher level of implicit professional identity, meaning that they have developed these skills more than pre-service teachers did.

Table 5: *T-test results for implicit professional identity of pre-service and in-service teachers*

	t-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Self-expression	3.98	.05	-1.97	68	.049	-.371	.189	-.749	.0064
			-1.972	64.374	.049	-.37143	.18935	-.7496	.0068
Teacher's duties	5.02	.028	-2.529	68	.014	-.40000	.15819	-.7156	-.08434
			-2.529	58.621	.014	-.40000	.15819	-.7165	-.08342
External influential factors	.478	.492	.785	68	.435	.13571	.17294	-.2093	.48080
			.785	67.153	.435	.13571	.17294	-.20945	.48088
Pedagogy	.580	.449	-2.527	68	.014	-.38095	.15078	-.68183	-.08008
			-2.527	66.568	.014	-.38095	.15078	-.68195	-.07996
Instructional skill and knowledge	9.25	.003	-2.523	68	.014	-.38571	.15290	-.69083	-.08060
			-2.523	56.274	.015	-.38571	.15290	-.69198	-.07945
Teacher's citizenship behavior	5.17	.026	-2.630	68	.011	-.43810	.16660	-.77054	-.10565
			-2.630	60.085	.011	-.43810	.16660	-.77133	-.10486
Total Implicit professional identity	8.10	.006	-2.593	68	.012	-1.8404	.70969	-3.2566	-.42432
			-2.593	51.627	.012	-1.8404	.70969	-3.2648	-.41614
work-based dimension	2.756	.102	-2.24	68	.028	-.32571	.14493	-.6149	-.0365
			-2.247	65.40	.028	-.32571	.14493	-.6151	-.0363
student-based dimension	1.292	.260	-2.025	68	.047	-.27755	.13706	-.5510	-.0040
			-2.025	64.421	.047	-.27755	.13706	-.5513	-.0037
self-based dimension	.832	.365	-3.686	68	.000	-.54286	.14729	-.83677	-.2489
			-3.686	66.698	.000	-.54286	.14729	-.83687	-.2488
skill-based dimension	10.892	.002	-2.527	68	.014	-.52857	.20915	-.94592	-.1112
			-2.527	61.769	.014	-.52857	.20915	-.94668	-.1104
Total explicit professional identity	1.510	.223	-3.236	68	.002	-1.67469	.51755	-2.7074	-.6419
			-3.236	66.473	.002	-1.67469	.51755	-2.707	-.6415

Based on the information in the above tables, there is a significant difference between the six indicators of implicit professional identity of respondents before and during service. Besides, the average indicators of implicit professional identity of in-service respondents are higher than the average indicators of implicit professional identity of pre-service respondents. However, the difference in the average external influential factors of teachers for the two groups (before service and during service) is not significant, and in other words, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the average of external influential factors of pre-service and in-service respondents. Finally, the average external influential factor of in-service and pre-service respondents is almost at the same level due to the use of a 5-point Likert scale: very high = 5, high = 4, medium = 3, low = 2, very low = 1, the responses beyond 3 are significantly different). Mean of Self-expression in pre-service group was 3/73 while in in-service group, it was 4/10; mean of Teacher's duties in pre-service group was 4/06, while the value for in-service group was 4/46; mean of External influential factors in pre-service group was 3/86 while it was 3/72 in in-service group; mean of Pedagogy in pre-service group was 3/9 and in in-service group, it was 4/31; mean of Instructional skill and knowledge in pre-service group was 4/15 and it was 4/54 in in-service group.

The second research question of the current study aimed to check any significant difference between pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' explicit professional identity. The results of t-test for this comparison are given below.

Table 6: Independent-samples t-test of explicit professional identity for pre-service and in-service teachers

	t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
work-based dimension	-2.247	68	.028	-.32571	.14493	-.61491	-.03652
student-based dimension	-2.025	68	.047	-.27755	.13706	-.55104	-.00406
self-based dimension	-3.686	68	.000	-.54286	.14729	-.83677	-.2489
skill-based dimension	-2.527	68	.014	-.52857	.20915	-.94592	-.1112
Total explicit professional identity	-3.236	68	.002	-1.67469	.51755	-2.7074	-.6419

Based on the information in Table 6, there is a significant difference between the six indicators of explicit professional identity as well as the total explicit professional identity among pre-service and in-service respondents. And the average indices of explicit professional identity of in-service respondents are higher than the average indices of explicit professional identity of pre-service respondents.

Discussion

In the previous section, it was revealed that there is a significant difference between the average explicit and implicit professional identity indicators for pre-service and in-service respondents. The second result of the current study was that the average indices of explicit and implicit

professional identity of in-service respondents are higher than the average indices of explicit and implicit professional identity of pre-service respondents.

One reason behind the higher level of implicit and explicit professional identity of in-service teachers in comparison to those of pre-service teachers may be the teaching experience of in-service teachers. That is to say, in-service teachers have the actual and practical involvement with students. They also have valuable experience of working in educational settings with other teachers. Such kind of experiences can positively influence their professional identity (Abednia, 2012; Gheitasi & Aliakbari, 2022). They may also feel the responsibility to heighten their professional identity and its related constituents so that they have better teaching. In this way, they help their continuous professional development, as well.

In addition to internal motives for keeping their professional identity heightened, external forces such as Ministry of Education requirement may be influential in in-service teachers' greater level of implicit and explicit professional identity. Some of these requirements include taking part in in-service courses for updating their knowledge of language and teaching, taking part in regular workshops and sharing experience with other colleagues, encouraging them to keep diaries (somehow in the form of critical autoethnographic narratives introduced by Yazan (2018) and doing action research, and having innovation in their teaching. Pre-service teachers are underprivileged in this issue and this may lead to their lower level of professional identity. Yet, lower level of professional identity of pre-service participants can be attributed to their lower level of language proficiency. As Xiong and Xiong (2017) showed gap in second language proficiency of teachers can lead to gap in their identity. Nevertheless, this point should be discussed more deeply in forthcoming research.

The other reason behind the difference between professional identity of pre-service and in-service participants may be the early choice of teaching in Iran due to its ensured employment after graduation. In such situation, the applicants are more inclined to think about their safe employment rather than issues such as professional identity and its development. But, after commencement of their teaching, they become more involved in matters pertinent to their career and their development, both professionally and personally.

Yet another reason for higher professional identity of in-service teachers may be the influence of peer learning (Gheitasi & Aliakbari, 2022) from other English colleagues in school setting. In such educational setting, English teachers can share their experiences of what works or doesn't work in their class with their peers and become aware of the methods that their peers utilize in their own classes. This experience-sharing can improve professional identity of English teachers because it makes their teaching better and, in this way, they will develop positive self-image about themselves as English teachers. It should be noticed that pre-service teachers are deprived of such opportunity.

English workshops which are regularly held by Ministry of Education may have positive influential impact on professional identity of in-service teachers and heighten this characteristic. In these workshops, the most up-to-date developments regarding second language acquisition, teaching, and learning are introduced and discussed among English teachers. Such workshops, in fact, enable teachers to equip with the most up-to-date knowledge

in their field. Such improved knowledge can improve professional identity of in-service teachers, in turn.

Two studies investigated teachers' implicit professional identity. In one study, *Chen et al. (2023)* revealed no significant difference between explicit and implicit professional identity of financed and non-financed teachers. In the second study, *Wang, et al. (2020)* found that physical education pre-service teachers had positive implicit professional identity and the correlation between explicit and implicit professional identity measures was not significant. These results are somehow contradictory with the results of this study. One reason may be the different nature of participants of those studies and this study. In the first study, the participants of both groups were in-service teachers and in the second research, participants were teaching in the field of physical education; while the participants of this study were pre-service and in-service teachers in the field of teaching English language.

In his study, *Posada-Ortiz (2022)* depicted that pre-service teachers' identity is changeable and not essentialized. It was also found that pre-service teachers' professional identity is lower than their in-service counterparts. This result can corroborate the *Posada-Ortiz's (2022)* one because the lower level of professional identity of pre-service teachers is a signal that their professional identity is a changing characteristic which is not established as strongly as in-service teacher's identity and desired self is founded. The result is in line with *Castaneda's (2015)* finding whereby the evolving nature of pre-service teachers' professional identity was depicted. *Castaneda (2015)* also declared that pre-service teachers also face a permanent struggle to establish a personal professional style. It may lead to their lower level of professional identity. *Haghighi Irani et al. (2020)* also pointed out that pre-service teachers' professional identity is amenable to change and development via taking part in educational programs such as ESA (Engage, Study, Activate).

Yet another reason for the greater professional identity of in-service teachers can be explicated via the notion of 'community of practice'. *Wenger (1999)* stated that community of practice is "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p. 98). It can be claimed that because in-service teachers learned how to teach and how to behave in their classes via participating in communities of practice, their professional identity is more strengthened. Nevertheless, pre-service teachers have fewer experience of communities of practice. Thus, it can affect their explicit and implicit professional identity. The positive influence of community of practice on in-service teachers' professional identity is also confirmed by studies undertaken by *Fallah et al. (2021)* and *Sarani and Najjar (2012)*.

Labbaf et al. (2019) declared that pedagogical knowledge and social relationships are important factors in making up EFL teachers' professional identity. Social relations included some factors such as respectful relationship with colleagues and friendly relationship with students. Pre-service teachers do not have the chance to build rapport with their colleagues and students as they are studying yet. This may lead to their lower professional identity in comparison to their in-service counterparts.

One of the results of this study was that among subscales of implicit professional identity, external influential factors and self-expression were the lowest ones in in-service group. This

result contradicts Derakhshan et al.'s (2020) study whereby it was shown that external influential factor plays an essential role in teachers' professional identity. This opposing result may be because of different nature of the participants of two studies. While in this study, the participants were only in-service teachers teaching in school context, the participants of Derakhshan's (2020) study were university lecturers and language institute teachers.

It was found that instructional skills and knowledge is the highest subscale of implicit professional identity in both pre-service and in-service groups. In a study done by Ghanizadeh and Abedi Ostad (2016), this subscale was the second highest subscale. This result can be justified on the ground that teacher's knowledge and skills always play a critical role in his/her profession and is of great concern for language teacher. In addition, educational administrators prefer to work with those language teachers whose knowledge, skills and proficiency is at optimal level.

External influential factors were the lowest subscale among in-service participants of the current study. Similar results have been gained by Ghanizadeh and Abedi Ostad (2016). This subscale is related to the perception of social interactions and school policy. It can be said that the participants enjoy good self-confidence hence external factors are the least influential in constructing and improving (or weakening) their professional identity. This speculation, i.e. the relationship between external factors and self-confidence and their impact on professional identity) can further be explored in upcoming research.

On the other hand, self-expression was the lowest subscale of implicit professional identity among pre-service participants of this study while it was the highest in Ghanizadeh and Abedi Ostad's (2016) one. One reason behind this discrepancy in the results of the two studies can be the fact that the participants of this study were guaranteed about their employment after graduation while the participants of the latter study were teachers whose job position was not guaranteed hence, they performed their duties as best as they could so that they ensured to remain in their job.

Another result of this study was that among subscales of explicit professional identity, skill-based dimension was the highest one in both pre-service and in-service groups. It shows that both pre-service and in-service English teachers have passion for continuous learning and expanding their knowledge and skills as far as their profession is concerned. In a study carried out by Abu-Alruz and Khasawneh (2013), it was also found that their participants enjoyed high level of skill-based dimension. This result indicated that the teachers are committed to their profession and professional practices (Enyedy, Goldberg, & Welsh, 2006). Such skill-related identity has the potential to result in satisfaction and effectiveness in maintaining and improving the job (Henderson & Bradey 2008).

As far as explicit professional identity is concerned, it was also found that student-related identity is the lowest subscale in both pre-service and in-service groups. Abu-Alruz and Khazawneh (2013) also found that student-related identity is low among the educators. It can be due to the fact culture of teacher-centeredness and looking at teacher as the main authority of the class still prevail in Iran. Hence, the teachers prefer to maintain their status in the classroom and their professional identity is not well-developed in this dimension.

The two other dimensions, i.e., work-related identity and self-based dimension were found to be at moderate level in both pre-service and in-service groups. Participants in *Abu-Alruz and Khazawneh's (2013)* study exhibited high level of self-based dimension and moderate level of work-related identity. The possible explanation for the difference in result concerning self-based dimension may be the fact that educators in the later study were faculty members who enjoyed their social recognition as professors in university which is a high- prestige job while in this study, the participants were either pre-service or in-service teachers whose profession is not highly regarded in the society. It is also worth mentioning that work-related identity was moderate among the participants of both studies. It should be noted that educational system has a critical role in constructing and maintaining work-related identity (*Danielewicz, 2001*) because such system is authorized to determine policies, rules, and principles for schools and universities.

Above all, it should also be noticed that EFL teachers' professional identity is ever-changing, dynamic and context-dependent construct (*Wang et al. 2021*). Therefore, there is possibility for this construct to strengthen or weaken in different points of professional lives of an English pre-service or in-service teachers. The current study measured professional identity only cross-sectionally and in one point of teachers' lives.

Conclusions and Implications

As previously mentioned, there were two main results in the current study. First, it was delineated that there is a significant difference between the average teachers' explicit and implicit professional identity indicators for pre-service and in-service teachers. The second result of the current study was that the average indices of explicit and implicit professional identity of in-service teachers are higher than the average indices of explicit and implicit professional identity of pre-service teachers.

These results have practical implications for policy makers and curriculum developers of teacher training courses in Iran. Based on the results of the current study, the professional identity of pre-service teachers needs strengthening. Hence, policy makers, curriculum developers and syllabus designers of such courses are recommended to take professional identity of pre-service teachers into consideration seriously.

Pre-service teachers are also recommended to take the responsibility for self-learning and search for the ways to heighten their professional identities. They can take part in pertinent seminars and workshops. They can also share their experiences with their classmates and help them to enhance their professional identities. In-service teachers are also recommended to pay attention to the prominence of professional identity and its role in their professional development.

The current study is no devoid of shortcomings. The study involved only Iranian pre-service teachers and in-service teachers as participants. Consequently, generalization of the study's results to other culture's pre-service and in-service teachers is not possible. The number of participants was restricted. What's more, teacher's professional identity was defined in this study in terms of teacher role /characteristics, self-efficacy, career aspirations and future

perspectives which are greatly germane to a teacher's professional identity. However, other pertinent facets to teacher's professional identity were not explored and investigated.

Perhaps unfortunate to the circumstances of this study was that the teachers' demographics such as age were not explored in the current study. Nevertheless, it is possible that old and young English teachers have different implicit and explicit professional identity. This limitation might have restricted the results of this study. The current study was narrowed regarding concertation on school teachers. That is to say, university lecturers in higher educations were excluded from the research participants. In addition, this study was confined to EFL context and ESL contexts were not taken into consideration.

In spite of the aforementioned limitations, the current study points to important areas for potential research in English teachers' professional identity development. More evidence is required to confirm whether the similar results are gained in other populations. Upcoming studies should concentrate on examining this matter cross-culturally and across another educational environment. Additional studies with pre-service and in-service teachers of diverse educational settings will be required before coming into generalizations with regard to the results of this research.

Barrett (2006) demonstrates the significant impact of learners and parents on the formation of professional identities of teachers. As a matter of fact, teachers save appreciation and instant confirmation or deterrence regarding their identities via their pupils' approval or forbearance. Parents also give a kaleidoscope of standards and morals directing teacher/learner rappings (Kimaliro, 2015). These two social parties can construct 'otherness' of teachers' professional identity. Teacher/ learner and teacher /parent communications manifest consideration of teachers are regarded as professionals. Hence, it is suggested that the influence of these two parties on English teachers' professional identity be explored in forthcoming researches. It is also useful to gain opinion of other factions, like policy-makers, school administrators, teacher instructors, and program designers about teachers' professional identity, as well.

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