

Examining Teachers' Development through Past-Present-Aspirational Continuum of English Language Teachers' Professional Identity

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Abstract

Professional development and professional identity of English language teachers have usually been explored separately in the research agenda. However, there might be a nexus of relationships between professional identity and professional development in the context of English language teaching. This study, therefore, explored how professional identity might contribute to professional development of English language teachers. To this end, 60 English language teachers from inner, 60 from outer, and 60 from expanding circle of language use were sampled to fill in a questionnaire which was constructed and validated by the researchers. The study concluded that language teachers' professional development could be theorized on a development of past-present-aspirational identity. It was also found that language teachers' professional identity could be improved through development of interpersonal relations, system of knowledge and belief, and intrapersonal identity that would be considered as sub-identities of English language teachers' professional identity.

Keywords: English Language Teacher, Professional Identity, Teacher Development, Teacher Education

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1. Introduction

Professional Development (PD) of language teachers has mainly been practiced by formal teachers' training programs. However, such instructional factors have low significantly meaningful relationship with professionalism (Keng, Hoong, & Aun, 2008). One explanation here may be that such factors as teacher training programs might lack enough enhancement of "teachers' role, responsibility and agency" (Stannard & Matharu, 2014, p. 36) which could be considered as concepts of professional identity (Clarke, 2008).

Accordingly, it is almost possible to say that what could develop professionalism in English language teaching community of practice are the ideas from professional identity. Professional identity encompasses numerous intrapersonal, interpersonal, and discursive factors which shape language teachers working-self status (Clarke, 2008). English Language Teachers' Professional Identity (ELTPI) implies that language teachers should have an active role in their own PD (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Therefore, if considered from ELTPI, PD needs to be seen as holistic and decentralized, with a focus on professional discourse and a climate of interaction for the system as well as for individuals (Light, 2009; Padwad & Dixit, 2014).

Therefore, what could develop professionalism in English language teaching community of practice might be the ideas from professional identity because it encompasses numerous intrapersonal, interpersonal, and discursive factors which shape language teachers working-self status (Sarani & Najjar, 2013). As such, this study was an effort to explore how professional identity development could change over time. The rationale for conducting this study was that through exploring shifts in professional identity formation from past to the future, it was possible to examine how English language teachers might develop professionally.

2. Literature Review

Studies on teachers' professionalism showed that there have been two strands of research on the issue. First, professionalism has been investigated in ideas form skill-based PD. Second, professionalism has been explored in the ideas form professional identity.

On the first hand, English language teachers' PD has been concluded with various implications for teachers' progress. Accordingly, teachers PD could be supported by prescribed pre-service and in-service training practices, teacher-centered and teacher-controlled programs, and collectively teacher-oriented instructions led by school (Day, 2004; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Timperley, 2008; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). However, the more appropriately implication of investigations on teacher development seems to be what suggested as self-directed rather than school-led professional development (Fraser-Seeto, Howard, & Woodcock, 2015). It implies that teacher development is a process that requires teacher's self-awareness (Borg, 2006) and reflectivity (Dantas-Whitney, 2002) rather than solely skilled-based training courses. Reflectivity and self-development are also part of PI development (Richards, 2006).

Some studies on PD also intensify the roles of specific variables which might contribute to or impede teachers' progress and development. Collegial consultation, for instance, could develop skills and experience of language teachers (Phelps, Graham, & Thornton, 2006) and their risk-taking (Phelps, Graham, Watts, & O'Brien, 2006) although some believed that teaching experience has few correlations with professionalism (Keng, Hoong, & Aun, 2008). While teacher-colleagues relations and discussions also showed making progress in teachers PD (Pandit-Narkar, 2012), it was suggested that these discussions had to be considered as life-long programs rather than short-term

and certification-based programs which imposed by educational system (Khan, 2015). In other words, it was the amount of PD rather than academic qualifications that found to be meaningful variables in teachers' development (Keng, Hoong, & Aun, 2008). Furthermore, since collaboration of teachers within the same system of education contributes to teachers' PD (Timperley et al., 2008), the education system should facilitate this collaboration for developing professionalism.

Teacher' PD has recently been investigated in online forums (Alhabahba & Mahfoodh, 2016). Information and communications technology (ICT) and internet infrastructure have come to the core in various teachers' training courses (Prestridge, 2014). For example, Demir (2010) investigated theoretical predictors of internet use for the professional development of teachers.

On the second hand, studies on ELTPI are based on the rationale that teachers play the main roles in educational systems (Harding & Parsons, 2011). It was believed that intrapersonal characteristics, interpersonal relationships, and system of knowledge and beliefs in language teachers might contribute to their professional identity development (Clarke, 2008). Given this rationale, studies on ELTPI concluded with two broad strands. From one aspect, some scholars shed light on the theoretical understanding of ELTPI. From another aspect, others worked on exploring the features, aspects, and meaningful variables of professional identity formation.

Theoretically, ELTPI is "multiple, shifting, and in conflict; related to social, cultural, and political context; and was being constructed, maintained, and negotiated primarily through discourse" (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p.35). Clarke (2008) conceptualized professional identity of language teachers as "being the teacher" or "becoming a teacher". The former view defines a teacher based on the skills and knowledge that she/he gets to

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perform the functions of teaching and the latter construes a teacher due to her/his sense of oneself as a teacher. It seems that the latter view i.e., “becoming a teacher” is more related to professional identity of language teachers than skill-based teachers’ development. Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) theorized identity as “assigned identity” and “claimed identity”; accordingly, assigned identify imposed on by others in the community of practice and claimed identity acknowledged or claimed for by someone for his/herself.

Given processes and features of professional identity formation, ELTPI has been explored in various contexts and communities. In an EFL context, for example, teacher agency, awareness, and self-reflection introduced as the agents of change in the teachers and their community (Canagarajah, 1999). Tsui (2007) highlighted participation, membership, legitimacy of access, and power relationships as the main community-based features of an EFL professional teacher. To elaborate on this finding, Trent and Gao (2009) pointed out that non-participation might contribute to antagonism in language teachers. They drew distinctions between first-career teachers and second-career teachers in terms of what they called “institutionally-endorsed identity positions” (p. 253). These studies emphasized on the role of workplaces or environment that language teachers worked within. Workplace in particular and community of practice (Kimble, Hildreth, & Bourdon, 2008) in general could (re)construct ELPTI variously.

Each community of practice might (re)produce various features of professional identity. While focusing on situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as a framework of analysis, remove for peer-review (2013) explored the features of professional identity of English and Arabic language teachers. They found that ELTPI was construed with different features in comparison to Arabic language teachers’ professional identity in terms of their

access to knowledge. For example, knowledge of testing (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL...) played an important role in English language teaching community of practice in terms of being a teacher in contrast to Arabic language teaching community of practice which put emphasizes on non-language related source of knowledge. In addition to EFL teachers, the community of practice might facilitate or impede identity (re)construction of native-English-speaking teachers (Canh, 2013). Features of native ELTPI showed that non-participation, limited socialization, and lack of collaboration affect the concept of being a language teacher among native-English-speaking teachers (Canh, 2013).

In general, the implication of such aforementioned studies might be that professional identity could be developed through manipulation of research findings. It could also be claimed here that what is suggested as qualifications or requirements for PD could be interpreted as part of professional identity features or processes. Interpreting teachers' development through professional identity means that it would be the role, agency, and responsibility of language teachers rather than structure that play a role in teachers' development and their profession (Stannard & Matharu, 2014). Through striving to professional identity development, language teachers could develop, for example, their creativity, participation and involvement, and critical thinking (Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

Although it is possible to conclude English language teachers developmental features from studies on PD and ELPTI separately, there has almost been a paucity of information gained from conducting PD studies under the framework of ELPTI. It means that findings of the existing studies has depicted PD as either a separate process form professional identity development or a static phenomenon which could be developed at a particular

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point of time or place. The latter view, i.e., PD as a static phenomenon, ignores, at least, shifts in professional identity over time.

Therefore, the current study is an effort to explore ELTPI on a past-present-aspirational continuum. According to Weinreich (2003), professional identity “is defined as that part of the totality of one’s self-construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one’s construal of one’s past position and one’s future aspirations” (Weinreich, 2003, p. 31). As a result, past professional identity is “one’s construal of me as I used to be”, present identity is “one’s construal of me as I am now” (Weinreich, 2003, p.83), and aspirational identity is “one’s construal of me as I would like to be” (Weinreich, 2003, p.80). As can be inferred, this framework could manipulate the shifts and continuity of identity as well as its multiple natures (Varghese et al., 2005) or sub-identities (Beijaard et al., 2004). From PD perspective, this continuum could represent how PD might occur over time and contexts.

3. Purpose of the Study

This study was to explore how ELTPI could be developed from past to the future. Because professional identity formations could be context-based, ELPTI was examined in the context of World Englishes to illustrate the variety of professional norms that might exist within each variety of Englishes. Therefore, according to the Kachruvian approach (Bolton, 2004), context of the study aimed to include language teachers from inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle.

Given the aims of the study, the following questions were the starting point for this study:

- 1- Is there a change in English language teachers’ professional identity status across past, present, and aspirational identity in the inner circle (US/UK)?

- 2- Is there a change in English language teachers' professional identity status across past, present, and aspirational identity in the outer circle (India)?
- 3- Is there a change in English language teachers' professional identity status across past, present, and aspirational identity in the expanding circle (Iran)?

4. Methodology

This study followed a quantitative design which used numbers and a priori categorization to explore professional identity. It also used quantitative form of data collection (Dörnyei, 2007) and statistically-oriented data analysis.

4.1. Participants

The sample of the study included English language teachers in the inner, outer, and expanding circle (Kachru, 1992; 2006). Targeting this sample, 60 participants from inner circle (UK/US), 60 from outer circle (India), and 60 from expanding circle (Iran) were selected through opportunistic sampling (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Participants from inner and outer circle were mostly TESOL Arabia members who had been established members and participants for more than 5 years. Participants also were experienced and professional in terms of teaching English for more than 5 years and their age was 35-65.

4.2. Materials and Procedure

The main emerged data-gathering instrument of the quantitative part of the current study was called 'English Language Teachers' Questionnaire of Professional Identity (past-present-aspirational identity)'. This instrument was composed of past, present, and aspirational identity components as the main framework of the study (Weinreich, 1980; 1986). Given the extensive

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examination of the related concepts and categories, items of past, present, and aspirational identity, were classified under 3 main themes of ELTPI including: interpersonal relations, system of knowledge and beliefs, and intrapersonal identity.

According to the expert judgments, validity, and reliability, 60 of the most related concepts were arranged as items of an attitude scale i.e., the questionnaire. For scaling items, Q methodology was applied (Stephenson, 1953; cited in Best & Khan, 2006); as a result, a 3-specified category scale (agree/undecided/disagree) was established. Validity of the questionnaire was established through the calculation of Lawshe formula (1975) for each item. Reliability of data was also calculated through Cronbach's alpha ($r = .92$).

4.3. Data Collection

Data was gathered through the questionnaire which scaled statements of ELTPI. Item specification in the questionnaire was based both on the past, present, and aspirational identity and on the components of professional identity concluded from interpersonal relations, system of knowledge and belief, and intrapersonal identity (Table 3.1).

Table1. *Items Specification in the Questionnaire*

	Number of Items	Interpersonal Relations	System of Knowledge and Beliefs	Intrapersonal Identity
Past Identity	19	1-6	7-11	12-19
Present Identity	15	20 -24	25 – 29	30-34
Aspirational Identity	26	35-47	48-52	53-60

The questionnaire was distributed via Google forms on the Internet (<http://goo.gl/forms/3TtmwBBISQ>) to the mailing list of TESOL Arabia

members stipulating respondents should be language teachers from inner- (UK/US) and outer circle (India). Link of the questionnaire were also shared with Language teachers from expanding circle (Iran) identified according to their experience in the Iranian English language teaching community of practice.

5. Data Analysis

In general, data from past-present-aspirational continuum of teachers' professional identity were analyzed according to the items dedicated to interpersonal relations, intrapersonal identity, and system of knowledge and belief. Participants' answers to the questionnaire were analyzed through Friedman Test (Pallant, 2013). It is used when participants are measured under three or more different conditions. Accordingly, each group of participants' ELTPI and its potential changes over time were evaluated based on the shifts or developments happened to their intrapersonal identity, interpersonal relations, and system of knowledge and belief.

6. Results

Is there a change in English language teachers' professional identity status across past, present, and aspirational identity in the inner circle (US/UK)?

The results of the Friedman Test (table 2) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in interpersonal relations over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum $\chi^2(2, n=56)=33.60, p<.001$ in the inner circle. Inspection of the median values showed an increase from past (Mdn=4.50) and present identity (Mdn=4.60) to aspirational identity (Mdn=5.85) in terms of interpersonal relations in the inner circle.

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Table 2. Results for ELPTI in the Inner Circle

	Past		Present		Aspirational	
	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn
Interpersonal Relations	1.60	4.50	1.60	4.60	2.80	5.85
System of knowledge and belief	1.31	4.00	1.94	5.00	2.74	5.80
Intrapersonal identity	1.06	3.63	2.29	5.25	2.66	5.63

MR= Mean Rank; Mdn= Median

As far as system of knowledge and belief was concerned, results of the Friedman Test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in language teachers system of knowledge over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=56)=36.94, p<.001$). Inspection of the median values showed an increase from past (Mdn=4.00) to present identity (Mdn=5.00) and a further increase to aspirational identity (Mdn=5.80) of language teachers in the inner circle.

Results of the study showed that there was a statistically significant difference in language teachers' intrapersonal identity over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60) = 49.79, p<.001$) in the inner circle. Inspection of the median values showed an increase from past (Mdn= 3.63) to present identity (Mdn=5.25) and a further increase to aspirational identity (Mdn=5.63).

Results of the study (table 5) illustrated shifts in past, present, and aspirational identity in general. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference between past, present, and aspirational ELTPI in the inner circle ($\chi^2(2, n=60) = 54.22, p<.001$). Median values showed a development in professional identity from past (Mdn=3.94) to present (Mdn=4.53) and a further development in aspirational identity (Mdn= 5.53).

Is there a change in English language teachers' professional identity status across past, present, and aspirational identity in the outer circle (India)?

Results of the study (table 3) showed that there was a statistically significant difference in language teachers' interpersonal relations over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60) = 11.20, p < .005$) in the outer circle. Inspection of the median values showed a decrease from past (Mdn=5.17) to present identity (Mdn=4.60) but an increase from past and present to aspirational identity (Mdn=5.92).

Results also indicated that system of knowledge and belief showed a statistically significant difference over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60) = 20.77, p < .001$) in the outer circle. Inspection of the median values showed an increase from past (Mdn=5.00) to present identity (Mdn=5.20) and a further increase to aspirational identity (Mdn=6.40).

Table 3. Results for ELPTI in the Outer Circle

	Past		Present		Aspirational	
	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn
Interpersonal Relations	1.60	4.50	1.60	4.60	2.80	5.85
System of knowledge and belief	1.31	4.00	1.94	5.00	2.74	5.80
Intrapersonal identity	1.06	3.63	2.29	5.25	2.66	5.63

MR= Mean Rank; Mdn= Median

Results also indicated that intrapersonal identity of language teachers from outer circle established a statistically significant difference over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60) = 47.36, p < .001$). Inspection of the median values showed an increase from past (Mdn=3.63) to present (Mdn=5.50) and a further increase to aspirational ELTPI (Mdn=5.75).

Results of the study (table 5) illustrated shifts in past, present, and aspirational identity in general. Results also illustrated a statistically significant

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difference between past, present, and aspirational ELTPI in the outer circle ($\chi^2(2, n=60)=47.48, p<.001$). Median values showed a development in professional identity from past (Mdn=4.42) to present (Mdn=4.73) and a further development in aspirational identity (Mdn=5.92).

Is there a change in English language teachers' professional identity status across past, present, and aspirational identity in the expanding circle (Iran)?

Results of the study (table 4) showed that there was a statistically significant difference in language teachers' interpersonal relations over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60)=46.85, p<.001$) in the expanding circle. Inspection of the median values showed a decrease from past (Mdn=5.00) to present identity (Mdn=4.20) but an increase from past and present to aspirational identity (Mdn=6.00).

Results also (table 5) indicated that there was also a statistically significant difference between past, present, and aspirational ELTPI in the expanding circle ($\chi^2(2, n=60)=70.35, p<.001$). Median values showed an undeveloped progress in professional identity from past (Mdn=4.78) to present (Mdn=4.36) but a development from present to aspirational identity (Mdn=5.88).

Table 4. Results for ELPTI in the Expanding Circle

	Past		Present		Aspirational	
	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn
Interpersonal Relations	1.93	5.00	1.28	4.20	2.80	6.00
System of knowledge and belief	1.95	5.00	1.36	4.60	2.69	6.10
Intrapersonal identity	1.54	4.69	2.20	5.25	2.26	5.38

MR= Mean Rank; Mdn= Median

Results also indicated that system of knowledge and belief showed a statistically significant difference over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60)=36.87, p<.001$) in the expanding circle. Inspection of

the median values showed a decrease from past (Mdn=5.00) to present identity (Mdn=4.60) but an increase to aspirational identity (Mdn=6.10).

Results also indicated that intrapersonal identity of language teachers from outer circle established a statistically significant difference over past-present-aspirational ELTPI continuum ($\chi^2(2, n=60)=13.59, p<.005$). Inspection of the median values showed an increase from past (Mdn=4.69) to present (Mdn=5.25) and a further increase to aspirational ELTPI (Mdn=5.38).

Table 5. *ELPTI on the Past-Present-Aspirational Continuum*

	Past		Present		Aspirational	
	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn	MR	Mdn
Inner circle	1.20	3.94	1.86	4.53	2.94	5.53
Outer circle	1.26	4.42	1.86	4.73	2.89	5.92
Expanding circle	1.98	4.78	1.08	4.36	2.95	5.88

MR= Mean Rank; Mdn= Median

7. Discussion

The main issue of the current study was to explore how professional identity might shift from past to the future in each circle of English language use.

In the inner circle, all categories of ELTPI showed a kind of development. It implies that the inner-circle English language teaching community of practice has constructive features for identity (re)formation. Results imply that, in the inner circle, language teachers' interpersonal relations improve from past and present to the future. The process of development could be described as movement from self-focused relations in the past to the context-focused relations in the present and then learning-based (Clarke, 2008) interpersonal relationships in the future. In terms of system of knowledge, past-present-aspirational continuum of ELPTI also showed a constructive development.

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ELTPI developed from a subject knowledge perspective in the past to individualized “road map” knowledge in the present (Clarke, 2008) and discovery learning in the future (Ormrod, 1995). In other words, language teachers construed themselves as knowledgeable in different ways from past to the future. At the beginning, they were teachers qualified by “documents” or “certificates”. For the moment, they are teachers with a specified direction for getting knowledge (environmental knowledge) and in the future they would like to discover knowledge or facts. Interpersonal identity also showed a development from past to the future. It seems that this development has been happened because of the more commitments (Clarke, 2008) of language teachers. In other words, item specifications of the questionnaire showed that inner-circle teachers (re)form from being ego-centered teachers to other-centered teachers (Weinrich, 2008).

As far as identity development in the outer circle is concerned, although it is possible to say that ELTPI had a developmental process, the interpersonal relations of language teachers showed a lack of development from past to the present. One explanation for this could be that the outer-circle community of practice had little opportunities for teacher-teacher, teacher-student, and student-teacher interactions (Khan, 2015). As a result, they aspired more interactions within the community of practice since they ranked the related items of the questionnaire at the higher level of importance than past and present.

The expanding circle, however, exemplify a unique community of practice. Although this working context had been constructive and developmental in terms of general ELTPI, it was less developmental from sub-identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) perspective. Since the inner circle developed the ELPTI from intrapersonal identity, it could be concluded that the inner-

circle community of practice might be an individualized-oriented community (Clarke, 2008). Accordingly, teachers potentially would be (re)formed as individual-oriented rather than community-based. This idea was supported by the process of interpersonal relations development in the expanding-circle that was also a less constructive development from past to the present. The less developmental process of system of knowledge and belief might also imply that language teachers in the expanding circle consider system of knowledge as less intelligible (Clarke, 2008, p.5) in their minds. It means that they develop such a knowledge that has few agreements among the community of practice.

Results from aspirational ELTPI from all circles of language use indicated that teachers' figurative community of practice would be a developmental identity community. In other words, since language teachers approved the importance of aspirational identity items, the nature of items showed that teachers would hold their belonging in the community (Wenger, 1998) through multiple modes of 'engagement, alignment, and imagination' (Clarke, 2008, p.12) which implied professionalism.

In general, although exploring past, present, and aspirational identity of English language teachers in the context of this study supported some established theories on ELPTI such as ELPTI is multiple (Varghese et al., 2005) and in shifts over time and its direction is toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), it is the sub-identities of language teachers, i.e., intrapersonal identity, interpersonal relations, and system of knowledge and belief, which could (re)present that identity would be a development or diffusion (Weinreich, 1989). The results of the study also intensified the continuity (past, present, aspirational) of ELPTI exploration.

8. Conclusions

According to the findings, this study allows some conclusions and draws implications. First and foremost, it would be possible to say that past-present-aspirational continuum of teachers' professional identity could be introduced as an instrument of investigating teachers' development while it could be investigated through various exploratory and explanatory researches. For example, in the context of this study, English language teachers were in the process of professional development since all of them put their aspirational identity at the highest level of importance. Another methodological conclusion might be that ELTPI could be introduced through its components that are interpersonal relations, system of knowledge and belief, and intrapersonal identity. In other words, teachers' development should be planned via developing these components.

It could also be concluded here that unless the role of English language teacher as an agentic self, i.e., identity, are considered, PD would have few improvements. Professionalism will be improved in the community of English language teaching if the agentic roles of its members are considered. Accordingly, being an English language teacher might be distinguished from being a teacher in other professions, for example, an Arabic language teacher (Sarani & Najjar, 2013).

These conclusions recommend that language teachers' professional development practices could be replaced with teachers' professional identity developmental praxes. Praxis (Kemmis & Smith, 2008) shift ELPTI to go beyond conventions and requires teachers to be creative, critical, and self-reflective. This 'being' status takes time to happen and as Kemmis (2008) argues "cannot be closed once and for all by the answers given in any particular time or place" (2008, p. 29). Teacher development programs should be planned

toward “continually review and revise past answers in the light of changed historical times, and changed social circumstances” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 29). In other words, practical application of past-present-aspirational identity development as a theory for teacher PD would be a praxis that consistently interprets the present status through using the knowledge gained from past experience. Accordingly, Teachers’ PD could happen when ELPTI develop and, then, ELPTI develops when teachers themselves control its effective elements such as those referred as item specifications in the context of this study. It is strongly suggested that English language teachers, as knowledge suppliers (Day, 2004), control their own learning process thorough challenging, stimulating, and making it real and attainable (Padwad, 2008; Padwad & Dixit, 2008).

In general, to elaborate on these findings and conclusions, researchers can conduct longitudinal studies on professional identity development. Longitudinal and qualitative studies can answer the developments during the times more accurately because the perception of a teacher is different from her/his actual ability to be a teacher. Because of that, TTC courses in many institutions in the world are based on a rigorous evaluation done by an expert/experienced teacher to identify the areas that a teacher may need further development. Therefore, this study which is based on the questionnaire can be only informative to link teachers’ perceptions of professional identity and PD. But in actuality it may not be the case, which means teachers’ perceptions about their abilities may not be true.

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