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RECONSTRUCTION OF IRANIAN ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN ONLINE CLASSES

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Abstract

Because of the Covid-19 outbreak, all academic institutions all over the world swiftly shifted to reconstitute the presentation of their courses that customarily took place on campus. This study explored the kind of online professional identities that English teachers in private language institutes constructed during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Additionally, it examined possible impacts of adopting online solutions on teachers' performance and teaching skills and their perceptions of communities of practice and their effect on their PI in online classes during this period. The study was conducted on 35 English teachers, teaching English in language institutes in Yazd, Iran. The study followed a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually and also in groups, to gain access to their lived experiences of running online classes. Results revealed four main characteristics that (re)constructed and affected teachers' PI in online classes, namely, teachers' role, competency and self-effectiveness, appreciation and connection, and future plans. The findings also revealed that streamlined communication and communities of practice were very beneficial in (re)constructing their changing identities in online classes. Membership in communities of practice was found to be an essential action to make teachers' teaching skills and social learning better and share common experiences. The results showed that these aspects highly influence the teachers' reconstruction of PI in a positive way in language institutes.
Keywords: *communities of practice, English as a foreign language, language institute, online professional identity, qualitative approach*

Introduction

In the realm of education, professional identity (PI) is reflected as being a complex and dynamic construct, which maintains an equal equilibrium between professional self-image and the perceived roles that teachers play at work (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). As Fogle and Moser (2017) stated, comprehending teacher identities are crucial to acquire deeper perceptiveness into the influencing elements on teacher's decision-making process, attitudes, and beliefs. Two elements can add to the complexity of teacher professional identity (TPI) development. These two elements are interactions and anxiety: Interaction with students and coworkers, interaction with institutions, and the anxiety of learning English in a society (Abednia, 2012). According to the majority of researchers, the development of PI is an ongoing process which is dynamic, in which teachers comprehend their engagements to construct and reconstruct their belief, persuasion considering the meaning of a particular profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teachers' perspectives are reconstructed in agreement with who they are as teachers in the teaching profession; this perspective entails esteem, belief, knowledge, and inducement which are used to explain and guide proficient learning and development entailing two types of reasoning, namely moral and cognitive reasoning (Stricker et al., 2019).

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An abrupt change of face-to-face classes to online classes because of Covid-19 has implemented many problems on teachers. This abrupt change consequence was brisk learning of novel technologies and the construction of fresh PI. The construction of these fresh identities entails continuous renegotiations of the teachers' and students' functions, suggesting further consideration of how the knowledge goes on to be formed through online interactions in the synchronous and asynchronous environment (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Now the teachers have to teach in isolation, they do not have eye contact with their students most of the time, it is just voice. The next thing was the change to completely student-oriented classes, the most difficult part of it was the use of technology. All these created stress and tensions for the language teachers in the institutes, and this was the cause of their changing identity, and it took time for them to reconstruct their identities. For the reconstruction and development of the PI of teachers and their career flourishment, constant learning needs to occur. This learning is better when you are not alone but in a community with your colleagues, someone who has the same profession as you. Nonetheless, teachers may find it hard to perform in online classes, not only for the variation of basic interactions from face-to-face class, but also because of the lack of knowledge and preparation of skills (Laferrière et al., 2012; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020).

Background to the Study

TI has acquired noteworthy consideration in educational research in some past years. Various meanings have been given to the concept of identity in the literature considering different perspectives. According to Gee (2000), teacher identity is "an important analytic tool for comprehending schools and society" (p. 99). Teacher PI relates to an individual's identity and self-concept that stems from the teacher's comprehension of and reflection on his/her career related experiences (Pinar, 2012). Yazan (2018) defines teacher professional identity as teachers' continually evolving the conception of their teaching selves or how they define their professional roles which may shift in response to changes in their immediate contexts and their interaction with other individuals. As such, teacher identity construction resides mainly in how they make sense of the contemporary realities, and how they constantly negotiate their position within their professional communities (Nguyen & Dao, 2019). Thus, conceived as fundamental to teachers' professional practice and development (Tsui, 2011), research on language teacher identity (LTI) has gained footing in the last two decades (see Barkhuizen, 2017a; Cheung et al; 2014; Schutz et al; 2018). In addition, Olsen (2008) stated that the challenges teachers encounter, learning outcomes, and the effect of strong TPI are the factors that can shape the procurement of TPI. The educational context that is dynamic and authentic, crucially influences the formation of TI (Xu, 2013).

This study attempted to investigate Iranian English language institute teachers' conceptions regarding their PI, sociocultural factors that influence it, and the effect of CoP on their PI. Lately, Borg, (2017) defined teacher PI in terms of the professional roles teachers and others believe they should accomplish. Various factors affect the PI of teachers, and it is constructed historically, contextually, and socially (Barkhuizen, 2016; Kao & Lin, 2015).

There are many factors like teacher's qualification, knowledge, learning including teaching practice experiences that can influence on their TPI. Some people who have expectations from teachers are heads of the departments, mentors, supervisors, coworkers, parents, and students. These expectations are related to the teachers' function or role, expertise level, behavior, and competent practices. Hashwani (2013) stated that it is the social environment in which teachers' professional and personal identities are shaped and reshaped.

Teachers' sense of their PI synchronizes with the above-mentioned constructs, and they stand for a personal perspective on how teachers see themselves as professionals in their profession. Confirmation of teachers' sense of their PI is gained through investigating teachers' self-efficacy, motivation, job satisfaction, and occupational commitment in integrating them.

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A study was conducted by Eren and Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez (2017) where they illuminated the teachers' ethical attitude to find the negative feedback effect on professional competency. This study objective was to find the pre-service teachers' views on competency and job engagement. The findings of this study revealed teachers' high sense of competency and professional engagement despite the negative feedback their ethical attitudes were not harmed or destroyed.

A study in which Kuo and Tseng (2013) examined social participation and knowledge sharing in teachers' online professional community. In this qualitative study, data was collected from interviews and self-reports. The results of the study revealed the existence of a very close connection among the members of the community, which in turn resulted in teachers' concern, recognition, and appraisement of one another in the group. According to many researchers in Online CoP, teachers readily assist and cooperate and find solutions for their issues both instrumental as well as emotional issues, and this reveals the strong connection among the teachers in the communities. In a study Hou (2014) examined the elements which influence online teacher CoPs in a positive and meaningful way. The results showed that these CoPs give the teachers instrumental and emotional support, and a higher probability to produce good results.

Lately, some research studies investigating TPI were conducted in Iran. Eslamdoost, et al; (2019) examined how Iranian EFL teachers manage the identity conflicts. Another study conducted by Sheybani and Miri (2019) explored the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' PI and critical thinking. Their findings revealed an increasing positive meaningful relationship between professional identity and critical thinking of Iranian EFL teachers. Behin et al. (2019) suggested that every language teaching policy might shape and reshape teachers' understanding of themselves.

Lately, Parisa Riahipour (2020) conducted a study to examine conversion in Iranian EFL teachers' PI in the context of the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (2012). The findings indicated a potential conversion in Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity development. Additionally, a longitudinal study conducted by Haghighi Irani et al. (2020), investigating the PI construction process of eight pre-service teachers during their practicum course in a higher education institute through engagement, suggested that focus on engagement could produce a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers' PI construction. In their study, Haghighi Irani et al. (2020) examined English language institute pre-service teachers' identity construction in a three-phase pre-service teacher education program. Results showed two chief changes in the PI when the shifting took place from one phase to the other that produced the study phase as the summit of the changes. On the whole, in the participating teachers' identities, three main shifts were observed from a commitment to evaluation towards a commitment to modality, from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional perceptions, and from problem analysis to problem-solving skills.

In another study, Armaghan Qaleshahzari (2020) examined Ph.D. TEFL candidates' PI development during the Ph.D. course. The findings revealed that most participants believed that this Ph.D. course led them to acquire social legitimation from their CoP, get socialized to their worldwide teachers' community, and make their status in the society much better; they were convinced that there was development in both professional and personal development. However, there is a lack of research on the teachers' identity shift in online classes. Therefore, this study sets out to examine the TPI shift of teachers moving from face to face to online classes.

Because of the pandemic, all academic institutions all over Iran swiftly shifted to reconstruct the presentation of their courses that took place face to face. Rapid changes for conducting the classes completely online caused the fast learning of new technologies and the reconstruction of fresh PIs. The reconstruction of these fresh PIs entails continuous re-

transactions of the teacher and learner's functions, recommending additional examination of how experience on goes to be formed via online interactions (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Richardson and Alsup (2015) conducted an interview-based, qualitative study to understand the experience of first time online teachers and how they develop their online teacher identity. They suggested that we should extend the definition of teacher identity by learning from existing TPI research and reflecting upon new challenges and concerns—as well as new definitions of success and accomplishment—in an online context with its unique feature. Their findings indicated that becoming a successful and productive online instructor is not just a matter of putting all your existing courses online. They note that:

> *"There are clear and distinct characteristics of online instruction that affect the professional identities of online teachers in profound ways. These characteristics of teaching online require teachers to grapple with personal and professional subjectivities that are perhaps unquestioned in a traditional setting." (p. 152)*

They argue that online teaching necessitates re-thinking or engaging in an interior dialogue with many subjectivities and beliefs necessary to face-to-face instruction and adapt them to the features of online teaching. They maintain that to become an effective online instructor one might have to re-build a traditional teacher identity along with some traditional assumptions about effective teaching and learning. The present study was also conducted to investigate TPI in the context of online teaching with a focus on the impact of participating in communities of practice on teachers' online PI construction.

Conceptual Framework

Wenger (1998) utilized the conceptualization of 'communities of practice' (CoP) for defining professional practice as a process where people experience the social world and also their engagement in it as being significant. Wenger further stated that participation within CoPs involves three dimensions: (a) it improves mutual engagement; (b) it builds trust between members; and (c) it allows the discussion of issues about the practice. Community of practice requires three elements, namely domain, community, and practice. In a Chinese EFL teacher context Tsui (2006) examined the process of TPI formation in CoPs. These studies revealed that teachers' knowledge and practice formation are two dimensional, individual, and social.

The perspective adopted in this study was social-cultural theory according to which identity is, first of all, at the center of the teachers' development and according to this theoretical perspective, identity is something dynamic, ongoing, shaped, and reshaped by contextual factors especially the focus of the social-cultural theory is on contextual factors because it maintains that identity is not something formed in isolation or individually independent of contextual factors. So, from the social-cultural perspective, all the contextual factors that can have an impact on PI construction must be considered. The CoP is also a socially culturally inspired concept on teachers' professional learning and teachers' PI. The overarching framework of this study was a socio-cultural perspective on identity construction and development. As a part of the study was concerned about professional networks, professional circles that teachers form, and through that, they share experiences especially after the pandemic they share experiences about online classes in these CoP which is of course a social culturally inspired framework, was used. As a result, through CoP where the teachers shared their experiences and practices, they could monitor their learning process instead of just dealing with theory only (Wenger, 1998). These measures helped them to initiate social connections in the communities where all the members were entailed in different ways. From a sociocultural perspective, "self-representation is socially negotiated and the identity work by individuals in their environment happens in and

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through interaction between perceptions, participation, and actions" and this ongoing process is embedded within the macro and microenvironments "(Li, 2020, p. 243).

Empirical studies have also verified that the effect of CoP on teaching practices and student learning is positive (e.g., Cheng, 2014). For instance, Vescio et al. (2008) have reviewed 11 studies and discovered that the teaching practices in many cases gradually became more student-centered after the teachers had participated in CoPs.

Regarding online teacher communities, Lantz-Anderson et al. (2018) stated that little research has examined teachers' online identities and suggested that "other area that merits further exploration is the role of online professional learning communities in teachers' development of self-identity" (312). In addition, there is no research investigating (re) construction of Iranian EFL Language Institute TPI shifting from face-to-face to online classes. This investigation is significant as it can make clear how teachers view their identity shifts. To address this gap, through the examination of teacher identity in Iranian EFL language institutes, this study analyzes teacher identity (re)construction. Furthermore, "exploring the affordances of online teaching would provide an understanding of the dynamics of teachers' membership in these contexts "Robson (2018).

As mentioned before because of the connection between teachers' identity and teachers' practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998), investigating the TPI changes shows how teachers perceive their role, behaviors, efficacy potentials, practices, emotional fluctuations, etc.

A study was conducted by (Nazari & Seyri, 2021) regarding the identity shift of schoolteachers moving from face-to-face to online classes. Semi structure interviews were used to collect the data including self-reported practices, and group discussions. The participants of the study were six schoolteachers from different disciplines entailing Persian literature, English, Arabic, chemistry, physics, and biology. The findings showed that teachers' shift to online classes had influenced various aspects of their identity. Yazan's (2018) theoretical framework was used in this for understanding language teacher identities. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by McNaughton and Billot (2016) regarding technological change among higher education teachers.

One more study was conducted (Ballová et al; 2020) in primary and secondary schools of Slovak. The main objective of this study was to explore the nexus between teaching experience, personality traits, and emotions of teachers and their perception and management of distance education during the coronavirus pandemic. 379 teachers participated in this quantitative study. The results showed that during the pandemic, there was an increase in negative emotions of teachers increased and a decrease in positive emotions; in addition, teachers showed a willingness to apply partial changes into their teaching after the pandemic period.

Research Problem

In the study, the reconstruction and reshaping of Iranian Language Institute teachers is considered. Because of the pandemic rapidly the classes in all educational centers were shifted to online classes. Most of the teachers did not have any previous experience of online, remote or distance teaching classes especially language institute teachers. The sudden change did not give time to the authorities to conduct some training classes for the teachers. The teachers entered in a new environment, in isolation without any experience of conducting online classes. The problems teachers faced was environment, lack of technological knowledge, student centered classes, and command of language.

Teachers face many problems in their careers, entailing low pay and professional development scarcity, and now online classes and technology. It has been seen that some teachers without pedagogical qualification are working as English language teachers in language

institutes, and some of them their major is not English they are from different disciplines. These challenges usually result in inadequacy in commitment, demotivation, and by default a distorted teacher identity. Teachers should try to overcome these difficulties and reconstruct their identity. As the students seemed to become more independent learners online, while they remained facilitators of learning, the teachers realized that as teachers they need: (a)more flexibility in performing the roles of 'enhancers and cherishers' instead of 'presenters' of content (see also Ducan & Barnett 2009; Jin, 2005), (b) more concentration and cherish to become more efficient and efficacious communicators (Komninou, 2017; Vinagre, 2017), (c) being more sentience of each student's needs, strengths and interests, including their accessibility to technology and support networks and preferred e-learning styles (see also Chambers et al., 2012; Tai et al., 2018; Coole & Watts, 2009; Ducan & Barnett, 2009), (d) continuous dedication to producing content that is interesting and engaging through new forms of technology (see Borba et al., 2018; Thomas & Thorpe, 2018).

In Iranian English as foreign language research, some studies have touched upon teachers' reconstruction identities, most of them are related to pre-service teachers (e.g., Abednia, 2012; Karimi & Mofidi, 2019; Safari & Rashidi, 2015), but there is no comprehensive study about the reconstruction of Iranian English Language Institute teachers' online identities. Very few studies in Iran have studied these issues but not directly. A comprehensive search for research on teachers' lived online experiences and online identity (re)construction to have particularly focused on community of practice (CoP) had not been probed into. Lack of research on the reconstruction of online teachers' identity, made Iranian EFL a perfect site for researching this topic and probe for more information and in-depth analysis in response to the high significance attached to online TPI globally.

Considering the conditions that have aroused because of this pandemic, all the classes were held online. These online classes have brought the teachers too near to each other through social media, and different platforms. The teachers who were not in contact with each other, with teachers from other states, now are in contact through CoP groups, in some groups, even teachers from other countries are there. In these groups, teachers shared their experiences, problems, and solutions. There is a connection between Identity and community, and it is the nature of the community that is fluid that makes the fluid identity become a dynamic, hybrid, multi-framed, fragmented, and contradictory notion (Teng, 2018). Due to the lack of studies in this area, this study was attempted. Hence it may be concluded that there are many elements that affect teachers' identity. Then how teachers observe themselves as teachers and what elements contribute to their perceptions is worth of exploring. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining those elements that influence the PI of EFL teachers who are working in English Language Institutes from the perspectives of the teachers themselves in online classes. In this study, the possible grouping of these factors will be examined in order to identify what factors affect EFL teacher's PI. As Cohen, 2008; Tseng & Kuo, 2014 claimed, "teachers' identities are central to the beliefs, values, and practices that guide their engagement, commitment, and actions in and out of the classroom."

Research Focus

The study was centered around language institute teachers' perceptions of their changing online TPI and how they perceive themselves as online teachers. In addition, this study focuses on the teachers' prospects about the consequence of communities of practice on their online PI.

Research Aim and Research Questions

This study explored the kind of online professional identities that English teachers in private language institutes constructed during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and how they perceive themselves as online teachers. Additionally, it examined possible impacts of adopting online solutions on teachers' performance and teaching skills and their perceptions on the communities of practice (CoP) and their effect on their PI in online classes during this period.

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions of their online professional identity?
2. What is the range of CoP effects on teachers' online professional identity?

Research Methodology

General Background

Framed within Wenger's (1998) conceptual framework of communities of practice, this qualitative study examined the online professional identity of EFL teachers. This study explored the kind of online professional identities that English teachers in private language institutes constructed during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Additionally, it examined possible impacts of adopting online solutions on teachers' performance and teaching skills and their perceptions on the communities of practice and their effect on their PI in online classes during this period. The study was conducted in the Iranian EFL context with a very wide community of (of all age groups) and teachers. It was conducted during the academic year of 2019-2020 and 40 EFL teachers participated. It was mainly an interview-based study which examined shifts in teachers' professional identity by shift in the mode of teaching from face-to-face to online which was of particular interest to the researchers due to the fact that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, online English classes were rather unorthodox, and technology was at best used only as one component of the teaching rather than forming the entire practice.

Design and Context of the Study

This study was conducted on EFL teachers teaching in an English Language Institute of Yazd, Iran during the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021. The institute offers foreign language courses, mainly English, for different age groups: including teenagers, young adults, and adult learners (ranging from 13 to 40 years of age). Each term lasts for three months, and classes meet twice a week. Each class lasts for 90 minutes.

This study is exploratory using a qualitative approach. This approach was applied as the researchers aimed to examine Iranian language institute English teachers' perceptions about their online PI and CoP. As Atieno (2009) stated, a qualitative approach examines the whole situation to evaluate its involution and assure that it takes into account general factors and also unique factors. A qualitative methodology was used, as the objective was to get a more satisfactory comprehension of the study context. As researchers have stated, qualitative data is used to seize expressive information about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors (e.g., Willig & Rogers, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Sample

Thirty-five Iranian English language institute teachers, both male (*N*=8) and female (*N*=27) were selected from English institute of Yazd. Male teachers were less than the female teachers that is the reason for the imbalance in the number of male and female participants. The

participants were selected by convenience sampling based on their availability. Their age range was from 26 to 49. The teachers' least teaching experience was 2 years, and maximum was 20 years. All the participants' first language was Persian. The data were gathered according to ethical guidelines for qualitative research including informed participant consent, guaranteed anonymity, and confidentiality.

Table 1

Demographic Background of the Participants

No. of Participants	35 EFL teachers at English Institute
Gender	27 Females & 8 Males
Native Language	Persian
Major	TEFL
English Language Institute	Yazd in Iran
Academic Years	2019-2020

Instrumentation and Procedures

It is a qualitative study, and as Edwards and Holland (2013) revealed that crucial forms of qualitative research are in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Thus, the data were collected from two major sources, namely, individual interviews and focus group discussions and these formed two data sets, which are explained below.

Data Set One: Individual interviews

An attempt was also made to obtain the right data that would answer the research question through the questions and comments. Semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews formed the primary data set by focusing on detailed and elaborate researcher-elicited narratives from the participating teachers. Interactive interviewing approach was employed (Corbin & Morse, 2003) to access "teacher stories" and "stories of teachers" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) with each interview lasting from one to two hours in one or two sessions. The interviews were mainly conducted in Farsi for the participants to feel comfortable, but they were free to choose or switch to English if and when they preferred. The focus was on creating safe, non-judgmental spaces for teachers to open up and reflect on their job to produce unhindered stories. However, if the researcher thought that the story is incomplete, she would interrupt to ensure efficient recalling, recounting and deep reflection.

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Semi-structured interviews were used because of the tractability that is experienced by both the participants and researchers. As Judger (2016, p.2) stated that most of the studies use semi-structured interviews "to get multiple perspectives, augmented by documentary sources of evidence." Cook (2008) explained that in a usual semi-standardized interview, the researcher has more guidance over the direction of the conversation and discussed content than in a non-directive data collection approach; but still the informants are not restricted in elaboration or changing the course of the interview into other related areas.

The interview questions were 16 in number, out of these 16 questions, the first five were related to demographic information, the next four questions were related to teachers' conceptions to their own online PI and the elements influencing their online PI, the next four questions were about CoP and its effect on their online PI, the last questions dealt with teachers' future plans and their career. Each interview continued for about 20 to 25 minutes. The questions given for the interview were taken from (Weiner & Torres, 2016; Yilmaz, 2016) with some slight changes are given in appendix A. Because of the Covid 19 pandemic, the interview questions were asked on the WhatsApp application with prior information, for some it was emailed. Consequently, interview related to five focus group were organized online on Amjad Platform, (a localized blue button platform) to acquire interactional data derived from group collaboration and interaction. Individual interview questions aimed to know the teachers' conceptions about their online PI, and the different elements that influenced their online PI, identity, and CoP. For the focus group interviews, teachers were divided into five groups, and information about collaboration and interactions in CoP was achieved through semi-structured interviews. (refer appendix).

Data Set Two: Focus Group Discussion

The strength of the focus group as a method for data collection prevails in its capability to mobilize participants to answer to and discuss and comment on one another's views. In turn, statements received are challenged, extended, developed, undermined, or qualified in ways that produce deep data for the researcher. The focus group was really a group interview that used the interaction among teachers as a source of information. Here, the researchers introduce the focus of the group, the researcher introduced the questions to smoothly start the discussion. These allowed group members to respond to problems raised by others or identifying agreements and disagreements among group members. The researchers set the time limit for the discussion. The discussions were recorded transcribed and coded.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews, was carefully transcribed and analyzed. For analysis of the information, a thematic analysis approach was applied, and different themes were accomplished from the data. Narrative analysis, which entailed thematic analysis was conducted at two different levels: (a) individual interviews (b) focus group interviews. Both the individual and focus group interviews were categorized into four contexts. The information was analyzed, and the pertinent texts were combined in one report. For analyzing the first part of the interview, which was related to Iranian English institute teachers' PI, the above-mentioned three elements that affected teachers 'online PI; admiration and relationship, self-efficacy and competency, future plans and career aims were considered.

The first step was transcribing the content of interviews and constructing texts. Information of the interviews disclosed the first chief motifs i.e., teacher online PI and their identity conceptions. From the analysis Five sub-motifs appeared: teacher function, competency, future plans, admiration, and relation. The relevant data was analyzed, and codes were given for

the main motifs, for the sub- motifs different coding was performed, and codes were taken into account, after coding a comparison was performed.

Research Results

The first motif or theme which was TPI and teachers' conceptions about their own PI was revealed from the data collected from interviews. There were initially four themes but during the interviews, a new theme, teachers' role and function in online classes stemmed in their interviews according to the teachers' perspectives. This online teachers' role and function entailed teachers' essential characteristics such as, being flexible, patient, dedicated, fair, having positive attitude flexibility, and particularly effective communicators, which is very essential in online classes. Ultimately, eight major themes were generated from the data regarding online teaching and the main characteristics that can impact teachers' PI construction in online teaching. In what follows the findings are presented with regard to each of the eight core themes that were generated from the data including: a) being patient, b) fairness, c) dedication and positive attitude, d) streamlined communicator, e) self-efficacy and competence, f) future prospects and plans, and g) appreciation. The findings regarding each theme are presented separately for the individual interviews and focus group discussions. To better illustrate the findings, extracts from the interviews are presented under each theme. The extracts are selected to present the prevailing views and opinions and best caption the theme being presented.

Flexibility

Individual Interviews

In the individual group, the majority of the teachers' idea was that the connection between the teachers and students should reflect flexibility, according to them this tightens their relationship with their students, and a close bond comes into existence. The mainstream literature of effective teaching shows that rigid approach to education is not the best practice and may not result in productivity and optimized learning outcomes (Pearson, 2007). Rather, research has shown that effective teachers adapt their instruction to meet the needs of diverse students and situations (Parsons et al., 2011). Consider the following statement by a male teacher:

> *"Flexibility is reflected in the teacher-student relationship and can affect the teacher's performance. I think the most important aspect of a teacher's identity is the kind of character, the personality that they assume in a classroom. So, they either choose to be flexible in the class or very rigid and I think this influences their performance throughout the whole semester."*

Another teacher also commented:

> *"For me, I believe that teachers should have this background where they are flexible when it comes to dealing with students inside the class. They also have to be understanding and be friendly but not a friend as there have to be limits and boundaries. The teacher's flexibility can determine the kind of rapport they build with learners and of course the outcomes of the class."*

The participating teachers also stated that a teacher should be able to understand the students. It is the duty of the teacher to create a friendly and low-anxiety classroom atmosphere inside the class, which in turn will affect the teacher and learners' motivation (Pickett & Fraser, 2010; Young, 1991). This is possible when a teacher is flexible, at least to some extent.

Focus Group Discussions

According to the majority of the focus group teachers' conceptions, the teacher's role and function in the online classes during this Covid-19 has some crucial characteristics that a teacher should possess. In all the five focal groups, the teachers emphasized the vitality of flexibility in the teaching profession. Most of the teachers mentioned that in an online class they cannot be too rigid and strict but their friendly relationship with the students was an important factor, they also said that they should not only be accessible but also professional at the same time and should have command of the language and technology. According to them, there was a dramatic change in the role of teachers, in online classes the teacher in these classes is just the facilitator and a streamlined communicator (see also Klein et al., 2004; Álvarez et al., 2009), while developing competencies for online teachers, re-examined the competencies for face-to-face settings and came to the conclusion that competencies for online teachers were not substantially different from those in face-to-face settings at a high level of abstraction. The teachers also referred to the isolated environment of teachers and stated that comprehending the effects of this isolated environmental change on teachers' identity is vital as it can influence the instructional for comprehending and affecting teachers' cognitive process of instructional decision-making (see Anderson et al., 2017).

According to the focus group interviews, the teachers' idea was that maybe there are some reasons that a teacher is not flexible. They suggested some factors that can force a teacher to be strict. These factors include lack of experience, small age difference, fear of losing authority, fear of losing control, different social backgrounds, and maybe the lack of eye contact.

Being Patient

Individual Interviews

The teachers had the same idea of focal groups. The teachers announced that we can control the online classes just by good relationships and patience.
Teacher X said

"I asked my student to answer a question, he said to me "I am driving I cannot answer you". I said to him this is your class time you should be at home and pay attention to your class. He replied, "I did not want to miss your class."

I had nothing to say but thank him. We should be patient and give time to our students. "One positive point of online classes is the setting; the students can be in their class anywhere. I would like to add here that listening with patience well is one of the most important skills needed to be an online teacher."

Focus Group Discussions

The teachers in the focus group consistently pointed to the importance of being patient as a main characteristic of qualified online teachers. According to them in online classes, the professional and personal lives have been mingled. The students come late to the classes, do not respond to teachers' questions, sometimes when they are asked to read something they say that I do not have books, they are not at home, etc. Here the teachers should not lose their patience but try to control themselves. It is a fact that in online classes the control of teachers is lessened. They stated that patience is a crucial character that a teacher should possess. They also pinpoint that the teachers should be very patient with the low pace students, it should not slip off their mind that some students' pace might be slower than their peers, online classes demand more patience from the teachers. Furthermore, teachers need to be objective in some situations because students might behave in a particular way that requires a certain amount of patience and flexibility.

Fairness

Individual Interviews

Most of the teachers' view was that one of the characteristics of a good teacher is that she/he should treat the students equally, especially in online classes usually teachers try to give more importance to the students who are active, and the other students are neglected. In this way some students are given more importance than the others. For example, in conducting class discussions some students' role should not be more colorful, but the teachers should pay attention that all of them should be treated equally, of course some of them may need the teachers' help more than the others. The following comment captures all teachers' positions regarding fairness as the quality of an online teacher:

> *If teachers build a strong rapport with learners, the classes will be more productive and successful; however, this is not enough in online classes. In online classes, teachers should give more attention in treating all the students equally whether fast or slow-paced or high or low achievers. They should feel that they are receiving equal attention and care and opportunities."*

Teachers should not forget that along with the students in online classes one of the parents or guardians is present. Teachers have different roles in online classes, they are facilitators, guiders, controllers, caretakers, evaluators (e.g., Jaques and Salmon, 2007; Harasim, 2017), if they are unresourceful and do not perform these roles appropriately, they might encounter some ethical problems such as: being biased by paying more attention to some more active students and ignoring the passive ones, being minimalist in their efforts to optimize the learning opportunities, being unintentionally disrespectful to learners, and being indifferent to their needs.

Focus Group Discussions

Focal groups concluded that teachers should be fair, it is not important whether it is a face-to-face class or online class. If teachers are partial, they will spoil the good relationship between them and the students, being partial may affect the learning outcome of the class. One of the vital characteristics of a good teacher is being fair with all the students. Most of the teachers on this ground had the same view and were in favor of being fair. All their ideas have been grouped as follows, students should be treated fairly in classes, which will encourage students to respect and tolerate each other. This will help students to learn how to live responsibly in societies.

Dedication and Positive Attitude

Individual Interviews

According to the focal groups' interview, the teachers' idea was that one of the colorful elements in the development of a passion for teaching is teachers' dedication to students and learning. Globally it has been accepted that the distinguishing feature of a teacher is her/his dedication. They said it is important for them to build a positive relationship between themselves and students. Sense of responsibility is important for the teachers. They stated that teachers should be an inspiring model and guider in the class. According to the teachers' interview, their responsibilities have increased in online classes. All the teachers in all five groups had the perspective that a positive attitude motivates students. It is an essential feature of a good teacher.

Teacher Y: "Teachers must have a sense of responsibility, this will result in mutual understanding and respect. I believe in give respect and take respect."

Focus Group Discussions

Most of the teachers thought that the most important thing for the teachers is that they should have passion for teaching. Their idea was that if you do not have a passion for teaching you cannot show yourself or progress. They said dedication and a positive attitude are the two vital qualities that a good teacher should possess, these features are very essential for building a good relationship between students and teachers. They revealed that teachers should be very particular about the way they behave, speak, react, because as teachers they are samples for the students, these things can have a direct impression on the way the students behave, that is why a teacher should positively impress the students as this gives way to create a positive learning environment.

Streamlined Communicator

Individual Interviews

Majority of the teachers (nearly 95%) believed that two major factors can largely impact on teachers' identity as well as the way online classes are run, namely, mastery over the language and knowledge of technology or technological literacy. Teachers' identity is completely washed out. Their idea was that the rapid change had an effect on most of them and at the beginning when the time of class was near, they were in blues and frustrated, one major thing for this was isolation, and these things affected their whole nature of being a teacher. They also emphasized that streamlined communication means you are not only giving infinite ways to interact with your students, but also building an effective relationship with each of them.

Teacher z *"Instructions given online must be frequent, sound, and employ highly interactive designs and content to ensure communication has taken place. Teachers must understand the need for keeping in touch with every student. Actually, the value of feedback increases in the online classes as there is ample of information, but no filters to streamline it."*

Focus group Interview

As nearly all of the teachers in the focus had the same view, it was turned on to a single quoted view which is as follows:

"When we wanted to start our online classes first, we had the sense of skepticism and doubt, along with negative notions that online learning is not effective. Lost opportunities of interacting on regular basis with peers and teachers. Sense of isolation, lack of interaction with students, threat of losing authority of class. We teachers started our classes with so much of negative energy. One more blue point was there, technology. All these things resulted in changing identities. After taking in training classes in our institutes and fighting with our self this semester we could know what we have to do. Our students in online classes need a high level of appreciation. It is crystal clear for us that our students want teachers who are flexible, friendly, and streamlined communicators. We can stand the challenges and know these complex times require prompt realization, we have to adapt our practices and transform that best support online learners. Our teacher identity is continually renegotiated as we are trying to support our role in the online classes."

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Self-Efficacy and Competence

The second characteristic of teachers PI considered was Self- Efficacy. Self-efficacy involves teachers' teaching practices, organization, and management skills (Bandura, 1977). The participating teachers pointed to various factors influencing their perception of their own self-efficacy which are presented below.

Individual Interviews

According to the individual interviews, teachers' behavior, meaning their manner and their treatment with the students are two important factors that reflect teachers' self-efficacy. They also referred that the student's progress and performance show how effective the teachers are, majority of the teachers pointed that. It was explained by many teachers that their effectiveness is measured by students' progress. All the participants of the study insisted that efficiency and organization are interrelated.

In addition, the teachers stated that the teachers who had a higher sense of competence and self-efficacy could tackle the online classes better than the teachers who had low sense of competence and self- efficacy. They said that high self-efficacy and a high sense of competence could promote positive perceptions towards technology-based teaching, improve learning and increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Consider the following comment by one of the female teachers:

> *"When the teacher is confident about their mastery over the language and over the use of technology, they can manage the classes better. That's because they know they are equipped with the required tools to run a successful class. They feel positive and they can transfer this to their students. This gives them the sense that they are efficient teachers, and their learners are progressing because of their effective teaching."*

Online teachers' efficacy is tempted by various causes, for example, problems and difficulties with technology, not having experience in online teaching, poor internet connection that results in losing connection with students, inadequate comprehension of online pedagogical knowledge, and time-consuming online teaching items, isolated environment, lack of eye contact, school administrative processes, and unsatisfactory student academic advancement.

Focus Group Discussion

In the following focus group discussion, the teachers discussed about three topics, decision making, issue solving, and skills related to organization in online classes. The skills which they have to develop in relation to teaching and management in online classes.
Nearly all of the teachers had the same idea. The foremost aspect that comes to your mind when you talk about organization is that the teacher should go fully prepared for the class, the novice teachers with their elaborated lesson plans and experienced teachers with a short lesson plan. It should be clear what the teacher is going to do in the class, how she/he is going to transfer their knowledge. After the discussion the teachers concluded that in online classes not only issue solving, but decision making is also linked to the teachers' skills of organization.

Future Trajectories

When the teachers were questioned on this topic of their future plans, most of them wanted to continue for their PhD course. Consider the following excerpt by one of the teachers recounting her future career plans and prospects:

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"I would like to involve in activities that help with my professional development, and I believe that graduate studies can better prepare me for my teaching career and equip me with more profound theoretical and practical knowledge of the subject matter and methodologies."

These were the indications of their extreme involvement to their occupation, pure motivation for professional advancement, progress, and competency. The participants' idea was that teachers are always in line with learning, there is no end to the learning if they have no barriers they should continue with their education and research. As Hawk et al., (2016) argued that "teacher learning is crucial as it affects their PI strongly and improves their chances for future occupations".

Appreciation

Some teachers' idea was that it is a vital point to be appreciated by the supervisors as clear from the following comment by a female teacher:

"Appreciation is very important. My institute and my supervisors really support me, which definitely affects my teaching, motivation, and eagerness to become a better teacher. First, observations, second, teacher autonomy; third, a place that encourages you, these things give you positive energy and you always go to class with something new."

Following this statement, it could be argued that appreciation by supervisors, mentors, managers, and administrators enhances motivation and teachers' commitment to their profession and investment in their practice and professional development. Teachers should be motivated and supported by the supervisors. This motivation will give them the sense of attachment to the place where they work, and this really has an effect on the teachers' identity. Class observations and reflective teaching, and its advantages were also said by the teachers.

Discussion

Online Professional Identity

Regarding the first research question, the teachers' ideas were nearly the same and it can be said that there were no meaningful differences between their perspectives. From the answers to the interview questions given by the teachers, four chief motifs stemmed. After considering the responses, the participants concluded that the most important factors that influenced their identity in online classes were the isolated environment, command of the language, and technology. They further added that it was difficult and as the classes were online, the classes were student-centered, and it was really difficult to cope up with technology. The other factor that was referred to, was losing eye contact, most of the teachers said in some cases only the teachers' webcam was on, and the students' web cam was off. They stated that eye contact was very important to build a friendly relationship and controlling. Many teachers informed that they had training classes that helped them to reconstruct their identities, but it was difficult as they did not experience before. According to the teachers after one term they could get their self-confidence back.

The first theme that stemmed as mentioned before was the teacher's role and, which is vital in online classes. According to the teachers, being flexible, patient, and friendly was very important. As the teachers stated, teachers in online classes should be more flexible, somewhat in between strict and soft, the best term to be used can be lenient and professional too. For a well-disciplined class, the rules must be crystal clear, this will result in a positively productive

learning environment. They also stated that a teacher should be able to understand the students, it is the duty of the teacher to create a friendly atmosphere inside the class, which in turn will affect the teacher's motivation. They concluded that teachers in online classes have variable roles as a course facilitator, counselor, guider, controller, instructor, helper, and a friend, but not an authority. In a similar way, Jaques and Salmon (2007) and Harasim (2017) posited that successful online teaching is not merely the matter of adopting the latest technologies, but highly depends on effective online pedagogies, critical human skills, understanding, as well as teachers' presence in various roles to create collaborative, transformative online learning processes. It is difficult for teachers to attract them to online classes and according to the results, they have to play all their skills and tricks. All these features influence the students, need to be positive, and also professional. Results showed that teachers declared that the effectiveness of their instructional and teaching practices influence their self-efficacy (Cooper et al., 2020; Hatlevik, 2017).

According to the results, the teachers' course preparation in online classes is elaborated and vital that affects the teacher's confidence. One more point the teachers pointed was the command of the language. As revealed without the command of the language a teacher cannot survive in an online class. Teachers' self-efficacy related to teachers' skills of managing and organizing the online classes were also mentioned.

According to the teachers, appreciation is something that has a direct effect on motivation. If the teachers are appreciated for their good efforts and work, the teachers' motivation and energy doubles. The administration system affects teachers' PI directly. It enhances self-confidence and competence. They also pointed that when teachers support each other, a close relationship comes into existence and that is support, support for each other, support for the community of teachers. The result also illuminated that when teachers in COP see that the other teachers have the same problem and the experienced teachers help them, they feel a sense of belonging, mutual trust, and confidence, and this, in turn, helped them to validate their professional identity and even build a stronger identity as a teacher (Goktepe & Kunt, 2021; Fraga-Cañadas, 2011; Santos & Arroio, 2013; Teng, 2020).

The data obtained from the interviews revealed that teaching online is a demanding job and a teacher is always a learner, always in the process of learning more and more being better and better. According to the teachers interviewed there is no end to it, and they are always in process of development, their identities are reshaped and reconstructed again and again.

The next aspect of teachers' PI stemmed from the question related to their future trajectories and plans. Many teachers were continuing with their future studies. According to the results, the teachers' idea was that high qualification does affect the PI. They stated experience and the training classes they had in the institute helped them to reconstruct their TPI, even the workshops which were held by the institutes and the observation of the online classes of some good teachers also had a colorful role in reconstructing their PI. Therefore, these were the results of the teachers' interviews that supported the study's first research question.

Communities of Practice

This second research question was devised to examine the benefits, involvement, experience, and effect of being a member of CoP on online TI. All the teachers without any exception stated that CoP is very beneficial, and they shared their problems, solutions, experience here. All of them were sailing in one ship each of them trying to help the other trying to solve the problems finding new ways of attracting the students in online classes, tackling the technology problems. According to them, these communities helped them reconstruct their identities and had a colorful role in bringing back their confidence. These CoPs have created an encouraging learning environment (see also Mak & Pun, 2015). Based on the teachers'

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interviews, a significant number of teachers regarded CoP, as being highly influencing on their PI. Furthermore, the results of the interviews revealed that these communities help them to upgrade their teaching practices, their skills, sharing new ideas, mutual learning, cooperative work, being more efficient, planning lessons, competency, self-efficacy, assignments; all these elements affect the teachers' PI. In a similar vein, Korthagen's (2010) work in the context of teacher learning and behavior revealed that participation in concrete activities in one's social context is a deeply influential factor in how teachers perceive information and then later transfer this information to personal schema and theory and accordingly identity developments that occur in specific communities of practice, shape the ways in which teachers understand and weigh information that relates to their self-efficacy beliefs as according to Takahashi (2011), teachers co-construct their efficacy beliefs in shared practices. In the context of this present study, one such aspect that was pointed out by the teachers and emphasized was being up to date, which can be achieved through the national and international workshops and enhance their identity development and self-efficacy. Based on the data collected, majority of the teachers regarded the workshops as influential CoP.

Conclusions and Implications

As the results revealed, there is a TPI shift of English language institute teachers moving from face-to-face to online classes. Being a member of a CoP is a must for an online English language institute teacher. According to the results, CoP takes care of involving teachers in social learning and entails them in a productive environment.

The implications of the study are as follows, (a) teachers' communities exchange their experiences, knowledge, build their self-confidence (b) teachers' efficacy and competence support their extraneous acknowledgment via experiencing, observing, formal and informal Cop, (c) being a member of CoP gives a sense of mutual connection with other teachers from different institutes, encourages mutual support and learning, helps to be up to date, (d) Teachers in online classrooms should be flexible, streamlined communicators who adapt and transform their practices to support students as online learners.

This study suggests that TPI can be supported in different ways. To begin with, as the classes are online, there should be some training courses for the teachers to provide them with a realistic view of the environment of online classes and what they should expect. As most of the teachers reflected in their interview that they reconstructed their PI and even for the experienced teachers there was stress and tension as the online classes create isolation and also the use of technology. The training programmers' objective and novice teachers, experienced online teachers and administrators should understand that appropriate preparation and mentorship for new online teachers is essential to successful teaching and learning in online courses in all disciplines. Furthermore, the other prominent issue revealed in the study was the significance of self-efficiency and job responsibility, command of language and technology acquaintance which should be essential for online language institute teachers. Their performance in the online classes is directly and positively affected by their improvements, advancements, which in turn will have a positive effect on their teaching performance, PI, and occupational morals. However, it must be noted here that the results obtained in this study must be treated with caution as this study, much like any other research study, suffers from several limitations including, the small sample which cannot be considered as fully representative of all teachers in this context. There is no guarantee that the results obtained here are shared across other similar contexts. They may be indigenous to this EFL context or even to the participants in this study. There is also the issue of data sources. The data was collected from interviews and focus group discussions, but there were no reflective journals or artefacts. Despite these limitations, it must be noted that the findings warrant the need for a more serious consideration of the issues discussed here and

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more informed discussion as well as further research in the areas of teachers online professional identity (re)construction and the impact of participation in virtual or face-to-face communities of practice in sustaining resilience in the time of crisis and continuing professional development for a better and more effective experience of online education for both teachers and learners.

Declaration of Interest

Authors declare no competing interest.

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