



RESEARCH ARTICLE



EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY ON THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10105>

ABSTRACT



This study aims to explore the influence of teachers' professional identity construction on their professional development needs. Interviews were conducted to gather the data for the study. This qualitative study has been adopted throughout the research. To gather the relevant, eight English language teachers were selected purposely. Charmaz's Grounded Theory was used as a possible framework to analyse the data. The results of the study reveal that teacher's knowledge of the subject matter, like grammar items, vocabulary, and effective communication skills are essential factors in the teachers' professional development. The data further reveals that teachers' professional development pertains to their involvement in the development of subject matter knowledge and teaching skills which are essential constructs in their professional identity construction. The interview data also reveals that there are dynamic connections between teachers' professional identity and their professional development needs. The data further indicates that teachers' subject matter knowledge and their pedagogic skills are key elements in which their influence and connections are noted. It can be noted from the data that English teachers honored their linguistic knowledge and pedagogic skills to shape and construct their professional identities as teachers. The result of the study may help MoE and researchers who want to conduct on similar studies. Based on the findings of the study, it was suggested that English language teachers want further development programs.

Keywords: *Professional Development, Identity Construction, Professional Development.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional identity construction (TPIC) entails discussing the qualities that teachers already possess as well as those that need to be developed (Aslan, 2019). According to Asla, English teachers gradually construct their professional identity through improving their teaching practices and enhancing their professional development. Darling Hammond (2000) reveals that when teachers participate in professional development programs (PDP), their image of themselves can be built and rebuilt. Supporting this, Zhao (2022) pointed out that teacher professional identity (PI) frames teacher's explanation of their roles, academic changes, class experiences, utilization of approaches and strategies and their connection to other problems in academic setting.

Teachers' explanation of their roles as an aspect of the TPIC is a continuous process (Darling-Hammond, Hayler & Gardner, 2017). Their finding further implies that teachers want to get continuous training to improve their practices and shape their identities. Day (2002) states that teachers are required to get continuous training programs based on their development needs.

Teachers' professional self-image and the understanding of how students and the community at large feel about themselves is not only about how teachers define their professional roles and how they see themselves as teachers but also how they integrate with personal roles, both social and family roles, what kind of personality characteristics they would have, and what role they would take as teachers (Zaree & Ghasedib, 2014). Supporting this,

Abednia (2012) reported that teacher professional identity construction (PIC) is influenced by teacher subject knowledge and teaching skills. The factors determine how successful he/she teaching, his/her subject matter knowledge and teaching skills, and his/her beliefs about what others say about his/her teaching. Varghese et al. (2005) pointed out that teacher knowledge is the core of teaching, so knowing about the subject they teach and their personalities is crucial in comprehending the teaching materials used to achieve the lesson objectives. Their finding further reported that teachers' knowledge of the subject and teaching skills would be used to shape a teacher's identity.

A study by Kelchtermans (2009) revealed that teacher identity is important to explore because it is directly linked to a teacher's subject matter knowledge, occupational commitment, and their professional development needs. The finding is further supported by Steinert et.al. 2019 whose study reveals that teacher professional identity construction can exert a powerful influence on their knowledge and teaching skills.

Gee (200) pointed out that TPI has gained importance in many field disciplines as a tool to study the professional development of teachers. However, most researchers and other development initiatives focus on knowledge and skill acquisition and the nature of identity (Gee, 2000), and the process of identity construction (Gedik & Ortacte, 2017). Others still examined teachers' professional identity (Karaolis & Philippous, 2019). So far, the majority of the reviewed literature has never addressed how teachers' professional identity construction influences their professional development needs.



Borg (2017) reported that professional development refers to language teacher can deepen their pedagogical skills and material understanding and they can reform their professional identity. Borg further stated that teachers utilize PD to educate themselves, reform working activities, think about professional identities and keep passionate about education. This finding is further supported by Zhao (2022).

A study by Eba (2013) recommends that professional development needs of teachers in Ethiopia should be a priority area. This means teachers' construction of professional identity is a valuable tool to prepare them to meet the professional development needs of twenty century schools.

The influence of teacher's construction of professional identity plays a key role in their professional development needs. However, to the best of my knowledge to date; there have never been studies which explore the influence of teacher professional identities in relation to their professional development needs in North Showa zone of Oromia region in English.

1.2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how a teacher's construction of professional identity influences their professional development needs.

1.3. MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative interview was conducted to explore the constructs of the teachers' professional identity in relation to their professional development

needs. Guest, MacQueen, & Namey (2012) reported that qualitative research approach consists of reading through textual data, identifying themes in the data, coding those themes, and then interpreting the structure and content of the themes.

The interview protocol had parts. The first interview question was designed for the participants to respond on the kind of linguistic knowledge they sought to enhance their classroom teaching. The second interview question wanted the respondents to express on the kind of pedagogic skills they wished to develop to teach English in primary school. The teacher interview data was used as evidences of how the teachers' the construction of PI influenced their professional development needs.

1.3.1. PARTICIPANTS

This study is a qualitative study. Eight English language teachers (five male and three female) in primary schools were selected as study participants. The study employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to focus in depth on small samples that share certain characteristics (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

1.3.2. DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Teacher interview was the main data gathering tool. Interview was conducted to collect data relevant from the ELT primary schools found in North Showa Zone of Oromia region in Ethiopia. The teacher interview was used as a qualitative approach to **gain an in -depth understanding of how the teachers construct their professional identity and develop their profession as teachers** (Flores & Alonso, 1995). The interview involved eight



teachers who were teaching English to grades 5-8 at the data collection time.

1.4. ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

To address the interview question (objective of the study) regarding the two points, key themes that evolved from the responses were identified based on the core points shared among the participants. Then, using grounded theory approach, the identified significant themes were then developed into conceptual framework (Charmaz, 2014). Based on this theory, the researcher first identified key themes evolved from the responses of the study participants. He then developed concepts supported by theories.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. CONTENT KNOWLEDGE THE TEACHERS WANTED TO DEVELOP

Significant themes evolved from the interview participants in response to linguistic knowledge they sought to improve their classroom teaching were knowledge of language items like grammar, knowledge of vocabulary, and understanding of effective communication techniques.

3.1.1. LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE, GRAMMAR KNOWLEDGE

One significant theme that evolved from the responses of interview participants' regarding the kind of linguistic knowledge they needed was the knowledge of grammar items. The respondents repeatedly pointed out that they needed to have knowledge of grammar points, like conditional clauses and passive versus active voices to teach

English in primary school. This means a teacher's content knowledge plays a significant role in teaching the English language in primary school. Here is what P1 had to say:

Teachers should know conditional clauses and other grammar knowledge to communicate ideas clearly. This knowledge helps the English teachers to teach English well. If we do not know grammar items, we cannot teach English and students lack the motivation to learn. So, an English teacher is expected to have good knowledge of grammar items.

Supporting this, P3 reported that active versus passive voices:

For English teachers, active versus passive voices is the most basic knowledge that we English teachers need to develop to teach English. The knowledge of active versus passive voices construction enables us to communicate freely, explain our ideas to our students easily, give clear instructions and feedback as we want..

The data from the response reveals that English teachers in primary school need the knowledge of active versus passive voices and vice versa to teach English so they can explain the material in the textbook. One can infer from the data that the teacher's knowledge grammar items (conditionals and active versus passive voices) would help the teachers to teach students who have different learning characteristics and to instruct them. For example, P2 pointed out that:



Besides knowledge conditional clause, English teachers need to have the knowledge of active versus passive voices to present our ideas with the colleagues. This knowledge of active versus passive voices helps English teachers to communicate our lessons plans well and to instruct the students during activities.

P8 shared how important the knowledge of active versus passive voice.

In every day communication the knowledge of active versus passive voice plays key role. So, English teachers need to have the knowledge and its teaching skills.

The data revealed that the teachers need to have knowledge of active versus passive voices that enables them to teach English in primary school. This implies that active versus passive voices are critical PDN of the English language teachers.

3.1.2. VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

Data from the respondents regarding the type of linguistic knowledge the English teachers needed to develop was knowledge of vocabulary. The study participants repeatedly mentioned that they wanted to have knowledge of vocabulary as one of the key PDN to develop. This is linked to the basic values expressed in the objective of CPD in Ethiopian schools. Here, P5 was caught saying

Besides, knowledge grammar items, the English teachers must have advanced knowledge of word meaning, vocabulary. Because when we know vocabulary well,

communication is easy. So, teachers of English should have the knowledge of vocabulary. It is important.

Evidence obtained from the responses of interview participants revealed that knowledge of vocabulary plays a key role to teach English in primary school. This finding shows this knowledge enables English teachers to communicate well and to use the target language as needed. Here is what P4 pointed out:

Vocabulary is the basis for learning any language. It helps teachers, especially, English teachers to communicate freely. When a teacher has rich knowledge of vocabulary, he can focus on helping students learn the meaning of new words and concepts in various contexts.

Supporting this idea T6 was caught saying:

Knowledge of vocabulary helps English teachers particularly to provide explicit instruction to do activities from text and teaching students strategies to find meaning of words based on the contexts in which the words are used in a passage.

P3 on his part mentioned the importance of vocabulary in oral and written communications as follows.

English teachers should have rich vocabulary knowledge. This knowledge is critical for both oral and written communication. The knowledge enables English teachers to comprehend word meanings well.

The interview data emphasized that the teachers are required to have knowledge of vocabulary to teach



students in primary school. From this one can understand that the teachers wanted to have the knowledge to encourage a curiosity about the meaning and use of unfamiliar words help students find meanings of unfamiliar words. They further argued that poor vocabulary knowledge impedes successful communication and overall language teaching and learning processes.

3.1.3. AN UNDERSTANDING OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUE

Yet another theme that emerged from the responses of interview participants regarding the kind of linguistic knowledge they needed to have to develop is an understanding of effective communication technique. This indicates that an understanding of effective communication technique is one of the knowledge areas the teachers need to develop further to teach English to primary schools.. In this connection, P6 had to say:

English teachers want to develop effective communication skills. It is one of the most useful skills teach English, to ask and answer the questions the students ask, and to communicate our ideas freely. We need to develop this skill further.

Corroborating this, P1 was caught saying:

To deal with classroom challenges, English teachers need effective communication skills. Communication is one of the problem solving skills the English teachers, in fact all the teachers need to have. Communication skill is important to motivate students well

and to create conducive and interactive learning atmosphere.

The data emphasized how important effective communication techniques are to English teachers in teaching English. This means that teachers need to have knowledge of effective communication techniques to communicate ideas effectively and solve students' problems in the school. This technique would help the teachers not only to communicate ideas clearly but also to address learners' low motivation to provide them with a suitable environment. In this connection, P4 was caught saying:

English teachers need to Effective communication techniques to communicate ideas well, to motivate students and to create conducive environment for the students to learn.

Besides, the data further revealed that interactive, motivational, and conducive learning environments were mentioned to emphasize how important effective communication skills were for the English teachers to communicate ideas effectively in the target language. Based on the facts the respondents frequently mentioned, one can understand that the teachers are required to get further professional development programs in this regard.

3.2. PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS THE TEACHERS NEED TO DEVELOP

Other significant themes that emerged from the responses of interview participants regarding the kind of pedagogic skills the English language teachers



wished to develop to teach English were pedagogic skills, like contextualizing grammar lessons, students' learning characteristics, academic proficiency, and teaching speaking, and reading skills.

3.2.1 ABILITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE GRAMMAR LESSONS

A significant theme that emerged from the responses of interview participants in connection with the kind of pedagogic skills the English teachers needed to develop was the ability to contextualize grammar lessons. This means the participants emphasized that they needed to have ability to contextualizing grammar items to teach English in primary school. In this connection, P1 had this to say:

English teachers need the knowledge and skills needed to contextualize when teaching grammar lessons, for example, present continuous tense. We English teachers, specially, need this knowledge to teach English to lower grade levels.

P3 on her part mentioned the importance of contextualizing grammar lessons in teaching present continuous tense as follows:

English teachers need the knowledge and skills needed to contextualize grammar lessons. This one is very important as I think.

So, teachers of English need to have the knowledge in this regard.

The data emphasized that the English teachers are required to have ability needed to contextualize grammar lessons. This might imply that the English teachers needed to develop the ability to contextualize grammar lessons which are important

parts of grammar knowledge. The data further shows that teachers need extended professional development training regarding contextualizing grammar items as it gives the English teachers the opportunity to practice delivering quality lessons. From this, one can understand that without the knowledge of contextualizing grammar lessons, teachers cannot teach what they themselves do not know well. This means they need CPD to enhance their linguistic capability.

3.2.2. KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS' LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS

The other significant theme that emerged from the responses in connection with what the kind of pedagogic skills the English language teachers needed to have to teach English in primary schools was knowledge of student learning characteristics. Teachers' knowledge of students' learning characteristics is necessary to equip them with a high quality of learning. Knowledge of student learning styles are regarded as one of the crucial factors to be taken into account when designing instruction and creating a conducive learning environment for students. This has important implications for effectiveness of teaching of English language in primary school. In connection with this, P 3 was caught saying:

Teachers need knowledge of learner characteristics. This knowledge is important to make learning more effective, efficient and enjoyable. We as English teachers want to have knowledge of students' learning characteristics. So, teachers should have this knowledge area as it is important for them.



Knowledge of students' learning styles, as implied in the excerpt above, is a crucial indicator of how the students perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment during lessons. This means the participants were aware of the need for teachers' knowledge of students' learning styles to deliver lessons appropriately. This means the teachers need to develop professionally in the areas of students' learning characteristics. Corroborating this, P1 had to say:

English teachers want to have knowledge needed to identify learners according to their learning needs. This will help the English teachers to easily apply the knowledge, to increase students' motivation, develop their communication and maximize their interactions.

The data emphasized the importance of identifying students according to their learning characteristics. The implication is that the English language teachers want further development programs that help them match their teaching strategies with students' learning preferences.

3.2.3. TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS

One significant theme that emerged from the responses in connection with the kind of pedagogic skills the English teachers needed to have to teach English was teaching speaking skills. This means teaching speaking activities in students' textbooks was the kind of pedagogic skills the English teachers needed to have to teach English. Teaching speaking skills was found to be the key pedagogic skill the participants needed to develop.. They reported that speaking activities in the student

textbooks need to be adjusted to teachers' development needs areas.

The data further revealed the need to develop teachers' speaking skills emanated from the teachers' need for development. To develop their confidence, teachers needed to the knowledge to effectively present their own ideas. Without having confidence themselves, teachers find it difficult to teach speaking well. Let's see P3's opinion reported below in this regard.

There are pictures in student textbooks. I want the students to look at the picture and describe what they can see in the picture. This picture requires the teachers to have good skills of teaching speaking. Picture description requires the English language teachers to know how to deliver the speaking lessons in the students' textbooks. When teachers know how effectively to speak themselves, they easily interact with the students, make their lessons easy and clear for the students.

Supporting this idea, P6 has this to say:

First of all, I tell the students a few points about the previous lessons. Then I inform my students we are going to do speaking lesson. When students open their books, I show them the pictures, so they discuss them in groups. When their discussion is over, I ask few students to report the main point of their discussions with the whole class.

The data shows that the textbook's teaching speaking activities engage teachers and students in a variety of interactions. The interview participants emphasized



that teaching speaking lessons in the students' text books demanded teachers' competence in teaching speaking skills to implement a student-centered method of teaching speaking activities in the books. This means the pictures are used to create a suitable environment to practice and develop speaking skills. In connection with this, P3 was caught saying:

To make speaking lessons easy for the students requires good knowledge of teaching which the teachers want to develop in the areas. Teachers need good knowledge of how to teach speaking lessons in the students' textbook.. When the teachers know, they can be free to allow students to discuss the pictures to develop communication skills.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The interview data revealed that ELT in primary schools want to develop their subject knowledge and pedagogic skills. This content knowledge helps them to apply a student-centered method of teaching English and equips them with the knowledge and the pedagogic skills they need to implement in English classroom. Similar finding by (Tudor, 1996) reveals that teacher needs to have knowledge of the subject (grammar, for example) to apply in the class they teach. This application of teaching skills is an indication of their professional identity construction. Similarly, Zhao (2022) reported that subject matter knowledge and pedagogic skills are the two key elements in which their influenced connections professional identity are noted. Zhao's finding further revealed that the qualities of teachers' lives greatly influence teachers'

professional development needs in the way mental wellbeing elevates. stress for the lack of knowledge and skills needed to teach can be decreased, and professional identity of teachers can deepen pedagogical skills. This can reform their professional identities (Borg, 2017).

Dabata (2013) further elaborated that English teachers' knowledge of grammar, for example, active versus passive voices, helps them to effectively communicate their ideas in class. This means their ability to use and understand an indefinite range of sentences. From this one can infer that English teachers valued knowledge of grammar rules for teaching. Dabata believes that knowledge of grammar helped English language teachers interact efficiently and easily. Ofter and Pedder (2011) reported that teachers' professional development pertain to the growth and improvement of their knowledge and teaching skills results in the improvement of their teaching which can enhance students' learning.

Tao and Geo (2017) hold a similar opinion when they stated that TPD is the development of professional identity which develops throughout their profession which might be affected by how the teachers construct their professional identities, and contexts and their development preferences to learn and instruct the principles on the topic they learn and the areas they are required to develop further. The findings of the present study reveals that teacher professional identity influences their development needs. This finding confirms the finding by (Zhao, 2022) whose finding reported that teacher professional identity construction assists teachers to manage not only academic problems and bring



innovation but also and create effective in teaching practices.

Teacher's knowledge of conditional clauses is one of themes emerged from the data. This means teachers need to develop their knowledge of conditions and its teaching skills to teach in primary schools. For example, the knowledge and its teaching skills helps them perform well in class when teaching grammar items, converting active to passive voices. This finding is similar to the finding of (Dabata, 2013). According to Dabata's finding, knowledge of grammar items and their teaching skills allow the teachers to communicate well. From this one can understand that they they communicate well in class, they become effective in their communication techniques which results in students' high levels of participation and high engagement and motivation. The result of the present study reveals that teacher's knowledge of grammar items and communication skills are developed through continuous professional development programs that enable the ELT to identify a wide range of challenges in teaching grammar lessons. This clearly implies that teacher's professional identity construction influences their professional development needs.

Vocabulary knowledge is indicated as teachers' other professional development need areas. This means that vocabulary knowledge is one of the essential factors in teachers' construction of their professional identity. This finding is similar to the finding by Schmitt (2000) who studies vocabulary in language teaching. Schmitt's finding emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge help the LT to helps the teacher of English to construct their identity and acquire communicative competence needed to be

effective in teaching. This finding is further supported by Nation (2011) whose finding shows that knowledge of vocabulary is one of the key professional development need areas where ELT need to develop. Nation further pointed out that teachers' vocabulary knowledge and language use is complementary which the teachers want to develop. This implies that knowledge of vocabulary addresses the development of one's professional identity as a teacher.

Alqahtani and Mofareh (2015) discussed the inevitability of vocabulary knowledge for ELT. They argue those teachers' with rich knowledge of vocabulary helps students master the four major skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This finding is further noted by Richards and Renandya (2002). They state that knowledge of vocabulary plays a crucial role in one's foreign language learning and language proficiency. Brown (2001) discloses that the purpose of activating students' background knowledge is to help them get a better understanding of the text they are tackling. Raudenbush (2015) holds a similar opinion when he states that EFL teachers want to develop their skills to teach, to help students learn and understand the lessons. This as one can imply the teacher knowledge and skills are sources for the teachers to construct their professional identities.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hence teachers' subject matter knowledge and pedagogic skills are the core of teachers teaching developing them is crucial to deliver quality education. For example, teacher professional identity construction is an effective element to improve their



teaching and students learning. From the data presented and the discussions had so far, the following conclusions are given. It is suggested that English language teachers wanted to get professional development courses that equip them with the linguistic knowledge and pedagogic skills the grade levels want them to have.

The content knowledge and pedagogic skills the English language teachers wish to develop could be influenced by professional identities they construct when they attend the knowledge and skill areas they seek to have. From this finding, it can also be recommended that the ministry of education, in consultation with district education officers and other stakeholders, should frame teacher professional identity as teacher's explanation of their roles, academic changes, teaching experiences, utilization of approaches and strategies and their connection with professional development needs. This means Ministry of Education should provide professional development programs that respond to teachers' professional development needs.

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