

An English Teacher's Professional Identity Development: The Effect of Educational Policies

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Abstract

A fundamental aspect of teacher socialization and development is the construction and maintenance of vivid and strong professional identity. As a multi-layered and dynamic phenomenon, teacher identity is affected by diverse range of social and institutional factors. Aiming to add to the growing literature on teacher identity, the current study examined the effects of language teaching policies on an English teacher's identity development. Following narrative approach which is the dominant paradigm in identity research, the stories of an English teacher obtained through semi-structured interview were examined. The teacher's narratives and accounts of his teaching experiences were analyzed through constant comparative approach which produced five main themes including lack of teacher autonomy, the effect of macro political concerns on language teaching, movement towards communicative language teaching, lack of resources, and inappropriate student placement strategies. The results indicated that every single language teaching policy shaped and reshaped the teacher's understanding of himself.

Keywords: Identity, Educational Policies, EFL Teacher, Narratives

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1. Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a rise of interest in teacher identity research. This surging interest has transferred this area of inquiry into the status of a separate research area within teacher education (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Teacher identity is an ongoing, dynamic, multilayered and evolving construct (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011) which plays a vital role in teachers' occupation and personal life. In fact, teachers' understanding of themselves and their role in the micro setting of the classroom and macro level of the society determines their behavior and conception of effective teaching. Johnson (2006) remarked that the paradigm shifts from positivist to interpretive in examining teachers' perspectives and teaching process resulted in accentuating the role of identity in teacher development and learning how to become a teacher (Friesen & Besley, 2013). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) suggested that in order to understand teachers, we should consider their professional, cultural, political, and individual identities. In the same vein, Kanno and Stuart (2011) argued that "the development of L2 teacher identity should be at the center of research and debate on L2 teacher education because it is the central project novice teachers engage in" (p. 250). This indicates the critical role of teacher identity in achieving instructional objectives.

Diverse range of social, cultural and institutional factors impact teachers' identity development. One major institutional factor which can affect the process of teachers' identity development is the language teaching policy in a particular teaching context. Language teaching policy is associated with wide range of social, cultural, linguistic (Dorner, 2011) as well as political (Dixon, 2009) and ideological concerns (Liddicoat, 2013). It guides and directs teachers' and pupils' linguistic repertoire and educational practices (Menken & García, 2010). In recent years, English language teaching policies around the world has changed as a result of general educational reforms (Rixon, 2013). Kumaravadivelu (2012) called for reconsideration of teaching approaches and teacher identity in today's globalized world and questioned reliance on western knowledge and worldview. Taking into account the global perspectives of education, Norton (2018) while supporting decolonized and decentralized teaching practice in neoliberal era, emphasized the importance of language teaching policies on teachers' teaching practice and identities and recommended continuing research on language teacher identity by shedding light on the ways in which educational policies impact teacher identity and practice in a specific community. Studying the effect of language teaching policies on English teachers' identity construction would provide rich insights into EFL teachers' professional growth and improvement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Identity

According to Pennington (2015), teacher identity is “a construct, mental image or model of what ‘being a teacher’ means that guides teachers’ practices as they aim to enact ‘being a teacher’ through specific ‘acts of teacher identity’” (p. 17). Teachers’ commitment to their work and adherence to professional norms of practice is affected by their professional identity (Hammerness et al., 2005). Teachers should be aware of their “self” which is blended in their teacher identities, beliefs and values (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Teacher identity continually changes as a result of educational, social, historical and cultural contextual factors (Ponte & Chapman, 2008). Teachers’ identity development has been an inspiring and growing research area in the field of applied linguistics. In a study, Higgins and Ponte (2017) suggested that the teachers’ own linguistic histories strongly shaped their views about multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies created opportunities for critical self-reflection about the relationship between languages, teachers’ identities and academic engagement of multilingual students. Flores and Day (2006) indicated that teacher’ personal and professional life histories, pre-service teacher education training, and school culture and leadership played critical role in establishing and maintaining teachers’ identity. Salinas (2017) indicated that the administrative task that teachers had to perform severely affected their teaching task and blocked their identity development.

In Iranian context, teacher identity has also attracted some authors’ attention. For example, Zainadiny Mofrad (2016) studied a group of Iranian English teachers’ identity development. The findings indicated that teachers identify themselves primarily as didactical experts, then as pedagogical experts, and least as subject matter experts. There was no significant relationship between the gender and experience of the participants and the three sub-scales of professional identity, except for a significant relationship between subject matter expert and experience of the teachers. In another study, Abednia (2012) explored the professional identity of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. The results indicated that taking part in critical pedagogical courses resulted in major changes in teachers’ professional identity.

The above-mentioned studies indicate the intricate and complicated nature of teachers’ identity development which is tied to a wide range of social and constitutional factors. The contextual factors of working environment and educational policies imposed by authorities also affect teachers’ development so in this section it is necessary to have a look at English language teaching policies in educational system of the context of the current study i.e. Iran.

2.2. English Language Teaching Policy in Iran

The value and eminence of a language in a language policy depends on a multitude of factors including functional uses, prestige, nationalism, political ties etc. English possesses some or all of these features in different countries (Bambgose, 2003). It is positioned in language policies over the world because it is the gate for knowledge and technology. English language teaching in Iran has been historically influenced by sociocultural, political and religious attitudes in the country. Indeed, it has witnessed many ups and downs. Before Islamic Revolution in 1979, due to close political and economic ties between Iran and western countries, English language played critical role in Iranian society and educational system. However, after Revolution, there were ambiguous and controversial positions about role of English in the society and educational system. In a study, Narafshan and Yamini (2011) reported that 70% of their participant believed that ELT policies in Iran are influenced by political concerns as authorities are sensitive to English-speaking countries and being fluent in English is not a primary goal for them.

In the educational system of Iran, English is a compulsory course both at school and university level. It is introduced in the middle school; however, in the primary school which is the most appropriate time for learning another language, the educational system does not provide any English course for students since the dominant belief among policy makers is that in the first years of education, students should learn about their national language, and culture. In a period of six years of education when students reach the age of 12, a class time of only 2 or 4 hours is devoted to teaching English at school.

In the old education system, the main objective of teaching English was helping students learn reading skill and improve grammar knowledge; it was the function of English in Iran. However, in new education system after approving The Fundamental Transformation of Education Document the emphasis has been shifted to communicative language teaching and interactional skills; although the practical realization of objectives of Document and whether the changes in policy has been applied in practice remains a question.

In 2003, Iranian pre-university English syllabus underwent a reform. In 2007, the first Iranian national curriculum for teaching foreign languages (based on communicative approach teaching) was developed by a team working under the supervision of the Ministry of education. In 2011, the new curriculum was implemented and the books and evaluation system underwent radical changes which came through as a result of changes in policy toward teaching English in Iran. However, in prescribing foreign language teaching course at schools the Document emphasizes teaching it in order to stabilize

the Islamic and Iranian identity. In fact, English language serves as the means to introduce this identity to the globalized world.

The theoretical foundations of English language teaching policies in Iran have been the focus of some studies. Kiani et al. (2011), in their review of the directions and orientations of educational policies in Iran, mentioned the need to develop unitary foreign language if the aim is to achieve pedagogical objectives. It needs to be mentioned that in education system of Iran there is no specific language teaching document to clarify the objectives of teaching English. Furthermore, Atai and Mazlum (2013) suggested that in designing English curriculum in Iran, policy making is highly centralized and it does not allow for involving local policy makers in the country. Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2016) mentioned the discrepancy between officially stated ELT policies and the implicit practices in Iran, arguing that officially stated positions regarding ELT in Iran are policy segments rather than coherent structured policies which makes it difficult to draw a boundary between objectives of the policy and realization of *Islamic-Iranian* identity in educational policies. And even within this tentatively stated policy, there seems to be a lack of concentrated effort to create awareness of the cultural, social, and political functioning of English in a world of diversities (Mirhosseini, 2008). Similarly, Morady Moghaddam and Marry (2019) questioned lack of well-defined and vivid teaching policies which has resulted in haphazardness, inconsistency, incoherence, and subjectivity in the implementation of ELT. They mentioned that ELT macro policies not only did not contribute to improvement and success in Iranian context, but also led to major educational and social problems. The authors concluded that current language teaching policy and planning is at odds with social and educational needs of the country.

In the global context there also have been several studies in relation to teachers' beliefs and attitudes about language teaching policies. For instance, Farrell and Kun (2007) in their study of Singapore's 'Speak Good English Movement' policy on the beliefs and classroom practices of school teachers suggested that teacher's complex and contrary beliefs about the policy exerted different degrees of power and influence on the teachers' classroom practices. Rashid and his colleagues (2016) examined the implementation of ELT policy in Malaysia. They suggested that the Malaysian education system has gone through constant reforms; however, new policies have been implemented without considering the voices and opinions of the wider society which has strongly challenged teachers. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2017) suggested that the language teaching policies of the East and Southeast Asia are creating a divide between the privileged elite and the rest. Advocators of these policies priorities English at the expense of local languages with an aim to create opportunity to participate in

internationalization and modernization. This is against the policies in Iran which avoid globalization and emphasize application of national language in the process of teaching at school and university.

The review of literature indicates that studies of educational policies have been mainly at theoretical level rather than practical realization of these policies. The studies have reviewed and compared the changes in language teaching policies in the global and modern eras. However, there is lack of studies about the effect of educational policies on teachers' development and professional growth. As teachers' identity and self-development is a context bound matter (Taylor et al., 2013), there is need to extensive studies of teacher selves in different contexts.

Furthermore, with reference to other general educational document, it is clear that the language teaching policy in Iran contrary to many other countries opts for reinforcing teachers' local and national identities with an aim to decrease English role to mainly educational and functional purposes rather than aiming to project a global identity in individual teachers and students and accept the hegemony of English as an international language in order to join the growing community of countries under the influence of English culture and community. However, it is not clear how these policies would affect different facets of teaching which will be reflected in teachers' development and self-understanding. So, to fill these gaps and add to literature on teacher identity research, the current study aims to consider the effect of language teaching policies in Iran on an English teachers' identity development.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participant of the current study is an English teacher who teaches at public schools. He is named Aras after this. Aras is 42 years old and holds MA degree in English Language Teaching. Aras studied his BA at Farhangian University (Teacher Education University) and his MA in non-Farhangian University. He started his job with BA degree; however, after 13 years of teaching he decided to study his MA.

He has five years of experience of teaching English in small cities in East Azerbaijan province (located in North-West of Iran). He has also been teaching in schools of Tabriz (the capital of East Azerbaijan province) for 15 years. At the present time, Aras is teaching in downtown and uptown of city, however, the schools are public ones and do not have the facilities existing at private schools.

Aras is a multilingual speaker; his native language is Turkish and his second language is Persian (the formal language of the country). Aras loves

English and teaching and eagerly invests in his job as mentioned in interviews and as one of the authors knew him. In this study, Aras reported his job stories related to the context of public schools.

3.2. Data Collection

The data for this qualitative study were collected through narratives. Narratives have received much attention over the past decade and represent the main body of data for studying teacher identity. According to Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014), narratives are useful tools in teacher identity research because they “capture the nature and meaning of experiences that are difficult to observe directly and are best understood from the perspective of those who experience it” (p. 8). They also allow teachers to consider themselves and their actions as socially and historically situated (Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

In order to obtain teachers' stories, three interviews were conducted with the participant. Each interview session lasted 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Farsi language and then were translated into English. The translated texts were referred back to the interviewee to be checked for accuracy of intended messages and meanings. The study followed semi-structured interview structure format starting with the same protocol of open-ended grand tour questions which aimed to elicit the teacher's stories about his teaching experience at school, the principles and rules he had to follow, the dominant approaches and methods, reform movement in the past 20 years and his understanding of his own role as the teacher including different dimensions of his teacher identity.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data of teachers' stories were analyzed by using constant-comparative strategy (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In constant-comparative method, the researcher develops themes and concepts by coding and analyzing the data at the same time (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). First, we searched the data for specific language teaching policies, the principles the teacher relied on in his teaching, the guidelines offered by the ministry of education, and the prescribed roles of the teacher in language teaching process. Then an attempt was made to find out different dimensions of teacher identity including his role as knowledge transmitter, facilitator, caregiver and degree of his vocational identity manifested by the degree of investment he made in his job. And finally, by going back and forth through the data, an association was made between language teaching policies specified in the data and emergent teacher identity categories. The data were approached using Varghese et al. (2005) identity framework. In their overarching framework for studying teacher identity, the authors suggested that exploration of identity requires attention to “identity- in discourse” and

“identity- in- practice.” In the current study, our main focus was on identity- in- practice which emphasizes attention to actions and practices in studying teacher identity. It also indicates social nature of identity manifested through concrete practices and tasks (Trent, 2015).

To ensure credibility of the coding, the data were coded by another independent coder and Cohen’s Kappa coefficient was applied to the results which produced inter coder reliability of .90. And the validity of the findings was checked by using participant checking. The participant teacher was asked to read the themes and evaluate the accuracy of the results. This section included an additional interview session with the participant. The results of this interview were applied in finalizing the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Thematic analysis of data revealed that existing language teaching policies affected Aras’s identity development in different ways. In this regard five main themes emerged: lack of teacher autonomy, the effect of macro political concerns on language teaching, movement towards Communicative Language Teaching, lack of resources, and student placement strategies.

4.1.1. Lack of Teacher Autonomy

An important theme that emerged from data analysis was the effect of highly centralized and top down educational policy on teachers’ identity development. In the current educational system of Iran teachers are never involved in the process of decision making and implementing the policies. To use Cuban’s words, they are viewed as “technical” rather than “moral” agents in their profession. Cuban (1988) describes the technical teacher as one who “matches the needs of large organizations impelled to provide standardized services to many students” (p. 3). In other words, teachers are supposed to put the decisions and policies of higher order into practice without having the authority to challenge the appropriateness of existing rules and principles.

This kind of centralized policy involves teachers in the act of conveying certain language material with prescribed rules of presentation and assessment, in spite of the fact that language teaching is a dynamic activity and classroom is a vivid and context bound setting which displays unpredictable and changeable features in the flow of instruction and interaction with students. Questioning the appropriateness of current policy, Aras believed that language teaching is an activity which requires critical thinking and creative knowledge construction rather than passive reliance on higher order rules and principles of conveying knowledge activity. He expressed:

In order to be successful and make changes in students' learning and motivation, teachers need some degree of autonomy in their job. By having autonomy, they can help their student acquire knowledge of critical thinking and become active agents in their life and learning. However, in our educational system all the decisions are made by authorities, teachers are never involved in decision making process, although they are highly knowledgeable.

... And this is more problematic in designing books and teaching material. Representative groups of teacher are not involved in process of preparing books and it results in designing books that are not standard and in the long run demotivate both teachers and students.

The fact that teachers do not have the power and authority to decide about the policies of their teaching activity severely affects the quality of their teaching activity. In fact, for example, the teacher notices that there are many problems in students' learning because they are not motivated enough or interested in particular language activity, but does not have the authority to make changes in prescribed syllabus, teaching activity, material of teaching, and assessment process. He is not given the authority to consider the contextual factors of his own classroom in managing the teaching activity and interactional process. Current educational policies and standards which are mostly made by unspecialized individuals do not take into account the contextual features and shortcomings of individual teaching contexts. In the same vain, students' interests and expectations of a language course are not considered in designing and implementing the language courses.

The contrary point is that in the current language teaching policy there is a big miss match in clarifying the objectives of English courses and the demands made in the final stage of teaching. Teachers understand that students need interaction and aim to develop communicative skills as emphasized by authorities, but cannot ignore students' needs in their examinations. As mentioned by Aras

... thanks to changes made to language teaching approaches in Iran, the effectiveness and appropriateness of applying grammar translation method is questioned and Communicative Language Teaching is introduced as the appropriate teaching approach, however, teachers can not apply this approach effectively because students need knowledge of grammar and reading in their examinations.

It is clear that, although the objectives of the English courses have been changed at the level of formal documents, in practice the oppositions create extra challenges for the teacher and make him frustrated and confused up in his professional world as he does not clearly know what he is expected to do and what his objectives are. He is enforced to focus on discrete knowledge

skills in spite of emphasis made on communication and interaction in English language courses. Furthermore, the quality of teaching act is judged according to his students' final examination performance which relies on knowledge of grammar and lexicon.

The fact that the teacher is not allowed to teach according to his own beliefs or interact with the students the way he considers appropriate besides, lack of autonomy in his job causes very tremendous threat to teacher's identity development as he has lost ties with the reality of his teaching experience. Lack of power in making educational decisions has caused extreme stress for the teacher and has ruined his self-confidence. There is a big gap between his initial expectations of this career and his current experiences. As Aras said:

I find myself a controlled EFL teacher who is overwhelmed by lack of freedom of action and uselessness of my teaching experience. My primary aims and desire in choosing this job have gradually been lost due to demands and requirement made on me and my work.

... You were talking about immigration to Turkey, as an English teacher with MA degree I do not have the confidence to think of being English teacher in another country. Unnecessary expectations and absence of autonomy in my job have completely changed my view of being English teacher.

4.1.2. The Effect of Macro Political Concerns on Language Teaching

Another important theme obtained from data analysis was the effect of macro political concerns on language teaching at schools. The political approaches of the country and its principles determine the educational policies in general and English language teaching orientations specifically. As Shannon (1984) noted, politicians manage the resources of education and make teachers, schools and principals accountable for the learning outcomes of all students. In Iran, an important aim for policy makers is to advocate development and enrichment of students' Islamic and national identity; accordingly, the educational practices revolve around this objective. Instructional courses intent to extend students' understanding and knowledge of Islamic principles and emphasize learning Farsi language and literature on the part of all students considering the fact that Iran is multilingual country. In line with current policy, students are not exposed to English language at elementary level which is the most appropriate time to learn another language. Furthermore, in the secondary and high school only two or four hours a week is devoted to English course.

In designing the instructional material including books there has also been an attempt made to remove English cultural traces from books and instructional process as much as possible. Since cultural identity is a big

manifestation of social attributes of human beings and affects the identity of individuals and ethnic groups as well as their national identity (Han, 2010), it is concerned inappropriate to expose students to western life and ideological systems.

This kind of educational policy affects every single aspect of education. Considering English language teaching, the limitations and the changes made to English material, teaching, and classroom culture result in eradication of unique features of English language courses at schools. Consequently, students view it as a boring and useless course which lacks innovation and originality. It should be considered that the technological advancement in 21st century has broadened students' worldviews and they understand the features and values of an ideal English learning class. They no longer believe in traditional perspectives or specific educational policies. They aim to learn a new language, culture and worldview; however, in practice, the kind of learning students receive at schools is far away from their expectations and interests because English at schools, universities and almost any other official sections of the country is reduced to the level of functional and instrumental purposes rather than as a gate for new ideology and worldview. Aras believed:

Our students have different expectations about English classrooms' environment, culture, even their teachers' appearance, dressing, and behavior. When they notice that there is no difference between the atmosphere and culture of English classes and other classes or between English teachers and other teachers, they lose their interest and excitement and shift to private language institutes in order to learn English. They consider English classes at school useless and boring which can never fulfill their expectations nor teach them English.

According to Aras's view, lack of student interest and investment in the English classes makes it a challenging experience for the teacher as large portion of teacher interaction is devoted to students in the classroom. The teacher is left with a number of demotivated students who do not have interest to invest in their learning process and classroom activities. He said:

I try a lot to motivate them. I pay specific attention to my interaction with them. I even create telegram channels and ask them to bring their language problems there, but I notice that they do not have any interest to learn. They only tolerate English classes as a compulsory course at school.

It is indicated that the existing situation creates big barriers for the teacher in his identity construction. He notices that students do not show interest in learning and consider it a useless course so he becomes indifferent

to student learning. And when the teacher gets detached from his students, his image of his role and activities becomes obscure and dark.

It seems that extreme attachment to certain rules in educational contexts including English classes results in vagueness of experiences for both teachers and students and creates extra tension for teachers as they lose main focus of their instruction and have to deal with demotivated students. Unfortunately, the integration of political concerns to education has severely affected the quality of instruction at schools.

4.1.3. Movement towards Communicative Language Teaching

Another important factor which affected Aras' professional identity development was reform movement in relation to English language teaching in Iran. In the last decades, the primary aim of teaching English at Iranian schools was to develop reading skill. The objective was to educate students who were capable of reading English texts, as English could not serve any functions except this; accordingly, books were designed to provide students with reading practice. In these classes the teacher had to read English texts and translate them into Persian with focus on providing students with knowledge of English grammar. The result of this policy was uselessness and failure of English classes at schools because they could not fulfill students' expectations nor teach English language. In fact, this policy could not even achieve its primary objective of improving reading skill because those who developed the books and the teaching material were not experts in this field; as a result, the books were not standard and did not take into account students' cognitive development. They even had a very low quality papers which would ruin the interest of learners and make them totally bored. As Aras expressed:

... During the last 20 years, we never emphasized speaking and listening in our instruction. The only focus was on reading. And this proved useless. Students could not learn so the attitudes towards English at schools have been negative. There are a lot of shortcomings at school. In fact, there is not opportunity to practice speaking English.

In these classes, the teacher under the influence of educational policies and facilities, drew upon old teaching methods and techniques and did not have desire to invest in his professional development and improve his teaching skills because there was no opportunity to put new teaching skills into practice. In this situation, the instructional identity of the teacher which was manifested in desire to develop and apply innovative teaching strategies was questioned and consequently resulted in lack of vocational identity as the teacher did not have motivation to invest in his job.

However, recently after approval of the Fundamental Reform Document of Education in 2011, the primary objective of English language

teaching has changed. In the new document, the aim of teaching English at schools is to help students develop communicative competence in English language; in line with this objective the books and teaching material have changed and become more interaction oriented and teachers are expected to focus on four skills of language rather than mere emphasis on reading skill.

This shift has been a turning point for both students and teachers as it can to some extent enhance their interest in school English classes. Although there are still many shortcomings, the variety of activities conducted at the classroom and the desire to interact with others can reduce the heaviness of classroom atmosphere and add to excitement and inspiration of the learning activities. This was a motivating factor for Aras as he said,

Like many other English teachers, I was tired of dealing with extremely boring and out of date English texts written by non-native authors.

Furthermore, he believed that the new books challenge teachers' professional knowledge as they are required to be knowledgeable to be able to fulfill students' expectations in new teaching system. This is more crucial in classes where students have attended private language institutes and possess high proficiency level in English. In Aras's words:

Teachers need to be professionally well developed in order to take control of teaching process and gain the trust of students.

As a result, the teacher tries his best to improve his professional knowledge and enthusiastically invest in his instructional identity in order to apply innovative teaching skills and strategies in his class which can have positive effect on his quality of teaching and his sense of self-efficacy.

4.1.4. Lack of Resources

The results indicated that although following communicative language teaching is inspiring for teachers, they can still face problem in applying this approach appropriately because the lack of facilities and resources create a big barrier for them. The amount of financial resources dedicated to education in Iran is very limited so in line with other sections the necessary equipment and amenities are not present in language classes. In addition, it should be considered that the number of students in language classes is one of the critical concerns in any educational system. In Iranian schools especially public ones, large number of students is placed in each class which affects almost every aspect of the teaching act. As our participant mentioned:

The limitations of our classes at school do not allow applying a real communicative approach because they are extremely crowded. In such classes most of the class time is wasted in teachers' classroom management acts

since some of the students are noisy and disobedient and create many challenges for the teacher.

It is indicated that dealing with students' disruptive behavior which results from over-crowdedness of the classroom is a challenging task for the teacher and restricts' his capacity to follow communicative language teaching in which the teacher, taking into account students' needs and interests, aims to create opportunities for students' interaction. In fact, in crowded classes the teacher has to follow "high structure" classroom management strategy and apply a strict and pre-determined classroom schedule because the contextual factors of the classroom limit the chances to apply "low structure" classroom management style (Hall, 2011, p. 24) and allow the students and teaching process follow in natural phase and expect emergence of interactional opportunities. Aras said:

In these classes giving the stage to students is impossible because class time will be lost in crises so the teacher should be in control of everything. Even the seating arrangement is problematic because it makes it difficult to have group discussions.

It is noticed that these contextual features make the teaching process totally teacher-oriented and enforce the teacher occupy the central role in teaching process. The teacher views himself in charge of teaching process and classroom events and do not allow students to practice autonomy in their learning process since the existence of large number of students in the classroom is demanding and results in turmoil and waste of classroom time if there is no neat schedule for the teaching process.

4.1.5. Inappropriate Student Placement Strategies

Another important theme that emerged from data analysis was the challenges associated with placement strategies at Iranian English classes. According to our participant's views, the big shortcoming of English teaching at Iranian schools is placement policies. Unfortunately, all the students are placed in the same classroom regardless of the fact that they display multitude of proficiency and motivation levels. They are provided with the same teaching material and there is no value attached to the successful performance of motivated students. In fact, these students are not given the kind of instruction they deserve. In addition, the teacher does not have any information about students' background. As Aras said:

... It is not clear what kind of methods have been used by their previous teachers and more critically whether they have got the score which is displayed in their results reports because it is a long time that there is no fail/pass in Iranian educational system; all the students can start next level even if they have failed the previous stage.

Aras believes that this kind of placement and assessment policy affects every aspect of teacher's instructional route as nothing can be systematic in the classroom. The teacher has to deal with some low proficiency students who are not ready for the current stage and some who are really motivated and proficient. In current situation he is left with a lot of controversies and does not know who should be the priority. In these classes the existence of low proficient students does not even allow the teacher to speak English. In order to make the teaching material and classroom discussions comprehensible for these students, the teacher has to use students' native or second language in the classroom and the medium of instruction in English classes is any other language rather than English. Language learning in these classes is a boring and useless experience for all the students. It is transparent that in such a teaching context the teacher cannot achieve his objectives as he is occupied with the problem of making a balance and providing the kind of instruction which can help both groups. However, achieving this is not practical in English classes and both groups are sacrificed and deprived of their rights to receive the appropriate instruction.

The results indicated that this kind of teaching context enforces the teacher to occupy the role of teacher in traditional senses and be the central figure in doing the teaching activities. Lack of homogeneity among students barricades the use of any innovative teaching or learning activity and makes the teacher rely on teacher-centered instructional approaches which critically affects them because they notice that this kind of instruction cannot be helpful for their students, but they do not have any other choice. Aras expressed:

... At the end of the day when I evaluate my teaching act, I notice a lot of shortcomings. I try to find the causes, am I not a good teacher? Is it my fault? No. but whatever the causes it affects me.... Like any other teacher I do like achieving my objectives but with current situation, it is almost impossible to be able to teach English at our schools. And achieving the objectives of the Document which emphasizes educating international citizens is almost impossible.

In educational system of Iran, the teacher can only rely on his local identity of being English teacher which is defined according to institutional factors of Iranian education system. In this system the teacher is asked to only convey some predetermined teaching material in English language and does anything he can to have low rate of failed ones even if students have not learnt. In fact, teachers' efficacy is judged by this criterion so the teacher should try to achieve this objective even if it is practical through rote learning activities and in the cost of meaningful and useful learning activities. The wrong criteria of assessing teacher efficiency accompanied by inappropriate

student placement strategies makes the teacher move on the wrong direction and be far away from ideal and standard teaching strategies and practices.

4.2. Discussion

The current study examined the effect of educational policies on an Iranian English teachers' identity development. The findings showed that educational policies which are utilized to improve the quality of teaching and facilitate the teaching process for teachers and students, in some levels create obstacles for teachers' identity construction. One important factor which shaped teachers' understanding of themselves and their role in educational system was the existence of highly centralized educational policy which restricted teachers' autonomy in their occupation. Current educational system in Iran has given instrumental and technical roles to teachers who should work for implementing and empowering the system rather than being active agents who try to make changes in the society and educate creative and critical students. This kind of attitude towards English teachers and their roles creates many challenges for them and prevents their professional identity development because it destroys their self-image and makes them frustrated and passive in their professional life. In fact, this kind of educational system diminishes teachers' desire and motivation to tackle inappropriate and wrong policies and prevents their capacity to develop higher order thinking skills in order to become creative teachers. And if there is no creativity and constructive knowledge in teacher, there will be no creativity and ingeniousness in the students. As Hinnant-Crawford (2016) reported, restricting teachers' autonomy makes them lose their confidence to make change and view themselves as implementers more than creators of education policy and this reduces the value society members and teachers themselves attach to their job as teachers are blamed for any kind of failure in achieving the objectives of teaching. And as noted by Dörnyei and Ushido (2009), based on self-determination theory, the restriction of teacher autonomy contributes to teacher motivation loss. Webb (2002) also emphasized teacher autonomy stating that teachers need autonomy in their job in order to be able to make changes to prescribed curricula as well as forms of assessment. In order to be successful in their job, teachers need to be empowered in their job. This empowerment serves as a management tool that maximizes the engagement and productivity (Dee, Henkin, & Duemer, 2003).

The results also indicated that intervening macro political concerns in educational decisions indirectly affected teachers' identity development by destroying students' motivation and interest. It is an axiom that students develop national identities; however, it should be considered that in the globalized world of 21st century, the rapid increase in communication technologies has broadened the depth of relations between communities which makes individuals susceptible to change in ideologies, values, cultural

understandings and identities. In other words, as the physical boundaries are constantly changing and improving, individuals are also moving in the flow of modernity. Today, Western civilization has exerted major impact on other societies and new generations accept it as the dominant cultural trend in the world and Iranians are not an exception in this regard. The increasing rate of migration to western countries, existence of high life standards in these countries and technological advances have made them increasingly interested in English language and culture as most symbolic representation of Western society. Restricting students' exposure to English culture cannot strengthen their ties with Iranian and Islamic culture, because they are exposed to it at home through technology. The results of this policy and ignorance of English is the loss of effectiveness of English courses at schools as students find it boring to deal with books designed by non-natives authors or to experience strict rules of interaction in these classes. Kinman and Jones (2003) also emphasized the importance of student interaction and motivation on teachers' teaching and emotional wellbeing. And here it was noticed that students' lack of motivation which was the consequence of applying certain policies affected different aspects of teacher' identity development. Aras's investment in his job and this professional development was associated with the feedback he received from his students. When he noticed that students did not welcome and value his hard work, and did not show any sign of interest to learn, he also experienced lack of motivation and doubted his self-efficacy which was a big threat to his identity development.

The results of the study indicated that a positive effect on teachers' identity development was caused by reform movement in teaching English at schools. The focus on Communicative approach and designing books according to features of this approach added to the popularity of the books as for a long time the books were boring and lacked interesting topic and texts. This reform movement which originated from soft attitudes towards English in macro levels of society made teachers interested in teaching process as they had variety in their teaching tasks. This reform movement helped teachers invest on their professional knowledge and try to improve their proficiency in four skills of English language rather than be occupied by grammar knowledge. The results confirmed that positive changes happening in educational frameworks and practices have influential effect on different aspects of teachers' identity including desire to improve instructional identity and invest in their job in order to hasten their professional capacities.

Another finding of the study was related to the effect of educational facilities including the number of students in language classes and placement strategies on teachers' identity development. The findings demonstrated that the number of students in the class determined the role teacher played in the process of teaching; over-crowded classes enforced the teacher to occupy

central role of authority figure and restrict the opportunities for students to experience autonomous learning activities. This contextual feature which originated from lack of schools in the country gave rise to teacher-centered education and made it difficult to practice students-centered instruction. And this consequently resulted in traditional and less effective teaching activities in accordance with transmitting view of instruction. The opportunities to practice constructive, critical and active learning activities were lost in the existing shortages. In addition, lack of standard procedures and criteria to place students in appropriate classes severely affected the instructional decisions and approaches of the teacher as well as quality of teaching process. This factor which is the basis for any successful and effective teaching practice is missing in language teaching policies of schools in Iran. This big shortcoming frustrated the teacher as there was no way to achieve teaching objectives and manage the classroom according to standard qualities. In line with this finding, Khan and Iqbal (2012) reported that effective teaching was not possible in over- crowded classes because in these classes teachers had to deal with a lot of problems in their instruction, discipline making, and assessment process. Marais (2016) also reported that class size affected teachers' quality of instruction since it was not possible to use a variety of teaching strategies in these classes and the teaching activities did not lead to active participation of learners.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The current study examined the effect of language teaching policies of Iran on an English teacher's identity development. The results demonstrated that the limitation at the level basic requirements as well as ideological and political concern affected different aspects of teachers' identity construction. Although, this was a case study and limits generalizability of the findings, it produced rich and insightful results about existing policies and their implications in teachers' every day practice. The study found that existence of centralized policies which restricted teacher's autonomy to make local decisions about their classroom matters affected teachers' orientation and teaching practices. It is necessary that teachers be given some degree of autonomy in their job in order to find the solutions to some local problems and improve the quality of instruction at schools. Otherwise, many of these problems which severely affect the quality of teaching English at schools and result in useless courses for students to the point that after being educated for six years they are not able to introduce themselves in English language, will remain as unsolved dilemma and the objectives of the Document will not be achieved. It is necessary that policy makers understand the limitations and problems in language teaching and take steps to overcome the problems. It is transparent that English language teaching at Iranian schools needs more investments on the part of government as the lack of facilities affects

teachers' orientation and approaches in their job. There is also need for reconsideration of existing policies and pedagogical frameworks in order to provide a valuable and desirable teaching experience for teachers and influential learning opportunities for students. Teachers should be more trusted and be involved in educational policy makings so that innovative and creative ideas emerge in the country and teachers regain the confidence and motivation to grow professionally and be able to provide effective teaching practices.

As for future research, conducting longitudinal study and examining the effect of current policies in the long run can provide a clearer picture of the effect of language teaching policies on teachers' identity development. Future research can also involve more teachers including experienced and novice teachers in order to provide more comprehensive findings about current policies and their implications. Applying mixed method studies and doing surveys can also prove helpful in understanding the role of educational policies on teachers' identity development.

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