A Study of Native English-Speaking Teachers' Professional Identity in the Korean University Context

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Considering critical roles of teachers in education, an increasing number of studies have investigated language teacher identity. Although many studies have reported nonnative English-speaking teachers' identity, few studies have explored native English-speaking teachers' (NESTs') professional identity. Taking poststructural approaches towards identity, the present study investigated how two NESTs working in Korean universities perceived themselves professionally and how their identities were realized in class. Data were collected through interviews, class observations, and material collections. Findings showed that the NESTs constructed multiple identities differently shaped by various factors, such as previous experiences and college majors. One NEST had identities of a role model for foreign language learning and a caretaker, while the other showed weak identities as a teacher with identities of a writer and a babysitter. Despite such differences, the NESTs commonly manifested an overarching identity as a guide who desired to create safe and comfortable learning environments. These findings confirm close connections between teachers' professional identity and practices.

Key words: Native English-speaking teacher, NEST, teacher identity, language teacher identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language teacher's professional identity has emerged as an important issue in the field of language education for the past several decades (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). With a recognition that teacher identity is an ultimate source of classroom practices, an increasing attention has been paid to teacher identity, that is, who the teachers are. It is well acknowledged that depending on teacher's professional identity, what teachers bring to their classes can have huge impacts upon what they do in the classroom including their teaching methodology, curricula, interactional styles, and teaching materials, and eventually upon language learners' learning outcomes (Donato, 2016; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Teachers' professional identities are, indeed, translated into their classroom practices, and, thus, teacher's professional identity is nowadays considered a critical component in language teaching and classroom practice (Tsui, 2007; Zacharias, 2010). Against this context, understanding teacher identity is crucial to developing a better understanding of the nature and, also, intervening factors of language learning and teaching. Furthermore, Varghese et al. (2005) claimed that "in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them" (p. 22).

Meanwhile, responding to globalization, native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) came to constitute a significant portion of instructors in English programs in most Korean universities. The widespread presence of NESTs intends to help students to improve their English communication abilities by interacting with those instructors and to promote globalization on campus. Considering the significant role of teachers in the educational process and outcome, it is urgently necessary to investigate the professional identity of NESTs working in Korean universities, more specifically, how the NESTs define themselves, what they believe about English learning and teaching, and how their beliefs are translated into classroom practices (H. Kim, 2011; S. Kim, 2012, 2017).

Unfortunately, however, there is a lack of studies exploring NESTs' professional identity in the Korean college context, compared with research on nonnative English-speaking teachers' (NNESTs') identity features and struggles. To our knowledge, only a few studies by S. Kim (2012, 2017) addressed identity issues of NESTs working at Korean universities, and they contributed to an understanding of how NESTs construct and negotiate their professional identity to some extent. The present study intends to expand knowledge on professional identities of NESTs by exploring the identity issue in a couple of new ways. First, as S. Kim's (2012, 2017) studies based their findings on interview data only, those findings are more or less limited, and, therefore, this study involves multiple data sources, such as interviews and classroom observations, in order to shed more light on complex, multiple dimensions of teacher identity. In addition, those studies by S. Kim

(2012, 2017) investigated identities of four NESTs as a group, thereby losing sight of unique identities that individual NESTs possess respectively. This points to the need for studies examining different, idiosyncratic identities of different NESTs, whose formation was largely influenced by myriads of personal, sociocultural factors. The present study is a timely response to this call. This study aims to address the gap by exploring various aspects of different NESTs' professional identities unfolding in classroom contexts through multiple data sources including interviews, class observations, and materials review. The purpose of this study is to explore how two NESTs perceive themselves as teachers and how their identities influence their classroom practices.

The following research questions guided the present study:

1. How do two NESTs working at a Korean university perceive themselves as English teachers?
2. How do their professional identities shape their classroom practices?

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Teacher Identity

In the field of education, professional identity is defined differently, or different dimensions of professional identity are highlighted (Beijaard et al., 2004), as in other academic fields. For example, professional identity is defined in terms of teachers' concept or sense of self, or in terms of their perceptions of their roles or relevant features of their profession, which leads to different approaches to professional identity. Among the many, the present study follows Pennington and Richards' (2016) definition of identity as "the sense which a person has of the self as an individual, including the person's self-image and self-awareness" (p. 3).

In general, those various meanings of professional identity have a couple of features in common (Beijaard et al., 2004), and these common features are closely aligned with the poststructural understandings of identity (Weedon, 1997). Above of all, identity is not a fixed, stable attribute of a teacher, but "changing over time" (Norton, 1997, p. 411). Teachers continuously negotiate and reshape their professional identities in the social, institutional contexts while engaging in their professional duties and interacting with students, colleagues, or, more broadly, institutional, social and political forces. This way, an individual constructs her own "subjectivity," which is "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997, p. 28). According to Beijaard et al.

(2004), "identity is not something one has, but something that develops during one's whole life" (p. 107). From the transactions with the environment which is social communication, self, who has theories, attitudes, and beliefs about ourselves, is developed. Second, professional identity is "multiple, nonunitary" (Norton, 1997, p. 411). Furthermore, these sub-components of identity are often contradictory to each other, and teachers can take on different identities, depending on the context, which accordingly characterizes identity as "a site of struggle" (Norton, 1997, p. 411). Third, professional identity is an ongoing process in which personal and professional aspects of becoming a teacher are continuously integrated. This notion acknowledges teachers as persons and professionals at the same time who live and work under the great influence from a myriad of factors inside and outside the school.

As regards factors affecting teacher's professional identity, it is well documented that biographical, social, and cultural factors all influence identity formation (Cooper & Olson, 1996). Identity is significantly shaped by intrinsic factors, such as teachers' personality, personal experiences as learners, pre-service teacher education, and knowledge of subject matter, and also external factors, such as national educational policies and pedagogical orientations of an institution (Flores & Day, 2006; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). Notably, not only a teacher's sense of self but also others' expectations and perceptions of the teaching profession, in other words, social expectations of how teacher is expected to do and live, have huge impacts upon a person's identity as a teacher as well.

In an attempt to present a methodological framework to access teachers' professional identity, Davey (2013) highlighted five specific, intertwined areas of identity – becoming, doing, knowing, being, and belonging – as follows:

· Becoming is related to teachers' intentions and motivations for becoming a teacher.
· Doing is about teachers' daily experiences, key roles and professional activities.
· Knowing focuses on various knowledge bases about subject matter and teaching methods.
· Being focuses on the teachers' self-image, personal qualities, likes and dislikes, and values.
· Belonging is about the communities of practice that teachers are involved in, and about similarities and differences with other teachers.

2.2. Language Teacher Identity

Interest in teacher identity as a research topic has been expanded to the field of language education, and thereby language teacher identity has attracted increasing attention from researchers as well. Many of the studies of language teacher identity focused on NNESTs' identity, as mentioned earlier, and revealed that, in general, NNESTs struggled to construct positive professional identity due to their nonnative status (Martel & Wang, 2014). Choe (2008), for example, showed that four Korean NNESTs working in a university English program viewed themselves as "second-rate teachers" for lack of nativelike pronunciation and knowledge on the target culture. Similarly, H. Kim (2011) reported that NNESTs had low professional identities under the influence of native-speakerism (Butcher, 2005; Holliday, 2006; Phillipson, 1992). In the Chinese context, Tsui (2007) examined the process in which one Chinese EFL teacher working at a college created and negotiated his professional identities, taking Wenger's (1998) notions of identity construction as a theoretical lens. The teacher's identity construction was heavily influenced by not only his previous English learning experiences but also the social, institutional forces, including a heavy focus on communicative language teaching methods, but, significantly, the teacher exerted agency in resisting externally imposed expectations and negotiating for more effective language teaching, which eventually contributed to his identity formation process.

Compared with the studies of NNESTs' identity, there is a paucity of research investigating NESTs' professional identity (Charles, 2019; Howard, 2019), particularly in the Korean college context (S. Kim, 2011, 2012, 2017). Among the few, taking critical race theory as a theoretical lens, Charles (2019) examined how two black NESTs working in Korea's secondary educational system constructed their identities as native English speakers and also English teachers, and how their identities influenced their pedagogical approaches. Findings showed that while race was playing a very important role in their identity construction, the NESTs constantly negotiated their identities surrounding the constructs of privilege and marginalization. They were privileged as resource persons teaching English with native English pronunciation and also teaching American culture with cultural experiences and knowledge. However, the teachers were also marginalized because of their race in that students ascribed crimes or negative cultural aspects to the African American culture. Due to these conflicts between privilege and marginalization, the African American NESTs commonly developed their identity as cultural ambassadors who could enlighten students about the African American culture, which has been misrepresented or underrepresented. Another recent study by Howard (2019) explored how NESTs' experiences and beliefs hinder or promote their positive professional identity construction in the Korean EFL context. Through interviews with 11 NESTs working at various work sites, the study reported that their identities were ambivalent, mediated by

multiple contextual factors. On the one hand, the NESTs habitually experienced marginalization or institutional isolation as distanced others. Working at commercialized education domains usually positioned the NESTs as commodities constrained by the power of stakeholders, such as owners and educational customers, and as replaceable parts underpinning temporality. These experiences all impeded the affirmative development of their sound, robust professional identity. On the other hand, the NESTs had experiences in promoting positive identity development at the same time. They often experienced favorable treatments, such as a flexible working schedule and exemption from extracurricular activities because of their foreignness although they were isolated for the same reason. Besides, under the influence of the native-speakerism, NESTs were treated as teachers with intrinsic linguistic and cultural competence. Such experiences helped NESTs to develop their professional identity as legitimate educators to some extent. In sum, this study confirmed that professional identities are complex, conflicting, and constantly negotiated.

A couple of noticeable studies particularly relevant to the current study were conducted by S. Kim (2011, 2012, 2017) involving NESTs working in the Korean university context. S. Kim (2012) explored professional identities of four NESTs in a university through interviews, reporting that the NESTs experienced ambivalence in line with Howard's (2019) study. They viewed themselves as competent teachers in the classroom. Outside the classroom, however, they experienced conflicts in the way that they were respected but separated, and welcomed but not belonging to communities. More recently, S. Kim (2017) conducted a similar study to explore how four NESTs working at a Korean college negotiated conflicting identities and constructed their professional identity, and analyzed the interview data from a theoretical perspective of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Findings showed that the NESTs constructed their contradictory identities, first of all, as English educators who were trying to create comfortable learning environments in which students could feel comfortable in speaking in English and in making mistakes, and, also, as a collaborative volunteer who willingly taught extra classes in other departments or participated in in-service teacher training programs. At the same time, the NESTs experienced contradictory feelings surrounding their title *professor*. As a socially defined identity of a professor which requires a doctoral degree and research career does not fit their career, the NESTs expressed uncomfortable feelings with the title, which led them to prefer to assume the instructor identity. Furthermore, the NESTs always felt as outsiders living in an English island with limited opportunities for interactions with Koreans and social occasions. Importantly, the NESTs claimed their professional identities as legitimate educators who were implementing theoretically supported language teaching methods in a learner-centered class, and striving to continue professional development as valuable members of the teacher community of practice.

In sum, previous studies of NESTs in Korea contributed to illuminating multiple aspects of their professional identity to a great extent. In particular, S. Kim (2012, 2017) shed light on salient features of professional identity of NESTs working at the Korean university context. Despite the significant contributions, however, those studies presented the findings on the shared identities of the NESTs as a group, and thus there still remains a question of what unique professional identities different NESTs develop and what factors affect the identity construction process. Considering the fact that individuals have idiosyncratic identities shaped by internal and external factors, it is necessary to examine individual NESTs' professional identities separately to illuminate both shared and unique aspects of their identity through multiple data sources. The present study is a response to such a call.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

Two NESTs, Jenn and Nick (pseudonyms are used in this study), who were teaching English at a university located in a metropolitan city in Korea, participated in this study. Both of them had a master's degree and were enjoying teaching English in Korea. They thus desired to continue their teaching career in Korea. The first author of this paper, who had been working with Jenn and Nick at the same university for years, came to be aware of the differences between the two NESTs in terms of their teaching philosophies and pedagogical styles. Recognizing that these two NESTs could reveal different, idiosyncratic aspects of professional identities, she asked them whether they could participate in the study after explaining the purpose of the study and data collection methods, and they agreed to do so.

Jenn, a 33-year-old Canadian, taught English in college for five years. She majored in English literature for a bachelor's degree and English linguistics for a master's degree. She married a Korean and had been living in Korea for nine years at the time of data collection. Jenn came to Korea for the first time right after she graduated from her college. She started her career as an English teacher in an English kindergarten in Korea, and after teaching there for one year, she went back to Canada to start her master's degree. Two years later, Jenn came to Korea again and had a chance to work at a private English academy which allowed teachers to establish their own curricula and lesson plans. She appreciated such freedom to develop her lessons creatively and flexibly, which inspired Jenn's greater interest in English teaching, and after studying linguistics at a graduate school, she finally became an English instructor at a Korean college. At the university, Jenn taught many English courses including English conversation, business English writing, and English

research writing. Among the courses, English writing was her favorite, and Jenn expressed her satisfaction with her current job. Partly due to her marriage life with a Korean spouse and personal interest in foreign language learning, Jenn commanded good Korean, and passed high level Korean proficiency tests. She could also read and write in Korean. This often enabled her to serve as a mediator between Korean faculty and English-speaking foreign faculty.

Nick was a 33-year-old American with three years of English teaching experiences at a Korean college. His undergraduate major was English with a special focus on film writing and he had an M. A. degree in education. Nick had the first encounter with English as a foreign language students' writing when he edited their works at the college writing office as a part time job. Later, he had an opportunity to visit Korea and work at an English summer camp as an English teacher, which was co-arranged by his university and the Korean government. Two years after his college graduation, Nick came back to Korea and started his teaching career in an English kindergarten. While working there for five years, Nick suffered from tight work schedules and restrictions to freedom of creating lesson plans and teaching materials. After obtaining a TESOL teacher certificate, Nick could start his new career at a college. Like Jenn, Nick had taught general English classes whose curricula were already established by the college, but in the semester when data were collected, Nick had an opportunity to design and teach a new course titled *Understanding American Culture through Movies*. Nick was very excited about this opportunity because that course was closely related to his undergraduate major and he could create course contents and teaching materials on his own according to his specialties.

3.2. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in the fall semester of 2019 in four ways: interviews, class observations, video recordings, and teaching material collection. We finalized the research design together, and then the first author of this study conducted semi-structured interviews with Jenn and Nick individually four times each – two times before class observations and two times after class observations in the professors' offices. In the pre-observation interviews, she asked questions to explore multiple aspects and peculiarities of each NEST's professional identity and also identity development process. Pre-observation interview questions were formulated based on Davey's (2013) framework of teacher's professional identity, which consists of five dimensions (i.e., becoming, doing, knowing, being, and belonging) as mentioned earlier. In the post-observation interviews, she asked questions about any classroom practices that had captured her attention during the class observations in order to further delve into each teacher's professional identity and

understand how identity is translated into classroom practices (see Appendix for interview questions). Each interview lasted 40 to 80 minutes, and all interview data were transcribed.

Class observations were made six times – three times for each instructor. The first author observed the class at the back of the classroom while video recording the lessons. During the observations, she paid special attention to how the class was organized and managed, class activities, the ways that the instructors taught and interacted with their students, and any peculiar, interesting episodes or moments while she was taking notes of them. After each observation, she wrote down questions to ask later during post-observation interviews. Each observation took 50 minutes. Finally, teaching materials, including course syllabi, presentation slides and online materials for each class, and students' writing notes were also collected.

3.3. Data Analysis

We analyzed the data following general procedures of qualitative data analysis based on Lincoln and Guba (1985). In the initial pre-coding stage, the first author read the interview transcripts and classroom observation data repeatedly while highlighting seemingly important points and writing down overall impressions of each teacher's identity. In the next stage, while reading the data carefully, she coded the data, and the codes were later grouped into larger categories in consideration of emerging, salient themes of the teachers' professional identity.

She then compared and contrasted those identified themes with the classroom observation data and teaching materials for data triangulation. Specifically, she crosschecked the interview data and the other data sets, and modified the initial themes of each NEST's identity accordingly. Finally, excerpts most representative of each theme were chosen. Throughout the data analysis process, the second author crosschecked the analysis procedure and results with the first author at each stage. Whenever there occurred disagreements in the coding process, the two researchers worked together to resolve the discrepancies by analyzing the data again and discussing ways to make themes refined and more sophisticated and finally reached a consensus.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Jenn

4.1.1. A role model for foreign language learning

Jenn learned French and Korean as foreign languages, whose experiences she regarded as valuable assets for her English teaching career. Previous foreign language learning experiences, either positive or negative, played an important role in shaping her language teacher identity. She mentioned that from those foreign language learning experiences, she could understand learners' point of view, difficulties, and motivations. As regards her French learning experiences which she had back in Canada, she said, "I often reflect on my positive and negative memories of studying French. I do remember something like activities that I enjoyed and teachers that I liked. And I think maybe those are important things for teaching a language" (pre-observation interview, October 24, 2019). She also sometimes reflected on how she could successfully learn to speak Korean, particularly what kind of curriculum, activities, and materials were helpful for her Korean learning, and tried to use the insights gained from them for her own teaching.

In the meantime, negative memories of her foreign language learning experiences also turned out useful as she was trying to avoid those negative aspects in her teaching. Back in Canada, she learned French for 10 years as part of public education, but her French, particularly spoken French, was extremely poor. She explained the reason as follows:

> I remember feeling really stressed about speaking French because my French pronunciation was not good. I remember when I was in middle school, I had a French teacher who constantly corrected my pronunciation all the time in front of everybody, and that just made me feel so nervous and so anxious. Those experiences are helpful to me, because I say to myself, 'maybe that's not a good way…to correct the students in class.' (pre-observation interview, October 24, 2019)

The teacher's frequent corrections on her pronunciation in front of other students made Jenn fear speaking French, which eventually impeded her French learning. She lost her motivation for French learning, and gradually forgot French grammar and vocabulary. Bearing these negative experiences in mind, Jenn decided to provide students with feedback, not obvious corrections. In addition, these experiences taught her a lesson on the importance of positive environments in language learning where students are motivated to feel free to try out language. In her view, teachers with foreign language learning experiences knew what their students would go through and could thus create more favorable learning environments for them. This view is echoed in the following:

> Some people who know about my Korean proficiency say to me, "You are good at learning language," but I don't think that is truth. If it were a matter of talent, I would be good at speaking French, too, but I am not. Context and

environment make big differences. So, I tried to create positive environment. That is the only way to learn language. (pre-observation interview, October 24, 2019)

4.1.2. A trainer for writing development

Jenn thought writing as a way of communication is one of the most important language skills, which led her to prioritize enhancing students' writing abilities as a teaching goal. In her view, English education in Korea focused too much on grammar, vocabulary, and receptive language skills – listening and reading – without offering students enough opportunities to practice speaking and writing. This resulted in students' low proficiency in English writing, which she believed should be properly addressed. Jenn expressed this view when saying:

> Students don't get a lot of chances for practice writing. It takes a long time to develop writing skills. A lot of students say that they can write a sentence, but they can't keep writing for long time because they are not used to it. Absolutely they do need more practice. (post-observation interview, November 21, 2019)

Recognizing this problem, Jenn designed and implemented a couple of things in her writing class to help students to improve writing skills. First of all, Jenn involved her students in practicing writing sufficiently in class. As soon as students came to her writing class, Jenn gave a writing topic to them or the students chose a topic on their own, and then they wrote about the topic in their journal as a warm-up activity. Jenn required her students to write for 15 minutes without stopping. The purpose of this activity was making them feel comfortable about writing and get into the mood for writing. As regards the value of this activity, she mentioned:

> In the class, I keep saying to my students, "Learning to write is exercising. At the first time, it is really hard to write one or two sentences, but if you keep writing all the time, you will get better." (post-observation interview, November 21, 2019)

This warm-up writing activity usually turned out successful as many students made dramatic improvement in their writing skills. At the end of a semester when Jenn showed the students' first week journals and last week journals in the class, and compared them in terms of length, content, and correctness, her students were surprisingly pleased to see that

many of them wrote only one or two lines in the beginning of the semester, but completed one whole page at the end of the semester. Jenn received good feedback about this activity from her students, which further confirmed her belief in the value of this type of writing activities.

Jenn also liked to provide students with feedback for writing with a belief that feedback plays an important role in L2 writing development. Furthermore, she gave different types of feedback depending on writing genres she taught in order to maximize instructional effects. Her view is expressed in the following comment:

> In case of journal writing, I don't check spelling and grammar. I just focus on content, their ideas and thoughts because I know that Korean students are focused more on grammar check than content of writing. However, for academic writing, I give feedbacks on grammar, organization, and writing style because academic writing has a specific goal that should be met with sufficient competence. (post-observation interview, November 21, 2019)

In a similar vein, Jenn approached two different writing courses – academic writing and business writing – in somewhat distinguishable manners. She set different goals of writing for the classes and created curricula accordingly.

Another important intervention that Jenn made for her students' writing improvement was provision of individual tutoring. Her teaching did not stop in the class, but Jenn spent extra time in meeting her students in her office, and in a one-to-one meeting, gave comments to individual students on their writing. In her calendar placed on the desk in her office, dates were marked with the information on student names and appointment times.

4.1.3. A caretaker

Jenn did not limit her role to an English teacher but went beyond to assume a caretaker role. She developed empathetic attitudes towards her students, particularly their struggles in language learning, and regarded creating a safe environment as a top priority for students. She shared her view as follows:

> Especially in our context, students need to feel safe. When I meet my students, I could see that they have a lot of trauma, maybe from the Korean SAT, or they think English is not something that they want to learn. Whether they think it is scary or hard, I think the first step is breaking down that stereotype...and just making them feel like 'O.K. nobody is judging me. My

teacher wants me to succeed.' I think the most important thing is affective factors. (pre-observation interview, November 7, 2019)

Jenn strongly believed that warm, friendly relationships between students and the teacher is particularly important in creating safe, relaxing environments. In her view, one of the positive signs of such relationships is that students do not hesitate to come to teacher and ask about what they did not understand in class. In an effort to establish such relationships with the students and, at the same time, create comfortable class environments, Jenn greeted each student with a simple question about their daily life when checking student attendance. She made a comment on the positive effects of this practice on her students as follows:

> It helps my students to think I care about their life. 'My teacher cares about what I'm doing.' And actually, many of my students mention this small thing in the course evaluation, for example, 'she always asks me how I'm doing and that makes me not be late for the class,' and 'I want to go to class so that I can have that one-minute chat with my teacher.' (post-observation interview, November 22, 2019)

As regards the reasons for creating comfortable environments, Jenn mentioned that students could learn a lot through questioning, which is more easily approachable in such environments. Emphasizing teacher's roles in that direction, she said, "Teacher's attitude is a big deal, so when students ask me a question in class, I try to get really excited and say, "Oh great! I love your question." I encourage them to ask more" (post-observation interview, November 22, 2019).

Importantly, Jenn's relationships with students did not end in a classroom. She sometimes spent much time with students for other class projects and personal works, for example, resume writings. Jenn was willing to take care of her students both inside and outside the class as reflected in the following:

> I want to be a teacher who is open for my students not only in the classroom but outside of the classroom. I always feel happy when students come and ask me about their work on projects outside of my class." (post-observation interview, November 22, 2019)

Jenn felt that her efforts to take care of students paid off. Her former students who took her course in the previous semesters, or even those who already graduated from a college

sometimes came to her to ask for a writing help, and Jenn willingly gave them a hand while interpreting the request as a sign of their trust in her.

4.2. Nick

4.2.1. Not a teacher, yet

Nick had eight years of English teaching experiences – five years in kindergarten and three years in college – but he was still in progress of adapting himself to the teaching profession. He felt uncomfortable in identifying himself as a teacher yet, and the title of teacher sounded awkward to him. Regarding this, he mentioned:

> I don't really see myself as a teacher at all. I have a hard time looking in the mirror and thinking, 'yes, you are a teacher making a living by teaching other people to do what to do.' I worked as a writer for quite a while, so I've never really seen myself as a teacher even though I've been doing it for seven or eight years now. Teacher sounds too formal for me. Guide, maybe, but not really a teacher. (pre-observation interview, October 21,2019)

Nick did not identify himself as a teacher for a couple of reasons. According to his view of teacher, a teacher is someone who not only provides knowledge for students but also serves as a life role model or someone with many experiences in teaching, but he felt himself not fitting into his definition of teacher. The following is Nick's view of a teacher:

> A teacher should be able to say this is what we're doing and then go with five or 10 ideas, and just be ready for whatever the students need to. A teacher should not just bring in a book and say, 'Okay, we're going to do these pages,' but say, 'We are going to these pages and I've got these three ideas for how we can do these pages depending on what students are interested in doing. (pre-observation interview, October 21, 2019)

To Nick, an ability to identify student needs and decide on the lesson goals with several teaching ideas is one of the most critical qualifications that a teacher should have. An ability to modify lesson plans according to student levels and interests is another qualification. Unfortunately, Nick felt himself not reaching those standards for lack of teaching experiences. Furthermore, in the semester when data were collected, Nick was severely struggling in teaching a new course. In response to a need to change what he prepared including curriculum and lesson plans to a large extent, he felt uncomfortable and

unskillful, and accordingly acted in the new course differently from the other classes: he was not relaxed but more or less nervous; he raised his voice higher to capture the students' attention. These struggles further consolidated his notion that he was not a teacher, more specifically, a skillful teacher yet.

Moreover, his identity was heavily affected by his undergraduate major and previous working experiences. He clearly announced his identity as a writer, not a teacher, when saying:

> I still see myself as a writer. My background is writing. I have been writing stories since I was a first grader, and I became a paid editor before I went to the college. Even before I had my bachelor's degree, I was working as a writer. That's where I see myself in my head. Working as a writer or a storyteller and then I don't know. I do teach. I work as a teacher, but it is hard to envision myself as a teacher. (pre-observation interview, October 21, 2019)

Nick had longer experiences and greater interests in writing, which allowed him to feel more confident as a writer than as a teacher. He still liked to write stories in his free time and had a plan to publish some novels in the future. Although his main job was a college English teacher, he still remained as a writer than a teacher.

4.2.2. A multiple player in conflict

Nick believed that teacher roles could be varying and flexible depending on the course objectives. In an English communication class, he identified himself as a guide or a facilitator who should offer students enough opportunities to speak in the target language. He made this point clear while saying, "I tried to see myself as a guide, somebody who can get students to interact with others and the materials. This term, I am really trying to give students more speaking time" (post-observation interview, November 20, 2019). As a guide, Nick tried to lead his students to practice speaking as much as possible instead of listening to his instruction. "For the conversation class, I try to do as little teaching as possible with just a little bit of instruction and then giving the students self-guided work that I can listen to and respond to putting them in the role of doing the work and then just guiding a little bit" (post-observation interview, November 20, 2019).

Furthermore, Nick understood his role as a guide in relation to a need to create environments where students could feel free and comfortable to speak out without worrying about grammar errors. He emphasized practicing English and made the class environment comfortable for L2 language learning in class as follows:

> I don't want to stand up and lecture because they are not going to learn English through lecture. They might learn grammar and vocabulary, but they won't be comfortable to using it until they are standing in front of friends and talking, so that's why I tried to be a guide rather than a teacher in that sense. (post-observation interview, November 23, 2019)

In a film class, however, he acted quite differently. He stood up and gave a long lecture without interactions with students. Besides, he did not involve students in pair or small group works unlike in a conversation class but spent too much time in speaking by himself. In the film class, he did not perceive himself as a guide but an expert who possessed sufficient knowledge of films and was trying to deliver his knowledge to his students. Unfortunately, however, Nick felt that the film class he newly designed was not going smoothly and he had to make changes accordingly.

4.2.3. Maybe a babysitter

Nick saw his college students as babies who he had taught in kindergartens. He made this point clear when saying, "Every time I walk in a classroom, I see a mass of kids who need to be guided. Even though they are 20 years old already, they are babies to me" (pre-observation interview, October 21, 2019). This perception eventually helped to shape his identity as a babysitter.

Nick developed his perception of students as babies partly due to their low English proficiency. To him, his students were babies who were struggling a lot for language learning and thus in need for guidance. Above all, he was particularly concerned about the students who were hesitant to speak in English for fear of making mistakes. Nick believed that it is necessary to provide those students with proper guidance and opportunities to try out language. He highlighted such needs as follows:

> I looked at them in the same way as my seven year olds. They are babies to me. And they need to be taken care of and guided, but they also need to be left alone and make their mistakes. If you jump on top of a baby and say "No," that's not how they learn to talk. That's not the right way because they will never be going to do that again. (pre-observation interview, October 21, 2019)

As shown in the quote, Nick's perception of his students as babies was playing a role in his performance as a language teacher. To Nick, his students were babies who needed guidance for their language learning but, at the same time, should feel free to make mistakes in the process. With this perception, Nick treated his students accordingly offering proper help.

However, such perception did not always work positively. Nick confessed that his perception was heavily influenced by his students' behaviors in class. He regarded their behaviors as childish for their age, which is shown in the following comment:

> 22 year olds showing up with little dolls and playing with dolls in class…They bring their doll pencil cases and play with them. It is not just girls, but boys and girls together. The boys are having teddy bear pencil cases in classes. I can't understand it. (post-observation interview, November 20, 2019)

Nick could not understand why college students were attached to dolls. Comparison between his Korean students with American students at the same age further convinced Nick that his students were babies. He made the following comment:

> It is so different. Even in middle school you wouldn't have boys showing up with dolls. And it would not be socially acceptable. The other boys would put a stop to it. Also, the girls can play longer than boys, but until the high school. Bringing the doll pencil cases showed students were mentally young. (post-observation interview, November 20, 2019)

To Nick, bringing dolls or doll pencil cases was a clue to his students' immature state. Thinking of his students as babies, not adults, Nick, in turn, perceived himself as a babysitter.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to investigate how two NESTs perceived themselves as teachers and how their identities were reflected in their pedagogical approaches. The findings of this study revealed significant aspects of the NESTs working in the Korean university context. Above all, the two teachers' professional identities were multifaceted and varying, which is in line with the poststructural understandings of identity (Weedon, 1997). Both of them possessed multiple identities: Jenn viewed herself as a role model for foreign language learning, a trainer for English writing development, and a caregiver; Nick perceived himself as someone who did not fit into the teacher category yet, juggling between different teacher roles, and also a babysitter who should take care of *childish* babies who need guidance. Working together, all those identities defined each NEST, but according to the context, one or more particular identities stood out prevailing the others.

Additionally, this study found that the two NESTs constructed unique, idiosyncratic identities under the influence of a myriad of internal and external factors. While S. Kim (2012, 2017) reported common aspects of professional identities of her participants, this study found that individual NESTs were having different identities. That is, the participants, indeed, shared a lot of commonalities: they were working for the same English program at the same university, teaching similar courses; they started their teaching career in a kindergarten in Korea for a couple of years and moved to a university setting; they had eight years of teaching experiences in Korea; nonetheless, they manifested different features of professional identity differently shaped by their personal backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs, as suggested by Beijaard et al. (2004) and Golombek and Johnson (2004). In case of Jenn, her experiences in learning French and Korean played a critical role in helping her to view herself as a role model for foreign language learning. Thanks to the foreign language learning experiences, Jenn could develop hew own views on effective language learning and also easily understand her students' struggles and needs, which subsequently allowed her to take appropriate pedagogical actions. This confirms Pennington and Richards' (2016) claim that a language teacher identity is closely tied to the language background and language proficiency. In addition, Jenn positioned herself as a caretaker interested in students' overall wellbeing as well as teaching, and she thus willingly provided assistance for her students inside and outside the class. Meanwhile, Nick hesitated to identify himself as a teacher for lack of confidence in teaching. Instead, his long experiences in professional writing created a self-image of a writer in him, and he preferred to view himself as a writer though he was struggling between a long-fixed identity as a writer and a realistic, job-oriented identity as a teacher. Nick as a NEST was involved in an ongoing process of interpreting himself through experiences and thus negotiating his identity.

In spite of such differences, however, a common, overarching theme was mentioned by both participants – teacher's duty to create safe learning atmosphere for students. The two NESTs recognized that constructing comfortable environments should be a priority for foreign language learning and reported their teaching experiences as taking on the role as a guide or facilitator with a responsibility to make students feel comfortable and try out a new language. This identity is well aligned with claims on the importance of teacher's roles in facilitating language learning by creating anxiety-reduced, safe learning environments (Krashen, 1985).

Another finding worth noting is that, as well documented by Donato (2016), Pennington and Richards (2016), and Varghese et al. (2005), the participants' identities were translated into their classroom practices. For example, Jenn, who strongly believed in the importance of writing skills in L2 development and positioned herself as a writing trainer, implemented various writing practices in class. Also, Jenn's identity as a caregiver led her

to take interest in her students not only inside but also outside the class. Subsequently, students' recognition of her caring mind further strengthened her caretaker identity.

Taken together, the findings of this study contributed to illuminating multiple aspects of professional identity of NESTs working in the Korean university context. Based on these findings, some pedagogical implications can be presented. First, considering a crucial role of teacher's professional identity in the instructional process, it is necessary for NESTs to have an opportunity to critically reflect on their identities by asking questions, such as *what are significant features of their professional identities? how do their identities affect their classroom practices and interactions with the students?* and *are there any critical incidents in which they have to negotiate their identities?* Individual reflections can then be shared with other NESTs in a professional meeting, which allows NESTs to perceive significant roles of professional identities and also reflective practices in education and to further develop their professional identities. Second, the finding that one of the participants, Nick, hesitated to position himself as a teacher points to an urgent need to provide NESTs with supports for their professional development. Workshops, observations of more experienced, better-performed teachers' instruction, and access to high quality teaching materials may enable NESTs without solid professional identity to grow professionally and perform as a skilled professional teacher over time.

As a final step, we propose suggestions for future studies as a way to better understand professional identity of NESTs who constitute a significant portion of English teaching professionals in Korean universities. The present study focused on the characteristics of NESTs' professional identity, but it is also necessary to explore how NESTs construct and reconstruct their identity as English teachers in context. Future studies need to investigate NESTs' professional identity construction process. Besides, it is necessary to examine features of professional identity of NESTs working in different universities or their identity construction process with a focus on how contextual factors affect NESTs' professional identity. Future studies in that direction will contribute to constructing more knowledge of NESTs' professional identity, which may eventually enhance the quality of English education in the Korean university context.

Applicable level: Tertiary

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APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions

1. Do you see yourself as a teacher? How do you define yourself?
2. What do students mean to you? How do you see them?
3. You are having a lot of materials for your classes. Why do you prepare them?
4. You have lots of group works in class, and why are you having them?
5. You mentioned that you are facilitating students. What does that mean and what do you do then?
6. You personally meet students after the class. How often do you meet them? And why do you meet them?
7. After you have classes with students, do you make any change in curriculum?
8. In what ways do students get help in class?