

## How Shifting from Teaching Arabic or Persian to English Prompts the Professional Identity: A Thematic Study

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### Abstract

There have been some researches on the way teacher identities are (re)constructed; however, the study which investigates the improvement of the identity through the shift in language teaching has not been conducted. Thus the present qualitative study set out to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' professional development who had been teaching either Arabic or Persian languages for more than six years prior to entering the English language teaching profession. Eleven Iranian in-service teachers took part in the study through purposeful sampling. For the purpose of the data collection, in-depth interviews, teachers' narratives, and focus group interviews were used. The thematic analysis of the data through the Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) perspective revealed three main themes: *identity shift*, *identity development*, and *productive identity*. The results indicate that teachers' professional learning requires rebuilding identity perception, and constructing a new identity will lead, in turn, to the professional development of teachers and their constructive learning. The present study contributes to the existing knowledge of teachers' professional identity in that changes in the languages teachers teach will lead to reconstructing their professional identity in a positive way and happen as a result of opportunities for professional development. The results have a number of implications for policymakers, teacher educators, and language teachers.

**Keywords:** Professional Identity, Identity Shift, Thematic Analysis, Teacher Education, Teacher Development

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## **Introduction**

Day (2011) defined teacher identity as how teachers perceive themselves and the way they reflect themselves to others. The development of the identity is considered an ongoing and dynamic process that varies from a context to another (Gee, 2001). Professional identity development of teachers has been a subject of research interest Rostami, Yousefi, & Amini (2020) in tandem with the agency construction of teachers (Rostami & Yousefi, 2020). For teachers, identity development and teaching effectiveness are probed to be influenced by the subject that teachers choose to teach (Beijaard et. al., 2000; Newman, 2013). It is probable for a teacher to shift to another major and teach a new subject that is regarded as contributing to new identity formation (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Cohen, 2010). However, the research that investigates the identity shift as the result of the shift to teaching another language is not or few done. To address this gap in literature the present research probes the dynamic process of reformation identity through the shift in teacher identity along with professional identity. The variation in identity manifested itself in the alternation of the former language of teaching, Persian or Arabic, to teach the modern language of English.

## **Literature Review**

Identities are elaborated in Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons's (2006) works as a shifting "amalgam of personal biography, culture, social influence, and institutional values which may change according to role and circumstance" (p. 613); that is, identities are multifaceted and liable to change according to external influences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The creation of identity is regarded as the first step in identity change (Burke & Stets, 2009).

The teachers are required to access more knowledge whenever they change the priorities of their education; however, (re)construction of the teachers' identity needs to be regarded as the prime issue (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Xu, 2014). Enhancing professional knowledge and broadening the horizons are vital elements in shaping productive and additive identities among English teachers who perceived themselves as more academic (Chien, 2019). He elaborated on the identity shift among the teachers who shifted to new disciplines and found that the teachers gained more interest in the new teaching field "which potentially affect teaching effectiveness" (p. 13). It is noted here that the shift to new language teaching, in line with Chien's (2019) research, was adopting a new discipline along with improving the specialty in the new major of teaching. Thus the change has led to prompting the professional identity among the English language teachers of the current study.

At the beginning years of the Iranian Revolution, the students were opted to go to the High School in which syllabus was designed to prepare students to teach after graduation. The high school students were considered as pre-service teachers. Our participants in the current research were among these types of teachers. Xu (2013) explored the identity change of the novice teachers who shifted their

imaginary identity during their pre-service teaching to professional identity during their in-service teaching. He found that the transition from cue-based imaginary identity to rule-based practiced identity mediated by perseverance and agency contributed to professional development.

The change in professional identity was also examined among college English teachers' managerial context (Huang & Guo, 2019). However, there are not any empirical researches associated with a shift among non-English language teachers who shifted and prioritized teaching English. To shed light on this issue, the present study investigated whether and in what ways identity has been promoted among EFL teachers who previously taught Persian or Arabic languages in the Iran context.

### **Theoretical framework**

Identity is dialogic, shifting, and negotiated in social contexts (Park, 2007; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), which is often replaced with “self” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Moreover, work has been considered as one aspect of a person's identity (Quinn-Trank & Washington, 2009). The conceptualization of identity's multiplicity and dynamism has focused on identity work as the process by which individuals adapt, tailor, maintain, and change their identities (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Professional identity is seen as a dynamic concept (Beijaard et al., 2004). It is formative and transformative in the English language teaching context (Tsui, 2007) so that professionals “gain a better insight into their practices and develop the talents and values required for the profession” (Han, 2017, p. 556). When teachers attend social activities, communicate with people, and position or are positioned at the same society, their identities shift consequently (Yazan, 2018). Moreover, the English teachers' professional identity is often related to favoring the communicative language teaching method and conceptualized by the learners' appraisal of the teachers (Amin, 1997).

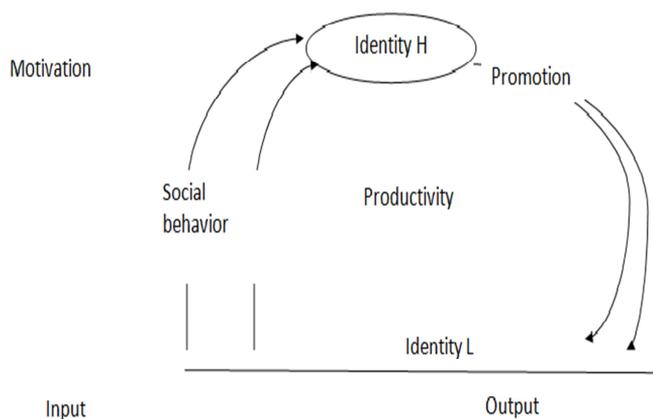
In this study, we utilized Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) as our main theoretical framework with a focus on *identity change*. Identity theory assumes that identity meanings are always changing; however, “the rate is not noticeable” (p. 175). Burke and Stets (2009) introduce two hierarchies of identity level; higher-level identity (H) and lower-level identity (L) in which identity H is influenced by identity L. Any manipulating or modification in the behavior of identity L leads to alter in the perception of identity H. In our study, Identity H is considered for language teachers, as they taught two other languages rather than English, and identity L is assigned for them after shifting into English language teaching (see figure 1). Conversion in acting and behavior to teach English in identity L has led to altering identity H's perception; that is, the new English teachers perceived higher identity for themselves after they changed the subject of teaching. It is also noted that the higher identity controls the number of lower-level identities. Thus, participants stay merely teachers at the lower level, but they can be reflected as an English teacher, English instructor, or English professor at the higher-level.

Burke (2006a, as cited in Burke & Stets, 2009) outlines three general outlines in which identities change;

- a) Changes in the situation that alert meanings of self
- b) Conflicts between the two identities held by individuals
- c) The conflict between the meanings of individuals and standards

Burke and Stets (2009) maintain "changes in the situational meanings result in a discrepancy between the identity-standard meanings and the self-relevant meanings in the situation" (p. 195). They add if people fail in the attempt to restore the situational meaning, the only thing is to change to match the situational meaning to reduce the discrepancies that ultimately lead to change in both role identities and social identities.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the ways the shift in cases identity L led to conceptualization in identity H. In addition, we scrutinize the extent of the shift in language teaching prompts their personal, professional, and social identity.



**Figure 1.** The Model of Shaping Identity L

## Methods

### Purpose and research questions

The current qualitative study tries to see how the identity of Arabic and Persian languages in the Iranian context is reconstructed after shifting to English teaching. For the research sampling, the researchers took advantage of the purposive sampling technique as it is useful for selecting individual(s) who have experience with the phenomenon understudying (Creswell, 2003). Unlike that some researchers have

been done on reconstruction of teacher identity in social context and interaction (Cohen, 2010; Lasky, 2005; Olsen, 2008), scant research exists to describe the need of building and rebuilding teacher identity in shifting environment, teaching context (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Xu, 2014) or identity shift (Tsui, 2007; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). Singularly particularly, little is known about a) how English replaces teachers' perception of identity shifts after teaching Persian or Arabic; b) the extent to which English teachers' social identity differs from other language teachers (Arabic and Persian). Given teachers' perceptions of their new possible selves as English language teachers, this qualitative study sought to investigate their conceptualization of English teachers' identity by addressing the following questions:

1- What factors motivated Iranian teachers to shift to teach the English language profession?

2- How do the English teachers perceive new identity, internally and socially, after quitting teaching other languages?

3- How did English teachers' professional identity reshape?

### **Context and Participants**

The study was conducted in Miandoab, Iran. The formal language of the country is Persian and Arabic is taught from first grade at public schools. Notwithstanding, teaching English is postponed to grade seven. Each of these languages has a different status for the members of the society in Iran. Regarding teaching other languages rather than Persian in Iranian textbooks, article 16 of the Islamic Republic of Iran constitution law states that since the language of the Quran and Islamic texts and teachings is Arabic, and since Persian literature is thoroughly permeated by this language, it must be taught after elementary level, in all classes of secondary school and all areas of study. Arabic is associated with religious values and ideological aspects of the Iranian community. In contrast, the English language is associated with modernity and open-mindedness. On the other hand, English is formally taught to students from grade seven at the age of eleven. The lack of the desired quality of English textbooks has always been criticized by experts. Thus “a large number of private and semi-governmental language centers across the country provide evening language learning services to learners of different ages and backgrounds often to supplement the language learning provision in the state education system” (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019, p. 7).

According to Morse (2015), the adequacy of the sample size in qualitative studies is commonly determined by data saturation rather than the number of participants. Accordingly, data saturation indicates no new information appears during the research, and it is well-developed with the theoretical framework. Although generalizability is not the concern of qualitative study, selecting eleven English teachers (four females and seven males) can represent a larger population or minimally apprehend the array of variables that impact a particular experience (Merriam, 2000). The researchers purposefully recruited participants who varied on demographic and cultural variables (person factors), that is, gender, religion, first

language, and years of experience (Hamilton, Best, Wells, & Worthy, 2018). The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy (Lichtman, 2012). Selection criteria were established to include participants who are teaching English, but they had been teaching other languages (Persian or Arabic) previously. Participants' first languages were Turkish and Kurdish, and English was taught as a foreign language in textbooks. The participants were selected based on a degree of homogeneity of both English teaching experiences and age. Table 1 demonstrates an overview of the teachers' characteristics, including years of teaching both Arabic/Persian language and English, years of experience, and education level.

**Table 1.** An Overview of Selected Participants

Name	Gender	First Language Teaching	Years of Early Language Teaching	Second Language Teaching	Years of Second Language Teaching	Education Level
1 Elmi	male	Arabic	7	English	13	M.A
2 Rad	male	Arabic	14	English	13	M.A
3 Hemati	male	Persian	8	English	13	M.A
4 Jamali	male	Persian	2	English	17	B.A
5 Rezaian	female	Arabic	4	English	12	M.A
6 Tavakkoli	female	Arabic	6	English	11	M.A
7 Ahmadi	male	Persian	5	English	13	M.A
8 Danayee	female	Persian	4	English	10	B.A
9 Rasuli	male	Arabic	7	English	10	B.A
10 Ketabi	male	Arabic	3	English	15	M.A
11 Moradi	female	Persian	4	English	14	M.A

### Data collection

Several sources of evidence were used to get accurate comprehension of the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), to allow cross validity checks (Patton, 2002), give means to the triangulation of data (Howe & Stubbs, 2003), and strengthen findings and conclusions (Merriam, 1998). For each case, three complementary data collection methods were employed:

1. Semi-structured interviews – the second author contacted each participant individually to schedule the interview. The purpose of the interview was explained to them, and they were assured that their information would be maintained confidentially since ethical behavior requires "protecting individuals, communities and environments" (Israel & Hay, 2006, p. 2). The teachers were interviewed about their profession's history, their decision making about the shift in language teaching, their sense of identity shift, and their new approach toward society (see appendix 1). These interviews lasted for about one hour. To elicit more meaning and to gain

insight (Fontana & Frey, 2008), open-ended questions were asked, and further follow-up questions elaborated on them. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed; then, they were carefully proofread. The transcription of the data was checked with interviewees through e-mail to enhance the validity of the research. The interviews were conducted in Persian and were translated by the first and second authors to English and double-checked by the third author.

2. Narration – considering the point that narratives play a significant role in identity development (e.g., Choi et al., 2016), this study tends to concentrate on the ways that stories support teacher identity development (Creswell, 2014). The teachers narrated the process of becoming a teacher, their position and identity as a teacher before and after teaching English, and the obstacles which hindered the pace of professional identity development. Their narratives were digitally recorded, and then they were transcribed verbatim. At the next meeting, the transcription of stories was rechecked with participants.

3. Focus group - similar to an in-depth interview, by conducting a focus group, there is the possibility to gain through experiences of participants; however, some new interpretations can emerge from the interaction of group members. To this end, two focus group interviews (see Newby, 2010) were undertaken with the same cases of English teachers. They were asked to share experiences and insights regarding the following topics:

- a) The reason behind entering the English language and leaving the previous language
- b) The sense of the shift in their identity and the extent to reach their possible selves
- c) The transformation of identity in view of social members.

The focus group responses were recorded and later transcribed by the first author. Following the transcription, all researchers scrutinized the transcript to obtain possible themes (based on questions posed during the focus group). The results of the focus group were combined with other data collection methods for data triangulation.

### **Data analysis**

Based on the objectives of the qualitative study, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilized. Each of the semi-structured interviews, along with their narratives and focus group interview, was transcribed to gain considerable insights into teachers' professional identity. Not only was the manuscript rechecked with the participants, but also, they were put forward by analysis of the data, emergent codes, and themes to grant authenticity and validity to the obtained information. The lead author and the second author coded the data separately with the measure of inter-coder reliability (Armstrong et al. 1997) to promote the credibility of findings (MacPhail et al., 2015). The final decisions and agreement about selective codes and emergent themes were made after subsequent discussions. Three broad themes

included *identity shift*, *identity development*, and *productive identity* have emerged. The theme *identity shift* was brought from codes such as the sense of modification in identity, new identity perception after teaching English, the social position of English teachers, and the reason behind the desire to be an English teacher. The theme *identity development* was formed from codes like the realization of being more active, steps to being more proficient, effectiveness from the outer and inner perception, and reasons behind being or not being proficient. The theme *productive identity* came from codes, for example, like feeling like a researcher, focusing on international business, feeling more competent, and better directing learners; furthermore, the statements related to the need to do reform in curricula and education system were laid in this theme. The final list of themes and codes was peer examined, and the final analysis, including similarities, differences, and interpretations were reported to the English teachers.

### ***Achieving rigor***

Appropriate strategies have been used to achieve rigor in the current qualitative research.

First, to reach thick and rich data, *quality time* and a *trusting relationship* were needed (Hamilton, 2020). The second author met the interviewees face to face for the first time. They were informed about the research. On the conducting day, they were called and were informed of the time and place of the interview. An intimate environment was established among researchers and participants to tight the relationships. To enhance quality time, the first researcher listened carefully to the teachers in an unhurried one-hour time of the interview, narration, and focus group. Since most of the participants have had academic achievements, they have self-awareness of the importance of the information they were going to express.

Second, the researchers selected participants with cultural and demographic variations. The “variations were essential considerations in enlightening the influences on trusting relationships and supportive experiences among participants” (Hamilton, 2020, P.4).

Third, the researchers adopted member checking as a strategy to enhance rigor in the qualitative study. Both findings and interpretations were emailed to the participants to verify their accuracy (Creswell, 1994). Member checking also assumes the willingness of participants to engage in interpretation and discussion of the results (Sandelowski, 2008).

Finally, intercoder reliability was another strategy that researchers utilized to strengthen the rigor in the study. Intercoder reliability was applied for a more robust evaluation of consistency in coding (Hamilton et al., 2013). The researchers coded the data almost similarly, and they consented to three main themes.

### ***The researchers' positionality***

The researchers needed to reflect on their own roles in the research process in qualitative researches (Merriam, 1998). The lead author conducted interviews and

recorded the narrations. The second author conducted focus group interviews. To enhance validity, the researcher listened carefully to the participants, posed in-depth and follow-up questions, and analyzed the data individually. The second author acted as a moderator in focus group interviews. The data were transcribed by the first author and rechecked by the second and third authors. To enrich the analysis, the results were also emailed to the participants whether to give comments or correct their own viewpoints declares. While they largely agreed with our findings, they also gave further remarks.

## **Findings**

As stated in the methodology, the objective of this qualitative study was to shed new light on teachers' perceptions of their identity shift through departing from Arabic language or Persian language teaching to English language teaching. The results from the rich analysis of the data representing three main themes: *identity shift*, *identity development*, and *productive identity*. All of these themes are elaborated along with participants' responses.

### ***Identity shift***

The participants monitored their perceptions toward a new identity positively but distinctively. All cases claimed on feeling a better position socially. Teachers felt further enthusiasm, promotion, and value among their colleagues. Elmi showed a constructive and affirmative sensation toward this shift. He asserted:

*Teaching English for me, above all, was a change in identity; identity shift in a sense. I wanted to be recognized as a different person with a different position and with a different identity in the society. I felt a kind of enthusiasm and admiration from among my colleagues. Actually, this was not what I sought for. This was a kind of external motive. The paramount change has taken place inside me. I had a sense of getting a promotion in my identity, claiming something different and more valuable among my colleagues, having a sense of accomplishment, and receiving something that I had waited for a long time. I was sure of the change in my identity, my thinking, and my feelings. I took it enthusiastically; it was like a landmark promotion.*

Underestimation, as an Arabic teacher, was discouraging for Elmi. He looked for a new identity so that he could obtain a higher position and identity in society.

The desired status could change the view of both learners and colleagues toward the participant. Moreover, the higher identity shaped the sense of accomplishment and promotion in the case. The participant sought these features in changing the subject matter. Speaking with much passion for English language teaching and recognizing it in society, Elmi seems that was driven by the enthusiasm and unbearable passion for English language teaching. In a sense, for Rad, the change in subject matter language has brought a change in identity perception both in the internal sense and the external one. It seems that the opportunities for identity development and professional development have been provided concurrently for him.

Nevertheless, Jamali showed a partly positive attitude to upgrade his identity – socially. He disclaimed any promotion and maintained:

*I was a good student in the English lesson during my high school course. My uncle prioritized a Persian language major when he was selecting among majors for university entrance exams. After two years of PL teaching, I decided to teach English because I wanted to involve something more international. I selected English to interact with abroad, something that is helpful outside of Iran. I could perceive this shift after graduation and starting teaching English. Parents treated me differently, but I can guess this is because, contrary to the other subjects, they cannot help their children in English. Others have thought I am in connection with overseas, and I acted dissimilarly. However, I have not perceived myself differently with other teachers. I am the same teacher. This is because, for curriculum developers and managers, there is no difference among English, math, art, etc. teachers. In our educational system, the subject you teach never makes sense.*

Selecting English as a teaching language has brought a new social position for Jamali. He has been received social respect and recognition from among the parents of his students. He thinks that there is a disparity between people's attitudes toward English teachers and top administrators. While the first group assumes higher social identity and prestige for English teachers, the latter group does not recognize them as more valuable than other subject-matter teachers. The pay and benefits system are the same for all teachers. Another motive in pursuing teaching English was involved in something that is more valuable and global. Furthermore, he was interested in English as the language of international communication. Jamali admitted that English is an international language and helpful in overseas interaction. It is implicit in confessing to the reality that society assigned higher position and identity toward the English teachers in comparison with other subject-matter teachers. There is probable that the participant regarded only the curriculum developers and policymakers as social individuals whom the shift in the language of teaching did not make sense in their perception.

In addition, Rezaian's expressions were in concordance with Elmi's. She accepted the researcher's question as an interesting issue and proclaimed:

*I was determined to be an Arabic teacher due to my devout Islamic beliefs. I wanted to teach related materials because I was good at them during my high school years' course. After graduation as an Arabic teacher, I noticed that I was good at Arabic as a result of being good at the Persian language, not merely because of spiritual notions. Besides, I concluded that what is present in religious books is totally contradictory to the actions in the real world. I can comprehend the shift in my identity. People consider me as an up-to-date and more open-minded person in comparison with other subjects' teachers. In the case of any problem, I am more trustful to consult students. The shift in identity changed me as well. I try to avoid the demodded method of teaching English and focus more on communicative based approaches. I want to teach students something that is more beneficial for their future life and career. I am more enthusiastic than before and in constant connection with professionals. Besides, I can easily perceive and adopt the norms of English-*

*speaking countries' culture; for example, I am more direct in my speech than the time I was teaching Arabic.*

Rezaian criticized the distance between what is declared in textbooks and what is performed accordingly. It could be a reason why he would not receive the requisite status from society. The shift in the subject matter justified his claims about the time he was teaching Arabic. He perceived himself as more open-minded and frank and was perceived as a more trustworthy person. The considerable changes are partly to adopt the target culture of English speaking countries. For him, English language countries are blessed with qualities that it is less found in counterpart countries. Consequently, the alternation in identity made him to enact better in applying better methodological perspectives.

### ***Identity development***

Every teacher has received higher education certificates in English language teaching comparing with the span of teaching AL or PL that is leading to develop their expertise. All of the cases recognized faith, a clear conscience, and enthusiasm in teaching as remarkable features to teach effectively and skillfully. They declared that education stakeholders regarded them as more effective than the amount they did rate themselves. Formerly, teachers blamed the education system, policymakers, and common shortages - mostly economics. Hemati, who is holding M.A, announced:

*I can evaluate myself as a competent English teacher. This is thanks to the English courses (B.A and M.A) that I have held and the professors who were teaching us in our master course. The amount of ineffectiveness arises from financial problems that I have been encountered. Also, the on-the-job training courses for teachers are useless. On the contrary, I was successful in teaching Persian because I had not had the social and economic problems then.*

The amount of professionalism that teachers acquire relates to in-service courses that teachers receive. Hemati considered the course useless both during teaching Persian and teaching English. However, he claimed that after shifting to teaching English, he could gain more professionalism due to quitting the course and the amount of literacy that instructors possessed. The enthusiasm for the English language directed him to try to be more knowledgeable. If the economic problems Iranian teachers suffered from did not exist, he could be a more competent and more qualified teacher.

Furthermore, Tavakkoli showed positive feedback toward progress after teaching English. She revealed that she has shifted not only in her identity but also in proficiency and literacy level. She maintained:

*Due to the courses I have taken during my postgraduate study, I have grown professionally. This is because of a number of my M.A. studies who have studied their PhD abroad and have had familiarity with English speaking counties. After teaching English, I had the feelings of being a teacher with higher position in the society and with positive professional identity.*

Professional development was reflected in Tavvakoli's quotation. She traces back his professional development and change in identity due to her academic education at universities. Her gain in professional development took place due to interaction with her university professors. Her teaching English at schools accordingly brought out a positive change in her professional identity.

In agreement with Tavvakoli, Moradi presented a considerable change in her proficiency and literacy level. She holds an M.A certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. She was an undergraduate while she was teaching Persian. She expressed that personality and eagerness were two critical attributes of an effective teacher. She evaluated herself as successful; however, she regarded the evaluation of others unfair as they are not in the position of judgment. She adds that students are better judges because they were the leading receivers. She states:

*Before teaching English, I involved in teaching a different language to young adults, Persian. Undoubtedly, I engaged in teaching Persian cognitively. Notwithstanding, I involved in teaching English, both cognitively and affectively. To me, language teaching and language learning was not only a cognitive endeavor but also an emotional task. Other people's perceptions and expectations are not so essential for me, too, for they may fade away and diminish in a blink. What is long-lasting and influential is your sense and perception of yourself. How do you evaluate yourself? How do you value yourself? For me, these questions were and are of paramount importance.*

Moradi was looking for a new identity in the form of appeal or prestige. The thought came from the lack of desired self as a Persian teacher in comparison with the English teachers. She, as an English teacher, could proudly state that she was an *English* teacher, and it has been more welcomed in view of the learners and society. She claims that the higher position and identity is observed in society by sending their children to English classes. It is commonplace to send the children to English classes. This matter approves the worth of the English language and the teachers of English consequently. Moradi added she felt a new identity after immersing in English, a cosmopolitan identity. She accepted she could adapt herself to the target culture. This matter made her an open-minded person from a self and social point of view. The type and amount of respect she receives is more considerable than the time she was teaching Persian.

### ***Productive identity***

Productive identity primarily emerged after the development of their identity, because the teachers considered themselves as more academic, researchers, and English teachers. Having identified themselves as researchers and being more aware of new findings through reading English articles, the participants were consent to select English as the subject of studying and teaching. For example, Ketabi declared:

*When I entered the M.A course, my professor presented a lot of research papers. I noticed how much research can develop the knowledge scope. After taking the research course, I tried to involve myself in doing research. Knowing English*

*contributes to seeking recent findings regardless of having concern over translating, referencing, or even author guides misunderstanding. I am a researcher that can fill the gaps and develop language knowledge accordingly.*

The lack of sufficient knowledge of English hinders some researchers from conducting research outside the boards and broadening their horizons. Ketabi found a straight and smooth way to research due to the lack of language barriers. He asserted that immersion in the research was more simplified by knowing the language of English. This point made him a more competent teacher-researcher who can broaden the expertise.

Ahmadi holds multiple identities. He teaches at High School in the morning and works at a store where sells home appliances in the evening. He is happy that he had changed his major to English language teaching. Knowing English has been helpful for him, from realizing the manuals of electric home appliances to sourcing the right suppliers of branded products. He claims the subject of teaching has made him a successful businessman. He nicely expressed:

*The decision to change the major of education to English was the most crucial in my life. I came from a poor and crowded family that the salary of teaching couldn't meet our demands and expenses of my life. I started to open a store, purchase goods, and retail them. I wished I could have understood the instruction of the products. However, when I followed my studies at college and in the M.A course, I started to source the most demanded goods, I emailed some suppliers, and I realized how much the prices are different if I can do business internationally . . . . I have done abroad travels, have met the cultures, and have used English operationally. While I am teaching, I can easily reflect the target culture for the students, and I simply convey the meaning and function of expressions to the learners. I am a more competent teacher than the era I was teaching the Persian language at secondary schools.*

Knowing the modern language of English as a language of business has released Ahmadi from economic worries that have hindered most of the Iranian teachers from attending payable professional courses. Being a businessman and teacher simultaneously contributed to advance him in both professions. This matter has helped him to reflect on the target culture while teaching, more tangible, to the learners of his classes. Mr. Ahmadi is teaching business management to undergraduate students too. He said his students at college need to learn about English for specific purposes. He claimed he could provide his students with ESP, and he has been regarded as a dedicated teacher by the learners in return.

To sum up, scrutinizing teachers' transcribes revealed their nuanced perception of their identity shift, professional identity development, and their productivity and competency. The results reflected that the identity of teachers while teaching AL or PL was replaced by their commitment to disciplinary and academic identity. The results based on examining similarities and differences (Mutch, 2013b) make more discussion available.

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to gain insights into the English teachers concerning both identity shift and proficiency development that resulted from their transition into teaching another language, English. The topic is less investigated, and it worth exploring. From the teachers' responses to interview questions, focus group discussions, and narratives, we found that they grasped a sensible shift in their identity and the reason they had decided to rule out AL/PL teaching and start teaching English. The change is shown in different ways;

Firstly, through focus group analysis, our results indicate that the participants had underestimated their position in the role of AL or PL teachers. Having considered teaching English as a respectable job among the Iranian context (Masoumpanah & Zarei, 2014) and desired to broaden their horizons through the international language, they had decided to shift in their identity and others' perceptions about them by teaching English. In line with the theoretical framework of the present research, the teachers tried to change in meaning that had attached to their sense (Burke & Stets, 2009). Through the teachers' narration, underestimation of the participant prior to teaching English could be traced: a) PL teachers had figured out that Persian is a national and easily perceived language by students and society and it can be learned in context without too much effort; b) AL teachers had realized that Arabic is useful just for university entrance exams of students and it is useless after that event as well as they had found an apparent discrepancy between textbooks and action of religious people. All English teachers could sense the shift in their social identity, people's behavior and manner linked to them, and their identity (Korte, 2007 as cited in Schauer, 2018). The whole participants who had taught Arabic and most of the teachers who had taught Persian before, thoroughly perceived self-development "attending to personal feeling about personal growth" (Hofstein et al., 2003, as cited in Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017, p. 367).

The second conclusion explores the participants' involvement in the professional development shift. All participants were undergraduate before their milestone decision. As a consequence of a social expectation of English teachers' role (Masoumpanah & Zarei, 2014), the teachers pursued their education, and they could gain B.A. and M.A. certificates. Unanimously, they saw in-job training courses as somewhat ineffective and a waste of time. They perceived themselves and have been viewed as more effective teachers. However, a small number of teachers have not put more steps forward to make a considerable shift in their proficiency level, e.g., attending conferences, publishing articles, study steadily, etc. due to the social and economic problems that teachers tolerated as a result of government dereliction of duty. Having accepted the lack of proper attention to teachers in the Iran context, AL teachers claimed that their great enthusiasm was internal motivation to take responsibility to improve their knowledge. They stated that they felt enforcement expressively and imposed pressure while teaching Arabic but feeling enjoyment and pleasure while teaching English.

Finally, to feel like a competent teacher, the teachers needed academic study range from four to six years. In line with (Burke & Stets, 2009), the duration of change of self-perception and shift in identity took a long time. Accordingly, academic fulfillment as identity L (academic studies in English language) has served

to change in perception of identity H (competent teacher and researcher). Since the teachers have academic literacy, they exercised agency to find and follow new methods of teaching to their students. Enacting agency “charges more desirable methods for teachers’ professional development” (Rostami & Yousefi, 2020, p. 13) in a way teachers do not to see themselves as less competent (Burke & Stets, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study aimed to explore teachers' nuanced insights toward the shift in their both identity and professional identity due to the change in their subject of teaching and pursuit of their academic studies.

Master's degree inevitably contributes to shaping the teachers’ professional identity, research-oriented view, and feeling more competent. These changes and perceptions indicate the teacher identity is dynamic and multifaceted. This perception and self-awareness lead the teachers to innovate new methodologies and interactive ways to better influence the learners. Being a master in English as a foreign language broadens the horizon and makes the teachers more familiarized with the target culture. Consequently, teachers are more easily able to reflect the target culture to the learners as language and culture are intertwined.

The results show that identity construction is a cyclical process rather than a linear one. Teachers learn and relearn to build a new identity. They develop and rebuild their characters to match their recently constructed identity. To put it another way, teachers’ professional learning requires rebuilding identity perception, and constructing a new identity will lead, in turn, to the professional development of teachers. Teachers’ professional identities are subject to change, shift, and promotion. Both external and internal factors can influence teachers’ identity change. The results suggest that changes made as results of internal factors are long-lasting and continue to affect teachers’ perceptions of their identity. The changes, moreover, will be positive. Notwithstanding, changes in identity perception due to external factors and forces are doomed to fade away over a long period.

There were some limitations to this study. First, finding the cases that previously taught other languages rather than English, and now are teaching English, was laborious and time-consuming. We checked several cities that resulted in wasting a lot of time. The second limitation was related to the location of participants. The cases lived too far away from the authors, and it took a long time for the authors to frequent there. It was inconvenient for the authors to find an excellent place for doing interviews and research.

Furthermore, the authors suggest several recommendations for future studies. One, we explored the identity shift among the teachers of Arabic and Persian languages that now teach English. This research is replicable among teachers of other languages or teachers who taught other subjects. Two, this research can be reversed by finding cases that were taught English previously, and now they are teaching other languages or subjects.

The present study has several implications for teacher education, policymakers, and language teachers. The teacher who teaches any subject is required to perceive the desired identity by the tools that policymakers provide for them in developing their position nationally and internationally. Secondly, teacher educators are recommended to find ways of enhancing teachers' identity perceptions. Several personal and professional variables, including organizational and situational ones, can affect teachers' professional identity perceptions. For teachers, they can search for ways to promote their assumed professional identity. Some permanent changes are driven by intrinsic factors. And these factors will continue to influence teachers' identity perception, their feeling competent as a researcher, their teaching effectiveness, and the vividness of the instructional practices teachers implement day in day out in their teaching. Furthermore, the study has implications for teacher education as to how teachers' professional identity was affected by the change in the subject matter teachers teach and the positive professional identity of teachers because of the higher social position of the language teachers tended to teach. The study also indicates that changes in professional identity will be linked to the professional development of teachers. In addition, policymakers are suggested that they pave the way/s for teachers' professional development especially for in-service teachers. The study showed that teachers' professional development is not linear rather than cyclical. Future studies are suggested to investigate the feasible relationships between teachers' professional identities and their self-efficacy (Khanshan & Yousefi, 2020; kurosh, Yousefi & Kashef, 2020).

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## Appendix 1

### Interview questions

- 1- Would you please illustrate your educational background, teaching experience, and discipline of the master’s program?
- 2- How does it happen to be a teacher?
- 3- How would you describe yourself as a teacher now?
- 4- What are the qualities of a good teacher?
- 5- Why did you decide to change the subject of your teaching from Arabic or Persian to English?
- 6- How your perception of what a teacher should do is changed during your academic study experience?

7- What differences have you noticed in your identity after shifting to teach English and follow your academic studies?

8- What “turning points” can you think about after shifting to teach English?

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