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Research Paper

Language Teachers' Gendered Identity in Ideologized Spaces: A Narrative Analysis of Their Positioning

Zahra Maleknia¹, Minoo Alemi², & Zia Tajeddin³

¹Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities, IAU, West Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran; z619_maleknia@yahoo.com

²Corresponding author; Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities, IAU, West Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran; minooalemi2000@yahoo.com

³Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran; tajeddinz@modares.ac.ir

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Abstract

Understanding the nature of language teachers' gendered identity is of significance due to its influential role in the development of their professional identity. However, the number of studies conducted on this area has been rare. The current case study investigated language teacher gendered identity formation to address this gap, focusing on 3 dimensions of gender-based constraints, gender-based discrimination, and gender-based attitudes toward the teaching profession. To analyze the data, content analysis was conducted on the narratives of a male and a female EFL teacher based on 3 levels of coding: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding (Riazi, 2016). Results indicated that the participants experienced a completely opposite professional status based on their gender and the impact of the dominant gender-based ideologies and patriarchal structure in their society. Whereas the female teacher suffered from the existing constraints and discrimination resulting from her gender, the male teacher was more concerned about his economic status as men are breadwinners based on their social norms. This study has pedagogical implications for teachers to be aware of the dynamic nature of their identity and for policymakers, teacher educators, and institutional administrators who need to be cognizant of the impact of sociocultural norms on the formation of language teachers' gendered identity.

Keywords: Female Teachers; Gender-Based Ideologies; Language Teacher Gendered Identity; Male Teachers; Sociocultural Contexts

1. Introduction

There has been an increasing interest in the concept of teacher identity during the last decade as a result of the shift in the view about the status of teachers (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Rather than being considered as individuals possessing a stable and unitary identity who step into the teaching profession in a vacuum, the more recent definition of teacher identity refers to teachers as active agents whose identities are dynamic, evolving, and multifaceted (Flores, 2020; Kayi-Aydar, 2017). Rejecting the previously held belief regarding teacher identity as a singular construct, Vandrlick (2017) defined language teacher identity as a complex construct consisting of two main aspects: teacher identity as professionals and teacher identity as individuals. Whereas the former is related to their professional role in the workplace context, the latter refers to their personal attributes including gender, age, race, ethnicity, and class. Indeed, he looked at language teachers as whole individuals who possess multiple identities due to the impact of different aspects of their lives.

Among various facets of identity language teachers adopt, language teacher gendered identity has been accentuated as one of their main identities (Badjanova et al., 2017; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2019) which affects, directly or indirectly, their teaching practice, their interpersonal relationships at the workplace context, and their image of self as professionals (Vandrlick, 2017). Gendered identity is different from sex identity as the latter is related to biological and physical features, whereas teacher gendered identity is shaped within the specific context where teachers live (Raman & Çavusoglu, 2019). Therefore, what it means by femininity and masculinity depends on the social and cultural conventions



and orientations of a particular society (Badjanova et al., 2017; Poczatkova & Kribikova, 2017), and these norms differ from one context to another (Pishghadam et al., 2016). The impact of these sociocultural norms on the formation of teacher gendered identity will be intensified in a context like Iran where there still exist traditional gender-based stereotypes, gender bias, and gender inequality (ZakerSalehi, 2020) due to the dominant patriarchal structure (Tailassane, 2019).

As a result of the existing gender-biased constraints and discrimination in such a context, teachers might experience tensions that affect their gendered identity and professional identity formation (Block, 2017), leading to teacher attrition in severe cases. Thus, what seems to be of significance is gaining insight into the nature of teacher gendered identity to prepare teachers for dealing with these challenges to avoid undesirable consequences. Despite its prominence, a limited number of studies are conducted on teacher gendered identity (Badjanova et al., 2017; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2019). To bridge this gap, the current study conducted a narrative interview to reveal the extent to which the participating teachers' gendered identity formation and tensions they have experienced in their path of professional development are under the influence of the existing gender-based constraints and discrimination in their workplace context and their gender-based attitudes toward the teaching profession.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Gendered Identity

The most recent studies in the area of language teacher identity have been conducted based on the new constructivist conceptualization of this construct known as dynamic, complex, and multifaceted (Flores, 2020). Therefore, language teacher identity embodies different dimensions such as racial, cultural, ethnic, and gendered identities and the significance of exploring each aspect in-depth to gain more insight into the nature of this construct as a whole has been highlighted in the existing literature (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2017, 2019; Vandrick, 2017). From a constructivist perspective, teacher identity is a construct which is both socially and individually shaped and reshaped over time in various contexts and consequently is in flux and multiple. Constructivists believe in teacher gendered identity as one of the main dimensions of teacher identity (Lawrence & Nagashima, 2019). In fact, gendered identity was previously considered as a unitary and fixed individual factor, but now it is conceived as a fluid and situated construct undergoing changes according to the variety of ways it is defined and represented by different cultural systems (Benson et al., 2013).

One of the main facets which has recently attracted researchers' attention is teacher gendered identity or the concept of femininity-masculinity as it has been revealed to play an influential role in teachers' quality of teaching (Moroz, 2017; Pishghadam et al., 2016) and their professional identity development (Block, 2017). Gendered identity is one of the basic constituents of teachers' personality and refers to their self-perception of their status as a male or female (Stets & Burke, 2000). Femininity and masculinity are rooted in social conventions rather than biological characteristics (Badjanova et al., 2017). In fact, it is the term sex that refers to the fixed physiological characteristics attached to men and women. Gender relates to behaviors, attributes, and roles a particular society attaches to male or female and considers as appropriate for each gender. Whereas sex is a stable concept in different societies, gender is in flux (Luk-Fonga & Brennan, 2010) and varies across societies (Asanti, 2016). Thus, the concept of teacher gendered identity deals with the existing differences, defined by social and cultural norms, between male and female teachers. It can also be transformed and adapted over time and place (Poczatkova & Kribikova, 2017). The degree of these gender-based differences and their impact on the formation of teacher gendered identity are more detrimental in societies dominated by gender bias ideologies and privileges in favor of one gender considered as superior (Raman & Çavusoglu, 2019). In such a context, the suppressed gender might experience a sense of marginalization or disempowerment in their workplace as the result of the imposed constraints and discrimination (Moroz, 2017) which will directly impact their professional identity developmental process, their employment rate, or even their legitimacy from students' viewpoints (Block, 2017).

Aligning with these assertions, based on the analysis of the existing literature, Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) identified two opposite theoretical perspectives held by researchers conducting teacher gender-related studies: the essentialist vs. poststructuralist perspective. Essentialism mainly believes in the stability and continuity of teacher gendered identity while focusing on biological stances and considering masculinity and femininity as two opposite poles. Although the proponents of essentialism strived to put one step forward toward socialization models and distance from such a deterministic approach toward the role of teachers' gender, they still put emphasis on gender as a stable trait. On

the contrary, researchers holding the poststructuralist perspective maintained that maleness and femaleness can be defined differently in various contexts and times. That is, rather than being deterministically biological and fixed, teacher gendered identity deals more with dynamicity and discontinuity (Rudolph, 2018). Indeed, poststructuralists criticized essentialist sex-oriented debates as they revealed the great extent to which teachers' professional identity is under the direct influence of social and cultural conventions on their gendered identity.

2.2. Research on Teacher Gendered Identity

Poststructuralism has focused on the intersectionality of language and gender which led to the lines of research on language teacher gendered identity (Lawrence & Nagashima, 2019). In what follows, some of the relevant studies in this area will be reviewed. Luk-Fonga and Brennan (2010) scrutinized gendered identity of four female teachers in Hong Kong revealing that they experienced tensions as they tried to keep the balance between their family expectations of being a perfect wife and mother and their contradictory workplace expectations. What seemed required was the constant negotiation between their traditionally defined gendered role identities as the core of the family and the changing situations of their workplace contexts. Velez-Rendon (2010) also investigated the gendered identity of a male language teacher who was shown to believe in his high level of authority as a male teacher. He also had a taken-for-granted attitude toward his classroom management ability despite some students' disruptive behaviors. In another study by Pishghadam et al. (2016), a scale was developed to measure language teachers' degree of masculinity and femininity. Then, it was distributed among three groups of language teachers (i.e., English, Arabic, and Farsi) in Iran. It was revealed that while English teachers were more feminine possessing features such as solidarity and permissiveness, Arabic and Farsi teachers were more masculine as they were more demanding and prescriptive.

The identity of a number of Indonesian female EFL teachers who experienced studying abroad was studied by Asanti (2016). The results showed that some aspects of their gendered identity were reshaped according to the social norms of a new place they moved to. However, their new conception of gendered identity emerged under the shade of their traditional beliefs in Indonesia as they still considered being a mother responsible for nurturing children as their main role. In a study by Moroz (2017) in Ukraine, a male and a female English teacher claimed to experience a sense of marginalization or disempowerment in their workplace context due to their gender. The female participant claimed to be criticized due to her appearance being considered inappropriate according to the institutional dress code. Also, she discovered her gender as a constraint in having a pay rise as her male supervisor did not take her seriously. Further, both genders had some unpleasant experiences in dealing with learners of the opposite sex. Exploring the relationship between language teachers' gendered identity and stroke (a component of teacher care) in the context of Iran, Noorbakhsh et al. (2018) predicted that gender is not a decisive factor in teachers' tendency to provide students with care. It was indicated that, on the one hand, the female teachers possessing more feminine attributes provide learners with more care and establish a stronger affective rapport with them. On the other hand, the male teachers with a higher level of masculine qualities were shown to give more strokes and cared about every single student.

Raman and Çavusoglu (2019) conducted a study in Turkish society where female teachers are expected to possess feminine features such as being soft and kind based on societal gender stereotypes. However, the female participants tended to develop a more masculine gendered identity to look more serious and to control students' misbehavior in class. It was, then, concluded that their desire to look more masculine stemmed from the dominant view in their society that men are authoritative and powerful and women are submissive and oppressed. Therefore, they wanted to look stronger and be taken more seriously by students in this way. Taking feminist poststructuralism as the theoretical framework, Safatian (2020) indicated that the participating teacher lacked self-confidence and did not have any ambitions for job promotion despite her professional achievements. She also had a tendency toward showing masculine dominance in her classes to achieve more legitimacy. It was, then, concluded that these negative senses emerged from the prevalent traditional view in the society of Iran where men are believed to be the superior gender and good leaders and women have never been taken seriously and need to prove themselves as capable in every single action.

Although the studies above were conducted with a focus on the gender dimension of language teacher identities, there still is a paucity of literature on this topic (Badjanova et al., 2017). In order to contribute to the existing literature, the current study conducted a narrative inquiry on the construction of language teachers' gendered identity, focusing on three dimensions of gender-based constraints, gender-based discrimination, and gender-based attitudes toward the teaching profession, in the society of Iran, where masculinity has traditionally been the sign of power and authority

(Tailassane, 2019). Indeed, scrutinizing the gendered identity of teachers in such a context laden with gender-biased beliefs will be more revealing. In this regard, the following research question was addressed here:

- How do the participating male and female EFL teachers narrate their gendered identity?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The current study is part of a larger qualitative collective case study conducted on 32 novice and experienced Iranian language teachers who were selected through convenient sampling from accessible institutes and on a voluntary basis. However, in view of the scope of this study, the researchers focused on two participants to present a rich and deep picture of the nature of their gendered identity. Aria (pseudonym), an experienced male language teacher, was 34 years old and had 12 years of teaching experience at the time of the data collection. He had a B.A. degree in TEFL and was a teacher trainer as well. Sarah (pseudonym), an experienced female language teacher, was 31 years old and had 10 years of teaching experience. She had an M.A. degree in TEFL. Both of these teachers were experienced in order to neutralize the impact of experience on their narrative account. They had the experience of teaching adult learners in private language institutes in which three levels of kids, teenagers, and adults study English based on the CLT method. Aria and Sarah were selected for two reasons. First of all, Aria and Sarah were revealed to be the right representative of the participating male teachers' and female teachers' populations, respectively, as they had some common gender-based work experiences with their same-sex participants in the study. Besides, they were indicated to undergo thoroughly different teacher identity developmental processes due to their gender. More precisely, under the influence of their gender, the degree of constraints and discrimination they encountered in their workplace context differed dramatically. Also, there was a striking contrast between their attitudes toward the teaching profession.

3.2. Instrumentation and Data Collection

This study investigated a male and a female teacher's narrative accounts of their gendered identity. The narrative interview is suggested in the literature as a powerful instrument to give insight into different aspects of teacher identity (Kayi-Aydar, 2018). Indeed, it provides teachers with the opportunity to reflect upon their life history and become cognizant of its implicit aspects (Flores, 2020). To collect the data, the narrative interview was conducted to make the participating teachers bring some valuable information about their gendered identity as a teacher from the tacit to the conscious level. As the first phase, the related literature was reviewed and three aspects of teacher gendered identity were extracted based on which interview questions were devised to prompt the participants while storytelling: (1) gender-based constraints in the workplace context, (2) gender-based discrimination in the workplace context, and (3) gender-based attitudes toward the teaching profession.

In the second phase, as to the content validity of the interview questions, they were revised by two experts in the field of teacher education regarding their content and relevance to the purpose of the study to elicit more trustworthy data. Then, they were piloted with two teachers (not the participants) to check the appropriateness of the questions and to make any changes required in the inquiry method. The interview questions were:

1. Did you experience any constraints in your workplace context? Was your gender a decisive factor in this regard?
2. Did you experience any discrimination in your workplace context? Was your gender a decisive factor in this regard?
3. Was your gender a decisive factor in your attitude toward the teaching profession?

As the last phase, the narrative interview was done by one of the researchers in the participants' L1 and each face-to-face narrative session took, approximately, half an hour for each participant to complete.

3.3. Data Analysis

The narratives were audiorecorded, later transcribed, and translated into English for the data analysis. To analyze the data, constant comparative content analysis was done. In this regard, the transcriptions were coded based on three

levels of coding: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding (Riazi, 2016). First, meaningful utterances were extracted from the transcriptions, and a code word was attached to each of them (open coding). Next, the extracted codes were compared and contrasted through comparative and categorical content analysis. Then, they were merged in the case of similarities and reduced to broader categories (axial coding). Finally, the extracted categories were compared and contrasted, and the relevant categories were listed under more abstract themes (selective coding). These three stages were not linear, but recursive as the researcher (one of the researchers who did the data analysis) went back and forth to come up with broad categories and abstract themes to achieve more consistent results. Intercoding was also done as 15% of the transcription was coded by one expert in the field of teacher education (the second researcher) and compared with the extracted codes. At this stage, the coders negotiated the extracted codes in the case of differences to achieve a consensus, make the required changes, and reach a higher level of dependability. In the end, member checking was done to be assured of the trustworthiness of the results. It was done at two levels: (1) descriptive level and (2) interpretive level (Riazi, 2016). To do so, the transcriptions and extracted themes (descriptive level), and the possible interpretation of the findings (interpretive level) were shared with the participants to receive feedback on their accuracy and to avoid any misunderstandings.

4. Results

The result of the content analysis of the participating teachers' narratives on the three dimensions of their gendered identity confirmed the prominent role of the dominant gender-based ideologies and sociocultural norms and expectations in language teachers' gendered identity formation. More details are reported in the following sections.

4.1. Gender-Based Constraints

When asked about gender-based constraints she encountered as a female teacher, Sarah, first, talked about her husband's disagreement with her teaching to adult students of the opposite sex:

- I have always been interested in teaching learners of both genders because I believe that you should use different methodologies teaching each gender and this results in teachers' more creativity and professional development. But, unfortunately, my husband doesn't let me teach the opposite sex.

Ignoring her passion for teaching male adult students, Sarah had to follow her husband's restrictive view toward the interpersonal relationship with the opposite sex although she found it as an obstacle in her process of professional development. Then, she claimed that such restrictions are not confined to her husband's personal view, but are imposed by the institute and the society at large:

- To your surprise, neither do the institutes assign male adult classes to us as female teachers. In fact, as a female teacher, I feel such restrictive impositions from our society where the dominant view regarding the opposite sex relationship is negative.

Later, Sarah told that all these factors led to her self-censorship when she was teaching a male adult student:

- I can remember, only once I had a private class with a man. In that class, I found myself limiting and censoring my behavior unconsciously.

Although Sarah did not believe in such a dogmatic negative view toward the opposite-sex relationship, her behavior was unconsciously influenced by outside impositions as she said that she was cautious enough in her behavior to avoid the probable misunderstandings.

Another constraint experienced by her in the workplace context was the restrictive dress code defined by the institute for female teachers:

- I can never forget a piece of paper on the notice board in the teachers' room with a threatening tone to remind us not to wear short or colorful uniforms.

Sarah expressed her dissatisfaction with such strict rules in a context where they are all the same gender (female teachers and students). Then, she emphasized that all these restrictions arose from the dominant traditional and religious structure in her country.

Further, Sarah talked about limitations she had in her teaching methodologies under the influence of her gender in not only boys' classes but also female students' classes:

- I wanted to teach the word sole in class. I liked to take off my socks in class and show students the soles of my feet to teach the word but because my students were boys (though kids), I was not allowed to. Even, when I took off my socks in female students' classes, my students were shocked as if something wrong happened.

Here, Sarah pointed to the constraints she encountered when she wanted to take off her socks, show her soles to students, and teach them the targeted vocabulary. In fact, she was not allowed to show that part of her body to the students of the opposite sex according to institutional principles defined based on Iranian Islamic culture. Even, when she did it in female students' classes, she found out that in her students' view what she did was not accepted as a proper behavior for a woman according to Iranian traditional culture.

Finally, Sarah pointed to the obstacles she encountered in her path of professional development due to her gender. More precisely, she remembered a bitter memory from the past when she was deprived of taking part in a conference held in another city:

- I couldn't participate in a conference that was held for TEFL graduates because I'm a wife and a mother and I have some responsibilities at home. Everyone expects me to prioritize my responsibilities at home over my duties as a teacher. Also, because it was a long distance, I had some limitations as a woman to travel alone. If I were a man, I wouldn't have such limitations.

As expressed by Sarah, her gender had a direct impact on the constraints imposed on her in being part of the community of practice. In fact, femininity made her prioritize her role as a wife and as a mother in the family over her role as a teacher in society. According to the dominant traditional view in the context of Iran, as Sarah asserted, a woman is the core of the family and everyone expects her to give priority to her responsibilities at home and consider her social roles as inferior. From another angle, she could not attend the conference as it was held in another city and a woman is mainly restricted from traveling alone to a long distance based on the Iranian Islamic culture.

By contrast, when asked about the constraints he experienced in his profession due to his gender, Aria maintained that he did not feel any constraints in his workplace context. For instance, he pointed to the more intimate and successful interpersonal relationship he can establish with his students compared to his female counterparts due to the more freedom he feels as a man in the context of Iran:

- I have more freedom in establishing interpersonal relationships with my learners as masculinity is associated with freedom in my society. However, if I were a female teacher I had to keep my distance from my learners to some extent as women are under a magnifying glass in the traditional society of Iran.

Here, Aria maintained that the Iranian traditional structure, in which women are under surveillance, imposes some constraints on his female counterparts that make them cautious enough in establishing interpersonal relationships with their learners. Then, he pointed to the only situation in which he felt the need to restrict himself:

- The only thing I can point to is that in female students' classes I avoid speaking about some topics considered to be culturally inappropriate to be discussed with the opposite sex.

Here, Aria talks about a restriction defined by him as a male teacher according to cultural norms in his society. In fact, some topics are considered taboos and should be ignored where both genders are present. In this regard, he self-censors in female students' classes to avoid probable problems. It should be noted that even this limitation is not something dictated to him directly from outside. It is his personal interpretation of the existing Islamic Iranian culture that caused him to set this standard for himself.

4.2. Gender-Based Discrimination

In terms of gender-based discrimination, Sarah expressed her strong disapproval of discrimination against female teachers by criticizing the patriarchal structure of the society in Iran:

- We are living in a patriarchal society that negatively impacts our professional status as female teachers. I, as a female teacher, do not have the legitimacy as male teachers.

Here, she emphasizes that she is not as legitimate as a male teacher as men have been considered as the symbol of power and authority in Iran for ages. Believing in female teachers' status as the disadvantaged, she claimed that male teachers are provided with more opportunities for job promotion and professional development as those in power such as managers trust male teachers more than their female counterparts. Then, she pointed out a real example of favoritism for a male teacher by her manager:

- Our institute has two branches for girls and boys. The supervisor is a female experienced teacher in the girls' branch and a male experienced teacher in the boys' branch. But, the person whom our manager trusts more and the one who has the mere authority and makes important decisions for both branches is the male supervisor.

What seems to bother Sarah is the existing discrimination in favor of male teachers in their institute, although they have some female teachers who are more experienced and knowledgeable in their own branch. Then, she ended her assertions with a desperate tone that "we are just followers."

Further, Sarah expressed her dissatisfaction with the lower salary she earned compared to a male supervisor although she was assigned more responsibilities in her workplace context:

- I'm both a teacher and a supervisor in my institute. Although the number of teachers and classes that I should supervise are more than my male colleague's, who is also a supervisor, the amount of salary which I receive is one-third of the amount he earns.

Then, Sarah maintained that this discrimination is rooted in the dominant belief in the society of Iran in which men are breadwinners and they need more financial support to afford their families. In line with Sarah's assertions, Aria also claimed to work in an institute in which they as male teachers received more financial support than their female counterparts:

- I used to work in an institute where we as male teachers gained more salary compared to female teachers. I think it partly goes back to the dominant belief in our society that men are breadwinners and need to be supported financially more than women.

Then, Aria added that this kind of gender-based discrimination arises from the fact that it is men who are supposed to afford their families in the context of Iran but not women. Therefore, it is generally believed that making female teachers satisfied financially is easier than their male counterparts. Moreover, Aria maintained that:

- There are more chances for job promotion for me as a male teacher in our country.

He, then, elaborated more on his claim as he talked about one of his experiences in which he got a promotion due to his gender:

- I have been chosen as a supervisor in this institute because the manager could trust me and my capabilities as a man more than my female colleagues.

As the excerpt shows, Aria accentuates his gender as a factor influential in assigning him a higher position in their institute.

Next, he emphasized that he had always been given more responsibilities in his workplace context because of the cultural background of Iranian society. Aria added that there is a famous sentence in Iranian culture that says "men never cry." He believed that this sentence is suggested to men from the early stages of their life, which not only increases their sense of power and confidence to take different responsibilities but also impacts positively the general view held by society regarding men's capabilities. Thus, Aria even believed that he has more occupational opportunities as a male teacher as he is trusted more:

- I have also more legitimacy among learners and their parents as a male teacher and therefore more TOEFL and IELTS classes are assigned to me.

Finally, Aria claimed that even learners prefer to have a male teacher particularly when they are preparing themselves for serious exams such as TOEFL and IELTS and have no time for trial and error. Therefore, he believed to be considered by learners as a more qualified and trustworthy teacher (due to his gender) whose classes are more popular.

4.3. Gender-Based Attitudes Toward the Teaching Profession

Regarding the impact of gender on her attitudes toward the teaching profession, Sarah asserted that she looks at teaching as her lifelong career despite its low income:

- As a female teacher, I have taken this profession seriously and consider it a long-term job. Although teaching is a low-paying job, I think that's enough for me as a woman.

Sarah expressed her satisfaction with her current status as a teacher to the extent that she ignored its financial aspect. In fact, she adopted more of a moral view toward teaching arising from her maternal feeling which made her care about the quality of her students' life beyond learning English:

- I have dedicated all my time and energy to my job, try to establish an emotional rapport with learners, and care about all students' future life. This is exactly how I feel as a mother about my child.

The image that Sarah projected of herself is that of a dedicated teacher who feels responsible for the future of every single student. Then, she claimed that if she were a man, she would spend less time and energy on this profession and consider it as a part-time job:

- I think male teachers are more concerned with making money in our society and do not limit themselves to this job.

Sarah's emphasis on male teachers' materialistic attitude toward their profession, as she claimed, stems partly from the dominant belief, regarding the scope of men's duties, in the society of Iran in which men are expected to be breadwinners and are in need of receiving more financial support.

Compared with Sarah's claim, Aria, in response to the role of gender in his attitude to teaching, pointed to his financial view toward his profession:

- As a male teacher, I have always been concerned with making more money. Once I heard that teachers can make more money by running IELTS classes. So, I tried to become a professional in IELTS training. Then, I heard that French teachers, earn more money compared to English teachers. So, I learned French and started teaching French. Although teaching is a low-paying job, I have always done my best to earn the maximum amount of money a teacher gains each month.

Here, Aria talks about his ever-present concern about making more money as a male teacher as he is supposed to afford a family. Then, he claimed to try different occupational opportunities to gain more financial satisfaction and reach a higher level of job security. However, Aria continued that the income ceiling is really low in teaching and his income, though higher than an average teacher, cannot fulfill his needs anymore:

- As we are facing the economic crisis in the current society, I feel more concerned and sometimes I think that I should leave this profession forever.

Finally, he maintained that he reached the end, and consequently, he might make his mind to leave the teaching profession due to the existing financial problems despite his passion for it. In fact, as a man, he found no way except to sacrifice his own interest for the sake of the duty he has to afford his family.

5. Discussion

Language teacher gendered identity is not an individual construct receiving no impact from the outside world; rather, it is closely connected to external factors. Its construction and reconstruction are influenced by sociocultural norms and expectations attached to each gender in a specific context. The role of the dominant gender-based ideologies and patriarchal structure in the society of Iran seemed so prominent that the participating male and female teachers experienced a completely opposite professional status based on their gender and the difference between the formations of their gendered identity was really striking. In what follows, the findings will be discussed in more detail.

Regarding the first dimension of teacher gendered identity (i.e., gender-based constraints), whereas Aria, the male teacher, did not experience any noticeable constraints at different societal levels, Sarah, the female teacher, was found to encounter constraints at three levels of inframicro, micro, and macro (Kheng & Baldauf, 2011). At the inframicro level which is related to family-defined norms, Sarah encountered obstacles in her professional developmental process as she could not participate in a conference due to her responsibilities as a mother and a wife at home. Another reason that

prevented her from attending the conference (held in other cities) was that it is not acceptable for a woman to travel alone according to Iranian Islamic culture and family traditional structure. Besides, she missed most of the opportunities to hold English classes with male adult students due to her husband's negative view of opposite-sex relationships. According to Al Bahri (2019), language teachers' identity is not immune from the existing traditional and religious family orientations in contexts where Islamic culture dominates. The opposite-sex relationship is considered a taboo subject and consequently discouraged in the Islamized context of Iran (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019). The term Islamized seemed more appropriate, as the society of Iran is overwhelmed by conventional and politicized Islamic culture (Safatian, 2020). The same restriction was imposed on Sarah by her workplace context regulations at the microlevel and by the society at the macro level. As Rashidi and Hosseini (2019) pointed out, these restrictive rules have been defined based on the Islamic Iranian cultural framework since the 1979 Islamic Revolution as language education policymakers were concerned about English teachers' compliance with Islamic-Iranian identity. As a woman who has been brought up to be the obedient gender, Sarah had to follow not only her husband as the superior gender but also the institutional and social conventions that run counter to her personal beliefs. As Tailassane (2019) argued, women's subordination in Iran is not inherent but arises from the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic culture. In line with the current study results, Safatian (2020) confirmed the superiority and domineering roles of men in Iran and the great extent to which the female participant in her study, as the obedient member of the society, encountered obstacles in her process of professional development. Indeed, her gendered and professional identity formation was negatively influenced and restricted by her husbands' sense of authority.

Moreover, femininity was revealed to be restrictive in Sarah's teaching practice as she was not even allowed to take off her socks in class according to the dominant principles of hijab in Iran and teach the relevant vocabulary, i.e. sole, in her preferred methodology. Another source of constraint pointed out by Sarah was the strict rules regarding the female teachers' dress code. It seemed to bother her as she felt a lack of freedom as an individual to wear clothes according to her personal norms. Therefore, it is assumed that female teachers do not have the right to wear what they want (Safatian, 2020) and are mainly restricted by rules on dress codes in Iran (Tailassane, 2019). A number of studies conducted in the context of Iran, support this finding as they revealed that the female participating teachers criticized institutionally defined teachers' dress code based on the Islamic Iranian culture as it is in contrast with their personal standards. The teachers found these appearance rules as a threat to their freedom that negatively impacted their gendered identity as female teachers (e.g., Eslamdoost et al., 2019; Gholamshahi et al., 2021). Also, Moroz (2017) found that the Ukrainian female teacher experienced a conflict in the process of her gendered identity construction as she was criticized for her appearance considered inappropriate according to the institutional dress code. This gender-based restriction aligns with Vandrick's (2017) assertion that female teachers are more concerned about how to dress than their male counterparts. Women are forced by their workplace authorities to wear clothes in a more traditional style. By contrast, as a male teacher, Aria hardly ever experienced constraints from external forces as men feel more free than women in the patriarchal society of Iran (Tailassane, 2019). This gender bias has been manifested at different societal levels but has caused no impositions on Aria from outside. Thus, the existence of gender inequality seems obvious in such a male-oriented context (ZakerSalehi, 2020), and this condition streamlines the process of the privileged gender's professional identity development.

When asked about gender-based discrimination, Sarah and Aria, unanimously, pointed to the existing discrimination in favor of male teachers in the society of Iran where the patriarchal structure is dominating (Tailassane, 2019). Indeed, in such a male-centered context, men are considered as domineering and authoritative and are believed to be a better option for more serious occupational status such as managerial positions. Therefore, as the participating teachers claimed, male teachers are provided with more opportunities for job promotion and professional advancement and better working conditions with higher salaries due to their gender compared to their female counterparts with the same expertise and experience. They have even more legitimacy among both male and female learners, as Aria asserted. To support this finding, Velez-Rendon (2010) revealed that the male participant believed in his more legitimacy among learners due to his gender which brought him authority, the power of management, and a high level of self-confidence. It was also indicated that, as his workplace contexts were constructed based on these male-oriented gender-based ideologies in their society, he had more opportunity for professional development as a teacher. Besides, in a study by Safatian (2020), the female participant suffered from the existing occupational discrimination against women in Iran. She had no ambitions for administrative roles as she claimed that it is men who are believed to be born with the power to lead and deserve higher occupational positions in her society.

With regard to the third dimension of gendered identity (i.e., gender-based attitudes toward the teaching profession), Sarah and Aria were revealed to adopt two opposing viewpoints shaped by the family structure and different traditional roles attached to men and women in Iran. In particular, Sarah, relying upon her maternal feeling, took up more of a moral view toward the teaching profession as she cared about the future life of each individual learner despite her financial dissatisfaction. What seems significant in forming this aspect of her gendered identity as a teacher is the role of the dominant sociocultural values that determine what to be a woman means in the society of Iran. Based on the Iranian traditional culture, women are considered the core of the family structure. Their protective role at home as a good mother and a good wife has been given priority (ZakerSalehi, 2020). Therefore, being caring, responsible, and supportive is defined as the prominent feature of femininity in Iran (Safatian, 2020) that might impact female teachers' gendered identity formation. A study by Asanti (2016) also revealed that the process of female EFL teachers' gendered identity construction was under the direct influence of such traditionally defined roles for women in Indonesia, where femininity is attached to being loving, caring, and devoted. On the contrary, Aria adopted a more materialistic view toward this profession as men are considered as breadwinners whose basic duty, according to Iranian culture, is to afford his family members (Tailassane, 2019). Similarly, Bayar et al. (2017) showed that, based on social expectations in Turkey, the first priority of male teachers is to have a high-paying job to undertake their massive responsibilities in meeting their families' needs. Also, Moroz (2017) concluded that the male teacher's gender provided him with better financial support in his workplace as men are expected to be more concerned with making money to afford their families in Ukraine. By contrast, the female participant experienced an opposite situation as women are not considered as breadwinners in that context.

Overall, the direct impact of the sociocultural norms and conventions on the formation of the participants' gendered identity and consequently their professional identity development was obvious as Sarah looked at her profession as a long-term job despite the fact that teaching is a low-paying job; however, Aria seemed to make his mind to leave teaching forever due to lack of financial security and his concern for making more money. Therefore, it is confirmed that the existing patriarchal structure in Iran is not always for men, but sometimes against them (Bayar et al., 2017), as they might sacrifice their enthusiasm for this profession for the sake of their duties.

6. Conclusion

The current study afforded insights into the formation of a male and a female language teacher gendered identity focusing on the three dimensions of gender-based constraints, gender-based discrimination, and gender-based attitudes toward the teaching profession. The results evidenced the prominent role of the sociocultural context on language teacher gendered identity construction. More precisely, the dominant patriarchal structure and gender-based ideologies, defined based on the Islamic Iranian culture in the society of Iran, led to an unequal professional status between teachers of the opposite gender. Indeed, Sarah (female) underwent a thoroughly different process of gendered identity construction from Aria (male) although they had approximately the same teaching experience. Sarah expressed her dissatisfaction with constraints imposed on her due to her gender at inframicro, micro, and macrolevels as the result of the Iranian Islamic principles regarding the opposite-sex relationship and dress code. Besides, she suffered from the existing professional discrimination in favor of her male counterparts due to the prevalent belief in men's better authoritative roles as the superior gender in the patriarchal society of Iran. By contrast, Aria, though seemed not to have Sarah's challenges, encountered a different obstacle in the process of his professional development in view of his gender. Because men are considered as breadwinners of their family based on social expectations in Iran and teaching is a low-paying job, Aria was more concerned about his economic status vis-a-vis his female counterpart to the extent that he was even inclined to leave this profession forever despite his passion for teaching.

The current study, despite its small number of participants, has some pedagogical implications for four groups of stakeholders: First, governmental policymakers are suggested to scrutinize these gender-based tensions and devise more teacher-friendly policies to (a) remove unnecessary restrictions and discrimination against female teachers by providing them with more opportunities for professional development and (b) improve the economic status of teachers to avoid male teachers' burnout due to the lack of job security. Second, teacher educators could make teachers cognizant of the dominant gender-based ideological system in a patriarchal society like Iran and its impact on forming their gendered identity and prepare them to deal with the undesirable consequences of gender bias. Third, institutional administrators are recommended to run in-service programs to equip teachers with enough skills to properly cope with the probable gender-related tensions to avoid teachers' attrition. Finally, teachers should be aware of the fact that the gendered identity assigned

to them by sociocultural norms at different levels can be challenged, renegotiated, and reconstructed to achieve a more satisfactory professional status.

This study has some gaps which could be bridged in other studies: First, as teachers' gendered identity is multifaceted, embodying different dimensions, other studies could address this construct from perspectives other than the three dimensions scrutinized in this study. Also, a similar study could be conducted on a larger population to gain more generalizable results. Besides, data collection could be triangulated using different instruments to reach a more comprehensive image of the phenomenon under study rather than being limited to the narrative interview only.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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