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A Narrative Study of In-service EAP Teachers' Cognition on Language Teacher Role Identities

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ABSTRACT

The present exploratory study probed Iranian in-service EAP teachers' cognitions on language teacher role identities. Life history narratives and teaching philosophy statements were employed to collect qualitative data from nine Iranian in-service EAP teachers at one of the state universities in Iran. The data included the teachers' descriptions of their teaching philosophies as well as their evaluations and interpretations of their prior teachers' ways of being language teachers. Inductive analysis of the data allowed the researchers to identify Eight role identities including 'teachers as creators and users of learning opportunities'; 'teachers as selectors and users of teaching/learning materials'; 'teachers as assessors and evaluators'; 'teachers as researchers'; 'teachers as realizers and facilitators of the development of learners' (full) potentials'; 'teachers as observers of ethicality'; 'teachers as learners'; and, 'teachers as teacher educators'. In addition to providing a typology of teacher role identities that Iranian language teachers identify with, the study might promise some implications for language teacher education and teacher education research.

Keywords: in-service EAP teachers; life history; role identity; teacher cognition; teaching philosophy statement

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Introduction

Identity has been recognized as an important factor in SLA research (Norton, 2013; Tajeddin & Adeh (2016); Vasilopoulos, 2013). Recognizing teachers as key to the success of language education and acknowledging the role of their personal values, assumptions and prior experiences in their professional development (Richards, 2008), researchers began to consider the study of teacher cognition (Borg, 2003; Golombek & Doran, 2014) and identity (Singh & Richards, 2006) high in the agenda. Relying on their own cognitions on teaching, learning and being a teacher, teachers construct their professional identities and theories of teaching (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Accordingly, teacher development was conceptualized “as the appropriation and resistance to skills and knowledge for the purpose of remaking identity” (Singh & Richards, 2006, p. 153).

Teacher cognition research seeks to understand and demonstrate “who” teachers are and “what they already know, and what they actually do when they teach” (Graves, 2009, p. 117). Similarly, teacher professional identity research focuses on identifying how teachers conceptualize their professional roles (Lasky, 2005) and see themselves as teachers (Burns & Richards, 2009). Both teacher cognition and identity studies help researchers gain insights into teachers’ “ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’, and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Thus, as Miller (2009) highlights, teachers’ cognitions cannot be separated from their identities.

Despite the contribution of teacher cognition (Johnson, 2006) and identity research (Martal & Kanunen, 2014) to second language teacher education, there is only scanty attention to these studies in Iranian L2 context. Atai and Fatahi-Majd (2014), Atai and Khazaee (2014) and Abednia (2012) are the few studies investigating teacher cognition and/or identity. Moreover, despite the advantage of narrative inquiry in investigating teacher identity (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Higgins & Sandhu, 2014), there is a lack of narrative studies in these research areas, in general (Liu & Xu, 2011), and in Iranian context, in particular. The present study drew on narrative inquiry to investigate Iranian in-service teachers’ cognitions on being a language teacher. The study, thus, aimed to investigate how language teachers describe their ways and identify a typology of role identities teachers prioritize accordingly.

Language Teacher Cognition and Identity

Teacher cognition is concerned with the “the unobservable dimension of teaching- teachers’ mental lives” (Borg, 2009, p. 163) and is defined as “what language teachers think, know, believe, and do” (Borg, 2003, p. 8). Golombek (2014, p. 103) focusing on the interaction between cognition and emotion argues that this definition should include what teachers feel about their knowledge, assumptions and practices, as well. According to Richards teacher cognition encompasses “the mental lives of teachers, how these are formed, what they consist of, and how teachers’ beliefs, thoughts and thinking processes shape their understanding of teaching and their classroom practices” (2008, p. 166).

Identity is defined by Danielewicz (2001, p. 10) as “our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are.” Similarly, Burns and Richards (2009, p. 5) define teacher identity as “how individuals see themselves and how they enact their roles within different settings”. Although there is not much consensus on the concept of teacher identity, scholars agree on its importance (Beijard, 2004). In this study, teacher identity refers to the in-service teachers’ understanding of “what it means to be a language teacher” (Singh & Richards, 2006, p. 168) and how they conceptualize teacher roles, qualifications and commitments.

Narrative analysis promises advantages to teacher cognition (Bell, 2002) and identity studies (Beijard, 2004; Søreide, 2006). Narrative inquiry enables researchers to effectively “uncover the personal and social meanings” teachers hold (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014, p. 50). Furthermore, teachers’ own stories about their learning experiences can illustrate their “underlying insights and assumptions” (Bell, 2002, p. 208) and help their “deeply hidden assumptions to surface” (p. 209).

Theoretical Approach

Conceptually, the study draws on different conceptualizations of teacher identity such as claimed versus assigned identity (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), positioning theory (Søreide, 2006) and role identity (Farrell, 2011). Positioning theory “examines the types of subject positions, or subjectivities, that people assume in telling stories” (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014, p. 50). Accordingly, subject positions are used by teachers “as narrative resources to position themselves as teachers” (Søreide, 2006, p. 528). According to Farrell, “Teacher role identity includes teacher beliefs, values, and emotions about many aspects of teaching and being a teacher” (Farrel, 2011, p. 54). Through narratives, the teachers find the opportunity to provide evaluation and descriptions of their prior teachers’ roles and qualifications as well as negotiate their own identities (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014). In other words, the teachers are likely to make their own views of being a teacher understood through “identification with or rejection of” their prior teachers’ ways of being a teacher (Søreide, 2006, p. 529). As teacher role identities are actualized through a number of activities and conditions teachers use/create in their teaching practices, it is reasonable to explore the activities and conditions they identify as essential for fulfilling each role identity. Guided by the assumption that the stories teachers narrate are “shaped by their own knowledges, values, feelings, and purposes” (Beijard, 2004, p. 21), this paper explored language teachers’ cognitions on teacher role identities. Teacher role identity includes professional roles, responsibilities and qualifications that the participating teachers prioritize in their life-history narratives as well as teaching philosophy statements.

Review of the Related Literature

The literature on language teacher identity shows that the studies cluster around a number of themes. Focusing on the linguistic background of teachers, a group of studies addressed the differences between professional identities of native and nonnative speaker teachers (e.g., Park, 2012). The second line of teacher identity studies probed teachers’ professional identities in relation with the features of their social identity including race, gender, ethnicity and class (e.g., Simon-Maeda, 2004). The third group examined, the process of teachers’ identity (re)construction. Many of these studies explored the development and negotiation of identities by language teachers in the contexts where they needed to reconstruct their identities (Liu & Xu, 2011; Tsui, 2007). Some examined the effects of different activities and courses on teachers’ identity formation (e.g., Abednia, 2012; Franzak, 2002; Maclean & White, 2007). A sub-group of these studies also addressed the role of different factors on teacher identity construction such as context (e.g., Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson & Fry, 2004) and prior experiences (e.g., Olsen, 2008, for a comprehensive review of research on teacher identity see Izadinia (2013) and for language teacher identity see Martel and Wang (2014). Finally, there are studies which examined the type of identities a group of teachers in a particular context display (e.g., Abednia, 2012; Atai & Khazaei, 2014; Farrell, 2011).

Farrell (2011) examined the discussion of three experienced female teachers working as college ESL practitioners in Canada to identify the number of professional role identities they collectively displayed. They found sixteen professional role identities and classified them under three main

categories of *teacher as manager*, *teacher as professional*, and *teacher as acculturator*. In Iran, a couple of studies addressed the issue of teacher identity, too. Abednia (2012) examined the influence of a critical pedagogy course on reshaping Iranian language teachers' identity towards transforming the critical aspects of their understanding of being a teacher. Actually, he investigated these teachers' understandings of their professional roles prior to and after the intervention. He found that the teachers' understandings of their roles especially the critical aspects of their understanding were limited. To answer the research question, 'what features mainly characterize EFL student teachers' professional identity prior to critical EFL teacher education?', he relied on the teachers' own evaluations of themselves, their qualities, roles and responsibilities. He reported that their teachers' identity features reflected "lack of mission" and "lack of a 'professional' identity" (p. 171) in terms of critical view of being a teacher. The prevalent features of their identities were found to be language proficiency and technical skills of teaching.

In a very recent study, Atai and Khazaei (2014), investigated EAP teachers' (two ELT teachers and two content instructors) cognitions on their professional roles and of the knowledge teachers need to have to successfully fulfill their EAP roles. They found that the cognitions of ELT teachers on different aspects of teacher knowledge were relatively limited and varied as they were not clear on the goals of EAP program and their own roles as EAP teachers. Despite reflecting some evidence of similarity between their cognitions, content teachers were also found to have limited understanding of EAP goals, teacher roles and qualifications. In a separate part of their study, the researchers explored the teachers' recognition of different constituents of professional identities. The participants identified eight constituents of identity including autonomy, interaction, attitudes and emotions, self-efficacy, efficacy doubts and reflection, knowledge, and experience as the attributes of their teacher identity. The ELT teachers' lack of recognition of the identity constituents of autonomy, interaction, commitment and job satisfaction distinguished them from content teachers. Unlike the content teachers, ELT teachers were found to disagree in conceptualizing language teacher knowledge types and aspects of professional identities.

Since language teacher identity is an under-attended topic in Iranian context and not much is known about teachers' understandings of teacher identities, this study aimed to uncover the teachers' views of who language teachers, including themselves, should be, what they need to do and the type of relationship they need to have with their students (Burns & Richards, 2009; Farrell, 2011). Relying on narrative inquiry, the study is guided by the assumption that reflecting on the activities and qualities of their prior teachers, the teachers can display who they think a language teacher is and what expertise, qualifications and roles she needs to have. Focusing on teachers' understanding of their roles, responsibilities and qualifications, the study explored "what they feel and believe about teaching and being a teacher" (Farrell, 2015, p. 55).

Accordingly, the present study was an attempt to find a typology of the role identities Iranian EAP teachers believe a language teacher should be identified with. Employing narrative inquiry, the study explored a group of EAP teachers' cognitions on and understandings of the language teachers' roles, responsibilities, commitments and qualifications. To this end, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are In-service EAP teachers' cognitions on language role identities (including teachers' professional roles, responsibilities and qualifications) when they reflect on their prior experiences of language education as language learners?
2. What major activities and conditions the participating teachers identify as essential for fulfilling each role identity?

Method

The Context

The data analyzed and interpreted in this study is part of the data collected in a larger study aimed to provide an in-depth description of the teachers' experience of learning as they were involved in a teacher education course inspired by premises and perspectives of the sociocultural theory (Azabdaftari; 2013; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Professional learning was operationally defined as transformation in the teachers' current cognitions on EAP education. The purpose of the main study was threefold: First, to develop and implement a teacher education course capable of providing learning opportunities that facilitate transformation in the teachers' current cognitions on EAP education and EAP teacher role identities; second, to document, examine and describe the processes as well as means involved in teacher learning; and third, to develop an EAP teacher education framework based on the findings of the study. To have a better understanding of the teachers' current cognitions and to trace possible transformations in their cognitions, the study involved three phases. In the first phase (pre-course-phase), a wide range of data collection methods were used to explore their current cognitions. In the while-course-phase, the teachers' experience as they professionally learned was documented and examined. In the post-course phase, further evidence was probed for the transformation in their cognitions as occurred in the while-the-course phase. The present study was based on the narrative inquiry conducted prior to the implementation of the teacher education course to make explicit the cognitions of teachers on teaching, learning and being a language and/or an EAP teacher. Accordingly, the data included the in-service teachers' current understandings of and cognitions on different aspects of being a language teacher, such as language teacher roles, responsibilities and qualifications.

The study was conducted at University of Iran (random names are used to keep the participating teachers' identities and information confidential). This university has served tens of thousands of students perusing their degrees in a wide range of disciplines. More than three hundred fulltime faculty members and a large number of part-time instructors taught the courses. All students at this university need to pass a three-credit general English course and at least a two, three or four-credit EAP course.

Participants

Through purposeful sampling and adopting the maximum variation strategy (Patton, 2015), nine in-service EAP teachers (six ELT teachers and three content teachers) were selected from among the 40 (or more) EAP practitioners at the University of Iran. The criteria used for selecting teachers were their EAP teaching experience (at least one semester of EAP teaching) and their willingness to participate in the study. Prior to sampling, the majority of the EAP teachers were initially interviewed by the third researcher working at the same university to meet the established sampling criteria. The teachers came from a variety of different backgrounds including their age (27-57), educational background, academic degree and rank, gender, and teaching experience. After being interviewed, all the teachers willing to participate in the study had the chance to be selected. The teachers were divided into two groups of content and ELT teachers. As a result, the "information rich" participant teachers in each group were selected (Patton, 2015, p. 264). A summary of their background and subject-specific characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
A summary of the participants' background and subject-specific characteristics

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Age/ gender</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>EGP proficiency*</i>	<i>EAP/ teaching experience</i>
<i>Arya</i>	Early 40/ M	Ph.D. Asso. Prof.	Fisheries	Very Good	7 years /--
<i>Majid</i>	Late 50s/ M	Ph.D. Assist. Prof.	Linguistics	Excellent	17 years/ 25 years
<i>Navid</i>	Early 30s/ M	MA, Instructor	ELT	Excellent	2 years/ 5 years
<i>Diba</i>	Early 30s/ F	MA, Instructor	ELT	Excellent	1 semester/ 7 years
<i>Behdad</i>	Mid 30s/ M	MA, Instructor	Information and knowledge science	Very Good	7 years/ 7 years
<i>Fateh</i>	Late 20s/ M	MA, Instructor	Translation studies	Excellent	1 year/ 4 years
<i>Shayan</i>	Early 30s/ M	MA, Instructor	Linguistics	Excellent	2 years/ 7 years
<i>Hamoon</i>	Early 50s/ M	MA, Instructor	Persian Literature	Good	5 years/--
<i>Mehrab</i>	Mid 30s/ M	MA, Instructor	ELT	Excellent	10 years/ 10 years

Note. ELT= English Language Teaching; M= Male; F= Female; Asso. Prof. = Associate Professor; Assist. Prof. = Assistant professor.

* Determined through the teachers' self-assessment of their language proficiency based on six levels of competence in a foreign language described by the Council of Europe.

Instruments

Life-history narratives

Life history research as one of the genres of narrative inquiry (Cole & Knowle, 2001) was used for data collection to allow teachers to talk about their language education experiences (as language learners). Telling stories, they talked about their education considering broader sociocultural contexts and revealed their thinking, assumptions and emotions (Cole & Knowle, 2001). Life history narratives allow teachers to use "stories to craft coherent visions of their past and present" (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014, p. 55). As persons living and working in the same sociocultural and educational context and experiencing the same education, the researchers were capable of understanding and interpreting the teachers' "personal and social meanings" (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014, p. 50).

A number of interview questions were developed for the ease of data collection (Murray, 2009). The interview questions were designed to encourage teachers to talk about topics associated with their role identities including their professional roles, qualifications and commitments (see Appendix). Accordingly, the research questions were designed in a way to prime them give as much information as possible on the issues and topics more significant to them. The narrators' task was to tell stories about their language learning experiences as learners during their schooling. They could focus on evaluating and interpreting their prior teachers' ways of being teachers.

Instead of the concrete events of their stories, the focus of the study was on eliciting the teachers' "underlying insights and assumptions" (Bell, 2002, p. 208). The narrative inquiry was run in two phases. First, they drafted and provided written stories of their experiences as learners. Then, using their own stories, the researcher probed further their stories through face to face conversation. In this phase, the conversation was run interactively and the questions raised by the researchers were based on the interview questions and also the points that teachers included in their own narratives.

Teaching philosophy statements

To triangulate the results of the study, the participating teachers were asked to provide statements of their philosophy of teaching (Allen, 2011). These statements included their conception of teaching and learning, a description of the ways they taught, their justifications for their use of these methods, their approaches to and methods of assessment, their own interpretations of teacher roles and commitments, and student roles in the process of teaching/learning. Before collecting data, they were clearly informed what could be included in the teaching philosophy statements.

Procedure

The main study was conducted during the winter of 2015 and spring of 2016. In the first semester of the academic year 2015-2016 and in three weeks, the data for the present study was collected. First, the participating teachers were asked to provide their own (written) stories of learning experiences as language learners. They used the interview questions to provide the relevant and as much data as possible. Reviewing the teachers' stories, the researchers conducted a face to face conversation with the teacher learners probing further the ideas they had included and focused on their studies and the themes included in the interview questions. After collecting data through life-history narratives, the teachers were asked to write or orally describe their own teaching philosophies. The English departments' agreement and the participating teachers' informed consent were obtained prior to data collection. The teachers were assured that their anonymity would be preserved and that they could withdraw from the study at any time and for whatever reason(s).

Data Analysis

The researchers drew on qualitative research procedures to collect and analyze the data featured in this study. Since, teacher identity in Iranian context is an under-attended and under-researched area, the present study was exploratory and descriptive (Merriam, 2009) to isolate a typology of language teacher role identities providing basic information on the topic.

The collected data were transcribed verbatim and translated (following Temple & Young, 2005) by the researchers. After putting together the individual teacher-learners' responses to configure unified stories, they were sent back again to the participants to check their stories. Being a colleague to the participants, the third researcher successfully created rapport with the participants. Furthermore, in case of lack of clarity in data or opinions he had the opportunity to individually refer to them for clarification.

Inductive coding of data was used to extract the inherent themes. Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with open, axial and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006) was used to "allow categories to emerge and for relationships between the categories to become apparent" (Harding as cited in Plamberger & Gingrich, 2014, p. 96). During these coding phases the researchers wrote

analytic memos to record their thoughts about and interpretation on coding and categorizing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Saldana, 2009).

Trustworthiness of data was ensured with the establishment of rapport between the third researcher and the participants (Riessman, 2008). This helped the researchers effectively use member-check (Saldana, 2009). Cyclical data analysis (Saldana, 2009) and using constant comparative analysis allowed to compare and contrast the information provided with one teacher with that of all other teachers. Moreover, the segments of data within each teacher's narrative were compared to the other segments of data by the same narrator. Other than the semi-structured interviews, the researchers had several informal interviews and constant contact with the participants (phone and often-time through face to face conversation) for clarification on the ideas. Furthermore, the researcher wrote up field notes on the context, the conversation and content of the interviews.

Findings

Inductive analysis (Creswell, 1998) of the narrative data allowed the researchers to find eight emerging professional role identities for ELT teachers: Teachers as creators and users of learning opportunities; teachers as selectors and users of teaching/learning materials; teachers as assessors and evaluators; teachers as researchers; teachers as realizers of and facilitators of the development of learners' (full) potentials; teachers as observers of ethicality; teachers as learners; and, teachers as teacher educators.

Teachers as Creators and Users of Learning Opportunities

The first role isolated from the teachers' opinions referred to ELT teachers' task of creating and using learning opportunities. They suggested a number of activities and conditions to be created or a number of other activities and conditions to be avoided by ELT practitioners. The major conditions/activities that needed to be avoided are taking test-oriented approaches to teaching, over-relying on memorization, and depicting learning as burdensome. On the other hand, the conditions that appeared to maximize learning opportunities included using methods that build on students' previous learning; giving students the opportunity to use their talents and abilities; using real problems with real challenges and solutions (e.g. thesis presentation and project activities); helping students relate lessons to their own experiences as well as lives and generate their own interpretations; creating the opportunity for interaction; and, being quality oriented in delivering teaching materials.

Example 1

... my task as a teacher is to use strategies and teaching methods that maximize students' learning opportunities. (Arya, teaching philosophy statement).

Example 2

...I did not like their teaching methodology because, being traditional and highly teacher-centered, their teaching lead to almost minimum classroom interaction and participation. (Navid, life history narrative)

Example 3

There was no interaction in English, at least in the classes I experienced. Teachers rarely used target language in English classes. They taught in Persian. (Mehrab, life history narrative)

In addition, comprehensibility of teaching lessons appeared to be a necessary condition for learning as it makes materials more accessible. This could be brought about through providing an overview of the themes of a lesson, directing students what and how to study and attending to the cultural aspects of a text.

Example 4

The main principle of my teaching philosophy is understanding. As a teacher, it's a must for me to make sure about my learners' understanding of the presented materials. (Shayan, teaching philosophy statement)

Teachers' methods of assessment and their use of teacher/peer feedbacks were recognized to significantly affect the learning opportunities, too. That is, only formative assessment, teacher feedbacks (if used for closing the gaps rather than displaying it), and peer feedback if not used merely for finding faults were believed to facilitate learning.

The other major conditions maximizing learning opportunity are taking a correct approach to teaching language skills and components. They suggested that teachers should avoid deductive teaching, use dialogues as a conversation activity rather than a reading text (see Example 9), avoid overreliance on reciting dialogues and texts, and take a bilingual and translation-oriented approach to EFL teaching.

Example 5

Language education in senior high school was a complete failure. The teachers, using a note book, taught grammar forms through formulas in Persian...simple present tense is.... They expected the learners to memorize these rules in Persian. Actually we were learning Persian rather than English...(Arya, life history narrative)

Decreasing the gap between teachers' and learners' roles is another condition that needs to be created by teachers through a number of actions. Avoiding teacher-centered instruction, seeing teachers as the speakers and solution providers and students only as listeners and passive exercise doers, was identified as essential. Of the interesting activities for this purpose, as they suggested, is teachers' participation in conversation with the purpose of challenging students' ideas, as well as producing and receiving comments. This means that teachers need to avoid merely observing and judging learners' interaction. Instead, they should actively participate in interactions and positively contribute to the progress of meaningful interaction.

Example 6

...the third step is to move towards some kind of interactive teaching in classroom. ...We are going to, in fact, put experiences and put our minds together in order to come up with something new in the classroom. (Fateh, teaching philosophy statement)

Flexible implementation of the assigned syllabi is another important condition actualized through avoiding being textbook-oriented. Simultaneously, they believed that teachers should be careful not to create alternative syllabi out of their inability in implementing the designed syllabi.

Example 7

The teachers did not abide by the curriculum. There was Inconsistency among teachers in their teaching methods. Their personal preferences drove their teaching activities. (Shayan, life history narrative)

Example 8

The teachers appeared to understand and interpret the goal of education as following blindly the prescribed syllabi. Rarely a teacher was found to show a little creativity in his/her teaching. (Diba, life history narrative)

Teachers as Selectors and Users of Teaching/Learning Materials

This role identity was specially realized by the teachers. They believed that teachers need to select and use materials which are rich in content through using texts taken from materials other than the prescribed ones such as admired literary masterpieces. In addition, using materials that grant sufficient attention to oral language skills and conversational activities is another important task of ELT teachers. The point they mentioned was that dialogues need to be treated as conversation rather than as reading extracts.

Example 9

No real dialogue was included in the textbooks and teaching activities. Both textbooks and the teachers had a reading approach to the sporadic dialogues... (Shayan, life history narrative)

Selecting and using comprehensible, challenging, non-exam-oriented materials were thought to allow students to generate their own interpretations. They also said that teachers should select and use materials interesting in terms of recency (introducing and discussing recent topics and issues), relevance (relevant to learners' learning purposes) and enjoyment (using funny materials).

Example 10

We had to sit on hard chairs in language laboratory and our professor strictly controlled our behaviors and forced us to have full attention to the tapes and audio materials highly beyond our understanding. (Fateh, life history narrative).

Some materials, they believed, should be avoided such as those which serve to function as key-to-solution sources or view language merely as a system. Also included are materials used for test preparation, those developed by non-native speakers, and those made up of artificially fabricated texts rather than authentic ones.

Example 11

My first grammar professor used a grammar textbook designed and developed by an Iranian writer. We used to read through grammatical rules and memorization. Few authentic examples were found in the textbook and most examples had been artificially fabricated by the author (Fateh, life history narrative).

Example 12

English courses were nothing more than something like using materials providing keys to solution. A text of key-to-solutions, if used by students through self-study, may be more effective than the mainstream EFL courses which rely on such an exam-oriented approach to teaching (Arya, life history narrative)

Teachers as Assessors and Evaluators

The teachers recognized the teacher's task of assessment as an important role. To fulfill this role, they believed, teachers need to match the instructional content with test content. Including interaction tests, using understanding-oriented and meaning-based assessment rather than measuring the amount of memorized materials as well as formative assessment were reported to be determining. Using different forms of assessment, having realistic and reasonable expectations of students' performance, and grading students' performance fairly and equally appeared to them as contributing to the maximization of learning opportunities.

Example 13

The teacher who I remember well, Mr. A.G, was perfect. He taught successfully because he continuously tested our learning giving us many quizzes (Shayan, life history narrative)

Teachers as Researchers

The participating teachers believed that ELT practitioners need to do needs analysis and be responsive to learners' needs. By being 'responsive to learners' needs', they meant caring for students' lacks, being sensitive to learner differences—learning styles and expectations, and taking care of sensitive students. Preparing learner-friendly materials rather than passively following the prescribed textbooks was identified as the measure helping teachers to fulfill their role of needs responsiveness.

Example 14

A good language teacher is a needs and objective analyst. He should be aware of the goals, the present situation and the target situation needs. He should select and use additional materials to compensate for the gaps in the prescribed materials (Majid, life history narrative)

Example 15

The majority of the teachers worked as content deliverers, following the sequence of the assigned textbooks. They didn't care for students lacks and needs as they believed that its students responsibility to improve their lacks. (Mehrab, life history narrative).

Teachers as Realizers and Facilitators of the Development of Students' Full Potentials

They believed this role can be fulfilled through developing all language skills as well as conversational, thinking, data collection, collaboration and critical thinking abilities. Attending to students' whole person and psychological as well as emotional aspects were also identified as important. They suggested that the main condition contributing to the development of these abilities is treating students as solution seekers rather than receivers and avoiding to see teachers only as information and solution providers.

Example 16

Students never got involved in critical thinking activities and their thinking abilities were not attended and developed (Behdad, life history narrative)

Example 17

I have always tried to help learners use all their resources in the process of learning. This way, they not only achieve desired learning, but also develop a number of different abilities... (Arya, teaching philosophy statement)

Teachers as Observers of Ethicality

To fulfill this role, teachers were believed to be required to use and create power relations justly. This can be done through avoiding working as absolute power, and forcing students to yield to teachers' expectations, seeing teachers as a source of information and students as passive receivers of materials. The other commitment pinpointed by the teachers was treating students equally and being careful about inclusion of personal preferences, issues and hostility in their teaching practices.

Example 18

...foreign language learning is a social phenomenon needing high interaction, involvement and participation by parties. When the teacher poses himself as a domineering and absolute power, as I experienced during both BA and MA courses, the interaction, if any, would be mainly mechanical and superficial. (Navid, life history narrative)

The required behaviors, to the participants, were caring for students' success beyond the assigned courses and feeling responsibility for leaving the impression of EFL learning on students. In addition, they thought that students' solutions, different from or better than those of teachers, need to be tolerated; personal preferences, issues and hostility in the process of teaching should be avoided; and, teachers should take care not to be ill-tempered.

Example 19

Some teachers really cared about students' success. That is, they seemed to feel a responsibility beyond teaching. But many of them only taught the lessons through delivering the materials ... (Mehrab, life history narrative)

Example 20

The teachers mainly included personal issues, preferences, misunderstandings and hostilities in teaching process. This, unfortunately, discouraged us all during our schooling (Shayan, life history narrative)

The results showed that the teachers viewed the ELT practitioner committed to doing their best. Thinking this way, they warned teachers against being comfort lovers—being superficial by only doing what is expected of them and functioning to serve only as a deliverer of materials and seeing teaching only as an income source. Furthermore, they should be serious in taking into account that language learning is a complex social phenomenon.

Example 21

The teachers seemed to be comfort-lovers as they only did on surface what was prescribed and expected. The majority of them did not love teaching. They saw teaching only as an income-source... (Diba, life history narrative)

They believed that teachers are responsible for meeting the real goals of education. They conceptualized this goal as increasing students' understanding of the teaching materials. This way, they have a commitment not to make students think the goal is passing the course and not to allow bad learning experiences determine their choice of theory and practice of teaching.

Example 22

I think that the most important responsibility of teachers is fulfilling his moral and faith commitment to teaching... employing recent scientific teaching methods, they are fully committed to prepare students for their future courses of action (Hamoon, teaching philosophy statement).

Teachers as Learners

ELT teachers appeared to be committed to their own learning and professional development which seemed to be done mainly through self-study. The areas of knowledge and expertise teachers need to develop include language knowledge and proficiency as well as knowledge of teaching methods.

Example 23

...besides teaching to students we are going to learn from students (Fateh, teaching philosophy statement)

Example 24

My prior teachers' unsuccessful teaching made me teach differently. The other thing that helped me to teach more effectively was my self-study... (Mehrab, life history narrative).

Teachers as Teacher Educators

The teachers believed that ELT teachers not only teach English to EFL learners but also educate, often unconsciously, future EFL teachers. Accordingly, they need to take responsibility for the consequences of not only using but also extending bad methods of teaching.

Example 25

Many university teachers like their pre-university colleagues, not only used but also extended the wrong approaches and methods of teaching such as teacher-centered classes, giving no place to students' voice and killing the opportunity for interaction (Behdad, life history narrative).

Example 26

One of my challenges in my teaching is to be careful not to use the unsuccessful methods or behaviors used by my prior teachers. I remember that our teachers pretended that the methods they were using were the best one (Diba, life history narrative)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to isolate a typology of the role identities teachers prioritize and are attentive to in the process of describing their ways of being language teachers. Some of the role identities appear to overlap with some other ones. For example, teachers' role of maximizing learning opportunities overlaps with their role of materials selection and use. The role identities have not been weighted and attended to equally. One way of distinguishing between them is through the number of activities/conditions the teachers mentioned and the amount of elaboration they provided to describe how each role can be fulfilled. For example, for the role identities such as 'teachers as creators and users of learning opportunities', 'teachers as selectors and users of teaching/learning materials', 'teachers as realizers of and facilitators of the development of students' full potentials', and 'teachers as observers of ethicality' each individual

teacher described a large number of activities and conditions required for fulfilling each role identity. On the other hand, the amount of the teachers' elaboration, and their attention to the related activities and conditions pertaining to the other role identities was not that much.

The results showed that the teachers ascribe a high value to language teacher' task of maximizing learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). A number of strategies and conditions were identified which were pinpointed in the literature as essential for facilitating student learning. The analysis of teachers' cognition suggests that the teachers are ready to view teaching "as creating conditions for the construction of knowledge and understanding through social participation" rather than seeing it as "transfer of knowledge" (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 6). Similarly, they recognized the role of teachers in selecting, using and even adopting teaching/learning materials. They tried to show the quality of effective materials and the content which positively affect students' learning. Surprisingly, they did not recognize teachers' role and/or ability of materials development (Tomlinson, 2013) despite the fact that they believed teachers should avoid being textbook-oriented. For instance, Diba, the female participating teacher, focuses on the ability and responsibility of teachers in being responsive to learners' needs through preparing and adapting needs responsive materials.

The success of teaching depends on teachers. Teachers should know the principles of teaching and learning and take appropriate teaching approaches and methods to teach effectively gearing to the situation and actual learners even if they had no choice other than using the prescribed textbooks. They can prepare and adapt their own materials. In my opinion, teachers are responsible for the success or failure of teaching/learning as they can control and change everything in the process of teaching. (Diba, life history narrative)

They also found the ELT teacher as observer of ethicality and committed to the development of students' full potentials. Their opinions can be considered in line with current literature which puts a special emphasis on developing students' critical thinking and information gathering abilities, and puts a substantial value on the emotional aspects of learning and considering learners' voice in teaching/learning processes (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). For the assessing activity of teachers, they recognized the role of assessing as influencing language education. Their priorities in assessment such as using formative assessment, employing various forms of assessment or avoiding the assessment activities which have no contribution to students' learning is also supported in the current literature (e.g. Leung & Scott, 2009).

Despite the focus of literature on qualified practitioner research (Allwright, 2005), our teachers defined teachers as researchers only in terms of needs analysis. Their focus on the importance of needs analysis appears to be limited to teachers' intuitive needs assessment as no sign could be found indicating their reference to systematic needs analysis activities. That is, they only recognized its importance. Moreover, teachers' task of research related to SLA, discourse analysis and classroom-based research was given little, if any, attention.

One of the critical roles of teachers is working as learners of teaching (Barduhn & Johnson, 2009) if they want to develop the essential identities of professional teachers. Teachers need to be involved in ongoing teacher development (Johnson, 2006), to keep track of the changes in language teaching knowledge base (Richards & Farrell, 2005), help connect their own constructed practice-based knowledge to theory (Jonson, 2006, p. 242) and enhance the quality of their teaching practices. Accordingly, they need to have access to professional learning opportunities which are collaborative (Edge, 1992), interaction-oriented, and inquiry-based (Graves, 2009). Despite recognition of teachers' responsibility of learning, the results showed that the teachers are unlikely to be teacher researchers willing to inquire into their own practices in their own teaching contexts, and/or consider the contribution of the current research to their profession. It seems that the constructive role of community of practice and collaboration is not well-recognized and

attended by our teachers. Being so, their practice-based knowledge may be constrained by their “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 5).

Finally, the teachers’ role in educating future language teachers was recognized by some of the participating teachers. This is the role which received the least attention and description among other roles identities. The Example 24 used in the result section shows that Behdad tacitly believes language teachers ways of teaching forms “apprenticeship of observation” for the learners who desire to be a language teacher in their future course of action. Accordingly, they have the responsibility not to extend unfavorable methods and approaches of teaching.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to bring about fresh insights into teacher cognition and identity studies in Iranian EFL context. The role identities, activities and conditions teachers prioritized in their cognitions were qualitatively explored and a typology of role identities was identified. The study might have implications for language teachers, teacher educators and teacher identity/cognition researchers. Language teachers may consider the findings in reflecting on their own cognitions and role identities. Language educators may take advantage of the insights gained from the results in designing teacher education courses that address the areas of teacher cognitions and aspect of identities requiring support for transformation. As the results provided basic information on Iranian language teachers’ identity, teacher cognition and identity researchers may consider the findings in their future studies.

Although, a rather larger number of participants and associated stories made it possible to compare more stories and access to more evidence on the stated themes and assumptions, the study was limited by the instruments of data collection. Researchers in their future studies may use other data collection methods such as focus group interviews and observation to enrich data. It was also limited as it did not aim to explore the quality of teachers’ cognitions. Accordingly, the results should be interpreted cautiously. For instance, the teachers’ preference of learner-centeredness approach should not be interpreted as their being learner-centered in their actual teaching practices. Further studies are needed to focus on individual identity roles to examine and depict teachers’ quality of cognitions on each role identity.

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Appendix

Interview questions used to prime the teachers to give as much as information in their life-history narratives.

1. What is your interpretation and evaluation of your prior experiences of language learning?
2. How do you evaluate your prior language teachers' ways of teaching?
3. Do you remember any teacher distinguishable from others? How they were different? How do you evaluate their teaching approaches and activities?
4. How do you evaluate your prior teachers' qualifications?
5. Why type of materials they used? How do you evaluate those materials?
6. How you, as language learners, were treated by your teachers?
7. How do you evaluate your teachers' methods of assessment?
8. Did your teachers involve you in classroom decisions and activities?
9. Who influenced you most (positively or negatively) in your ways of being a teacher? Why?