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Research Paper

Factors Contributing to Iranian EFL Institute Teachers' Identity Reconstruction in Online Classes

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Abstract

The current research explores the underlying factors affecting Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) institute teacher identity reconstruction in online courses. It also investigates the combination of roles that constitute Iranian EFL teacher identity in the context of language teaching institutes. Fifteen Iranian EFL teachers from 3 private foreign language institutes in Shiraz were interviewed through semistructured interviews for their narratives. The data were analyzed utilizing the grounded theory to extract the themes. Results indicated that 2 main sets of factors: (a) Individual factors and (b) context-based factors were responsible for the reconstruction of Iranian EFL institute teacher identity. Individual factors include educational background, professional background, emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. Context-based factors encompass classroom management, time management, communicative issues, course design issues, and teacher identity subfactors. Findings can be helpful for teachers, preservice teachers, institution managers, course designers, and program developers.

Keywords: EFL Teacher Identity; Teacher Identity Reconstruction; Online Instruction.

1. Introduction

Identity in teacher education settings can be seen as a frame or an analytic lens through which it is possible to consider a range of domains, from how students negotiate a range of influences to the necessity of dealing with professional tension in the workplace (Olsen, 2008). Being a successful teacher is related to a sense of identity that incorporates the emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of the teacher's self in the core identity of being a teacher (Alsup, 2006). Duru (2006), therefore, emphasizes the necessity of investigating teacher identity to acquire an impression for traditional instruction and "to create, and reconstruct the possibilities for the new educational reforms, programs, paradigms, and change educational processes for a better life" (p. 121).

Alongside advancements in the realization of education, the concept of teacher identity has also been conceived innovatively. One such development is the identities teachers create as they adapt to new responsibilities. For example, as a result of technological breakthroughs over the previous few decades, teachers' understanding of their evolving responsibilities and identities has undergone some changes.

Whereas there has been extensive research on the concept of teacher identity in face-to-face instructional settings, little is known about teacher identity in online environments. Particularly, much less is known about Iranian EFL teachers' identity development in online classes. This research aimed to address this gap by examining the major factors that shape the formation of Iranian Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) institute teacher identity within the



context of online classes. The research also aimed to explore the combination of roles that constitute teacher identity in online classes at Iranian EFL institutes. In this vein, the following research questions were the primary focus of this study:

1. What are the key factors of the construct of Iranian EFL teacher identity in the context of language teaching institutes?
2. What combination of roles constitutes Iranian EFL teacher identity in the context of language teaching institutes?

2. Literature Review

Over the past decades, addressing teacher identity development in the field of teacher education has become a vibrant line of research in language education (Bell, 2002; Chang, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Maleknia et al., 2022). The reason for doing teacher identity research relies heavily on the contention that “to understand language teaching and learning, we need to understand teachers: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22).

2.1. Teacher Identity

The process of teacher identity formation has been viewed to be influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including the social interactions and relationships with others within a historical, sociocultural, and institutional setting, values, emotions, traditions, beliefs, discourses, educational foundation, and job and life experiences, among others (Salinas & Ayala, 2018).

Moreover, the development of teacher identity is an active process during which individuals undergo continuous change and struggle because of internal and external elements (Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). Within the sociocultural process, teacher identities are shaped from a personal and social view (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Johnston, 2012; Miller, 2009). From a personal perspective, the development of teacher identity concerns emotions, meaning frameworks, agency, and the self (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), and from a social point of view, the main concerns are the effects of the context, experiences, traditions, social interactions, and positioning (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Miller, 2009). As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and Johnston (2012), argue, both personal and social elements are intertwined factors and bring about a process where teachers can consistently negotiate and reconstruct their identities in communities by means of social interactions and experiences.

Because instruction demands personal involvement with students, colleagues, and the context, professional identity seems difficult to be separated from teachers' personal identity. There is a close association between teachers' personal lives and their profession because teachers place themselves and their beliefs in their work and establish social connections with the context (Lamote & Engels, 2010). Teachers represent their teaching beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and practices through their identity, which impresses students' learning through the classroom setting and the sorts of approaches teachers take into account (Varghese et al., 2005). Similarly, as Lave and Wenger (1991) note, teachers shape identities particular to those communities and could be exerted on other communities in the process of involvement in various communities. In fact, due to engagement in multiple communities of practice, teachers bring about such a development, and additionally, they try to develop identities that go along with their participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As a result, the communities in which teachers operate create the possibility of adoption, extension, and construction of identities that determine their participation, particularly in novel communities that structure new frameworks for (re) conceptualizing their identities.

2.2. Teacher Identity in Online Contexts

Teachers can utilize online spaces not merely to acquire and/or share information, but also to achieve goals associated with professional communities, networks, and interactions (e.g., Hur & Brush, 2009). According to Kimmons and Veletsianos (2014) online contexts provide teachers with new opportunities to represent themselves. Online platforms have become increasingly popular as a convenient way for instructors to engage and cooperate with both close colleagues and the wider professional community (Duncan-Howell, 2010) to enhance their professional development (Tour, 2017). Research conducted into online peer-to-peer experiences before the explosion of online social platforms (Duncan-Howell, 2010) tended to emphasize both the value of both instructors' participation in closed settings linked to formal training

programs (Comas-Quinn, 2011), and online social networks for professional growth (Karagiorgi & Lymbouridou, 2009). In these studies, some teachers delineate themselves online in a way that is in harmony with their performance in face-to-face settings.

The educational system requires teachers' principal character, for which teachers' active collaboration is of utmost importance. Teachers should move beyond isolation in their profession and collaborate with other colleagues (Mitchell, 1997) to progress and construct their professional identity. Such active collaborations and interactions on the part of teachers shape social and cultural structures in and outside the classroom context.

What individual teachers believe and how they think in their professional realms are formed with the help of structures shaped through collaboration (Wertsch et al., 1993). The necessity to rapidly adapt to new online contexts has demonstrated how teacher educators and institutions confronted and experienced the challenges and opportunities to continue their jobs in such unexpected circumstances (e.g., Flores & Gago, 2020). In these contexts, among other issues, it is crucial to focus on how teacher education has changed to accommodate the interaction constraints and shifted to new teaching paradigms to prepare future instructors for a world characterized by uncertainty (Flores & Swennen, 2020).

Nowadays, many teachers are moving from traditional teaching to teaching in online environments (Traxler et al., 2023). As a consequence, the parallel move in their internalized images of themselves as online teachers and what they believe will occur leads them to develop their "electronic pedagogy" (Paloff & Pratt, 1999, p. 12). Many maintain that with online courses, teachers deal with new ways of utilizing cues, visual materials, understanding of time management, and online communication and presence (e.g., Simonson et al., 2019).

As already indicated, there is little research on the identity development of instructors in online contexts. By investigating the underlying factors of teacher identity reconstruction in online classes at Iranian EFL institutes and exploring the combination of roles that constitute Iranian EFL teacher identity in the context of language teaching institutes, the current study aimed to contribute to developing and expanding knowledge in this area. The obtained results also shed light on the murky areas of identity concept and its relationship with the teachers' profession in online contexts.

3. Method

3.1. Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in three private foreign language institutes located in Shiraz during the COVID-19 pandemic, between September and January 2021. The research participants included 15 EFL teachers with different experiences, ranging from 5 to 18 years of teaching. They participated voluntarily in this study. All the participants had, at least, three years of teaching experience, which helped to lessen the influence of initiating-career reality shock (Veenman, 1984). Further, the participants were selected from both genders (6 male, 9 female), and their ages ranged from 22 to 47, of whom the average age was 32.1 years. Six teachers held M.A., and nine held B.A. in TEFL. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they only taught online during the data collection time.

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

The semistructured interviews were deemed a suitable research technique to address the study topics. The interview questions were taken from the relevant studies (e.g., Sahragard & Sadeghi, 2017), and two Ph.D. holders in TEFL, and applied linguistics experts in EFL teacher education, then, reviewed them for content and face validity. The list served as the interview's beginning point, but further questions were added later. It should be mentioned that although all the participants could speak English well, English was a foreign language; thus, it would be rather difficult for them to express complicated thoughts and ideas in English. As a result, in this study, the communication between the researchers and them was conducted in their mother tongue, Farsi. To keep the participants healthy and away from infection to Coronaviruses, they were contacted for interviews via the WhatsApp social media application. Before the interview, the participants' informed consent was obtained, and it was emphasized that the information was kept confidential. Each interview session lasted for approximately 50 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded. The researchers asked focused chains of questions to cover as many dimensions as possible. The consistently patterned responses were elicited about Iranian EFL teacher identity reconstruction till saturation was reached (see Jones et al., 2013).

The researchers drew on the grounded theory procedure to analyze the data in this study. Initially, all the transcribed interviews were scrutinized and subjected to open coding of the data sentence by sentence to prepare categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to initial open codes, memos were also noted in a Word document and then compared to the codes for any emerging contradictions and redundancies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Then, analytic memos involving key statements of the utterances, namely Vivo codes (i.e., codes directly drawn from the participants' responses), or modified theoretical concepts, appeared.

When no new open codes appeared, the researchers began to interrelate the extracted categories and recognize tentative categories by moving back and forth between the data and the existing literature on teachers' identities (axial coding). These stages, then, facilitated the development of the selective codes for the research study in which the related categories were gathered under more abstract teacher identity reconstruction dimensions as the coding paradigm consisted of two main categories of factors, each with four and five subfactors. The ultimate stage included designing a visual model that represents the key factors of the construct of Iranian EFL institute teachers' identity in online classes. It should be mentioned that some transcribed interviews were sent to the participants to confirm the codes, interpretations, and the final conceptual model.

4. Results and Discussion

As already stated, the data analysis produced two main categories of underlying factors, forming a model that characterizes the teachers' identity reconstruction in the Iranian EFL institutes in online classes. Figure 1 indicates this conceptualization:

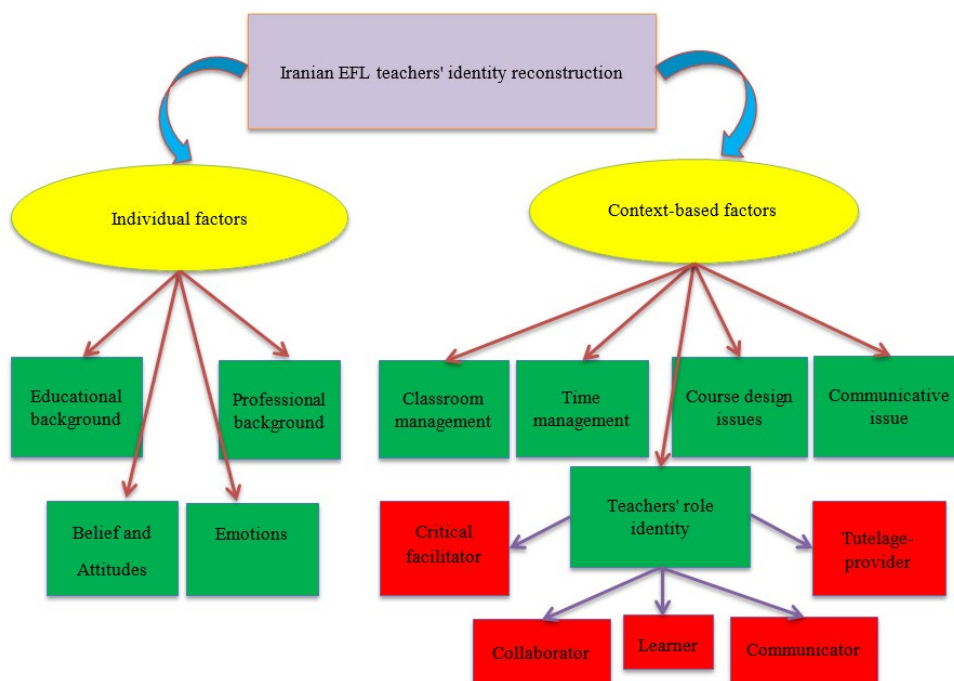


Figure 1. The Extracted Model

Figure 1 indicates that two main sets of factors along with their subfactors affected the teacher identity reconstruction in online classes. In what follows, each of these components is discussed and relevant extracts from the teachers are prepared to support the interpretations.

4.1. Individual Factors

The first set of factors predicting identity reconstruction in online classes for Iranian EFL institute teachers was individual factors: educational background, professional experiences, emotions, and belief system. Each of these factors will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

4.1.1. Educational Background

A few of the MA and BA teachers believed that they made solid connections between their experiences as MA and BA students and their later identity construction as online teachers. Since the COVID-19 crisis had a variety of adverse effects on education, and due to the closure of universities, they had to rapidly develop adaptation to remote learning for 2 or 3 semesters. The forced and unexpected transition from face-to-face to online setting caused these teachers to receive teaching more conveniently in online environments. In the following, a sample extract from one of these teachers who experienced online classes as a student is presented:

As I was an online student, I became aware of and more comfortable with the online environment. As a result, being in the situation of teaching online is no longer an issue for me. In addition, I have been able to deliver online courses.

In contrast, some teachers argued that their educational background, in graduate and undergraduate courses, was centered on teaching in face-to-face environments. Hence, they were provided only with information regarding this forum; they were not taught, for instance, adequate techniques or strategies to manage, take control of, and deal with the challenges of online classes, as one of the teachers stated:

At university, I only learned how to be a successful face-to-face teacher, but did not learn how to be a successful online instructor. Now, I am an online teacher and it is resentful for me that I cannot be as effective in virtual classes as I was in face-to-face classes.

These extracts show that the tutors who drew from their own experiences as students ventured into new modes of instruction and created online learning more tangible to their students. In contrast, those whose educational background only supported the information regarding face-to-face classes did not bring them any crucial preparation for online courses. They were inexperienced with techniques to conduct online courses. This result corroborates the findings of Russell et al. (2001).

4.1.2. Professional Background

Several teachers mentioned that teaching in online contexts required them to go off their tried classroom methods to education and embrace new approaches to delivering the content, establishing critical thinking and understanding in their students. One of the teachers mentioned that "as I began to differentiate between teaching in traditional context and online environments, and also came to a realization that what worked for me and my students, I feel much better."

Moreover, some participants believed that their successful face-to-face class experiences have significantly influenced their professional commitment and motivation in online classes and played a significant role in changing and forming their professional identity. As one participant cited:

I really enjoy teaching in an online setting and I feel I am a successful online teacher as I was in my face-to-face courses. I accept the fact that being comfortable with teaching in face-to-face contexts has improved my operation in online classes.

The conclusion is that, although these teachers were skillful and successful instructors in their face-to-face classes, they acknowledged the significance of understanding the design of online classes and the use of technology to aid students in learning in new ways and ultimately perceived that being an online teacher is different from being a face-to-face instructor. As similarly reported by Osika et al., (2009), this perception helped them to honor their professional commitments to online contexts.

In contrast, some others indicated they no longer have been able to distance themselves from teaching as they were used to; hence, they created their online courses reflective of their face-to-face classes. One teacher maintained that "I have always been concerned about effectively making sense of rapport and connection with my pupils, an issue none presented in my in-person courses. So, I applied the strategies I used in my face-to-face classes."

This statement indicates that this participant faced many concerns that made her teaching in an online setting challenging. Hence, she was thoroughly affected by her experience as a face-to-face teacher who utilized the same approaches while teaching online. As a result, their students were demotivated, which confirms that of other studies (Bachiri & Sahli, 2020).

4.1.3. Emotions

In the interview data, changes in the participants' emotions, as a result of different modes of pedagogy as well as going online consequently affected their identity reconstruction. As Hosseini (2022) maintained, identity is emotionally charged and teacher identity construction is directly associated with teachers' emotions (Lee & Jo, 2016). Students' emotional fluctuation due to comparing their in-person and online selves served as the basis of the participants' emotions.

Some teachers maintained that they could manifest their emotional responses more fruitfully in their face-to-face classes, as they were able to use more kinesthetic or bodily recourses to convey their emotions. One teacher pointed out, "When being face-to-face with my students, I could express how I feel through my facial gestures, but this virtual world has taken over, and now I just send a sticker to express my feelings."

On the other side, some teachers believed that the online forums had empowered them to establish an emotional connection with their students in and out of the class. The nature of online media acted as the major mediating factor for this argument. Synchronous and asynchronous affordances had led them to persistent emotional connectivity. For example, one participant argued, "Online classes enabled me to connect more with my students. I love them, and I try to inspire them to benefit from the situation and study more."

Going online caused some changes in the participants' emotions. Both emotionally charged experiences provided further opportunities to construct more robust relationships with the students and prevented them from utilizing their potential to convey their feelings to them. This finding is in line with the results of Nazari and Seiri (2021) in investigating a shift in shaping teacher identities from face-to-face- to online classrooms. Such responses are natural to changes in their identity. Together, these emotional oddities seem to impact the teachers' online identities along with their online functioning (Lantz-Anderson et al., 2018). This, in turn, seems to impact the instructors' satisfaction level (Tang et al., 2014).

4.1.4. Beliefs and Attitudes

The participants' positive and negative attitudes or beliefs toward online classes certainly worked on their operation and actual teaching in online contexts and, importantly, were linked to the formation of their professional identity in online classes.

The teachers who held positive beliefs toward online classes experienced satisfaction, enjoyment, confidence, and confirmation of their choices of acts in online courses. As one commented:

When I started teaching online, I found it to be a significant challenge. But as time passed, I perceived it as an opportunity to learn a new context with a new capacity. For instance, I always seek integrity and discipline in my daily life and I try to convey these qualities to students in online classes.

Although several participants stated that online contexts could be effective in providing rapport with their students, others believed that teaching is essentially face-to-face interaction and collaboration, which may be trivialized by over-reliance on technology. One of them noted, "even as I acclimatized to teaching in an online setting, my attitudes toward incorporating technology in my teaching have remained negative."

It is essential to remember that the participants' views regarding online instruction impacted their behavior, performance, and sense of self. Before beginning their online teaching experiences, several teachers (7) who had received training in the use of electronic learning described online education as puzzles to be solved and a chance to learn more about oneself, thus echoing the findings of Civelek et al. (2021), who maintained that training has a positive influence on teachers' perspectives towards online instruction. However, for some others, failing to adapt to the new teaching circumstances led to a conceptual shift in their views, independent of their willingness to do so, and resulted in a wholly unfavorable perception of technology as a tool for online teaching (Nazari & Xodabande, 2020).

4.2. Context-Based Factors

The above discussion focused on a set of individual factors influencing Iranian EFL institutes teacher identity reconstruction in online classes. As indicated in Figure 1, the second central category comprised the following context-based factors: class management, time management, communicative issues, course design, and teachers' role identity.

These deeply influenced the teachers and turned their online classrooms into a significant environment in which they enacted and formed their online identities.

4.2.1. Classroom Management

Several teachers found classroom management a major concern and a severe challenge that affected their teaching and students' engagement. For example, one of them stated the following:

I have been a teacher of online classes for more than two semesters, and I've found classroom management one of the most challenging issues I have faced. Since, it is tough for me to monitor my students' behavior, gauge how they comprehend course content, and also control their contribution and progress in learning experiences.

In contrast, some were satisfied with utilizing strategies applied by their professors in BA or MA educational experiences or the strategies they were taught in online teacher training courses. The extract below indicates this point:

Indeed, there are some sorts of shortcomings such as difficulty in managing online classrooms that accompany it. The things I learned from my university professors to tackle this challenge include making the content delivery more interactive, providing open discussions and questions, and using the polls function to administer short quizzes.

In the extracts above, the problem is that the unequipped and untrained teachers for online instruction could not manage this type of classroom properly and could not keep students motivated to engage properly. This lack of competency as a result of inadequate training was also reported by Garrett (2014), who investigated challenges faced by novice teachers. In contrast, some teachers trained in managing online classrooms believed that by instilling frequent communication, collaboration, and active learning into online classes, teachers could ensure their students receive engaging and valuable educational experiences.

4.2.2. Time Management

In the interview data, the convenience of time management in online classes was more accessible for some of our participants, leading to their best efficiency in meeting the needs of students in an online course. As one explained:

Time management can be easily well managed by employing appropriate techniques to control instructional workload. Of course, it depends on some factors: the nature of the course design, my working style, and internet connection quality, to name a few.

Some teachers, specifically those who were not technology savvy and had problems with classroom management, addressed some difficulty in managing time and a much higher workload for instruction in an online environment. One of the teachers, for example, believed that "distance teaching entails loads of teaching and learning practices that are considerably more labor-intensive than face-to-face classroom practices. Teaching in virtual contexts involves anytime, anyplace advising and round-the-clock availability for students."

According to the extracts above, the conclusion is that online classes are more demanding than their face-to-face equivalent, where the time is more fragmented. Accordingly, how to manage time in online courses has become a challenge. Still, some teachers believed that it could be better managed with adequate routines, collaboration tools, and technology equipment and resources. It was clear that these participants received convenience of time management due to utilizing some appropriate techniques. These findings concur with the same direction as those of Conrad (2004). In addition, upon further consideration of the transcripts, it came into view whether a lack of preparation for online teaching and some course designs typically made the teacher's responsibility heavier. The considerable time investment in material preparation, for instance, led some to conclude that their workload had increased compared to a similar face-to-face course, and they became "24-hour online teachers," as stated by Dhawan (2020).

4.2.3. Communicative Issues

In the interview transcripts, lack of face-to-face interaction with students and receiving feedback from them was frequently cited as the teachers' main problem. The extract below acknowledges this point:

It is tough for me to gain collaboration and interaction when students are not physically attending together. In my face-to-face classes, verbal and nonverbal signals from students helped me adjust the instructional process to address student's needs, but unfortunately, I lack direct access to this kind of feedback in online classes.

In contrast, some stated that they try to help communication work properly, giving them feel a sense of validation. For example, one of the teachers reported:

Establishing friendlier and warmer communication with students in an online course may seem a daunting task, but is rarely impossible. I, personally, for example, provide live virtual group discussions which facilitate the communication process and better learning opportunities. My students feel my presence.

It is apparent that online classes are often characterized by a lack of opportunities for communication and interaction, as argued by Pundak and Dvir (2014), and Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020). In fact, communicating through technology tools was different, even more complex and challenging for all the participants due to the absence of face-to-face engagement and interaction and communication barriers, which restricted the effectiveness of the online communication process for some of the participants. A portion of this restriction stems from their self-images (Yazan, 2018) and comparing themselves as face-to-face and online instructors (Zimmerman, 1998). Hence, the teacher identities were influenced by the recursive nexus between restrictions of online instruction, self-images, and identity transition (see Robson, 2018). On the other hand, some participants who combatted communication barriers using synchronous and asynchronous models and a few simple strategies made communication enjoyable. These findings agree with Richardson et al. (2012) who applied the community of inquiry framework to guide and implement online courses.

4.2.4. Course Design Issues

In the interview sessions, most teachers were unsatisfied with the design of online courses, even some of those who made rapport with online courses did their best to provide a fruitful classroom environment and were successful. They believed that online courses require them to present their students with passages to read or videos to view and then regurgitate the information in a simple discussion or an essay. For example, one of the participants stated:

The design of an online course should embody the initiative, creativity, and enthusiasm of students as the core of a learning process, but unfortunately, all of these factors are absent in the design of the courses we teach.

Moreover, some maintained that the curriculum and courses in which they are teaching were originally developed for traditional classes, as one of the teachers mentioned:

I have taught and am still teaching online classes, mainly focusing on what to prepare and learn. Course designers ignore how to facilitate learning, manage online classrooms, deliver content, and increase interaction with students.

In these cases, it seems that the design of online courses was considered a great challenge and a preventive issue for most teachers. They maintained that the curriculum and courses they teach are developed initially for traditional classes, so they are not appropriate for online delivery. This generated a feeling of being unsupported by institute managers (Tajik & Ranjbar, 2017) and negatively influenced some of the teachers' sense of efficiency, identity, and profitability. Although some teachers endeavored to deal with this issue and manage their courses in the best possible way, others failed to perform efficiently against this problem. Thus, the online course, curriculum designers, and planners should seriously adjust teachers' new roles. Similar findings have been reported by Dhawan (2020), who maintained that online courses should be designed to be interactive, creative, and relevant.

4.2.5. Teachers' Role Identity

Five primary role identities emerged from the interviews with the Iranian EFL teachers, which are presented in the following. It is noticeable that the terminology is strikingly similar to the work of Sahragard and Sadeghi (2017).

4.2.5.1. Critical Facilitator.

Some teachers allocated the role of facilitator to themselves but carried on a critical stance regarding online courses and still saw technology as a barrier to their abilities to facilitate their students' learning. One teacher noted, "one of the most satisfying aspects of teaching is the creativity and the challenge of working out to improve. I want to be alive in my teaching, even though the rote style of teaching is exhausting."

As observed in this narrative, the teacher recounted her identity as one who promoted her students' learning but was not necessarily willing to accept the new teaching era. This role identity was in accordance with Johnson et al., (2014) teacher critical facilitator role identity.

4.2.5.2. Collaborator.

Some teachers conceptualized themselves as collaborators who established an effective online teacher-to-teacher community with their colleagues. The following narrative of a teacher is presented as evidence:

In colleague meetings, we always provide significant points about how to cope with online teaching challenges to create a communicative online environment. Thus, I think collaborating in the teacher-to-teacher network has motivated me to be more effective at spreading successful practices as an online teacher.

As observed in this narrative, the teacher narrated his role identity as someone who shared his knowledge with his colleagues. This role identity was in agreement with Wenger's (1999) community of practice, Farrell's (2011) teachers' professional identity, and Sahragad and Sadeghi's (2017) teacher collaborator subrole identity.

4.2.5.3. Communicator.

It represents the online teachers' role identity who were concerned with translating communication with students to online classrooms in a meaningful and regular way. A teacher said, "I am teaching in an environment that is characterized by the absence of instant two-way communication. I promote my students' success through interaction with them and facilitating their meaningful engagement in online learning activities."

As revealed in this narrative, the teacher indicated how he supported his learners and helped them to experience a successful engagement by acting as online communicators. This role identity was in concert with Farrell (2011), who appointed the role of communication controller to teachers.

4.2.5.4. Tutelage-Provider.

Tutelage-provider is a role that denotes how online teachers develop a mutual trust and affinity with their students and endeavor to be a comrade or a good friend. In one of the narratives, one of the teachers cited:

I believe that teachers and students should bond more in online courses. I am a friend and supporter of my students in and outside the classrooms. It has helped empower my students and positively impact their online learning experience.

It could be inferred that the teacher tried to construct a bond with her students and keep this sense of intimacy with them. This role identity was in line with Farrell's (2011) care-provider sub-role identity and Sahragad and Sadeghi's (2017) tutelage provider for Iranian EFL teachers.

4.2.5.5. Learner.

Learner refers to the role identity of the teachers who taught in online courses and learned from these environments. The narrative of a teacher is presented in the following:

Being situated in an unknown online classroom environment put me once again in the position of a learner. I was taught how to be a face-to-face teacher and had no experience teaching online. As time passes, I think I will learn more about managing online classes, communicating effectively, and so on.

From this excerpt, it can be concluded that the teacher viewed his role identity as an online instructor and an online learner who could eventually learn from an online setting to be a successful online teacher. This role identity has aligned with Farrell's (2011) professional identity and Sahragad and Sadeghi's (2017) learner subrole identity.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the underlying factors of teacher identity in Iranian EFL institutes in online classes, to study the influence of these factors on teacher identity reconstruction, and consequently investigate the combination of roles that constitute Iranian EFL teachers' identity in the context of language teaching institutes.

Albeit small-scale, this study revealed that teacher identities in online courses are reconstructed from a complex mixture of personal and contextual factors. Individual factors comprising subfactors of educational background, professional background, emotion, attitudes and beliefs, and context-based factors, namely classroom management, time management, communicative issue, course design, and teacher role identity, emerged as a result of an in-depth analysis of the data. Positive, negative, and varying impacts were involved in the teacher identity reconstruction process. The positive consequences were accompanied by a change in the teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding technology and teaching through technology, improved communication with the pupils, and further consideration of education standards. The negative impacts entailed the teachers' confronting tensions as a result of experiencing different membership, experiencing greater responsibility, experiencing difficulty in conducting the classrooms and interpersonal relationships with the students, and having little willingness to build rapport in online settings and to stay in the profession of teaching online. Ultimately, the variations in the teacher identity which are associated with their role, emotional experiences, practices, and, importantly, the reconstruction of their identity as online instructors were considered to have varying consequences.

The results of this research can first help raise authorities' awareness at institutes of the significance of specific training on teaching online using relevant technologies and theories that construct the basis of online teaching to promote efficient practices. Second, it also may lead to a flip to the course and curriculum designers and planners to alter their thinking concepts, reconsider and renew online curriculum design, and adjust teachers' new roles; to improve the use of information and communication technology, to promote the quality of online teaching and learning. Third, teachers and preservice teachers can also be among those who benefit from the results of this research. It may cause apprehensions among them regarding the desires of the online course system.

However, the overall model of determining factors is in its infancy and needs to be flourished. Future studies can be conducted by employing a different research approach (e.g., ethnographic research and mixed methods research) and a different instrument (e.g., observation) because of the complex nature of identity. Second, the differences between the identities of male and female EFL teachers can be investigated. Third, the differences between university, school, and English language institute teacher identities can be examined as the other subject. Fourth, the differences between experienced and novice EFL teacher identities can be researched as another subject.

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Conflict of Interest

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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N/A.

Data Availability

The authors confirm that all the data collected or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

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Appendix

Interview protocol

1. How do you feel toward online classes?
2. Do you feel attached to the community of online classes?
3. Do you make any efforts to be more engaged in online communities?
4. What factors have been influential in construction and reconstruction of your professional identity in online classes? How? (For example, your past language learning experiences, your educational background, teacher training sessions, past teaching experiences, attending ELT related workshops, etc.)
5. What factors in online environment have been influential in reconstruction of your professional identity as an English teacher (for example, expectations and rules imposed from institute authorities, supervisors, feedback you have received from students, etc.)?
6. Would you please give it a thought and elaborate on whether your personal beliefs are in line/contrast with your identity as a teacher in online classes?
7. What are the benefits/challenges you have faced in online classes?

8. How do you manage your online courses?
9. What are your relationships with learners in either mode (face-to-face & online classes)?
10. How do you manage the stream of interaction and communication in your classrooms?
11. How do you provide an appropriate feedback for your learners?
12. Do you share or negotiate your online teaching knowledge with your colleagues?
13. What is your comparative understanding of online and face-to-face classes, your practices, and aspects of your self-perceptions being influenced?
14. At the end, how do you perceive yourself as an online teacher?



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