

On the Relation between Iranian EFL Teachers' Sense of Professional Identity and their Responsibility

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Abstract

Responsibility has always been one of the major concerns of teachers and those who are involved in the teaching-learning process. This is the way, since, if the sense of responsibility is improved and maintained in teachers, almost any other aspect of the teaching and learning environment would be considered safe. Therefore, the researchers tried to look for the possible relation between language teachers' sense of responsibility and their professional identity. Thus, a group of 100 EFL teachers from language schools and different universities took part in the study. Two questionnaires that were previously proved to be valid and reliable were used as the instruments in this study. Regression was applied for the analysis of the data and the results indicated that there was a significant relationship between teachers' professional identity and their responsibility. More specifically, it was revealed that there was a strong and positive relationship between teachers' responsibility and motivation as one of the indicators of teachers' professional sense of identity.

Keywords: responsibility, professional identity, EFL teachers, motivation, occupational commitment

1. Introduction

To improve instructional practices, teachers as central factors and pedagogical sources have been emphasized and all the dimensions that affected their teaching have been investigated. Two factors that might affect effective teaching are teachers' professional identity and teachers' responsibility. Teachers' sense of their professional identity has received extensive attention as an emerging research field of studies in the domain of teaching and teacher education (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Hao, 2011). Moreover, with the spread of English as an international language, the professional identity of non-native language teachers attracted the attention of several researchers (Kachru & Nelson, 2001; McKay, 2002). Also, keeping professionalism in mind, teacher professional identity refers to the sense that they create of themselves as subject matter experts, didactical experts, and pedagogical experts resulting from interpretations of experiences and interactions in the social context (Canrinus et al., 2012; Beijaard et al., 2000; Salehizadeh et al., 2020). It is argued that professional identity is a dynamic entity (Beijaard et al., 2004) characterized as an ongoing process (Kerby, 1991).

Accordingly, whether we consider ourselves as teaching professionals or not, partly might be rooted in how far we take responsibility towards our profession, our students, parents, stakeholders and above all the society. Moreover, students' performances and educational outcomes can be influenced by teachers' responsibility. The researchers, therefore, aimed to investigate whether these two variables can result in a statistically significant relationship or not.

2. Literature Review

Since teachers have an integral role in educational systems, the focus of research should be on various aspects of teacher education and the concepts related to teaching such as teacher cognition and teacher knowledge. Teachers' professional identity has recently been considered as a principal concept in teacher education. Professional identity is a social construct that manifests itself in four indicators as job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment and change in the level of motivation (Day, 2002). Thus, teachers' sense of professional identity can be acquired by assessment of these constructs (Canrinus et al., 2012). There are relationships between the separate indicators of teachers' sense of professional identity and teacher effectiveness and effective teaching behavior (Canrinus et al., 2011). Muijs and Reynolds (2002) revealed that there is a relationship between effective teachers and self-efficacy. This means that effective teachers have high levels of self-efficacy. Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) claimed that teachers' commitment is necessary for effective teaching. Similarly, Nwosu (2012) asserted that teachers with a high level of commitment work more diligently, demonstrate stronger affiliation to their school, and display more desire to carry out the goals of teaching than teachers with low levels of commitment. Additionally, Ganjali et al. (2020) claimed that committed teachers devote their time to continue education and never stop learning new strategies to teach their students. They are committed to challenging themselves and take every

opportunity to continue learning, all for the success of their students. Furthermore, Opdenakker et al. (2006) examined the effect of job satisfaction on effective teaching behavior. It was highlighted that a high level of satisfaction increases effective teaching behavior. In a study done by Ofoegbu (2004), the relationship between teacher motivation and teacher effectiveness was investigated. It was shown that motivation enhances teacher effectiveness and contributes to classroom effectiveness.

A number of researchers have investigated social, psychological, cultural and sociological factors that can influence teachers' sense of professional identity (Liou, 2008 as cited in Masoumpanah & Zarei, 2014; Hamilton, 2013). In the same way, Flores and Day (2006) explored the contextual, cultural and biographical factors that influence the formation of professional identity and reshaping of new teachers' identity. Wang (2014) studied the barriers that influence the professional development of English teachers. It was displayed that heavy teaching burden, the deficiency in research ability and the unsatisfying working condition have negative effects on the development of teacher professional identity. Puglia (2008) declared that strong and weak professional identities influence the quality of performances. Similarly, Ganjali et al. (2020) recognized teacher identity as one of the components of commitment to the profession in their studies and claimed those who accept themselves as a teacher and internalize the identity of teachers do their best to demonstrate commitment to their profession. Delima (2015) carried out a study on the relationship between teacher professional identity, professional commitment and teacher performance, showing that teachers with a high level of professional identity had a high level of professional commitment and performance. Likewise, Abtahi and Motallebzadeh (2016) illustrated that while there was a significant and positive relationship between computer literacy and job satisfaction as one indicator of teachers' sense of professional identity, there wasn't a significant relationship between computer literacy and occupational commitment as another indicator of teachers' professional identity.

It was proposed that people who feel responsible have high-quality performances (Bovens, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Personal responsibility has been defined as "a sense of internal obligation and commitment to produce or prevent designated outcomes or that these outcomes should have been produced or prevented" (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011, p. 127). Although responsibility has been defined and explored from a different perspective, limited research has been focused on teacher responsibility (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013). Teachers' sense of responsibility refers to "how teachers themselves view their responsibilities and the conditions under which they are willing to accept personal responsibility for such outcomes" (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013, p. 68).

Teachers' responsibility has been studied from a different perspective (Winter, 1992; Lee & Loeb, 2000). Lenk (2007) recommended a framework for responsibility from teachers' perspective including six components: who is responsible? for what? for/to whom? who is the judge? concerning what criteria? and in what realm? It was mentioned that personal characteristics and contextual factors have been considered as two major determinants of teacher responsibility. Personal characteristics consist of intrinsic motivation, personal integrity, values and work ethic, pre-service, and self-control. A great number of teachers highlighted the influence of contextual factors comprising organizational climate, their personal living

conditions, and the role of other agents of responsibility (administration, parents, students) (Lauer mann, 2013). Teachers emphasized the consequences of responsibility. While personal costs such as hard work and less family time are negative consequences, they return positive consequences such as job satisfaction, respect and recognition by students, parents, and colleagues (Lauer mann, 2013).

Teacher responsibility has been related to some issues such as motivation (Higgins, 1997), job satisfaction (Winter et al., 2006), self-efficacy (Guskey, 1988; Malmir & Mohammadi, 2018), and student achievement (Lee & Loeb, 2000). There is a positive relationship between teachers' sense of responsibility and improvements in educational outcomes (Lauer mann & Karabenick, 2013). Aliakbari and Babanezhad Kafshgar (2013) analysed the relationship between teacher responsibility and job satisfaction. The results indicated that there is not a strong relationship between these variables. The findings were in contrast with previous studies (Winter et al., 2006). Koohkan and Motallebzadeh (2015) revealed that teachers feel more satisfied when they are involved in the process of decision-making at the workplace. However, those who communicate their ideas with their authorities don't have more sense of commitment to work. In this study, motivation and occupational commitment are treated as relevant indicators of teachers' sense of their professional identity. The focus of the present study is the relationship between teachers' sense of professional identity and teachers' responsibility. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following question:

- 1) Is there any relationship between teachers' sense of professional identity and their responsibility?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A group of 100 Iranian EFL teachers, teaching in language schools and universities of different cities in Iran, participated in this study. They included 48 males and 52 female teachers and their age range was between 20-30. The majority of these teachers were those who had MA or PhD degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) with an average teaching experience of 4 to 15 years and they voluntarily took part in the study.

3.2. Instruments

Since the focus of the study was to look for the probable relation between teachers' responsibility and their professional identity and its subcategories, two questionnaires were considered as the data collection tools.

3.3. Teachers' Sense of Professional Identity Questionnaire

This instrument was used to check teachers' identities with regard to their professionalism. The questionnaire was a previously validated and reliable one designed by Day (2002). The professional identity

questionnaire included four subcategories: satisfaction with the job, commitment to occupation, self-efficacy, and motivation. However, based on the purpose of the study only two of these sub-categories were employed in the data collection procedure which consisted of commitment to occupation, and motivation.

The occupational commitment category contained three underlying notions as affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment which all resulted in an 18-item questionnaire, each category containing six items. The questionnaire was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Four items in this questionnaire were negatively phrased and therefore were reversed scored (items 2, 4, 10 and 13) such as 'I regret having entered the teaching profession.

The motivation category consisted of 18 items on 4 points Likert scale with options ranging from highly un-motivating to highly motivating. The reliability of the professional Identity questionnaire using Cronbach Alpha was proved to be .8. The total amount of time for administering the Professional Identity questionnaire was 20 minutes.

3.4. Teacher Responsibility Questionnaire

In order to check how much teachers felt responsible towards their job, Lauermann's Teacher Responsibility Questionnaire (2013) was administered. The questionnaire checked teachers' responsibility according to four notions of student motivation, student achievement, relationship with students, and teaching. The instrument consisted of 12 statements that asked teachers whether they did each of the activities or not and based on each idea, they marked the sentences as yes or no. the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach Alpha which was .81 and it took 10 minutes for each participant to fill out the questionnaire.

3.3. Procedure

As the purpose of the study was to check the probable relationship between teachers' responsibility towards teaching and their professional identity, two questionnaires (Teachers' Responsibility Questionnaire and Teachers' Sense of professional Identity Questionnaire) were administered to a group of 100 EFL teachers including 48 males and 52 females who were all teaching in Language schools and universities in Iran. They voluntarily participated in this study and filled out the questionnaires. The professional identity questionnaire consisted of two subcategories (Occupational commitment and Motivation) and the teachers' responsibility questionnaire checked their commitment towards teaching based on four notions of student motivation, student achievement, relationship with students and teaching. The reliability of these questionnaires were .8 and .81 respectively. The total amount of time for both questionnaires was 30 minutes and once the data was collected, it was entered and analyzed through SPSS 22 software. Regression was used as the data analysis procedure and finally, the results were analyzed in the teaching-learning context of Iran.

4. Results

The purpose of the study was to check the possible relationship between EFL teachers' responsibility and any of the two sub-categories of professional identity (Occupational Commitment and Motivation). Thus, to check which of the two sub-categories of professional identity had the greatest contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (responsibility) and also to check the internal relationship within and among the variables of the study, regression was employed for the data analysis procedure. The first step was to check if there is any significant relationship between the two variables. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

ANOVA, Relationship between Responsibility and Professional Identity

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	82.305	2	41.153	4.700	.011 ^a
	Residual	849.405	97	8.757		
	Total	931.710	99			

Based on the data presented in Table 1, Anova reveals a level of significance of .01 which is smaller than .05; therefore, the relation between the teachers' responsibility and their professional identity is a statistically significant one. Afterwards, the researchers aimed to check the relationship within and among the dependent and independent variables, the result of which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Coefficients Relationship between the Dependent and Independent Variables

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		Collinearity Statistics		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	13.673	2.529		5.407	.000		
	Motivation	.134	.052	.272	2.591	.011	.853	1.173
	Commitment	.021	.041	.054	.518	.606	.853	1.173

a. Dependent Variable: responsibility

According to Table 2, the Tolerance values for each of the two subcategories of Professional Identity (Occupational Commitment and Motivation) is smaller than .10 (.85), therefore it indicates that the multiple correlations with other variables are high, suggesting the possibility of multicollinearity. In other words, the independent and dependent variables of the study i.e. teachers' responsibility, motivation and occupational commitment, possess a high level of internal relationships within and among each other.

Also, as the Beta value in Table 2 reveals, motivation has a stronger contribution (.272) to the prediction of the dependent variable than the occupational commitment variable (.054). Finally, the sig. values are employed in order to check whether these predictions were significant or not. Among the two independent variables, "Motivation" depicts a statistically significant contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable ($.01 < .05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that motivation has a direct significant relation with teachers' responsibility.

5. Discussion

A relatively little research has focused on teachers' professional sense of identity and teachers' responsibility (Delimma, 2015; Koohkan & Motallebzadeh, 2016). Thus, the present study undertakes to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between teachers' sense of identity and their responsibility. Occupational commitment and motivation were put forward as two indicators of teachers' sense of professional identity. Results indicate that there is a significant relationship between teachers' professional identity and their responsibility. More specifically, it is revealed that there is a strong and positive relationship between teachers' responsibility and motivation as one of the indicators of teachers' professional sense of identity. The findings confirmed some other researches ideas about the relationship between teacher responsibility and some issues such as motivation (Higgins, 1997), job satisfaction (Winter et al., 2006), and student achievement (Lee & Loeb, 2000). Similarly, Inayatullah and Jehangir (2002) argued that there is a positive relationship between teachers' motivation and their performances in an educational context. This is well supported by the study of Delima (2015) and Ganjali et al. (2019) emphasizing teachers with a high level of professional identity had a high level of professional commitment and performance in an educational setting. In line with these results, it can be assumed that teachers' motivation contributes to teachers' responsibility more than occupational commitment. In the same way, Lauer mann (2013) asserted that teachers' sense of responsibility has remarkable implications for teacher motivation to be responsible for students' educational outcomes. It is presumed that teachers' motivation to accept responsibility leads to productive instructional practices (Lauer mann, 2013).

To further enhance our understanding of the relationship between teachers' sense of professional identity and their responsibility, satisfaction with job and self-efficacy as other indicators of the sense of professional identity can be taken into account concerning teachers' responsibility. Moreover, the same research can be done considering overall indicators of teachers' sense of professional identity. Moreover, due to the availability of the participants to the researchers, this study was carried out on university EFL teachers who taught English in language institutes and universities and also variables such as personal factors and gender were not taken into account which considering these issues would assist the researchers to come up with new outcomes.

6. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, the current study proved a significant relationship between and among the dependent and independent variables namely as teachers' responsibility and professional identity. For the purpose of the study, only two sub-categories of professional identity opted. The outcome indicated a high level of internal relationships within and among teachers' responsibility, motivation and occupational commitment. Furthermore, between the two independent variables, "Motivation" showed a more direct critical relation with teachers' responsibility than "Occupational Commitment". In other words, although motivated teachers and committed teachers both take on responsibility towards teaching, motivated teachers carry a special burden of responsibility and feel a stronger sense of responsibility to their job.

Teachers' sense of professional identity and teachers' responsibility are important factors that contribute to educational improvements. It is of value for the university administrators to recognize the causes of dissatisfaction among teachers as well as those influencing commitment and motivation of teachers all for teachers' quality of work-life, students' achievement, and university effectiveness.

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