Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Identity in Tertiary Education

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Abstract

This study attempted to conceptualize Saudi EFL teacher's professional identity and the vital role it plays in educational process. Mixed methods' design was used to answer four research questions using a questionnaire comprised of 14 elements in three subsections: the subject matter field (4 statements), the didactical field (6 statements), and the pedagogical field (4 statements) and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The 491 randomly selected participants who agreed to take part in the study were aware of the constructs underlying the formation of their professional identity but exclusively confined these constructs to their instructional experience. Future researchers should conduct more comprehensive studies to cater for other constructs that underpin EFL teacher's professional identity in the Saudi context.

Keywords: identity, construct, experience, belief, emotion, education, self-image

1. Introduction

1.1 Teacher Professional Identity

Teacher's professional identity, which plays a vital role in the success or failure of the educational process teaching (Rachmajanti et al., 2021), has been the focus of research in the last three decades. Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) report that most research studies systematically analyzed teacher's professional identity formation, the characteristics of teacher's professional identity and teacher's narratives of their professional identity. Similar research studies have examined the role of personal factors in the construction of professional identity by centering upon the connection between elements of personal identity and professional identity, the connection between emotions and the construction of identity, and the significance of self-image in the construction of teacher professional identity (Hsieh, 2010). Moreover, researchers have explored identity as a complex notion made up of several interconnected parts: knowledge, beliefs, and emotions (Bukor, 2015).

This study conducted a comprehensive literature search on Saudi EFL teacher's professional identity on Google Scholar yielding scarce research most of which drew on secondary data (AlHarbi & Ahmad, 2020; Alnahhas; Elyas & Badawood, 2016). The few data-driven studies attempted to explore the influence of teachers' educational background and life experiences on their professional identities (Aljuhaish, Othman, & Senom, 2020). Also, Almayez (2022) examined the place of religion within Saudi English language teachers' professional identity construction. Evidently, teacher's professional identity research in the Saudi context is in its infancy. Therefore, the present study set out to enrich the ongoing conversation on this theme by evaluating whether EFL teacher's awareness of professional identity constructs underpin their professional success by addressing four research questions:

      (1) How do the participants perceive different aspects of professional identity?

      (2) What emotions and beliefs that led Saudi EFL teachers elect to become teachers?

      (3) Do Saudi EFL teachers model their professional attributes on other teachers?

      (4) What are the unfavorable professional identity characteristics among Saudi EFL teachers?

1.2 Literature Review and Conceptual Background

Although teacher's professional identity has been extensively researched in the recent past, most studies problematized it as a concept that is difficult to define. Partly due to its relevance to an individual teacher's perception of identity; a challenge evidenced by different forms of t direct and indirect recurrent questions that researchers deemed central to the understanding of identity: 'Who am I at this moment?' (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Bukor, 2015; Castañeda, 2011; Hsieh, 2010; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). The question posed summarized teachers' attempt to identify themselves as professionals who strove to be in a constant process of reflection on their practices and experiences (Vokatis & Zhang, 2016). The question's subjectivity renders the term identity multifaceted, multi-layered, and dynamic. For example, teachers individually identify themselves with factors such as culture, gender, class, religion, and nationality (Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018). Additionally, a teacher can have his/her own believes, values, assumptions, actions, experiences (Bukor, 2015; Hsieh, 2010).

The subjective nature of identity has a strong bearing on the definition and characterization of professional identity. Teacher's personal factors can tempt teachers to think of their professional roles as 'important, attractive and in harmony with other roles' (Moore & Hofman, 1988; as cited in Han, 2017, p. 70). However, these albeit subjective personal factors were also perceived to (objectively) have real world consequences they 'strongly determine the way teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers and their attitudes toward educational changes'(Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 108). By taking a social theory stance, Widodo et al (2020, p. 2) conceived a teacher's professional identity as agency and capacity to behave and act professionally as they interact with policy-makers, curriculum artifacts (e.g. curriculum guidelines and textbooks), students, and colleagues. Another theory, the situated learning theory (SLT), views the language teacher's professional identity formation as 'a process of becoming part of a community of practice'(Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 28). Learning and professional development experiences are part of the core elements in forming identities according to SLT.

Having attempted to define the term identity and thus professional identity, it is logical to turn to the statements made in the literature about the professional identity construction. Teacher identity is dynamic and identity construction is an ongoing process, 'which develops in various ways and in response to multiple discourses about teaching' (Hsieh, 2010). Also, professional identity is constructed at different levels to warrant sub-identities that show relationships with students, other teachers, other members of school community and educational administrators; relationships that are central to the professional identity formation because they require recognition by others (Castañeda, 2011; Vokatis & Zhang, 2016). According to Castañeda, (2011, p. 23), these social relationships establish the meaning of being a teacher through 'visible and invisible domains of work and life.' While the visible domain includes classroom interaction, assessment, materials design, or task implementation, the invisible domain involves more personal phenomena such as cognition, beliefs, expectations, and emotions that relate to a teacher's professional identity. Hyland (2012) also concurs with other researchers that teachers' identity is formed through the texts they interact with. Thus, the act of shaping one's identity primarily entails the cautious selection of personal and professional content to share with others.

There is a need to explore the literature on the professional identity of EFL teacher per se to examine EFL teacher's professional identity. The second language classroom requires teachers to be in a continuous quest for learning and development. A closer look into teachers' identity reveals how numerous dynamics are at play in constructing and reconstructing a language teachers' professional identity; dynamics that now guide research into language teachers' education towards investigate the interrelationships between the teacher identity and its surrounding core constructs. Yazan (2018) lists these dynamics as 'teacher learning, teacher cognition, teacher's participation in communities of practice, contextual factors, teacher biographies and teacher emotions' (p. 21). Considerable research studies have been conducted during the last decade in continuous attempts to explicate teacher identity and its core constructs; for instance research studies relating to second language teachers' linguistic identities (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018), community of practice identity (Trent, 2017), the role of practicum experience in identity forming (Martel, 2015; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018) and teacher identity through teacher education courses (Peercy, 2012). Research studies have led to the development of many frameworks that theorize teacher identity, and develop identity dynamics, and constructs.

Interestingly, the essentialist perspective views teachers' identity as one which has 'unchangeable characteristics or qualities that individuals learn or biologically inherit' (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 400). A view that ignores the fact that an individual human being can affect others as much as he or she can be affected by others in the different social groups to which they belong including a linguistic group, a professional community group, a gender group, and so forth. Hence, teacher education researchers have classified a teacher's knowledge into four types of knowledge: knowledge of the pedagogy of the profession, knowledge of the practice, the knowledge that the teacher gains from personal experiences, and knowledge about the context in which the teacher practices (Hoyle & John, 1996). Understanding this nature of the teacher's knowledge forms the basis of a teacher's perception of his/her professional role and identity, and what it implies and entails.

2. Methodology

This study was informed by the interpretive approach to research. Garrick (1999) states that the interpretive methodology can be applied to justify experience-based methods to knowledge; an approach that suits the purpose of this exploratory study. The phenomena experienced regarding a language teacher's professional identity might differ from one teacher to the other subjective states (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pring (2012) states that interpretive researchers should explore participants' different interpretations of a social phenomenon and reflect upon these differences. The subsequent sections provide a detailed description of the study design, the study setting and participants and the data collection procedures.

2.1 Research Design

The researcher employed a two-stage mixed methods design: 1) a quantitative approach stage followed by 2) a qualitative approach stage. Brown and Crumpler (2012) argue that TESOL researchers who use quantitative and qualitative methods achieve a number of advantages over those who use only one method. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), mixed methods offer a comprehensive picture of explored social phenomena.

2.2 Setting and Participants

Study participants of this research were English language teachers employed at an English language institute at a Saudi university. The university is a public university where free education is offered and all students receive government financial support. The university is in the western region of the country, a multicultural region where people from different countries come to visit the nearby holy cities and

expatriate workers. The university has two campuses, one for all male teachers and students and the other for all female teachers and students.

This heterogenous study population consisted of 491 individuals, 213 male and 278 female teachers. In stage one of the study (quantitative stage), the researcher sent the online questionnaire to all 491 teachers but received only 115 questionnaires, with 60% and 40% of the responses from male teachers and female teachers respectively. Most of the participants (36.5%) were aged between 30 and 39 years followed by participants aged between 40 and 49 years (34.8%). Almost half (47.8%) of the participants held a master's degree, while 28% held a doctorate degree. Close to one-third (28.7%) of the participants had 11-15 years of experience in language teaching, while fewer (18.3%) had 16-20 years of experience, and the remaining participants had a wide range of experience levels. The heterogeneric study sample yielded robust research findings. The researcher selected interested participants to participate in the second qualitative stage of the study from participants who had participated in the first quantitative stage of the study. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to choose participants to provide more in-depth insights and meaningfully contribute to the research questions (Bryman, 2016).

2.3 Data Collection Processes and Tools

2.3.1 The Quantitative Stage: Questionnaire

The questionnaire utilized in this research was designed by Beijaard et al (2000); a teacher's Professional Identity (PI) questionnaire which includes a total of 14 elements in three subsections: teachers' PI in the subject matter field that includes 4 elements, teachers' PI in the didactical field that includes 6 elements, and teachers' PI in the pedagogical field that includes 4 elements. Study participants ranked each element on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 entails the absence of influence and 10 entails the most influential value to illustrate the influence of each of the 14 aspects on their professional identity. A review of literature (Sheybani & Miri, 2019) showed that the reliability of the Beijaard et al.,(2000) questionnaire was .71 indicating that the Beijaard PI questionnaire is an effective tool for measuring PI aspects' influence on teachers in the EFL teaching contexts.

2.3.2 The Qualitative Stage: Semi-structured Interview

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews at a time and location that was convenient for the participant. An interview questions list was initially prepared to form a question pool by drawing on some components of language teachers' PI. Several questions that would produce quality data in response to the research questions were selected from the question pool to develop an interview schedule. Then, an experienced applied linguistics Ph.D. holder who is specialized in EFL teacher education examined the content and face validity of the interview schedule. The interview schedule was subsequently modified in light of the expert's feedback. Interviewees already familiar with part 1 of the study were oriented to the purpose and procedures of the semi-structured interviews at the beginning of the interview.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative Results

Table 1 summarizes the study's quantitative results. Participants' perceptions about their professional identity across the three major categories, subject field, didactic field and pedagogical field were summarized as percentages in response to the first research question: How do participants perceive different aspects of their professional identity?

Table 1. Teachers' professional identity perceptions

	Statement	responses %										
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Subject Matter Field	Necessity of keeping pace with new developments in subject matter	0	0	0	1.7	2	5.2	8.7	7.8	12	15.7	47
	Relevance to your students of having a knowledgeable teacher	0	0.9	0.9	0	2	1.7	1.7	7	21	14.8	50.4
	Teachers cannot permit themselves to making mistakes	6	0.9	0.9	7	5	17.4	10	5.2	16	11.3	20
	Subject matter is not the only basis for a teacher	0.9	1.7	0.9	1.7	1	9.5	5.2	14.8	23	12.2	29.6
Didactical Field	Importance of taking into account the students' level	0	0.9	0.9	0	0	0.9	1.7	8.7	17	13.9	55.7
	There are many ways to teach and learn the same thing	0	0	0.9	0.9	0	0.9	3.4	3.4	11	15.7	63.5
	Importance of students' ways and strategies of learning	0	0	0	0.9	2	4.3	5.2	7.8	24	9.6	47

	Planning and organization are the basis for teaching	0	0.9	0.9	0	2	4.3	3.5	7	19	15.7	47
	Motivating students and raising their interest by changing learning activities	0	0	0	0.9	0	1.7	1.7	10.4	17	20.1	48.7
	Necessity of being alert by listening and observing	0	0	0	0	0	1.7	6.1	7.8	18	17.4	48.7
Pedagogical Field	Ways of approaching students (positive, open, with respect, etc.)	0	0.9	0	0.9	0	2.5	0	7	11	13.9	63.5
	Good/safe classroom environment as a necessary condition for teaching	0	0	0.9	0.9	0	1.7	1.7	5.2	13	15.7	60.9
	Being alert for signs of students' involvement	0	0	0	0	1	0.9	3.4	7	20	16.5	51.3
	Students' situation/well-being is starting point for the lessons	0	0	0	0.9	3	4.3	7.8	15.7	21	14.8	33

RQ1: How do the participants perceive different aspects of professional identity? As can be seen from table 1, participants highly valued their professional identity across the three fields based on the higher Likert-type points (i.e., 6 and above). Highest ranked aspects that were seen in all the three fields relate to teaching. Students should have a knowledgeable teacher' (subject matter field), 'There are many ways to teach and learn the same thing' (didactical field) and 'Ways of approaching students: positive, open, with respect, etc.' (Pedagogical field). Therefore, participants conceived teaching as a defining feature of their professional identity; an interpretation also ironically illustrated by the lowest ranking aspects: 'Teachers cannot permit themselves to make mistakes' and 'Subject matter is not the only basis of a teacher' PI' (20% and 29.6% respectively).

3.2 Qualitative Results

The interviewees provided answers to the three research questions pertaining to the emotions and beliefs that drove Saudi EFL teachers to the teaching profession; the possibility that Saudi EFL teachers modeled their professional attributes on other teachers; and unfavorable professional identity characteristics which are summarized in tables two, three, and four respectively.

Table 2. Reasons to select teaching profession

`Participant 1	In the second year of my university, I went to an internship in the summer. One of my doctors told me that if I want to pursue teaching, I have to take the TESOL course. So, it just happened that like six months after I went abroad to visit my brother and I was bored. I was bored. So, I searched for a course in teaching. It was, like, how to teach English. And to me that was in so many aspects eye opening, because I wasn't really taught that way. Growing up, like most of the years. I was taught in a different way, but maybe in high school, maybe in university, I had a taste of how teachers, apply these techniques on me on us as students. So I could see the difference.
Participant 2	My father wanted me to become a doctor. Okay, and he always, you see that, like wanted me to study science yet, from the very beginning. I think that my aptitude I would say was in, like in like humanities I used to love poetry, literature, like in my own language, and of course in English language, and in my primary school. My experience was also like that I had teachers. I had teachers who were wonderful in literature and language. Yeah. So, that thing from the very beginning my tone was set for like social sciences. So when somebody says I mean of course obviously I've been influenced by your own teachers and your own experiences at school.
Participant 3	Right. It's a, it's a very good question. Like most of the EFL or ESL teachers. Yeah, around the world. I did not choose this field. 15 years ago, when I had my first degree in English Language and Literature. So it was the first job that I could do. I did not intend to stay in the field for quite long. Here in the ELI, I went through some events, a professional development events, my role as a researcher in the Eli and. And then I had a feeling that well as a human being, I'm contributing something to society. Yeah, right, em, and in my head is clear now. So, now, at this moment as we are talking. I'm pretty much I am enjoying this field.
Participant 4	I was very good at the language. I decided to choose English as majored and to continue my pursue my literary studies, dreaming of having something like what we can say University job. Yes, so my dream was to, because I know that I have that ability I know about my, my potential and about my personality. My dream was to become a teacher to be honest with you, I yeah I chose this because I like that. Yeah, which is English needs you to continue if you want to be a teacher so it's not only be a you have to go through MA and PhD turned out to be something like what we can say, experienced teacher Yeah.
Participant 5	My first teacher, yes, then, yeah, he was like that. He made it. He was very sympathetic. He would play games in the classroom. He turned our classroom into very nice experiences. I feel he knows a lot about the nature of people and the best way to treat them. So I felt I want to be like my teacher.

RQ2: What emotions and beliefs led Saudi EFL teachers elect to become teachers? Generally, the interviewees had four reasons for electing to teach: an informed decision (participant 1), emulation (participants 2 & 5), an unplanned decision (participant 3) and a dream

(participant 4). Strong beliefs and emotions were the foundation of all participants' professional experience except the third participant. Beliefs and emotions are arguably inextricably intertwined, indispensable to each other, and are affected by personal biography, social context, and external factors (Bukor, 2015). Also, beliefs and emotions function as an integral unit, as two minds that think and feel, respectively (ibid).

Table 3. Modelling of professional attributes

Participant 1	I think my role model are all of my teachers but it was my Arabic teacher in high school. I used to tell her that I cannot do syntax like I was smart good and full Mark except for math. You can just give me any other tasks to do. Yeah, except for giving some texts and what she did is she wouldn't let me do the syntax of poetry and four verses. Wow, that was really difficult, but the thing is, it kind of gave me confidence so I knew it was my attitude. Yeah, that mental block was my attitude. It was it. I cannot live so I tried to do that with my students so whenever they tell me English is bad and like no, there are ways you can do it. m I like I I've studied. I think of myself of being more eclectic in methodology. Yes, I take more of a humanistic, and positive Psychology approach. Yeah, with my students. I believe in team building. Like I don't just go in class and give him the lesson or just give them the activities to do. I also want them to know each other to get to know each other because I believe it really helps them to cooperate and learn better. Yeah, especially that students are too shy and they don't want to interact with one another.
Participant 2	There was one teacher who really influenced being admired me and whenever I think about you see that she was a motherly figure she was from South Africa. And she was indeed a gem of a person like a great commander with her language, and like great a kind of teacher with extensive reading skills. Like, if you talk about drowning if you talk about kids if you talk about jaws. If you talk about Shakespeare, she would tell you, even the biography of those people that how these writers work. She had a full command over her language, and I still remember that she used to teach us like Shakespeare and, like, I still remember the King Lear. Yes. She taught us. And in a way, her body language helped. Like, you see that style of teaching. Like, it's matchless. I see that I'm nowhere I tried to imitate sometimes her as a teacher but you see that I feel that I'm not even very close, because she was a wonderful teacher, she had a like commands. For me, just like she was extraordinary. I had good teachers, like in my Masters doctor professor. She used to give her heart and soul and I never saw her late, being late for a single minute in our class so professional self-professed teacher.
Participant 3	I would like to be a teacher who, with whom students feel, feel comfortable, and students and students always look forward to learning the language, because of my personality. Yeah, you know because teacher's role is extremely important. So the image of myself that I have, as a future teacher is that is an extremely communicative teacher. Yeah. I mean, I, I simply don't like to go back to the grammar translation regime, you know, where the focus is on teachers and the students don't have any benefits.
Participant 4	I like to teach something which is literary related to literature. Yes, because literature opens the way for you to be creative. I think when you teach, or when you have the ability to teach literature, or to be something like an, an artist. I think this opens creativity for you, the door of creativity and teaching needs someone who thinks of being creative. So a teacher should be able to be creative with the students and provide an atmosphere and maybe give them materials that can make it interesting for us to understand It is very important in order to convince our students that they are there in order to learn from you if they think that you are creative. Yeah, and you have that those strategies that that, let's say motivate them to be successful in there, in their let's say university life, definitely, you will be out the story, they will be influenced by you, definitely, definitely creative people have the ability or have more abilities to influence others.
Participant 5	You have to do. In general, type of things. True training is very important. It is needless to say that. Also experience Yeah, for example, I see my experience I tell you. Yeah, my experience here. I have been teaching English for about more than 20. I feel it important to me

RQ3: Do Saudi EFL teachers model their professional attributes on other teachers? Table 3 shows that only two of five participants modelled their professional attributes on other teachers. The responses of the other three participants does not undermine the role of exemplars in the formation of teacher professional identity; nor do they indicate that these participants were not aware of the value of modelling as a professional development construct. However, the responses of participants 3, 4 and 5, that give little information about one's perception of professional identity, illustrate personal reflections that are independent of the professional culture. A teacher identifies himself or herself based on the nature of social interactions he or she has with his or her peers and others (Dillabough, 1999; as cited in Vokatis & Zhang, 2016). Furthermore, teacher identity is co-constructed 'through engagement with others in cultural practice'(Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004, p. 21).

Table 4. unfavorable professional identity characteristics

Participant 1	I wouldn't say I'm too ethical, but I have issues with some teachers, I have issues with teachers who mock students just for the sake of mocking students who would disparage or belittle students, especially those who have weaker abilities. So, you will find them who would like make fun of students like oh I like I have students who would tell me that they aren't afraid to talk in class because sometimes the teacher encourages them. I think it's the way that some teachers give feedback, yes, sometimes I wouldn't blame teachers because the way that they give feedback they think it's alright to talk that way with students and I think it goes back to the cultural sensitivity, because as our culture's we are less sensitive. Take the emotions or the feelings of the students in account right when we talk to them or when we address something about them like if someone says like I'm going to fail and you're like yeah you're going to fail. That's it. Yes. Instead of saying like, listen, don't say that. You can still make it. Yeah, this is what I did with my students after they all failed in the CBT. Okay, I told them, now you have a chance to redeem yourself, and if God forbid, you didn't have a chance to redeem yourself, whatever I'm teaching you right now, you can apply it again. This kind of lifted up their spirit
Participant 2	It's very easy to find fault with the others but you see that I was I think I was lucky enough. Yeah. Only I would say that one of our teachers was a bit harsh but again, like this job was like that to maintain the discipline and all that. So, people use being. You see that school going, boy. We used to hate that part of our UC school schooling like you see that he was so harsh and used to use some harsh words as well. So I would never like to be a teacher who is so harsh with the students, that's interesting.
Participant 3	You know it's not that you're putting something in somebody's mind now language learning is a very delicate process. Now, a teacher has to play the role of. If I could say a motivator, he should be. He should be a very big motivation himself for the students. Now, any and Firstly, you should show your students that I'm concerned about learning. If you do not think that you will not show that you care to the students, they don't care. They will be extremely. What can I say, you know, be lost in a way. So first you have to show them that I'm worried about your learning
Participant 4	I see some colleagues who are now, all in their 50s or their 60s, and I go to class, and I see them sitting just practicing the job. Just something like this what we can say transferring only ideas conveying the ideas I don't like this. Very few students will go to class because they know that I'm going to give them attacks and they will translate the texts of something that is new to them So what I did is that or was that from the very beginning. Yeah, it was not a joke, it's, it's real because yeah, we have differences between poetry and mathematics and we have similarities, for instance, when we write from left to from left to right, in English with the foreign says, four plus four equals two.
Participant 5	I think to just lecture the students is not always good. It's not about the way many people understand things, because some people and students just do not understand things the way some teachers teach.

RQ4: What are the unfavorable professional identity characteristics among Saudi EFL teachers? Table 4 reports a plethora of teacher's professional identity characteristics including inter alia, how teachers conceive of their roles vis-à-vis the students, other teachers, the educational administration, and the society at large. However, there is nothing inherent in these roles to render them negative or positive particularly when it comes to teachers' relationship with their students. Generally, study participants reported several unfavorable roles that were conceived partially to characterize the Saudi EFL classroom including some teachers' tendency to ridicule the students (participant 1), to treat the students harshly (participant 2), and to ignore students' needs and rights (participants 3, 4, 5).

4. Discussion

Quantitative data illustrated that the study participants greatly valued their professional identity aspects across the three fields (i.e., subject, didactical and pedagogical fields) reflecting their awareness of the constructs underlying their professional identity. Although some aspects were ranked highest (i.e., a score of 10), top-scoring statements (50%+) and their scores include:

- Ways of approaching students (positive, open, with respect, etc.) 63.5%
- There are many ways to teach and learn the same thing 63.5%
- Good/safe classroom environment as a necessary condition for teaching 60.9%
- Importance of taking into account the students' level 55.7%
- Being alert for signs of students' involvement 51.3%
- Relevance to your students of having a knowledgeable teacher 50.4%

While the whole questionnaire focused on the professional identity aspects that relate to the classroom environment, participants attach heightened importance to the efficiency of instructional practices as central components in the formation of their professional identity. Study participants emphasized the importance of these professional identity aspects, that reflect their commitment to the institutional rules that prioritize learner-centered teaching, in negotiating their roles with their students, their seniors and educational administration. As such, study participants generally understand that teachers with professional identity are deemed to have good quality in teaching (Rachmajanti et al., 2021). Furthermore, other stakeholders (including the society at large) understand who the teachers are and how they operate, and 'move through the various social, cultural, political and economic discourses that have permeated their workplace'(Cheng, 2021, p. 2). However, conceptualizing the professional identity of the Saudi EFL teachers requires further delving into the qualitative results.

The exploratory nature of the present study along with the fact that narratives 'are fundamentally intrinsic to the process of making sense of oneself and to the shaping of one's identity' (Reis, 2011, p. 11), renders the qualitative methods suitable to inform of teachers' professional experience. Tables 2, 3 and 4 demonstrate participants' narratives about three aspects of their professional identity. The related second and third aspects (i.e., the possibility that Saudi EFL teachers model their professional attributes on other teachers; and unfavorable professional identity characteristics as perceived by the participants) explain quantitative study results because they provide detailed information about teachers' professional experiences, beliefs, and emotions. Furthermore, both aspects are used by teachers as essential tools in negotiating their role in the professional community to which they belong.

Teachers' instructional practices are not only shaped by their past education and classroom experiences, but also modelled on their more experienced colleagues. In fact, the use of modelling in education is theoretically motivated; modeling has its roots in the social learning theory (SLT) developed by Albert Bandura in the early 1970s. SLT conceives learning as a process that is fraught with hard labor and hazards that cannot result solely from the effort made by an individual learner (Bandura, 1972). Thus, SLT proposes modeling acquire new behavior forms; people can form ideas 'of how new behaviors are formed [by observing others] and on later occasions use this coded information serves as guide for action' (p. 23): a possible explanation for why study participants reported that experiences inherited from their former teachers were partly responsible for the formation of their professional identity.

Finally, study participants reported some unfavorable professional identity characteristics they might have personally experienced as former students which fortunately are easy to detect and handle. Providetialy, the Saudi academia abounds in a variety of antidotes to such unfavorable professional identity characteristics. First, the academic quality assurance in all higher education institutions introduced in the last decade has come to enhance the relationship between teachers and students. The quality assurance standards require teachers to share their general lesson plans (technically known as course syllabus) with students and students to assess their teachers' performance to foster more transparency in teachers' academic and administrative roles (Al-Dahsh, Ezza, & Bidair, 2010; Alamoudi & Troudi, 2017; Ezza & Almudibry, 2018). Second, the integration of information and communication technologies into the Saudi EFL classroom has dramatically changed teachers' educational roles from the sole source of information to a 'facilitator' role (Alamoudi, 2021; Ezza & Bakry, 2014). But this study was solely focused on professional identity constructs that relate to the instructional practices and ignored the other determinants of professional identity such as teachers' relationship with other teachers, their administration, and their communities at large, and who teachers need to help negotiating their professional roles.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to conceptualize Saudi EFL teacher's professional identity from faculty members who were currently in the service of a public Saudi University. The study was motivated by scarce research having been conducted in the Saudi context to inform Saudi EFL teachers about the constructs underpinning teachers' professional identity and awareness of their professional roles. The current study set out to address two objectives: to contribute to the ongoing conversation on this theme, and to determine whether EFL teachers' awareness of the professional identity constructs underpin their professional success. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to attain study objectives. Study participants were aware of the constructs underlying the formation of their professional identity but exclusively confined these constructs to their instructional experience; a limitation of this study. Therefore, future researchers should conduct more comprehensive studies to cater for other constructs that underpin EFL professional identity in the Saudi context.

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