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**EXPLORING KAZAKH EFL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY:
A QUANTITATIVE STUDY**

Abstract: This study's extensive quantitative research design to investigate the professional identities of in-service EFL teachers in Kazakhstan and Turkistan makes it stand out. A comprehensive survey, unparalleled in scope and exhaustiveness, was distributed to 470 English instructors in 45 state schools, offering an extensive synopsis of how these educators see their professional identities. The survey findings provide insights into several professional identity factors, including the propensity to teach, act as role models, and establish productive learning settings. The results show that participants' professional identities were generally average, with major exceptions for knowledge-sharing and role modeling. Simultaneously, less emphasis was placed on recognizing students' original language culture and establishing a favorable classroom atmosphere. The study also looks at how different professional identities are within qualification categories, and it finds statistically significant variances that highlight how teachers' self-perception and professional growth are influenced by their educational background. These findings have implications for teacher education and professional development initiatives and a deeper knowledge of the elements influencing EFL instructors' professional identities in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Professional Identity, EFL Teachers, Quantitative Research, Teacher Development, Survey Study

Introduction

In recent years, in-service EFL instructors' perception and evaluation of professional identity have garnered increasing attention. This interest results from the realization that better levels of work satisfaction, dedication to teaching, and readiness for ongoing professional growth are associated with a strong sense of self as a professional (Day, 2011). Nevertheless, more empirical research that quantitatively analyzes the professional identity of in-service EFL teachers and investigates how credentials and teaching experience influence this identity is still desperately needed, even in light of the growing attention this field is receiving (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Our research attempts to close this gap and add to this sector's expanding body of knowledge.

By statistically identifying the professional identity of in-service EFL instructors, this study seeks to add to the body of literature already in existence. The study specifically aims to respond to the following research questions:

- (1) How do in-service EFL teachers assess their level of professional identity?
- (2) How do in-service EFL teachers' levels of professional identity differ depending on their qualification categories?
- (3) How do in-service teachers' levels of professional identity vary according to their years of teaching experience? Addressing these questions is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that influence professional identity among EFL teachers and for informing the development of targeted professional development programs.

The current study aims to evaluate in-service EFL teachers' professional identities objectively and investigate how these identities differ based on their backgrounds and experiences in the classroom. By addressing the previously mentioned research issues, this

study attempts to offer important insights into the elements that affect professional identity among EFL teachers. The results of this study should add to the body of knowledge on professional identity in EFL teaching and guide the creation of focused professional development initiatives that aid in the advancement of EFL instructors.

EFL teachers' professional identities are intricate and multidimensional constructs impacted by various circumstances, such as their training and prior teaching experience. Understanding how these elements influence professional identity is crucial to assisting instructors in developing professionally and raising the standard of EFL instruction. By offering a quantitative examination of the professional identities of in-service EFL instructors and concentrating on the influence of credentials and teaching experience, this study seeks to close the gap in the literature.

Literature review

In the context of teaching EFL, a teacher's professional identity refers to how they view themselves and their positions within the educational community and among their students and colleagues. Pennington and Richards (2016) claim that the interaction of several elements, such as language ability, cultural sensitivity, and the demands of the teaching profession, makes professional identity in EFL especially difficult. The conventions and expectations of their local educational systems and the more general international standards related to English language instruction (ELT) are frequently at odds with EFL teachers. This dualism may present particular difficulties in forming and upkeep of a coherent professional identity.

The cultural aspects of professional identity in EFL teaching are further highlighted by Duff and Uchida (1997), who point out that educators frequently have to balance their own cultural origins with the expectations of their students and the communities in which they work. Teachers' views about their jobs, methods of instruction, and relationships with students can be influenced by this process of negotiation and adaptation, which is essential to developing a professional identity.

Positive outcomes in teaching, such as increased work satisfaction, a strong sense of commitment to the field, and a readiness to participate in ongoing professional development, are associated with a strong sense of professional identity (Pennington, 2014). EFL instructors' professional identities influence how they approach teaching languages, how they run their classrooms, and how well they interact with students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Teachers with a clear sense of themselves as professionals are likelier to use cutting-edge techniques, evaluate their work critically, and look for chances to advance their careers (Kelchtermans, 2009).

On the other hand, educators who feel conflicted or unclear about their professional identity may find it difficult to stay motivated, have less work satisfaction, and become more likely to burn out (Day & Gu, 2010). This emphasizes how crucial it is to help EFL teachers build a solid professional identity by providing specialized professional development opportunities and institutional support. A number of variables influence the formation and growth of EFL instructors' professional identities. These consist of an educator's educational background, teaching experience, and the sociocultural setting in which they operate. Every one of these elements significantly impacts how instructors view their jobs and duties, as well as how confident and capable they are in the classroom.

One important factor influencing professional identity in EFL teaching is educational background. A greater feeling of professional identity is linked to higher qualifications, such as specialist certificates in language instruction or postgraduate degrees in education (Pennington, 2014). With these credentials, educators may equip themselves with the theoretical understanding and practical abilities needed to successfully negotiate the challenges

of teaching languages and establish their authority as professionals in their learning environments.

Another important component in the formation of a professional identity is teaching experience. With increased experience, educators improve their methods, better grasp their responsibilities, and become more self-assured. Because they have had more opportunities to reflect on their work, interact with professional networks, and overcome obstacles in the field, experienced teachers are more likely to have a well-developed professional identity (Beijaard et.al., 2004).

However, it is not always clear how experience and professional identity relate. Day and Gu (2010) point out that changes in institutional objectives, educational policy changes, or personal issues like burnout can cause conflicts in an experienced teacher's professional identity. Teachers at all stages of their careers require continual support and professional development since these variables might result in disillusionment or a loss of professional identity.

Pennington and Richards (2016) also highlight the significance of professional communities in forming a person's professional identity. Teachers can network with colleagues, exchange experiences, and collaborate on professional development by participating in conferences, online forums, and professional associations. These contacts make teachers feel more a part of a larger professional community, which strengthens professional identity.

Farrell's (2011) study examined the connection between an EFL teacher's professional identity and their level of autonomy. The study suggests that educators with a strong professional identity are more likely to be autonomous in their teaching methods, which enhances their dedication and job satisfaction. The study also emphasized the importance of reflective practice in forming a professional identity, implying that educators who consistently self-reflect on their methods will better define and fortify their professional identities.

The research above highlights the significance of providing focused professional development programs, institutional support, and chances for reflective practice to facilitate the formation of professional identities among EFL instructors. Educators and legislators can better assist the professional development of EFL instructors and improve the standard of language instruction by gaining an awareness of the elements that determine professional identity.

There aren't many studies that focus on this important facet of teacher development. Hence, research on the professional identities of EFL instructors in Kazakhstan is still comparatively underdeveloped. The literature in this field is still lacking, even though Kazakh academics have started looking at several elements that affect EFL instructors' professional identities, such as the influence of Kazakhstan's trilingual education policy and the function of professional development programs (Polovnikova & Qanay, 2023; Khegay, 2017). The majority of research that has been done so far has concentrated on more general educational issues, which leaves a big knowledge vacuum about the particular identity development processes and particular difficulties that EFL instructors in Kazakhstan confront. The dearth of thorough research highlights the need for further in-depth, context-specific studies that can provide a complete understanding of how EFL instructors in Kazakhstan create and interpret their professional identities and how this affects their instructional strategies and professional development.

By objectively analyzing the professional identities of in-service EFL instructors and investigating how these identities differ based on credentials and teaching experience, the current study expands on the body of literature already in existence. The results shed fresh light on the variables influencing professional identity and emphasize the need for focused professional development initiatives for EFL instructors' professional development.

Methodology

Research design

This study used a quantitative research design to obtain information on the EFL in-service teachers' professional identity. Quantitative data obtained through a survey method was used to describe the bigger picture by providing the result of a large survey.

Setting and Participants

A random sampling method was adopted to select the participants for the study. One commonly used sampling method in survey studies is simply random sampling. It is considered an appropriate sampling method for selecting a sample among homogeneous and uniform populations. With this selection method, all individuals have an equal chance of participating in the study, as it is entirely randomized (Noor et.al., 2022). The participants of this study were 470 English teachers teaching at 45 different state schools in Turkistan. The sample consisted of teachers of different qualification categories and experience. Detailed information is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1.

Demographic characteristics of participants related to their qualification categories.

Qualification category	F	%
Trainee teacher and teacher	150	31,9
teacher-moderator	144	30,6
Teacher-expert	107	22,8
teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	14,7
Total	470	100,0

As depicted in Table 1, the distribution of teachers across qualification categories is as follows: 32% are trainee-teachers and teachers, 30.6% are teacher-moderators, 22.8 % are teacher-experts, 13.6 % are teacher-researchers, and only 1 % are master-teachers. The qualification category signifies the level of professional competence attained by the teachers.

The Ministry of Education outlines the qualification requirements for teachers and classifies them into specific qualification categories based on their qualifications.

Teachers are categorized according to their qualifications as follows:

Trainee teacher and Teacher The qualification category of "trainee teacher" is conferred by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for one academic year, coinciding with the completion of the program designed to acquaint candidates with the teaching profession. During this period, the teacher trainee is paired with a teacher moderator who serves as a mentor, guiding the trainee's development.

Upon concluding the teacher education program, the teacher-trainee must compile a comprehensive report detailing their accomplishment in various instructional activities. This includes demonstrating and analyzing lessons, engaging in lesson study, and employing the action research method. Subsequently, the teacher mentor assesses the trainee's performance and issues a recommendation based on the program outcomes.

The educational institution's certification commission is responsible for conferring the qualification category of "teacher" to the trainee upon completion of the entry into the profession program and a positive recommendation from the teacher-moderator.

1. The "teacher" qualification category is extended to individuals who have completed relevant pedagogical or other professional training, including retraining courses, have at least one year of teaching experience, and are qualified for this position. Prospective teacher candidates must demonstrate proficiency in various domains, including academic discipline,

teaching methodologies, assessment and evaluation techniques, lesson planning and organization, and educational processes. Additionally, they should exhibit an understanding of student psychology and age-related characteristics and contribute to fostering students' general cultural knowledge and socialization. active participation in educational events, implementation of individualized teaching approaches tailored to students' needs, proficiency in professional pedagogical skills, and adeptness in utilizing innovative technologies are also essential requirements.

2. Teacher-moderator

Individuals with relevant pedagogical or other professional training, including retraining courses and boasting at least two years of teaching experience, are qualified for this position. The candidates for this position must fulfill the general requirements for the qualification category “teacher”. Additionally, they are expected to demonstrate adeptness in employing innovative teaching methodologies and techniques, conducting lesson research on teaching, including lesson study, using action research methods, engaging in lesson research, including the practice of lesson study, and receiving positive feedback from colleagues on teaching. Moreover, candidates should have prior involvement either as participants, laureates, or winners in professional skills competitions or have served as supervisors to participants or winners of Olympiads, competitions, or contests at the level of an educational organization, district (city of regional importance) following the pre-approved list provided by the authorized body in the field of education.

3. Expert-teacher:

Individuals who have completed relevant pedagogical or other professional training, including retraining courses, and have at least three years of teaching experience are qualified for this position. The requirement for candidates of the ‘expert-teacher’ qualification category is to fulfill the general requirement for the qualification category teacher-moderator. They must possess the skills of analyzing educational activities and the educational processes. Moreover, the candidate must be able to determine professional development priorities for himself and his colleagues at the educational organization level in an objective and constructive manner, to conduct lesson research on teaching, including lesson study, using the methods of action research, to reflect on lessons and receive positive feedback from colleagues on teaching. Further, the candidate must have experience as a participant laureate or winner of a professional skills competition or as a supervisor of a participant, winner, or prize-winner of Olympiads, competitions, or contests at the level of regional district or city of regional importance according to the list approved by the authorized body in the field of education.

4. Teacher-researcher and Master-teacher:

Candidates must have relevant higher or postgraduate pedagogical education and at least five years of teaching experience. In addition to meeting general qualification requirements, candidates must possess specific professional competencies, including skills for lesson research and development of assessment tools, participation in and achievement in competitions at regional, republic, and international levels, Olympiads, or holding the title of “Best Teacher” generalization of teaching experience at various administrative levels.

In addition to the requirements mentioned above, candidates for the qualification category of “teacher-researcher” must meet the following listed professional competencies:

presents the best educational practices and developments in pedagogy or a program developer whose programs have been implemented in educational organizations and approved by the Republican Educational and Methodological Council at the Y. Altynsarin National Academy of Education or the Republican Educational and Methodological Council under the Department of Technical and Vocational Education, or is an author or co-author of textbooks, educational and methodological aids included in the list of textbooks, educational methodological complexes and aids approved by competent authority in the field of education

or recommended by the Republican educational and methodological council under the department of technical and vocational education.

These requirements aim to ensure that teacher researchers and master teachers have the practical skills and ability to contribute to educational research, mentoring, and professional development within the teaching community.

Table 2.

Demographic characteristics of participants related to their years of experience.

Years of teaching experience	F	%
0-5	115	24,5
6-10	95	20,2
11-15	87	18,5
16-20	97	20,6
21+	76	16,2
Total	470	100,0

Table 2 shows that 24.5 % of participants had 0 to 5 years of teaching experience as English teachers, 20.2% had 6 to 10 years, 18.5 % had 11 to 15 years, 20.6 % had 16 to 20 years, and 16.2 % had more than 30 years of teaching experience as teachers of the English language.

Instruments

Survey

The present study collected data using the English Language Teacher Professional Identity Inventory developed by Hashemi, Karimi, and Mofidi (2021). The inventory consisted of 42 items grouped into 13 dimensions such as:

1) creating a relaxed learning atmosphere; 2) having the tendency to impart knowledge and experience; 3) having respectful behavior; 4) having the ability to develop/select EFL materials; 5) having management skills; 6) having error correction skills; 7) having communication skills; 8) creating an effective teaching environment; 9) having the tendency to develop professionally; 10) familiarity with target language and culture; 11) serving as an effective role model; 12) valuing L1 culture; and 13) being concerned about students' ability and development. The inventory was implemented for the participants as a 4-point Likert type (1- strongly disagree; 2- disagree; 3-agree; 4-strongly agree).

Chronbach's internal consistency coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire items. The interpretation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient generally ranges between 0.0 and +1.0. The higher the value of the test results, the higher the internal consistency of the test and, therefore, the reliability of the questionnaire (Abushabab, 2016). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of this scale in the original study was found to be .91. In contrast, in the present study, it was found to be .94, indicating good internal consistency of the items (Pallant, 2020).

Data collection and analysis

The data were gathered through the questionnaire sent to the participants via Google form with the support of the "Education Development Center" of the Education Department of Turkestan Region. The quantitative data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS version 25.0.

Initially, Skewness and Kurtosis values were computed to determine the normal distribution of the data before conducting inferential statistics. Skewness is commonly used to measure the extent to which the distribution of a variable is symmetrical. In contrast, Kurtosis

assesses whether the data distribution is too peaked. A range between -1 and +1 is considered excellent, and a value between -2 and +2 is considered acceptable. Values close to zero in skewness and kurtosis indicate a normal distribution of responses (Sarstedt et.al., 2021). Accordingly, these values were found to be 0.361 and -1,080 for the qualification category and 0,112 and -1,314 for the years of teaching experience, which indicated that the data is normally distributed. Descriptive statistics (frequency, means, and standard deviations) were used to describe the participants' general level of professional identity. To compare whether the participants' levels of professional identity vary according to their qualification categories and years of teaching experience, a one-way ANOVA test was adopted for data.

Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the study's first research question, "How do in-service EFL teachers assess their level of professional identity?" Table 2 shows the results in terms of means and standard deviations related to each item.

Table 2. Results of Descriptive Analysis

	Questionnaire components	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Creating a relaxed atmosphere	470	2,4894	,59618
2	Having the tendency to imparting knowledge and experience	470	2,6932	,69558
3	Having respectful behavior	470	2,5525	,67896
4	Having the ability to develop /select EFL materials	470	2,5287	,65788
5	Having management skills	470	2,4729	,52869
6	Having error correction skills	470	2,4177	,62121
7	Having communication skills	470	2,5454	,74564
8	Creating an effective teaching environment	470	2,3695	,61903
9	Having the tendency to develop professionally	470	2,4309	,65466
10	Familiarity with the target language and culture	470	2,5734	,80473
11	Serving as an effective role model	470	2,6537	,73983
12	Valuing L1 culture	470	2,1245	,38900
13	Being concerned about students' ability and development	470	2,4596	,65855
14	Total	470	2,5080	,46468

The findings reached through the descriptive analysis (Table 2) indicated the average level of professional identity of participants as ($X=2.50$). The highest mean values among dimensions were found in "Having the tendency to impart knowledge and experience" ($X=2.69$) and "Serving as an effective role model" ($X=2.65$), whereas all the other dimensions' mean values were lower than 2.60. The lowest mean values indicated dimensions "Creating an effective teaching environment" ($X=2.36$) and "Valuing L1 culture" ($X=2.12$).

A one-way ANOVA test was used to answer the second research question, "How do in-service EFL teachers' levels of professional identity differ depending on their qualification categories?" The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

One-way ANOVA test Results for Qualification Category Differences

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P	Posthoc LCD
Creating a relaxed atmosphere	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,4583	,59741	1,923	,125	
	teacher-moderator	144	2,4219	,54634			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,5864	,63793			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,5471	,61428			
Having the tendency to imparting knowledge and experience	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,6640	,70294	2,596	,052	
	teacher-moderator	144	2,5944	,63199			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,8280	,74451			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,7536	,70389			
Having respectful behavior	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,4978	,65282	2,264	,080	
	teacher-moderator	144	2,4838	,63298			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,6760	,72750			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,6232	,72965			
Having the ability to develop /select EFL materials	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,4767	,61261	2,848	,037	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,4549	,62972			2-3
	Teacher-expert	107	2,6776	,72928			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,5652	,66787			
Having management skills	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,3983	,49333	4,355	,005	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,4149	,49751			1-4
	Teacher-expert	107	2,5654	,57905			2-3
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,6123	,54661			2-4
Having error correction skills	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,3644	,60737	5,225	,001	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,3009	,50069			1-4
	Teacher-expert	107	2,5607	,70873			2-3
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,5556	,67559			2-4
Having communication skills	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,4400	,72386	5,327	,001	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,4468	,69089			1-4
	Teacher-expert	107	2,7570	,81979			2-3
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,6522	,71271			
Creating an effective teaching environment	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,3022	,58102	5,933	,001	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,2708	,55606			2-3
	Teacher-expert	107	2,5732	,71638			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,4058	,59648			
Having the tendency to develop professionally	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,4167	,65900	1,390	,245	
	teacher-moderator	144	2,3576	,61639			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,5187	,68310			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,4783	,67211			
Familiarity with target language and culture	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,5367	,78599	,740	,529	

	teacher-moderator	144	2,5382	,80227			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,6729	,85810			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,5725	,76828			
Serving as an effective role model	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,5917	,76106	2,054	,106	
	teacher-moderator	144	2,5851	,70411			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,7640	,74672			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,7609	,73818			
Valuing L1 culture	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,0767	,36973	1,147	,330	
	teacher-moderator	144	2,1389	,39421			
	Teacher-expert	107	2,1542	,43116			
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,1522	,34624			
Being concerned about students' ability and development	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,3978	,61269	4,147	,006	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,3588	,59535			1-4
	Teacher-expert	107	2,5826	,72986			2-3
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,6135	,71771			2-4
Total	Trainee teacher and teacher	150	2,4544	,44376	5,426	,001	1-3
	teacher-moderator	144	2,4317	,40176			1-4
	Teacher-expert	107	2,6346	,53147			2-3
	teacher-researcher and master-teacher	69	2,5873	,47723			2-4

*p<0.05

The results of the One-way ANOVA test examining differences in professional identity across various qualification categories of participants yielded a significant F value of 5.426 (p=0.001), indicating statistically significant differences at the predetermined significance level of 0.05.

A closer examination of individual dimensions revealed statistically significant differences among groups. These differences were found in “Having the ability to develop /select EFL materials” (F=2.848; p=.037), “Having management skills” (F=4.355; p=0.005), “Having error correction skills” (F=5.225; p=0.001), “Having communication skills” (F=5.327; p=0.001), “Creating an effective teaching environment” (F=5.933; p=.001), and “Being concerned about students ability and development” (F=4.147; p=.006).

Post-hoc comparisons using the Least Significant Difference (LCD) test revealed statistically significant differences between trainee teachers and teacher groups of participants and teacher experts in terms of their abilities to develop /select EFL materials, skills of managing, correct errors, communicate, create an effective teaching environment, being concerned about students' ability and development. Teacher experts consistently demonstrated higher scores than trainee teachers and teachers in these dimensions.

Similarly, significant differences were observed between the Trainee teacher and teacher groups of participants compared to teacher-moderators, with the latter possessing higher mean scores in management skills, error correction skills, communication skills, and concern for students' abilities and development.

Following, statistically significant differences were found between teacher-moderators and teacher experts with teacher experts scoring significantly higher in various areas, including abilities to develop /select EFL materials, managing, correcting errors, communicating, creating an effective teaching environment, and concerns for students' abilities and development.

Finally, statistically significant differences were identified between teacher-moderators and teacher-researchers and master-teachers group of participants, with the latter group demonstrating higher mean scores in skills of managing, correcting errors, and being concerned about students' ability and development

However, no statistically significant differences were detected among the groups in dimensions related to creating a relaxed atmosphere, imparting knowledge and experience, developing professionally, familiarity with the target language and culture, serving as an effective role model, and valuing L1 culture.

To answer the third question of the study, “How do in-service teachers’ levels of professional identity vary according to their years of teaching experience?”, a one-way ANOVA test was run. The result of the analysis can be found in Table 4.

Table 4.
One-way ANOVA test Results for Years of Teaching Experience Differences.

	Components	Year experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P	Posthoc
1	Creating a relaxed atmosphere	0-5	115	2,4826	,62366	3,850	,004*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,4711	,57063			2-5
		11-15	87	2,3966	,52489			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4175	,53731			4-5
		21 +	76	2,7204	,68309			
2	Having the tendency to imparting knowledge and experience	0-5	115	2,6783	,71950	3,558	,007*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,6084	,63374			2-5
		11-15	87	2,6644	,70644			3-5
		16-20	97	2,6124	,66132			4-5
		21 +	76	2,9579	,71652			
3	Having respectful behavior	0-5	115	2,5275	,69105	3,710	,006*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,5158	,61458			2-5
		11-15	87	2,5134	,64661			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4467	,61593			4-5
		21 +	76	2,8158	,79330			
4	Having the ability to develop /select EFL materials	0-5	115	2,4826	,63843	1,706	,148	1-5
		6-10	95	2,4553	,60139			2-5
		11-15	87	2,5517	,71339			
		16-20	97	2,5052	,62498			
		21 +	76	2,6941	,71484			
5	Having management skills	0-5	115	2,4391	,52835	4,136	,003*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,3500	,43209			2-5
		11-15	87	2,4598	,51415			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4923	,54660			4-5
		21 +	76	2,6678	,58650			
6	Having error correction skills	0-5	115	2,3797	,63658	3,242	,012*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,2807	,49181			2-5
		11-15	87	2,4061	,61511			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4570	,63705			
		21 +	76	2,6096	,68937			
7	Having communication skills	0-5	115	2,4638	,73574	2,654	,033*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,4632	,66364			2-5
		11-15	87	2,5900	,82233			4-5
		16-20	97	2,5017	,71706			
		21 +	76	2,7763	,76862			
8	Creating an effective teaching environment	0-5	115	2,2957	,59361	2,942	,020*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,3228	,54459			2-5
		11-15	87	2,4023	,62078			4-5

9	Having the tendency to develop professionally	16-20	97	2,3127	,61579	1,060	,376	
		21 +	76	2,5746	,70888			
		0-5	115	2,3739	,65173			
		6-10	95	2,4474	,65018			
		11-15	87	2,3736	,58676			
		16-20	97	2,4381	,65055			
10	Familiarity with target language and culture	21 +	76	2,5526	,73747	1,187	,316	
		0-5	115	2,5478	,82178			
		6-10	95	2,5895	,76485			
		11-15	87	2,5287	,82953			
		16-20	97	2,4948	,75517			
		21 +	76	2,7434	,85437			
11	Serving as an effective role model	0-5	115	2,6478	,81104	4,890	,001*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,5868	,67218			2-5
		11-15	87	2,6379	,71402			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4948	,64950			4-5
		21 +	76	2,9671	,77065			
12	Valuing L1 culture	0-5	115	2,1087	,39058	,143	,966	
		6-10	95	2,1263	,39254			
		11-15	87	2,1264	,42603			
		16-20	97	2,1186	,34440			
		21 +	76	2,1513	,40016			
13	Being concerned about students ability and development	0-5	115	2,4464	,65171	2,694	,030*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,3474	,56685			2-5
		11-15	87	2,4598	,65344			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4227	,67788			4-5
		21 +	76	2,6667	,72419			
Total		0-5	115	2,4762	,48267	4,999	,001*	1-5
		6-10	95	2,4431	,38761			2-5
		11-15	87	2,4923	,45413			3-5
		16-20	97	2,4578	,45066			4-5
		21 +	76	2,7193	,50568			

Statistically significant differences were observed among groups with various years of experience related to almost all scale dimensions and in the total mean scores of the groups ($t=4.99$; $p=0.001$). Only in several dimensions, such as “Having the tendency to develop professionally”, “Familiarity with target language and culture,” and “Valuing L1 culture,” did participants of different years of teaching experience demonstrate similar results, and no statistically significance differences were observed in this dimension.

The participants with over 21 years of experience demonstrated significantly higher mean scores than other groups across the dimension. Specifically, they showed notably higher mean scores in dimensions such as Creating a relaxed atmosphere, Having the tendency to impart knowledge and experience, Having respectful behavior, Having the ability to develop /select EFL materials, Having management skills, Having communication skills, Creating an effective teaching environment, Serving as an effective role model and Being concerned about students ability and development. Subsequently, statistically significant differences were found between participants with over 21 years of experience and other groups.

Discussion

The study's conclusions offer insightful information on the professional identities of EFL instructors currently in service. They concentrate on how educators view different facets of professional identity and how these perspectives vary based on their training and prior teaching experience. The study's findings show that participants' professional identities were generally average, with some strengths and shortcomings noted in several facets of professional identity.

By emphasizing the intricate and multidimensional character of identity construction in the context of EFL teaching, these findings add to the body of knowledge already available on teacher professional identity.

According to the first study question's descriptive analysis, participants' average degree of professional identification was moderate ($X=2.50$). The characteristics "Having the tendency to impart knowledge and experience" ($X=2.69$) and "Serving as an effective role model" ($X=2.65$) had the highest mean values. These findings imply that the EFL instructors in this research believe they are skilled and knowledgeable educators dedicated to imparting their knowledge and acting as role models for their pupils. This is consistent with other studies highlighting the value of role modeling and information exchange in helping instructors create strong professional identities (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

However, the study also pinpointed instances where the individuals' professional identities lacked depth. The aspects of "Valuing L1 culture" ($X=2.12$) and "Creating an effective teaching environment" ($X=2.36$) had the lowest mean values. These results suggest that EFL instructors could find it difficult to live up to some components of their professional identity, especially when fostering a positive learning environment and incorporating the culture of their first language (L1) into their instruction. The comparatively low ratings in these aspects imply that teacher preparation and professional development programs should focus more on these areas.

A few of the variables that make it difficult to create an effective learning environment in the classroom include the scarcity of resources, the size of the classes, and the pressure to achieve curricular requirements. These difficulties may impede educators' capacity to establish stimulating and encouraging learning environments necessary for efficient instruction and learning (Kelchtermans, 2009). Moreover, the low importance given to "Valuing L1 culture" can reflect how English is frequently used as the target language in EFL instruction, which might cause students' linguistic and cultural origins to be marginalized (Duff & Uchida, 1997). This research emphasizes the necessity of teaching EFL in a more culturally sensitive manner that takes into account the L1 cultures of the students.

The study also employed a one-way ANOVA test to investigate how participants' professional identities varied across their various qualification categories. With a substantial F value of 5.426 ($p=0.001$), the results showed statistically significant variations in professional identity across these categories. According to this research, a person's professional identity as an EFL instructor is greatly influenced by their qualifications, with more qualifications often linked to a stronger sense of self.

"Having the ability to develop/select EFL materials" ($F=2.848$; $p=.037$), "Having management skills" ($F=4.355$; $p=0.005$), "Having error correction skills" ($F=5.225$; $p=0.001$), "Having communication skills" ($F=5.327$; $p=0.001$), "Creating an effective teaching environment" ($F=5.933$; $p=.001$), and "Being concerned about students' ability and development" ($F=4.147$; $p=.006$) were among the areas where a closer look at individual dimensions revealed statistically significant differences among groups. These results emphasize how crucial certain abilities and competencies are to forming a professional identity, especially in student assistance, communication, and classroom management.

The notable variations noted in the capacity to create or choose EFL materials imply that instructors with greater training may possess more sophisticated abilities in these areas, essential for efficient instruction. This is consistent with Pennington's (2014) assertion that postgraduate degrees give educators the know-how and abilities to successfully negotiate the complexity of teaching foreign languages and demonstrate their authority as professionals. Comparably, the notable variations in communication, error correction, and management skills show that certifications also improve teachers' capacity to give students feedback and support and manage the classroom, which are crucial elements of good teaching (Farrell, 2011).

The results of "Creating an effective teaching environment" are especially significant since they imply that highly qualified teachers are more likely to establish stimulating and encouraging learning settings. This could be a result of their training's increased exposure to pedagogical theories and practices, which gives them the instruments and techniques required to design productive learning environments (Pennington & Richards, 2016). The considerable variations in the dimension of "Being concerned about students' ability and development" further emphasize the importance of credentials in supporting a student-centered teaching method in which educators give special attention to the needs and growth of each student.

Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Development

The results of this study have significant ramifications for professional development and teacher preparation initiatives. Higher credentials appear to lead to a stronger professional identity, especially in classroom management, communication, and student assistance, based on the considerable disparities identified across degree categories. To ensure that teachers are ready for the demands of the classroom, teacher education programs must emphasize the development of these skills and abilities.

Furthermore, the comparatively low ratings in "Valuing L1 culture" and "Creating an effective teaching environment" suggest that teacher education and professional development should give these areas greater focus. Programs should give educators the know-how and abilities needed to establish inclusive, encouraging classrooms that value and include their pupils' language and cultural diversity. This may be accomplished by incorporating students' L1 culture into the curriculum, stressing the value of cultural competency, and using culturally responsive teaching techniques.

In-service teachers should also get continuing assistance and training from professional development programs, emphasizing areas where their professional identities may be less formed. Workshops and seminars on culturally sensitive teaching, materials selection, classroom management, and chances for instructors to participate in peer collaboration and reflective practice are a few examples of what this may entail. Professional development programs can assist teachers in fortifying their professional identities and improving their efficacy in the classroom by offering focused assistance in these areas.

Conclusion

The results of this study illustrate the intricate and multidimensional character of identity construction in the context of language instruction, which advances our knowledge of the professional identities of in-service EFL instructors. The study found several areas where teachers' professional identities were strong and weak, with notable variations seen throughout degree groups. The results above highlight the significance of focused teacher education and professional development initiatives that prioritize cultivating essential skills and abilities in classroom management, communication, and culturally sensitive instruction.

The research also emphasizes the necessity of providing in-service teachers with continuing assistance, focusing on areas where their professional identities may be less formed. Professional development programs can help teachers enhance their effectiveness in the classroom and strengthen their professional identity by equipping them with the skills and strategies necessary to create effective learning environments and incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching practices.

In summary, this research presents insightful information on the elements influencing EFL instructors' professional identities and has useful ramifications for teacher preparation programs and professional growth. To gain a greater understanding of this crucial component of teacher development, future research should investigate the intricacies of professional identity in various teaching situations and employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers insightful information on the professional identities of in-service EFL instructors, it must be acknowledged that it has limits. First, the study may have been biased toward social desirability because it relied on self-reported data. Rather of giving answers that accurately represented their views on their professional identities, teachers could have given answers that they thought would be socially acceptable or meet the expectations of the researchers. In order to better understand teachers' professional identities, future research might solve this restriction by employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or observations.

Second, the results may not be as applicable in different educational situations because the study was carried out in a particular one. Future studies should examine these variations to offer a more comprehensive view of professional identity in various circumstances. The institutional and cultural elements that shape professional identity may change among school systems and geographical areas.

Lastly, the study concentrated on the connection among credentials, classroom experience, and professional identity. It did not, however, examine other elements that affect professional identity, such as student-teacher connections, institutional support, and teacher autonomy. In order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the elements influencing the formation and preservation of professional identities in EFL instructors, future studies may look at these elements.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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