

The Confused Professional Identity of Native and Non-Native EFL Teacher Educators: Are They Teachers or Researchers?

*By Adina Mannes**

The demands of teacher educators underwent a major change. They not only are required to excel in teaching, but also to conduct research as an essential part of their professional life. This ambivalence raises questions regarding their professional identity. How can they identify with their profession if their roles keep changing? Two native and two non-native EFL teacher educators were interviewed about their perception of professional identity regarding being a researcher or a teacher and whether the demand to excel relies also on personal background factors such as being a native English speaker. The results indicated tension between research and teaching, which is a cause of frustration for EFL teacher educators. As for the issue of personal background, most of the interviewees did not believe that such factors are crucial. However, everyday reality in their colleges, where there are more native than non-native English speaker teachers, shows otherwise.

Keywords: EFL teacher educators, native English speaking teachers; non-native English speaking teachers, professional identity.

Introduction

Teachers' understanding of their professional identity (PI) is crucial for many reasons. It is indicative of their job leaving intentions (Kremer & Hoffman, 1985; Moore & Hoffman, 1988), it explains their response to educational reforms (Nias, 1989), and it has a great effect on their performance, efficacy, professional development, and ability and willingness to cope with educational change and their teaching practice (Beijaard, 2000; Sercu, 2006).

The PI of teacher educators in education colleges is in a state of introspection (Klavir & Kozminski, 2012). This can be seen very clearly in the ambivalent demands made of teacher educators: on the one hand, they are regarded as academic staff and are thus required to conduct research as an essential part of their professional life, while, on the other hand, they are required to excel in teaching in order to prepare students to become teachers. How can these teacher educators identify with their profession if their roles keep changing? Since many teacher educators assume this position as a result of being excellent teachers in regular schools, their main expertise is clearly in teaching and teacher preparation and not in the field of research. Guberman's findings (2009) that only 10% of teacher educators deal with research confirmed this assumption. Being an excellent EFL teacher is even more complex since, unlike teachers of other

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subjects, the EFL teacher has to deal with a problem unique to language teachers, namely, of being a native or non-native speaker of English. This paper reports on findings from a study, which investigated how EFL teacher educators regard their PI and whether the demand to excel as an EFL teacher educator also relies on personal background factors such as being a native English speaker. The study examined these issues through a qualitative study based on four individual interviews with two native and two non-native teacher educators in four academic colleges of education one in each selected college.

Background Information and Theoretical Framework

Higher Education-The Local Context. Israeli higher education has grown tremendously in the last decades; since 1990, the number of students in higher education has doubled. It was thought that by opening more colleges and upgrading their status to academic colleges more people would get a higher education and social gaps would shrink. Today, most Israeli teachers obtain their teaching training in 23 different colleges. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (Maagan, 2015), in 2014, 1057 teachers obtained teaching certificates from universities, while 4428 teachers obtained their certificate from academic colleges. One of the results of this rapid growth has been the lower level of students accepted to the various universities and colleges, especially among those looking to become teachers. Clearly, such a change affects the general level of teachers as well as of future academic staff, since today's students are tomorrow's professors and teacher educators. This crisis prompted the Council of Higher Education to make changes to the funding of academic colleges to emphasize high standards of both teaching and research. As a result, research has now become a condition for promotion not only in universities, as previously, but also in the world of academic colleges (Vallensky, 2012). In his report on higher education, Vallensky (2012) criticized the preference given to research over teaching for high standards. He claimed that the same incentive given to research should also be given to teaching for high standards and that such a policy encourages teacher educators to direct their efforts at research rather than at the quality of their teaching. The original ideal of colleges as high standard teacher preparation colleges has lost its way. In their article about teacher educators, Klavir & Kozminski (2012) stated that the PI of teacher educators is confused in the eyes of educational leaders, society at large, and the teacher educator themselves. While education colleges aim to prepare students to become future teachers, they are also defined as academic institutions whose function is to advance research.

Professional Identity (PI) of Teachers

There are many ways to define self-identity. Norton (2000) defined identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop (2004) suggested that identity is not something that one possesses but rather something that develops

throughout one's life. One aspect of self-identity is professional identity (PI): "Who am I, or what am I as a professional person (Kosminsky, 2011, p. 13). Teachers' PIs are developed as a result of their experiences of different situations. It has been suggested that pre-service teachers bring their past experiences as students, their culture, their beliefs and values regarding what it means to be a teacher into their studies even before they become practicing teachers (Alsup, 2006). Some researchers believe that the PI of teachers is related to their concepts or images of self (Knowles, 1992; Nias, 1989). Others have proposed that PI should include societal expectations of what teachers should know and do (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Tickle, 2000). In general, identity can be understood as the various meanings that people attach to themselves and the meanings attached to them by other people (Beijaard, 1995). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson (2005) alleged that identity is the relationship between assigned identity (assigned by others) and claimed identity (claimed for the self).

In the field of EFL teachers, ideas concerning PI also vary. Astor (2000) asserted that a professional EFL teacher should be an expert in at least three fields of knowledge: pedagogy, methodology, and psycho- and applied linguistics. In addition, he believes that all these different areas must be learned and practiced since they are not attained intuitively. Glatthorn (1995) on the other hand, saw PI as the development of teachers in their professional role: "teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically" (p. 41). Professional development includes formal experiences (such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc.) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications, watching relevant documentaries, etc.) (Ganser, 2000). Despite these differences in defining the concepts, teachers' understanding of their PI is crucial as was mentioned in the introduction part above.

Native Versus Non-Native

One of the central topics in the EFL field, which is specifically related to teachers' PI, is the issue of native speaker teachers (NST) in contrast to non-native speaker teachers (NNST). Since teaching is a complex, personal and social activity and since it involves the whole person of the teacher (Cochran-Smith, 2005), his background plays a crucial role as well. Some studies have shown that NNSTs have identity conflicts due to the fact that, in some respects, their profession involves the acquisition of a second identity, namely, of the target language. This, understandably, can lead to feelings of inferiority among NNSTs of English and cause teachers to question their identity as legitimate TESOL professionals (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). It seems that NNSTs suffer from a psychological barrier which often has nothing to do with actual knowledge of the language but rather with feelings of inadequacy. Bernat (2008) defined this psychological phenomenon as "NNST Impostorhood" and claimed that it relates to feelings of inadequacy in the role of language teacher or language expert of one's non-native tongue (p. 1). This inferiority complex is believed by some researchers to be "much more wide spread than might seem at first glimpse" (Rajagopalan, 2005, p.

293). Furthermore, a recent study, conducted in Israel, examining the PI of EFL high school teachers, showed that NSTs have higher levels of PI than NNSTs (Mannes, 2015).

Objectives of Present Study

The aim of the present study was to investigate:

- how EFL teacher educators regard their professional identity and whether they feel a sense of confusion between the demands to excel in both research and teaching;
- whether the demand to excel as an EFL teacher educator relies also on personal background factors, such as being a native speaker or living for a substantial period in an English-speaking country.

Method

Since the aim of this study was to better understand the feelings and beliefs of English teacher educators, the qualitative method was found to be the most suitable. The qualitative method enables an analysis of what people actually say (Riessman, 2002) and is used as a means of understanding the identity, lifestyle, and cultural and historical world of the narrator (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, T 1998). Interviews were used in this study to collect the data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This type of method allows us to get a deeper understanding of the topic since we talk to the participants and elicit information from them that cannot be obtained from questionnaires. On the other hand, as the number of interviewed participants is usually small one cannot draw conclusions to the entire teacher educators' population.

In Israel there are 23 academic colleges of education, 18 of which train students to become English teachers. Purposeful sampling (Seidman, 2013) was used to select four colleges for the interviews out of the 18. Two colleges were chosen from the central part of the country, one from the northern and one from the southern part of the country.

Four EFL teacher educators, one in each college, were interviewed in semi-structured interviews, after giving informed consent: two were native English-speaking teachers (NEST) and two were non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST). One of the NESTs was a lecturer and the other the head of the English department. One of the NNESTs was a lecturer and the other the dean of human and social sciences. Anonymity was guaranteed. Some background questions about the teachers and their institutions were first asked. The other interview questions were based on the themes, which emerged from Robinson's research (2006) concerning the identity of teacher educators. The interviews of the present study included the following topics:

- a. Relationship with students: responsibility of teacher educators beyond the obligatory academic material for personal values and norms.
- b. Nature of instruction: the balance between academic (theoretical) and practical styles; lessons structured to serve as a model of good teaching.
- c. Professional background of teacher educators:
 1. Did they get their position due to outstanding performance in a regular school?
 2. Do background factors influence the choice of teacher educators; in other words, does being a native speaker or living abroad for a substantial time improve the chance of being offered such a job?
- d. Research:

Teacher educators' attitudes towards research

 3. How do they perceive themselves: as teachers or researchers?
 4. Demands of their colleges; is research a prerequisite for promotion?

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) of the interview data was used to identify the major issues surrounding EFL teacher educators. In order to find the key themes, the six phase-process was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first phase, the interviews were transcribed to enable familiarization with the text. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by examining all the data again and coding interesting features. The third phase included the collation of codes into potential themes, and in the fourth phase the chosen themes were refined. Some themes were combined since there was not enough data to support them, and others were separated. In the fifth phase, the themes were named and defined for the purpose of clarity. Finally, in the sixth phase, the report was written with the integration of selected extracts which relate back to the research questions and the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

All the teachers interviewed were EFL teacher educators in academic colleges of education. Their teaching experience and qualification varied, as can be seen in Table 1 which provides background details about the participants.

The results were arranged into four themes which emerged from the interview data: (1) teaching versus educating, (2) the best way to instruct future teachers, (3) professional identity: am I a teacher or a researcher? and (4) the influence of personal background on the EFL teacher educator.

Table 1. Participants' Teaching Experience, Qualifications, Background Factors, and Position in the College

Name	Teaching experience	Qualification	Background factors	Position in college
Sima	15 years as teacher educator, no experience as a regular teacher	PhD, trained as teacher in a local university	Non-native English speaker	Dean of social sciences and teacher educator
Orit	13 years as English teacher, 20 years as teacher educator (high school and college)	PhD, trained as teacher in academic college in Israel	Non-native English speaker	Teacher educator
Mali	40 years of teaching experience, 12 years as teacher educator	MA, trained as teacher in US	Native English speaker	Teacher educator
Miriam	30 years of teaching experience (high school and college)	PhD, trained as teacher in US	Native English speaker	Head of English language education and teacher educator

Teaching Versus Educating

The first theme that emerged from the interviews concerned the teacher educator as an educator. This was very well expressed by Miriam: "I am a firm believer in practicing what you preach"; in other words, those who prepare student teachers should actually demonstrate how to be a good teacher and not just teach about it. Other interviewees agreed with this: "the first thing that I want is to teach them how to be a mensch, (as teachers) they have to be role models" (Mali); "I would hope that they see themselves as educators and that they would talk about values, important things" (Sima); "I try to educate them to be a teacher as I think a teacher should be" (Orit).

Mali went even further and expanded the role of the teacher educator way beyond the time and place of the classroom: "we are accessible totally accessible...I have students that call me all the time, that they have been teaching for years and they come to me."

The Best Way to Instruct Future Teachers

All the interviewees maintained that instruction should be practical. For example, Miriam described how she teaches the topic of differentiated instruction:

"One of the things that I teach is differentiated instruction which means that my students, although they all get the same material, many of them get the material in

different ways. So it's partly lecture and partly collaborative work, small group work for those who need it..."

Likewise, Mali insisted that practice is the only way to teach students to become future teachers: "I learned when I was in college that theory doesn't mean anything; it's practice [real practice] that counts, and the courses that I teach are based on my 20 years in the classroom." Even Sima, who doesn't have teaching experience in a regular classroom and comes from a theoretical background, agreed: "I must say that when I began teaching 15 years ago, I used to be more theoretical...but then I realized that that is not what they need and I very quickly changed my approach."

Professional Identity: Am I a Teacher or a Researcher?

One of the major issues which came up in the interviews was the change that academic colleges are undergoing and the interviewees' different ways of coping with it. The reform in academic colleges of education affects the hiring requirements, the promotion track, and the actual demands of the teacher educators' job. Sima differentiated between two types of teacher educators:

"pedagogical instructors are those who have lots of experience in the field, theory is less relevant for them...on the other hand those who teach more theoretical courses... here we recruit those who show some academic excellence, who publish, who write in academic journals..."

In her opinion, being a good teacher is enough to get accepted to a college as a teacher educator in the first place, but research and publications are necessary for subsequent promotion. She perceives herself as a researcher and sees this as an essential part of her identity. Orit also explained that in order to get into college: "you need an academic degree and you need to be experienced as a school teacher and that's it...but definitely not in order to get a promotion." Orit sees herself as both a researcher and a teacher: "simply because I teach and I also do research and publish."

The other two interviewees, however, saw the situation very differently. Mali, who doesn't have a doctoral degree, is not at all interested in research: "as a teacher educator, I think that my 18 years of experience are plus doctorate [more than a doctorate] and I don't think that it [a doctorate] is going to help me." She emphasized that it was the college who invited her to teach there and that she had never intended teaching in a college. Miriam showed more openness to the idea of research and recognized its importance but expressed difficulties coping with the changing priorities in the colleges:

"I think research is important, [but] I don't think that it's necessarily something that everybody has to do. I think there is a great value in good teaching; I'm sorry that that isn't recognized nearly as much as self-promotion and publication is."

Although Miriam perceives herself as "a good teacher," she acknowledged that in the future she will have to publish, since "there is a demand for it and so I

will have to do it."

Miriam addressed another crucial issue when dealing with the change in emphasis from teaching to research: the need to provide the appropriate conditions to enable teacher educators to fulfil the requirements: "There is a huge push to publish, a huge push. However, most of the colleges don't give the conditions for research or publication...most teacher educators don't have the time, the tools, or the money to go into research."

The Influence of Personal Background on the EFL Teacher Educator

The fourth theme stemmed from 2 questions:

1. Did they get their position due to outstanding performance in a regular school?
2. Do background factors influence the choice of teacher educators; in other words, does being a native speaker or living abroad for a substantial time improve the chance of being offered such a job?

As for the first question, their answers varied. While Orit, Mali and Miriam taught first in high school, Sima, after finishing her studies immediately started teaching in a college. Moreover, nowadays, as a Dean, she also functions as teachers' recruiter, which allows her a more comprehensive point of view. In her opinion, for a pedagogical instruction position, only teaching experience in school is necessary while for a position requiring instruction of theoretical material academic credential such as, PhD degree, publications etc. are required. Orit, Mali and Miriam had wide experience as teachers in a classroom and so believe that any teacher educator must be experienced in teaching. Nevertheless, Miriam believes that today, teaching experience is not sufficient anymore and academic credentials are needed as well.

Concerning the second question, three interviewees maintained that the issue of being a native as opposed to non-native teacher of English was not relevant. As Mali said: "I've seen people who are native speakers but don't know the language well." Sima responded to this topic very briefly by just claiming that she saw no difference. Only Miriam elaborated on the topic, explaining that one of the requirements of a teacher is to excel in their subject matter:

"I would hire only someone whose English is excellent, so given somebody who is not native and their English is okay as opposed to somebody who is native and their English is excellent, I would probably go for the excellent – the native speaker."

Though most participants claimed it was not an influencing factor, when checking how many native English speakers were on the staff of the different colleges, it was found that they comprised over half of the English teaching staff; a ratio which far exceeds the estimate that NESTs comprise 35% of the total English teaching staff in the Jewish education sector in Israel (Inbar-Laurie, 2005a, p.85). Table 2 indicates the ratio of native to non-native speaker teachers in the four colleges discussed.

Table 2. Ration of NESTs to NNESTs in the Four Colleges

Location of College	Number of EFL Teacher Educators	English Native Speakers	Nonnative English Speakers	Percentage of English Native Speakers
Center of Israel (Sima's college)	24	12	12 many of which lived extensively in English speaking countries	50%
Northern part of Israel (Orit's college)	4	2	2	50%
Southern part of Israel (Mali's college)	9	6	3	66%
Center of Israel (Miriam's college)	23	17	6 3 of which have lived extensively in English speaking countries	74%

Discussion and Conclusion

The interviews described above highlight the complexity of the topic of PI for the EFL teacher educators interviewed in this study. On the one hand, they are teachers whose goal is to train future teachers of English -in itself a full-time and demanding job- and, on the other hand, they are required to do research and publish without the necessary time or facilities. How would they answer Kosminsky's (2011, p. 13) question: "Who or what am I as a professional person?" Is it even possible for them to define themselves professionally?

When relating to the key themes that came up in the interviews, some of the answers were very clear and all the teachers expressed almost identical opinions. For example, they all see that the function of the teacher educator is to educate and not only to teach. While it was evident from the interviews that each teacher educator has different ideas of the values they should be imparting, they all regarded educating as part of the teacher educators' job. The attempt of the Council of Higher Education to improve the quality of teacher educators by requesting them to become researchers (Vallensky, 2012) is a source of confusion for the interviewees of this study.

The interviewees were, likewise, in agreement on the nature of instruction. They all believe that lessons should be practical and serve as a model of good teaching. This was especially evident in the case of the teacher educator who, despite her theoretical background, acknowledged that what the field most requires is practice.

The other two themes, however, were more complex. The tension between research and teaching is clearly a problem for both EFL and regular teacher educators, as was mentioned in the introduction. It is enough to be a good teacher with the appropriate academic degree when applying for a job in a college but not when looking for promotion; a potential source of frustration for ambitious teachers. It is important to note that both NNTs attitude towards research was more positive and both saw it as part of their PI. This might convey a hidden need on their side to reassure their surrounding of their legitimacy as NNS teacher educators. The question is whether this is a symptom of the same phenomena described by Moussu & Llurda (2008) mentioned above, of teachers who are insecure and question their own identity as legitimate TESOL professionals. Specifically since an Israeli study (Mannes, 2015), examining the PI of EFL high school teachers indicated that NST have higher levels of PI than NNST. Other causes for frustration could be the inability to conduct research due to the colleges' lack of necessary conditions and the feeling that being a good teacher is not sufficiently appreciated. Vallensky's (2012) suggestion to give the same incentives to teaching for high standards might serve as a solution here.

The last theme, namely the effect of being a native or non-native English speaker on EFL teacher educators, is the most ambiguous. Unlike the aforementioned studies regarding feelings of inferiority associated with NNESTs (Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Bernat, 2008), most of the interviewees in this study did not believe that NNESTs have such feelings. They insisted that biographical factors do not influence the choice of EFL teacher educators. However, reality shows otherwise; NNESTs are certainly less common in the four academic colleges included in this study. The big gap between what is said and what is done indicates that this issue is important and should be studied in a different way. The current study is limited by being qualitative and thus conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the rest of the population. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, this study opens the way for further and deeper research which would allow for increased understanding of the issue.

According to the interviewees of this study, it seems that being an EFL teacher educator or researcher of either native or non-native origin can certainly be stressful, especially in this period of changing priorities. However, as a NNEST myself, I regard the changes in academic colleges as an opportunity to demonstrate research-based skills through which non-native teacher educators have an equal opportunity to show their aptitude.

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