

## **Flourished or Suppressed Teachers' Professional Identities: A Comparison between English Teachers of Institutes and Schools in Iran**

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### **Abstract**

Teacher professional identity is widely acknowledged as a multi-dimensional dynamic evolving concept contributing to teachers' self-perception about their professional roles. This qualitative study aimed to explore how different instructional settings of teaching English as a foreign language in Iran impacted on teachers' professional identities in a comparative way. To this end, 25 English teachers from public schools and private institutes of Kerman were interviewed to collect data and to examine how teachers conceptualize themselves at schools and institutes. All 25 participants (13 school teachers and 12 institute teachers) had a BA degree in English. Data analysis revealed that teachers of public schools had comprehended, strong, and thick initial professional identity in comparison to those teaching in private institutes. However, such an ideal professional identity was more vulnerable to professional identity shock that resulted from the discrepancy between initial professional identity arisen from pre-service training programs and an emergent one derived from the identity-in-practice in class life. In terms of preparation to teach, the findings showed that the teachers of public schools had more extended viewpoints towards teaching and its significance. Moreover, they believed that their identity influenced the teaching profession while the institute teachers believed in teaching influence on their identity that provided evidence for the variable nature of teacher professional identity resulting from parallel interconnections of different macro and micro factors leading to its steady reinterpretation and reshaping.

**Keywords:** Dynamic, identity, institute, public school, teacher

### **Introduction**

In the wake of globalization and pervasiveness of learning English as an international language keeping the interconnection and interaction of people all over the world, the essence of effective teacher and teaching paves the way for further efficient education and satisfactory outcome. Since teachers have a vital role in direction and magnitude of the learning process, what determines the effectiveness of final attainments, irrespective of the learners themselves, are the teachers that are regarded as the agents of change. As Gao, Cheng, Zhao, & Zhou (2005) highlighted, the teachers' attitudes towards how competent they are, how they prioritize their values, and how they perceive their communication styles and skills will be changed as they begin to learn a new language, affecting the way they teach. This assertion, hence, indirectly points to the fact that language can function as a means assisting individuals to construct and operationalize their identity (Kavaliauskienė, 2006; Campion, 2016). In favor of considering identity in the field of teaching, therefore, the notion of teachers' professional identity (TPI) becomes crystal clear. To bring this concept well within the scope of comprehension, Sachs (2005) argued that TPI "provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of how to

be, how to act and how to understand their work and their place in society” shedding the light on the way that realignment in TPI leads to positive and negative changes in teaching and learning process and vice versa (p. 15). That is, this definition highlights the significance of TPI formulation and reformulation and its key contributor and undeniable impact on teachers’ occupational behavior, success, effectiveness, and sense of well-being, motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to work (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Weiner & Torres, 2016). That is, TPI studies play an important role in showing the complexity of teacher professional identity to educational policy makers who do not understand the nature of teaching. Moreover, there is still more to learn about the mentioned multiple factors that contribute to developing TPI and how it relates to different sociological, cultural, political, and psychological contexts.

Despite the fact that the onset of TPI process is still puzzling due to some individuals’ childhood desire to become a teacher (Zaree & Ghasedi, 2014), what makes it to be the ongoing subject of the research over past decades is its ever-changing fluctuated nature which allows for constant evolution under the influence of a range of macro and micro factors such as contextual, social, cultural, political and personal (Beijaard et al., 2004; Hong, 2010; Ivanova & Skara-Mincine, 2016; Taylor, 2017; Zaree & Ghasedi, 2014; Van Huizen, Van Oers & Wubbels, 2005). That is, as Beijaard et al. (2004) confirmed and argued, in spite of diversity in terms of TPI conceptualization, the commonality of all definitions “is the idea that the identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon” (p. 108). As teachers go forward across the route of professional development and school life, therefore, their TPI is negotiated, interpreted, constructed and reconstructed in terms of their professional experiences, and other effective factors, specifically the contextual ones.

Regarding the issues of the context and its significance in language teaching and learning, in Iran, English is taught in two different contexts of public schools as an obligatory unit and private institutions as a voluntary course, resulting in diverse levels of outcomes in terms of effectiveness (Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017). In spite of the growing literature on factors’ types and their extents that influence the outcome (Baniasad, Tavakoli, & Ketabi, 2016; Dahmaraeh, 2009; Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Sahragard & Alimoradi, 2013; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000), there is still a debate on the efficiency of each educational context since there are lamentably few studies in the part of teachers, particularly their TPI as one of the influential aspects in each setting in a comparative way. The point of departure in this paper, therefore, is to compare the way through which TPI of teachers in public schools and private institutes is constructed and reconstructed under different instructional contexts’ influences.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Theoretical Background**

Identity is a complex and abstract notion that has been studied from three psychological, sociological, and postmodern perspectives. TPI is the beliefs, values and commitments that allow a particular type of teacher to be identified both as a teacher which is distinct from other professional identities, e.g. a doctor, an architect and as a particular type of teacher. The psychological theory emphasizes TPI as the process focusing on the individual and his/her self-reflections in the mirror of human nature. In this approach, TPI is the teachers’ perceptions of themselves at a present setting and is considered as the answer to the question: “Who am I as a teacher at this moment?” (Beijaard et al., 2004). This present image consists of a conscious understanding of his/her own professional self (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). In teaching, one’s

conception of himself/herself as a person is interwoven with how he/she acts as a professional and that individual cannot be separated from his/her profession since it is closely bound with personal beliefs and professional values (Loughran, 2006, p. 112).

The sociological approach emphasizes the social relationships and the context (the sociological processes) as primary factors which influence TPI, while the postmodern approach stresses the notion of multiple identities, which are continuously reconstructed and connected to people's performances. In postmodern theories, teachers may have a number of sub-identities connected to specific situations. In a more balanced approach, TPI was conceived "as both unitary and multiple, both continuous and discontinuous, and both individual and social" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 308). This dialogical position between individual and social dimensions is crucial for the formation of TPI since no professional identity exists without the both dimensions (Krzywacki & Hannula, 2010). The sociological approaches are of two types: the theories that emphasize the importance of learning contexts on professional identity development (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Macleod, 2006; Levy, Ben Shlomo, & Itzhaky, 2014; Pullen, Sansfacon & Crete, 2016; Sha, Wong, Lou, Pearson, & Gu, 2012; Tseng, 2011; Weiss, Gal, & Cnann, 2004; Wiles, 2017;) and those that discuss identity in relation to national and socio-political contexts in which individuals develop professional identity within the context of a group as they identify and internalize specific traits attributed to the profession (Campanini, Frost, & Hojer, 2012; Carter & Fuller, 2016; Higgins, 2016; Hill, Fogel, Plitt Donaldson, & Erickson, 2017; Moorhead, Boetto, & Bell, 2014).

In this study, the construction of TPI between two groups of private institute teachers and public school teachers is studied. Since these three approaches do not contradict each other and each has its pros and cons, we analyze the teachers' views to see which approach mainly contributes to their TPI's constructing and reconstructing processes.

### **Empirical Background**

Armed with sociocultural perspective, it is believed that teachers enter the teacher education programs with a dynamic base of initial identity being constituted by their prior perspectives, beliefs, values, concepts and perception of own selves, and the discourse of teaching and learning which provide a dynamic basis and framework for their initial teaching identities (Danielewicz, 2001; Korthagen, 2004; Olsen, 2016; Tao & Gao, 2018; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). What highlights more the role of context here is the constant interplay and interaction of the frame with teaching contexts leading to diachronically and synchronically reinterpretation and reformulation of TPI.

Drawing on the review of past works around the effectiveness of two instructional contexts of Iran, the public education system and private sector, in a comparative way, few studies were carried out especially in EFL setting. Such shortage of studies can be attributed to dominance and nation-state orientation of the public education system especially in developing countries (Dronkers, 2001). Turning now to the studies being carried out, the comparison parts which were identified include the diversity in objective and subjective expectations, needs, wants, materials, methodologies, the dominant contextual conditions which were shown to be more influential in shaping behavioral pattern of both learners and teachers that respectively affect the efficiency of final achievement and educational outcome (Dahmardeh, 2009; Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Safari & Rashidi, 2015; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000).

In the context of Iran, the studies indicated the ineffectiveness of the public schools to train and teach EFL learners as competent users of English language (Safari & Rashidi, 2015). It was revealed that after 6 years (the period that learning English is started and ended in public

educational contexts of Iran) students in the public schools rarely able to make practical use of language in authentic situations. Moreover, the lack of efficiency of the public schools especially in teaching effective communicative abilities was ascribed partly to the inappropriate method being employed by the teachers in classes which is Grammar Translation Method (GTM), and in part to the teachers themselves whose roles in class were not clear or they were not familiar with target language culture due to some imposed limitations and policies and were not qualified enough to teach learners effectively. Moreover, the low income of teachers forces them to have several other jobs to afford their living expenses which take the time being needed for them to be prepared for having an effective class (Dahmardeh, 2009). Additionally, it was disclosed that people are obliged to follow a predetermined teaching way being planned by the Ministry of Education. It was also revealed that the ignorance of students' interests and need analyses being traced through public schools' textbooks, and using merely books without any complementary or supplementary materials are other differences between the public and private educational sectors in Iran. To encapsulate, the commonality of all past studies is the superiority and dominance of the private institutes to teach and train effective competent English users in comparison to public educational systems.

To address the issues related to the teachers from TPI lens, it was shown that there was no trace and contribution of foreign language experts in the policy-making process. Moreover, the studies showed that the local policy consideration (with the emphasis on teachers) has been neglected in the policy-making process towards learning the English language which leads to a gap between planning and practice results in terms of material development (Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Kiany, Mirhosseini, & Navidinia, 2011). In this line, the notable research is the study of Baniasad et al., (2016) that investigated and explored the nature of the teacher education program (TEP) in Iran. This study revealed that transmission of a pre-determined body of knowledge, the generalizability of teaching knowledge in all situations, and ignorance of teaching context were the most important features which were being held. Moreover, the failure of TEP in accounting teachers' previous experiences in designing the program leads to a gap between what teachers need and prefer to learn and what the programs impose on trainers to teach (Tarone & Allwright, 2005).

### **Instructional Context of Iran**

Taking the context of Iran into consideration, learning English classes are held by two different settings of public schools and private institutes which are under the superintendence of the Ministry of Education. In Public schools, all related aspects from the initial recruitment of teachers, teacher-students, and teacher training and development programs to the designing and developing books being employed in the classes are within the purview of the Ministry of Education, while in institutes, those mentioned factors are done based on subjective decisions, but under the control of the Ministry of Education (Baniasad, et al., 2016).

Successively, entering into the teaching profession, individuals should follow either of three ways: First and foremost way is to choose the teacher education of their favorite field and take part in the university entrance exam. If they achieve the ranking 6500 or less, they are allowed to start their academic education at Farhangiyan University (specialized teacher training center) as teacher-students. Exemption from military service and definite official employment are of the advantages of being accepted in the teacher education field. The next way is to enroll in the exam being designed by the Ministry of Education with the purpose of qualified teachers' recruitment all over the country. Here, only those individuals who have academic degrees can participate rather than those who do not or want to start their education. After being accepted and

interviewed, they pass some in-service training programs to be placed in schools. These two ways allow teachers to begin their profession in public schools. The third way, therefore, is for those who want to teach at private institutes which its employment conditions are much less strict. To this end, teaching applicants who have the BA or higher degree in each of the English teaching, translation, or literature fields from higher education or are already the student of mentioned fields can apply for the teaching profession. After the examination of their résumé and being interviewed, they get permission to start their work as they are taking part in some in-service teacher training programs. There is, however, no guarantee to be allowed to stay and continue their teaching profession at that institute as soon as it is realized they are not qualified based on that institutes' criteria.

Going through TPI's previous studies, therefore, a gap was observed in terms of the impact of different instructional contexts of teaching and learning English on the emergent TPI of Iranian teachers as being placed in either of two public or private sectors in a comparative way. Filling the lacuna, the present study makes an effort to reveal how contextual, social, cultural, political and personal factors in Iran can negotiate with and alter the TPI of English teachers in public schools and private institutes. Moreover, this research is an attempt to determine whether there are any relationships between identity construction and the type of instructional contexts. The following questions are addressed to get a better understanding of the subject:

Q1. How do instructional contexts impact on teachers' professional identities?

Q2. Is there any difference between the professional identities of school teachers and institute ones?

Q3. How do macro and micro contextual factors have an influence on teachers' professional identities?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

We conducted this qualitative study by focusing on teachers who had one to fifteen years of professional experience to examine the relationship between different contexts and TPI construction or reconstruction. In order to fulfill this aim, the study employed a semi-structured individual interview to illustrate and elaborate in more depth the differences between TPI of teachers in the contexts of public schools and private institutes. A significant advantage of semi-structured interview is the opportunity for unknown information to emerge. Participants who are regarded as experts by experience; therefore when sufficient opportunity to speak freely is provided, new and novel information can emerge. To make it clear, the study aimed to examine how teachers differentiate on TPI according to their individual characteristics, instructional and learning contexts. The 25 interviewees were male and female English teachers of public schools and private institutes having BA degree. Their interviews were recorded and transcribed. Next, their collected data were analyzed thematically using Charmaz's (2014) suggestions for a grounded coding process.

### **Participants**

This paper reports a qualitative sub-set of data generated to explore and compare TPI of English teachers who have begun their teaching profession in either public schools or private institutes. Therefore, all male and female teachers who teach English in schools or institutes of Kerman make up the population of this study. All 25 participants, 13 school teachers and 12 institute teachers, were recruited from the pool of teachers with BA degree in the field of English (English language teaching, translation, or literature) who were continuing their educations as

MA student of ELT or linguistics in either Azad or Bahonar University. Moreover, they were teachers who could best inform the research questions. All of them indicated their willingness to be involved in the semi-structured interview and signed a written informed consent before participating in the study. All participants had one to fifteen years of teaching experiences. The participants were of both genders of female and male (13 women and 12 men) and their ages ranged from 24 to 33. The sample selection strategy being employed was of two types. It was random for institute participants, while for those from public schools, the researchers employed snow-ball sampling due to the fact that teachers from public educational system, for their initial years of teaching, were distributed all over Kerman province except the center. The interviews were performed over a six-month period from August 2018 to January 2019. Table 1 reports the general information of subjects.

**Table 1.** *Demographic information of subjects*

Groups	Subject number	Gender		Age Mean ( $\pm$ SD)	Academic degree	Teaching experience (years) Mean ( $\pm$ SD)
		F	M			
Public school	13	7	6	27.7 $\pm$ 2.6	BA	6.23 $\pm$ 1.7
Private institute	12	6	6	28.1 $\pm$ 2.1	BA	5.8 $\pm$ 1.3

### **Instruments and Materials**

To collect data, we used a semi-structured individual interview adapted from Weiner and Torres (2016) that its validity and reliability had been approved. We employed it in order to deeper examine how teachers conceptualize themselves at different contexts and to locate possible differences among teachers with different PI. It was composed of 15 questions to extract biography and demography information as well as identity construction information. The demographic items include questions on respondents' age, education, place and year(s) of teaching English. Teachers' beliefs, personal and social attitudes towards teaching and teachers, teacher training programs, teachers' experience, the relationship between identity and English teachers' characteristics are items that make up identity construction information. In order to ensure that all subjects comprehend questions clearly and to avoid language barriers in communication, we conducted the interview in Persian (participants' native language). The interview lasted approximately 20 minutes for each participant and the interviewees were informed that their voice will be recorded. The data analysis was done based on participants' audio transcription and translation.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

In this study, a semi-structured interview was employed as a tool for data collection. The interviewees were teachers of public schools and private institutes with the BA degree. At the outset, the principle of voluntary participation was explained to the respondents and they were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Before initiating the interview, we also provided a clear and concise explanation of the objectives and the purpose of the research, what the interview will involve, and how we are going to use and store the information collected. The study employed clear interview questions that were related to teachers' own experiences. The interview questions provided data which addressed the research questions appropriately. The responses were recorded with respondents' permission. This enabled

us to induce firsthand information from the teachers with regard to their experiences, challenges, and opinions. The questions were open ended making it possible for the interviewers to add new questions during the interviewing process, depending on the responses of the participants. For the purpose of the study, the interviews were voice recorded, and we took notes at the same time. After the interviews, we reviewed the notes, and wrote down direct quotes that were found to be relevant.

Each interview was conducted in a comfortable, secure, and private surrounding, preferably any place which was convenient for participants. Therefore, some were interviewed in their schools, some at the university where they were studying for their MA and some in our offices. This was necessary for the interviewees to feel comfortable in their own surroundings. We also created a friendly atmosphere where the interviewees were encouraged to request repetition of any question in the event that they did not understand a particular question. They were also assured that the information which they were going to provide would be treated in the strict confidence. This was achieved by allocating pseudonyms for each participant. We also provided the letter of informed consent to the interviewees to read and sign and we signed it in their presence too. As the interviewer, we served only as a facilitator who encouraged the interviewees to respond. This was achieved by our assuming a neutral stance and non-judgmental attitude towards respondents. Following the collection of data, all interviews were transcribed fully and analyzed and interpreted thematically.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

After the data were collected, we (two authors) independently coded the sentences according to themes of interview questions. Following Charmaz's (2014) suggestions for a grounded coding process, the data were coded line-by-line to explore the ongoing process of professional identity formation with a systematic inductive process through coding phases. Firstly, the data were broken down into meaningful units through *open coding*. Then *axial coding* was run to find any meaningful relations from initial coding by reassembling the data. And finally, through *selective coding*, the extracted conceptual categories were drawn. This coding strategy prompted us to remain open to the data, to see nuances and to identify implicit concerns as well as explicit statements. Comparing the data also helped us to identify the gaps and to discover the hidden ideas in them. The discrepancies between us were discussed until an agreement was reached.

A number of measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data. To replicate listening helped us identify any inaccuracy in the process of interview transcription. Moreover, within-method triangulation was done through asking a number of questions associated with the same issue to get sure about the correctness of teachers' opinions towards that issue from different facets and to improve the reliability and validity of the research. Moreover, the use of two coders, employing the same coding technique (methodological triangulation) and gathering data from different contexts of schools and institutes (data triangulation) are seen as forms of triangulation techniques that add validity and credibility to the investigation. We began the study with recruiting teachers who met the study aims. Their persistent observation and independent analysis of data by researchers diminished the risks of researchers and participants' bias. Moreover, using open questions in questionnaire instrument minimized the risk of measurement bias. Asking quality questions and remaining aware and focused on sources of bias provided the qualitative standards for the resulting research. This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of ethical guidelines in human research. To this end, the anonymity of

participants was preserved and the transcriptions were sent to them for proofreading and approval.

### **Findings**

The findings reported here focus on five issues that describe how training in different instructional contexts influences the way through which TPI of teachers in public schools and private institutes is constructed and reconstructed. The first is concerned with the initial attitudes and beliefs towards teaching profession that teachers hold to see how they were shaped and constructed the basis of their selection of teaching as their future profession. In the second category, the conditions and quality of preparation and training programs being provided for each group of school and institute teachers were explored. In the third category, the efficiency of acquired knowledge and skills arisen from two different instructional contexts is investigated in teachers as they are facing the reality of their workplaces and classes. The fourth analytical category focuses on the outcome of the discrepancy of which teachers may or may not aware that can direct teachers towards outdated and fossilized persons in terms of their teaching knowledge. And finally, in the last category, the orientation towards reconstructing the TPI is discussed.

#### **Belief Systems: The Early Attitudes toward Teaching Profession**

Firstly, we explored how being placed and surrounded in different social contexts affect the way through which the teachers' initial attitudes and beliefs towards teaching was shaped. Across the interview, some teachers of private institutes pointed to their unforgettable moments with their teachers and the sense of joy they felt at that time. They recalled the relationships with their teachers which made them think about their teachers as their idols. As Ali remembered,

During school periods, I always enjoyed having teachers who were extremely good in their teaching and making communication that I saw them as my idol and model. This made me more interested in teaching, and as I remembered from that time I felt that I love teaching so much.

Or Mina emphasized, "From childhood I would go to the English institute and I really loved my English teachers. I think, that feeling awoke my interest in teaching." The story for most teachers of public schools was different. Remembering Childhood experiences, they mentioned how they admired their parents who were teachers. They recalled how impressed when they saw their parents' effort and commitment which made them see teaching as a sanctity job. Sahar recalled,

Whenever someone talks about teaching, the first things come to my mind is my mother. Because she was a teacher, I saw how effort she put to be prepared for her class, to check some books, to provide material being used in her class, etc. In spite of her fatigue, she did all that work and simultaneously looked after us very well.

It is clear that the way through which participants' sense of teaching was shaped and the attitudes they held seem to push them towards choosing and following teaching as their professions. This discovery is in accordance with the reports of Coldron & Smith (1999). They stated that exposure to different social discourses and belief systems as well as experiences of students during childhood were much effective in directing one's initial sense of TPI.

Almost all institute teachers mentioned their interests in teaching as the foremost reason to select it as their profession, while school teachers pointed to the fact that since at least one person in their family was a teacher (parents, aunt, and/or uncle), they were encouraged, provoked, or convinced to follow the same profession. For instance, Sarah, a teacher of an institute, asserted,

“I was keen to teach in a way that I forced my little brother to sit and keep silence and listen to me teaching the subjects that I learned during school time.”

Mahtab, another institute teacher says, “As I remembered, from my childhood I was so interested in teaching. I used to explain what I learned and transfer my information to others.” On the contrary, Maryam, a school teacher, contends,

I felt that I am talented in teaching, but I never thought about it seriously. I chose teaching, at first, for the sake of my parents. They were both teachers and wanted me to follow their professions. After that, little by little I felt that I am interested in teaching.

Or Reza, another school teacher maintains, “Since I grew up in a family who were teachers, I was aware of all the bitter sweet of this profession. As my parents asked me to follow their professions, I accepted without any objection.” These pieces of evidence show that exposing to different social contexts and attitudes frames teachers’ initial belief systems towards this profession.

### **Teaching Onset: Fundamental Preparation for Teaching**

All of the participants in the present study had a BA degree in either of English Language Teaching (ELT), translation, or English literature fields. However, only the teachers of public schools were officially trained as teachers of ELT at Farhangiyān University which is a specialized center for teacher education under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education. During their teacher education program, they had been trained in the teaching profession generally and the English language particularly. They had passed eight theoretical and practical semesters. And throughout these years, they were paid salaries since they had already been accepted and employed as teachers. On the other hand, it is evident that being a teacher in an institute does not necessitate the candidates to be graduated merely from the ELT field. The assertions like “since I was the student of literature”, “my BA degree is on English literature”, or “I studied translation at university” being heard frequently confirmed the claim. Intensive in-service teaching programs which are held by the institutes help teachers of non-ELT fields who are not familiar with theories and methods of English teaching to be experts in English language teaching.

In terms of preparation, therefore, teachers of schools are more confident about acquiring the required knowledge and skills, and are more justified about the significance of their professions and roles. For instance, in answering the question about making the association between the general definition of job and their professions, Ahad and Reza realized the distinction between profession and job counting teaching as a profession, which was not heard by any teachers of institutes,

There is a difference between job and profession in that you choose the former because of its financial aspect, but the latter due to your interest and skills. Anyone can do a job, but for a profession you should be competent and expert, if not you have to be replaced. In this regard, teaching is a profession rather than a job. Firstly, we have to make distinction between job and profession. To be a teacher, you need more than mere knowledge. You should be skillful and competent. That is the profession is in a way that demands special skills which helps you to be an artist, mediator, consoler, mediator, etc. as well as a teacher while being a driver does not require such abilities.

Or asking participants to provide a definition for teacher before and after entering training and educational programs, school teachers have properly perceived the role of teachers goes beyond simple transmitters of information and see themselves as a person who is responsible for internalizing the skill life and preparing students not to be just a perfect learner but also a perfect,

ideal, effective citizen and human being. On the contrary, no one out of 12 institute teachers realized the intentional use of the words ‘job’ and ‘profession’ and emphasized the financial aspects in giving a general definition of the job. The frequent assertions were: “source of income”, “the work you do and you are paid back”, and “the work you spent time, and do it regularly, and receive a payment.” Additionally, in the part of giving teacher definition before and after being exposed to BA courses or in-service training program, the point of change for most teachers of institutes was to recognize the responsibility and difficulty of job more than what they had imagined before. Moreover, all the participants were inquired about the efficiency of the programs in terms of being equipped with required skills and knowledge to teach (teacher education programs for public teachers and BA period or intensive in-service program for institute teachers). Since all participants were MA students of the ELT, translation, or linguistics at Islamic Azad University, or Bahonar University, almost all the institute teachers whose BA degree was not ELT pointed to the fact that they took benefit more from their MA courses than their BA or in-service programs. In this regard, Mina recalled the moment she got surprised after entering MA in ELT. She declared,

I studied translation for BA. I love teaching and for many years I taught English at institutes but never imagined that I should study in this field to teach. I never thought that there is a need to be educated in this job.

Amir similarly explained,

I had taught for many years even before I studied in BA. I had a lot of questions about teaching in my mind. After entering MA, all my questions were answered and the courses I took extended my teaching viewpoints.

However, the school teachers did not express the same view on this subject. Some were satisfied and agreed about the effectiveness of the teacher education programs while others complained and were dissatisfied. For instance, Ahad felt the pleasure in his achievement. He said,

The semesters through which we have to put our knowledge in practice are so helpful and influential. .... At least, I learned how to assess my addressors, how to behave towards them, and things like this. I believe that learning is my job, while Bahram argued, a great number of teacher-students in class hinder the efficiency of the program. There is no enough or equal time for all to be taken part in theoretical and practical discussions.

However, all teachers of public schools had consensus on the issue of trainers’ well-education and believed that they mostly were not enough educated or dominant in the subject matter of teaching or some themselves preserved traditional perspectives towards teaching. Farhan, for example said, “The extreme point of disappointment was the time when the trainer said I do not know more than you about this subject, or asked us about the break time.” Although there are signs of unsatisfactory, the aggregate findings show that public schools have more extended viewpoints towards teaching and its significance.

### **Identity Discrepancy: Initial and Emergent Mismatch of TPI**

Of the participants who began their career after graduating from Farhangiyān University, most recalled their early teaching experiences full of anxiety and unexpected moments. According to the rules of the Ministry of Education, all novice teachers should start their first years of teaching from suburban areas which is the shocking time for most teachers. As they enter the authentic real contexts of teaching, they see a large discrepancy between what they have learned and what they need to implement in that special setting. What they have constructed during those years seems hardly match with their imagined and initial TPI through which they

thought and felt enough readiness and strength to make positive changes. This is clear from teachers' utterances. As Zahra, a school teacher recalled, "I found the impracticality of my knowledge when I realized that while teaching fruits, my students focused on the fruits themselves and they were licking their lips since all of them were from low economic status."

Similarly, Ahad recalled, The setting where I am teaching, my students believe that if they work on their farms, they will get benefit more than the time they are in English classes. This situation is intensified when their parents agree with them and support them. How much effort should I put to overcome their reluctance to study English? This is the question I ask myself.

In the same vein, Azadeh asserted, I got shocked when I found that most of my junior high school students got married. They said when they are supposed to be at home and be a housewife and have children, who care whether they are English literate or not.

On the other hand, it is obvious that the conditions in institutes are not as severe as the public schools, since the sort of students' goals is different and there is rarely obligation to learn English. Even if their parents send them to institutes by force, they can afford its costs and students have no responsibility for being a part of family income. Moreover, since their TPI is not as strong as public teachers (for the inefficiency of their education), the presence of discrepancy, even when they notice its presence, is lower than their counterparts. As there was no negative comments or even a point to the situations making them shocked.

### **Vulnerability: The Magnitude of Fossilization**

As it was pointed earlier, facing unexpected conditions makes the public school teachers negatively surprised which can function as a debilitating factor leading to untimely demotivation. As Azadeh continued her argument, "I got demotivated after hearing my students' attitudes towards learning which negatively affected my scoring system in a way that I gave them higher scores than they deserved, and my logic was 20 or 10, who cares?"

It seems, moreover, that the training program was not efficient in changing the traditional view towards books as the only valuable practical material. Since virtually all school teachers pointed to the fact that the content of the books is fixed and they have to repeat them each year. Moreover, this can be counted as the onset of fossilization since there is no need to be more prepared or updated especially, as it was discussed, in a context that most of students have no willingness, long or short-term goals, and motivation to learn. Such conditions do not necessitate teachers to present something more than the content of a book, or even to use at least what they have already known.

Their answers to the questions about how much they feel prepared for their classes and the amount of time they allocate to the teaching beyond their workplace confirmed this issue. As Sanaz stated, "Since I have taught the book many times, I have all of its content in my memory and consequently there is no need to consider more time to be prepared or to study more." Likewise, Amin said,

During the summer, I review the content of the book. Since there is no change in the content, I do not allocate much time to be prepared; just I take a look before going to the class in school time.

In accordance with their counterparts, institute teachers do not specify time to study more about the teaching subjects, the latest articles, or update their information. The only difference, however, is their readiness before the class since the authorities ask them to prepare a lesson plan. In this way, Mohsen explained,

Depending on the level of the class and the teachers themselves, the preparation varies. For novice teachers it takes time during their first years of teaching, but experienced teachers only scan the texts of books. Similarly for low level class, there is no need to provide more materials or have a total preparation.

Or Sarah said, “I allocate time to prepare my lesson plan. Since I am a busy person, I cannot put much time away for my teaching.” These experiences are the signs of fossilized information among both groups of teachers; it seems that teachers of institutes are less vulnerable.

### **TPI Inclination: Suppressing or Flourishing Reconstruction**

Despite their appreciation of teaching as an invaluable, challenging, and respectful profession, nearly all interviewees were unsatisfied with the lowly look of society towards their profession. The most frequent comment being heard is “contrary to other professions such as medicine or engineering, teaching receives less attention than it is deserved. No one cares about the significance of teaching and thinks that a future doctor or engineer owes my effective teaching.”

However, two groups are different in their elaborations. Most school teachers complained about not feeling appreciated or prized for their hardworking. On the face of difficulties and low income, they have exerted more effort, yet are still ignored by society. As Shima pointed,

Society has a negative attitude towards teaching. They see teachers as those who sit on the chairs, say something repeatedly and receive a salary. They are not aware of nor do they want to know how difficult and challenging this profession is.

On the other hand teachers of institutes argued that society does regard their job as an unimportant work in a way that has made the false public belief of teaching as a default job. Mahsa pointed out, “When I say that I am a teacher, most people nod their heads as a sign of ‘a poor guy’, as if I had no other choice for my future job.” Or Amir said, “Most people behave in a way that the work I do can be done by anyone and; I am not doing something special needing skills and talents.”

The pervasive belief upon which all of the teachers agree was the irresponsibility of the government toward teachers and inefficiency of the Ministry of Education and educational systems for providing effective teacher training programs. Merely two public school teachers accused themselves to be responsible for making such negative attitudes towards teaching. As Ahad mentioned, “I went to class; I was not enough educated to teach the subject matter effectively; I could not defeat my identity; I am the one who spoils the public attitudes towards teaching.” Or Reza emphasized,

Since teacher-students already know that entering Farhangiyan University guarantees their future job and assures them for a lifelong salary, some of them do not put much effort to develop their subject matter or teaching knowledge. This assurance fallacy intensifies the public negative attitudes towards teaching as a default job.

An interesting and thoughtful distinction, moreover, between these two groups of teachers was in terms of their viewpoints towards the relationship between their teaching profession and their identity. Virtually all school teachers see a unidirectional relationship from their identity towards their profession while teachers of institutes see the direction from teaching to their identity. The utterances of school teachers, in this regard, are as follow:

Each person should have a base for teaching, unless they face difficulties. Being patient and flexible are of the foremost vital characteristics a person should have if s/he wants to be a teacher. I felt that I am talented in teaching and transmitting the information.

On the contrary, institute teachers pointed out to the effect of the profession on their characteristics: Teaching helps me to make more relationships with people in society. It makes me a sociable person. Teaching was the cause of some of my features. Before that, I was a sensitive person who could not tolerate the opposite ideas; I was stubborn, but now I see and feel changes within myself. Teaching gives me a critical view. In facing problems and events I try to analyze the situations to choose the best solution and deal with it efficiently.

No one, except Reza, one of the school teachers, sees a bidirectional relation. He asserted that, My personal characteristics affect my profession and vice versa. For instance, I was a person who made a guard on the face of any criticism. But teaching has made me more flexible. On the other hand, I see myself as a person capable of teaching in an effective way which makes me intrinsically motivated to continue my job in spite of all its difficulties.

### Discussion

This study investigated and compared the professional identities of public school and private institute teachers. We found that early identities of school teachers were mostly articulated in terms of being impressed by their parents or members of their family who are or were teachers which convinced them to follow teaching profession, while teachers in the institutes were pleased by their teachers during the school time which provided them a sense of joy and interest towards teaching. This finding that exposure to different social discourses and belief systems, as well as experiences as students during childhood are more effective in directing one's initial sense of TPI is in line with the claim of Coldron & Smith (1999).

However, both groups experienced and derived benefits from different educational circumstances. It was also revealed that while the teachers of schools were provided with specialized courses through which they were justified about the place and significance of teaching, the role of teachers, and their undeniable impacts on future generations, the BA courses and intense in-service programs being held by the institutes and universities lacked such efficiency in training teachers.

The initial strong TPI, however, can be problematic when the school teachers come to experience and put what they know in practice in a real class life which is far away from their expectations. Citations to their feelings of being shocked, this indicates that even when the majority of their knowledge, information, and skills are thought to be acceptable and practical during the training program, all were useless in view of the actual practice on the ground; which in turn makes the teachers demotivated and inefficient to bridge the gap between the present and ideal atmosphere of teaching and learning. These feelings gradually lead to the undesirable educational and psychological states such as fossilization and burnout as time passes. As it was observed in comments of the school teachers towards their preparation before the class or allocation of their time to update and raise their information. The logic behind this behavior for most school teachers is "when there is no demand, logically there is no supply". However, regarding the teaching as a profession, one should commit her/himself to do her/his duty well and such excuses are not acceptable. These results were compatible with the findings of scholars (Dahmardeh, 2009; Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Safari & Rashidi, 2015; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) who proved that factors such as dominant contextual conditions can be more influential in shaping the behavioral pattern of both learners and teachers which respectively affect the efficiency of final achievement and educational outcome.

On the contrary, teachers of institutes did not face the same difficulties as their peers since the type of students coming to institutes, their economic status, goals, needs, and wants were entirely different. Moreover, the thin fragile identity of institute teachers arisen from their

inefficient unsatisfying initial education made them erroneously have an appraisal of the situation and feel no big distance between their actual status and the desired one as an effective teacher. However, they are, not as much as teachers of the schools, vulnerable to fossilization of information and burnout too.

Presenting and discussing the findings, therefore, the research question concerning how contextual factors in Iran can negotiate with and alter the TPI of English teachers in public schools and private institutes, is answered as follow: As it was reviewed, the most school teachers have an unpleasant sense of being sacrificed. As they frequently pointed out to this fact that in spite of their altruistic efforts, they were always ignored and even forgotten by the society and the Ministry of Education. All of them alongside experiencing the situations in which they feel no motivation and willingness and the inefficiency of what they had learned leading to suppressing their TPI in a way that they reconstruct it in a negative format coming to the fact that exerting effort has no beneficial consequences for them or their addressors. The opposite direction, however, was proved when teachers accepted the current views and situations and decided to make changes instead of being changed by the contextual factors. In this way, they can reformulate identity in a flourishing format. As few of school teachers believed that they chose teaching profession to have an influence and bring positive and effective changes.

Regarding the institutional context, the discrepancy being felt by the teachers between the kind of TPI they initially constructed and the one they had to reconstruct in accordance with the reality of class was not big which in turn did not put as much as pressure that their counterparts felt due to the inefficiency of teacher training program to which institute teachers were exposed. Consequently, despite the practical shortages of teacher educational programs for school teachers, the courses were identified to be more efficient in terms of preparation for teaching in comparison to programs being held by institutes. This discovery was opposite to some findings showing the effectiveness of private institutes as a whole (Khoshsima & Hashemi Toroujeni, 2017; Safari & Rashidi, 2015).

The findings showed that teacher professional identity was constructed by a reciprocal and dynamic interaction of micro and macro contextual factors. The early attitudes towards teaching were shaped through the cultural and social macro contexts in which participants had a relationship with members of their family or society as teachers. The attention that the school or society paid to teachers' work is an affective micro factor influencing on teachers' identity since they value their works from students or other members' points of view. The educational system as a macro contextual factor also plays a significant role in constructing the identity resulting in a sense of frustration in public school teachers. On the other hand, in-service training, a micro factor, strengthened both the school and institute teachers' identity. The irresponsibility of government towards teachers as a political macro issue was another factor that weakened the professional identity of teachers. Moreover, studying at Farhagiyani University making school teachers not develop their teaching knowledge as a cognitive micro factor decreased the school teachers' professional identities as well.

What the institute and school teachers asserted proved that learners' English achievement was highly depended on teaching quality or teacher competency that demands the Ministry of Education pay much more attention and invests in teachers' professional development as Zare-ee & Ghasedi (2014) claim. The results of this study imply that practitioners and organizers of the teacher education programs should emphasize the essence of teacher's raising awareness by providing teachers of either schools or institutes with efficient programs in a way to give them a logical and upright picture of what the teaching profession means and what they need to be equipped in term of practical and plausible skills and knowledge. Moreover, teacher trainers

should be selected among those who hold educational and vocational qualifications since they are more influential in directing teachers' attitudes, values, and beliefs, and consequently in shaping their TPI. Further, teachers are individuals, with understandings of themselves, who come into the classroom with beliefs, values and commitments shaped by personal experiences and roles outside of the classroom. Teaching also does not occur in isolation, but teachers and their students are embedded in socio-political and learning contexts which affect teaching and learning.

### Conclusions

Given the scant research on TPI of English teachers in contexts of public schools and private institutes, this study has contributed to an enhanced comprehension of the dynamic interplay between these two contextual conditions and TPI in a comparative way. Citing to the findings, it is concluded that although the significance of the teacher training programs has been proved and attendance to them are regarded prerequisite to start the teaching profession, the essential principles that should be taken into account prior to fore-mentioned factors are the practicality, utility, and flexibility of acquired knowledge and skills in facing the non-familiar and prospect of challenging and problematic situations and contexts. In spite of the efficiency of the teacher training programs being held by Farhangiyan University, most school teachers got shocked as they enter to the classes and face the reality of their workplace demanding them to adopt and adapt what they acquired. The findings of this study, moreover, shed light on debates surrounding the effectiveness of school-institute contexts by reemphasizing to add the teachers and their professional identities as undeniable influential factors in final attainment of learners in each context.

The findings showed that school teachers' initial sense of TPI was different from private teachers'. They also revealed that contextual factors had a bidirectional relationship with teachers' TPI. On the one hand, lack of motivation and feeling inefficient suppressed their TPI. On the other hand, the view that they had chosen teaching profession to have a positive influence flourished their TPI. Moreover, TPI was constructed by reciprocal interaction of micro and macro contextual factors.

The findings of this study had to be seen in the light of some limitations. The first was that the semi-structured interview was done within the context of the school teachers' dispersal and restricted time. The second was the context-bound of this study which is specified for the context of Iran due to its particular types of teacher recruitment for teaching profession and only a few number of other university students were employed as teachers. In accordance to the scope of this study, it is suggested to carry out a longitudinal study to see the long-term and short-term effects of TPI construction and reconstruction in teacher-students from their first entry to Farhangiyan University to their first years of working as a teacher.

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## **Appendix**

### **Teachers' Professional Identity Interview Protocol**

#### *Biographical and Demographical Information*

- Age
- Education level
- Place of teaching
- Years of teaching

#### *Identity construction information*

- How do you define "job"?
- How does this definition relate to your teaching profession?
- What were some of the reasons you had for pursuing teaching?
- How do you see the society attitude toward the teaching profession?
- What is your attitude toward teaching profession?
- How efficient the educational program was in terms of being equipped with desired and requires both skills and knowledge?
- Before entering to teacher training program, how did you define and see a teacher?
- After entering to teacher training program, how did you define and see a teacher?
- Once you are in the classroom, how prepare do you feel?
- Out of class time, how much time do you allocate to your teaching profession?
- Do you feel any relationship between your identity and characteristics, and your teaching profession?