Reconstruction of Iranian Medical ESP Instructors' Professional Identity: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore Iranian medical ESP instructors' professional identity formation. It also aimed to design a conceptual model of Iranian medical ESP instructors' professional identity. To this end, a purposive sample of ESP instructors teaching at Iranian medical universities were theoretically sampled based on the principles and procedures of grounded theory. The participants who took part in this study were twenty medical ESP instructors (fourteen females and six males). The sample included ESP instructors from Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences, Bushehr University of Medical Sciences, Iran Medical University, Mashad Medical University, and Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The data were transcribed and transferred to MAXQDA 2020 and analyzed using grounded theory procedures in which open, axial, and selective coding were employed to extract the themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The results revealed that the contextual factors of professional identity formation include: individual characteristics, professional expectations, person's point of view towards the ESP profession, and external factors. Professional identity formation processes involve learning to teach, membership in the ESP community, and job tensions. The strategies to encounter the job tensions entail: consultation with others and patterning, finding a solution by the person himself, job development and facing the stressful situation. The consequences of the contextual factors, processes and strategies in forming professional identity are categorized as playing the role of a medical ESP instructor and emotions resulting from tensions. Membership in the ESP community was identified as the core category of medical ESP instructors' professional identity. The findings of this study could be a preliminary stage of designing preparation programs for pre-service EFL teachers who have decided to work as ESP instructors at medical sciences universities in order to have a successful transmission. The findings of this study also allow Iranian medical ESP instructors to understand their professional identity better and be more successful in rebuilding and strengthening it in a positive direction.

Keywords: ESP, ESP Instructors, Grounded Theory Approach, Professional Identity

1.Introduction

Around the globe, language teachers' lives and their educational practices have been greatly affected by the current changes in education (Mahendra, 2020). For instance, the advent of globalization, internationalization of education, multiculturalism, enhanced technology, and academic social responsibility resulted in the establishment of languages for specific purposes (LSP) programs in language departments of the United States (Grosse & Voght, 2012). In addition, offering English for academic purposes (EAP) courses in tertiary contexts has been the focus of the Bologna reforms in Western Europe (Fortanet-Gómez & Räisänen, 2008). In addition, in some Asian countries, the constitution of policies regarding the internationalization of business and education has changed the realm of English language teaching to teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) (Cheng and Anthony, 2014). These shifts in prioritizing language teaching policies reflect present societal ELT needs.

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Such changes are directly associated with the English teachers' professional lives and the construction of their identity (Mehendra, 2020). Kubanyiova and Crookes (2016) stated that the teacher's identity is considered a dominant element in adapting to changing educational contexts for novice and expert teachers. The shift in educational priorities may require teachers to acquire new knowledge about the subjects taught and appropriate teaching and learning approaches to raise their teaching performance, but more importantly, teachers are required to build and rebuild their identities. Therefore, exploring how English teachers make changes and adaptations contributes to an increasing body of literature concerning teachers' professional identities.

Recently, the realm of teacher identity construction has increasingly attracted scholars' attention (Abbasian & Karbalaee Esmailee, 2018; Borg, 2017; Pennington, 2015; Kao and Lin, 2015). Researchers have attempted to uncover teachers' lives and the visible and invisible areas of the teaching profession. The seeable area encompasses activities, including students' evaluation, materials preparation, and development. However, the invisible dimension of the profession entails individualized traits such as motivation, perceptions, beliefs, and assumptions. Examining teachers' identities can be beneficial when both the visible and invisible sides are reached.

The formation of a teacher's professional identity results from a mixture of an individual's initial experiences, before and after teacher training programs, his personal opinions and past understandings, which sequentially provides information about his/her behavior as a future teacher and affects his decisions and activity (Beijard, Meijard & Verloop, 2004). This identity influences a person's expectations for getting prepared for the teaching profession or experiences from teacher education programs. From this point of view, Bullough (1997 cited in Korthagen, 2010) argues that the beliefs of novice teachers concerning processes involved in teaching and learning situation and their self in the guise of a teacher cause great concern to teacher education programs because it would be a premise for making meaning and decision.

Professional identity is not a static entity. Environmental and situational factors, teachers' cognitive knowledge, their experiences and meaning of those experiences, their sense of agency, and dominant powers directing teachers' conduct and performance inside and outside the classroom construct and reconstruct their professional identity (Riahipour, Tavakoli & Eslami Rasekh, 2020). Some researchers state that professional identity is made up of a set of diverse and dissimilar identity factors, including self-esteem, self-concept, job motivation, discernments of teaching, subject, and subject teaching methods (Lee, Huang, Law & Wang, 2013). Even though these factors are diverse, they are intermingled in reciprocal actions among social, professional, personal, and situational elements (Day & Kington, 2008). The personal dimensions are identified in teachers' lives outside the educational setting and are associated with their roles in society and family. The situational and social dimensions are observed in a particular educational setting (i.e. support, assessment and funds). These dimensions could be influenced by policies issued at local and national levels. The professional factors reflect society, authorities, and educational policymakers' expectations towards a quality teacher.
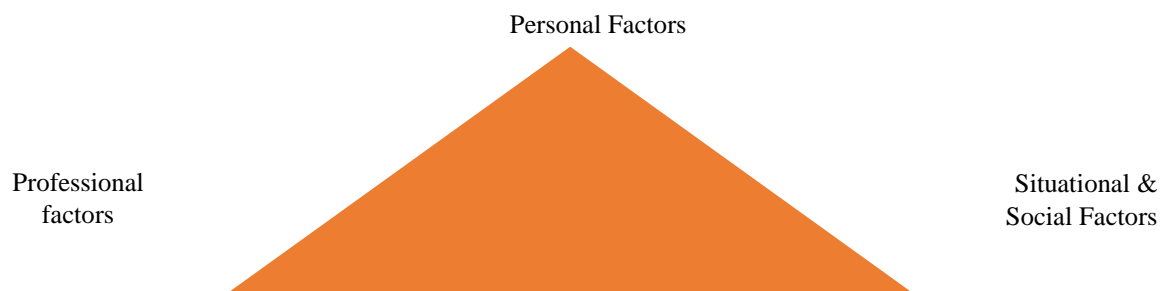

Figure 1. Factors Influencing Professional Identity (Day & Kington, 2008 cited in Lee et al., 2013)

According to the current trend, instructors of English for Specific Purposes go through a complex process to become ESP teachers. They are encouraged to transform their practices and build their professional identity by engaging in professional development activities and interacting with workplace communities. However, some challenges possibly occur among teachers adapting to the ESP teaching context. According to Hao and Mai (2016), low quality of lectures, lack of appropriate materials and textbooks, lack of genuinely qualified ESP teachers, and lack of principled methodology supported by sound theories are the significant challenges of ESP teaching in tertiary contexts all around the world. Furthermore, Mostafaei, Alaei, and Ershadi (2017) concluded that inappropriate policies, inappropriate teaching methodologies, lack of knowledge of students' field of study, and limited resources were the main concerns in running ESP programs in Iranian universities. Such issues could significantly influence ESP practitioners' performance, from developing suitable teaching-learning materials to classroom practices.

Those shifts in educational priorities and other related problems are thought to affect teachers' professional identity formation. Although the related literature on teachers' professional identity investigates teacher identity construction in specific teaching contexts, it should be argued that professional identity among ESP instructors is not fully explored (Jiang, 2017). This study, therefore, aimed to seek out the English instructors' professional identity mediated amid the stream of ESP teaching and learning. It focused on exploring the experiences of Iranian ESP instructors teaching in the English department at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. This context of the study drew the broader scope of ESP instructors' professional identity construction within English language teaching in Iran. It also depicted how the instructors engage with their professional lives to meet the demands of ESP learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Professional Identity

Professional identity is the notion that describes a teacher's perception of himself in the profession and his relationships with others. Firstly, this perception is a product of non-static interaction between interior and exterior powers pivoted around social interactions (Danielewicz, 2001). That is, identity is a consequence of teachers' engagements and relations with others in specific working settings, like university, college, or classroom. Next, according to Gee (2001), this perception is formed from teachers' inner conditions and performances. So, teacher professional identity is teachers' self-understanding and the understandings of others towards them in the character of professionals.

Non-unification and multiplicity are the first features of professional identity. These features prevail since they comprise the person and what she creates via social engagements (Varghese et al., 2005). In addition, according to Gee (2001), other people identify a person as a specific type of individual, or even in the characteristic of some various types at the same time, when she functions and communes in a given setting. In other words, the possible tags of a teacher could be revealed by how she functions and interacts in a particular setting and how other people react to her. Furthermore, teacher professional identity is made up of intertwisted individual and professional aspects. The personal facet of teachers represents their own ideas and opinions; however, the later facet represents widely-agreed merits regarding "teaching profession and being a teacher" (Beijaard et al., 2004). By merging both facets, both combination and non-static interaction permit the construction of teacher professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2000).

The fluidity of teacher professional identity is another prominent feature of professional identity. According to Connelly & Clandinin, 2000), this feature is present since teachers create their professional identity via reflective storytelling: 'stories to live by'. That is, teachers' professional identity is the outcome of their past, present, and planned experiences. Next, identity grows throughout a person's entire lifetime and is not something that a person owns (Beijard et al., 2004). In other words, identity is not fixed but continually developing under the more experiences that a teacher achieves and through reflecting on who I am currently and what type of teacher I intend to be (Varghese et al., 2005).

According to the features of professional identity explained above, it can be said that teacher professional identity consists of sub-identities. Beijaard et al. (2000) identified three sub-identities of teacher professional identity: subject matter expertise, didactical expertise, and pedagogical expertise.

2.2. International Studies on Teachers' Profesional identity

Lee (2013) examined how writing teachers construct and perceive their professional identities through interviews and classroom research reports. The study defined PI as in the way teachers talk about themselves, their practices, and their roles. The researcher concluded that the writing teachers develop commitment and enthusiasm after taking a writing teacher education course (WTE). It empowered them to see their roles differently as writing teachers, gave them clear writing task perception and in-class practices. They feel committed and associated with their students and their profession.

In order to understand how teachers perceive themselves and their professional identity, in-depth interviews and long extensive conversations were conducted with Art teachers by Kuster Bain and Young (2014). The participants were interviewed during the beginning of their career and then in their fifth year of teaching in this follow-up study. Findings concluded that at the beginning of their career till recently, the teachers have a strong belief about their teaching philosophy and career choice. They explained that the main reason for becoming teachers was their aim for professional growth, commitment to their profession, and satisfaction towards the field of teaching. The teachers also showed self-confidence as they felt valued and appreciated by their institution and students, as well as by instructional practices and setting high expectations for their students. In addition, they believed that due to their professional experience, they have a high sense of efficacy as they could achieve their goals.

Torres and Weiner (2015) explored how young teachers in charter schools shaped their professional identity by their views of teaching and teachers, teaching experience, preparation, and their histories. The researchers used literature that concentrated on the formation of identity, specifically Wenger's (1998) five dimensions of identity. Results reveal that the participants choose to work in charter schools as it constructs their professional identity and they did not view themselves as traditional public-school teachers. It makes them dedicated and connected to their profession, highly skilled and competent. Further, teachers understand and believe that teaching is a noble profession and a valuable job. They also seek teaching communities that enhance teaching skills and have high standards for the sake of their professional development and to benefit their own students.

Han (2016) examined Korean English teachers' responses to the current English language teaching policies and showed the attributes of their professional identity from their responses. Data were collected from 20 teachers through interviews, descriptive paper questionnaires, word and visual metaphors and classroom observations. The results revealed that the teachers valued the principles of communicative language teaching and that, in their opinion, teacher professional identity can be understood in terms of human education, having practical knowledge and willingness to learn something new, and employing various methods or materials depending on the students' levels and needs.

Tao and Gao (2018) examined the identity construction and negotiation of eight English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers at a Chinese university. Informed by an adapted model of TESOL teacher identity (Pennington, 2014), the data analysis reveals that for the study participants becoming an ESP teacher is a complex process of transforming professional practices and constructing professional identities. On the one hand, the participants felt a sense of intrinsic fulfillment through their teaching aimed at helping graduates acquire the ESP skills needed to support socio-economic development in the region. On the other hand, their construction of professional identities is undermined by the marginalized status of ESP, as imposed by the institution. As English language teachers are increasingly expected to equip university graduates with ESP skills in diverse educational contexts, more attention and support are needed to facilitate ESP teachers' professional development and hence identity formation.

Mahendra (2020) examined Indonesian ESP teachers' experiences regarding their identity construction and negotiation in a language institute. The findings revealed a complex process of transforming professional practices and constructing identities in relation to the struggles of becoming ESP teachers. Participants constructed ESP teacher identities through acquiring subject knowledge via professional development activities and building a sense of intrinsic fulfillment in becoming ESP teachers.

An examination of international studies (Han, 2016; Kuster Bain and Young (2014; Mahendra; 2020; Tao and Gao, 2018; Torres and Weiner 2015) demonstrates that each researcher has addressed this issue from a limited perspective and angle and because of the formation of identity during the time, and the necessity of conducting in-depth interviews for discovering interior and exterior dimensions and the construction of professional identity, no studies were found that examined this subject through qualitative approaches to design a model for this concept.

2.3. National Studies on Teachers' Professional Identity

Ghanizadeh and Abedi Ostad (2016) depicted the profile of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' professional identity. The second purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among the components of teachers' professional identity as measured by Kao and Lin's (2015) model. The results indicated significant correlations between teachers' teaching experience and all the teachers' identity components. It was also found that there were statistically significant differences between male and females in four components of identity as follows: teacher' duties (TD), Pedagogy (PE), instructional skills and knowledge (SK), and teachers' citizenship behavior (CB). The results showed that there were variations in teacher identity with regard to their educational level.

Khany and Azimi Amoli (2016) aimed to develop and validate a teacher professional development scale in an Iranian English foreign language context. The developed inventory measures the extent to which EFL teachers are professionally developed and makes teachers aware of multiple characteristics of professionally developed teachers. These competencies are essential components of teacher professional development, enabling the teachers to utilize them in everyday teaching and learning practices in the classroom settings, which, as a result, leads to student achievement. As teachers fulfill important professional roles, they need valid instruments to assess their day-to-day functioning in the class. With the instrument developed and validated in the current research, we, in fact, allow language teachers to assess their extent of professional development in different pedagogical contexts.

Zeinadiny Mofrad (2016) attempted to investigate the professional identity of the language teachers in Iranshahr city, Iran. The relationship between gender and work experience of teachers and their professional identity was also explored to determine any significant relationship. The results showed that teachers identify themselves mostly as didactical experts, then as pedagogical experts, and least as subject matter experts. There was no significant relationship between the gender and experience of the participants and the three sub-scales of professional identity, except for a significant relationship between subject matter expert and experience of the teachers.

Rezaei (2018) investigated Iranian Ph.D. teachers' professional identity changes associated with English learning. Findings of the study were as follow, first, general results indicate that teachers underwent professional identity changes after learning English. Second, female teachers were more committed to the three professional domains than male teachers. Almost all teachers unanimously believed that English learning has a key role in personal growth and development in their professional environment.

Sardabi, Biria and Ameri Golestan (2018) examined the role of a teacher education program informed by the principles of critical pedagogy in influencing novice EFL teachers' professional identity construction. Results of the study revealed two major shifts in participants' professional identity. Before the program their identity was characterized by "an attitude of compliance" and "a narrow view of EFL teaching". However, after the program, they "developed voice" and "adopted a humanistic conception of teaching".

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Moslemi and Habibi (2019) aimed to explore the relationship among Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity, their self-efficacy, and their critical thinking skills in their teaching process. The findings demonstrated that there was a strong positive relationship of the EFL teachers' professional identity between their self-efficacy and their critical thinking skills. The results of the ANOVA (analysis of variance models) test indicated that the EFL teachers' professional identity could predict their self-efficacy and critical thinking skills.

Abedi Ostad, Ghanizadeh & Ghanizadeh (2019) investigated the dynamism of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' professional identity with respect to their commitment and job Satisfaction through a mixed-methods design. The results of structural equation modeling (SEM) demonstrated that job satisfaction played a positive and significant role in SE and TD. Job satisfaction was in turn influenced by EF. Job satisfaction predicted teacher commitment both directly and indirectly via its effect on TD and CB. Teacher commitment, on the other hand, impacted on PE, CB, and SK. The results of the qualitative part demonstrated the overlap between the three constructs and were in line with the results of the quantitative part of the study.

Aghaei, Bavali and Behjat (2021) intended to explore the relationship between professional identity and reflectivity of Iranian EFL teachers. It also aimed to examine how high and low reflective teachers perceive the professional identity components. Pearson product correlation coefficient revealed that there was a positive relationship between EFL teachers' professional identity and reflectivity. Furthermore, the findings of regression analysis indicated that reflectivity could predict EFL teachers' professional identity. Furthermore, the participants were categorized into two high and low reflective groups. The thematic analysis showed that high reflective teachers used and implemented much more professional identity components in their teaching practice in comparison to the low reflective teachers.

A comprehensive literature reviews on this area in the Iranian context (Aghaei et al., 2021; Abedi Ostad et al., 2019; Moslemi and Habibi, 2019; Rezaei, 2018; Sardabi et al., 2018) also shows that none of the previous studies have tried to create a theoretical model for L2 teachers' professional identity. Thus, by considering the complexity of professional identity that justifies the use of grounded theory, this study will occupy this research methodology space. Considering the complexity of ESP context and the tensions and struggles that ESP instructors may encounter, very limited attention has been paid to these struggles in previous ESP studies all over the world. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore Iranian medical ESP instructors' professional identity and shed some light on the complexity of becoming an ESP instructor in tertiary settings. In addition, a comprehensive literature review on this area in the context of Iran indicates that there has been no single study done on the construction of Iranian medical ESP instructors' professional identity. In line with the preceding points, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

Research Question One: What are the components of the professional identity of Iranian medical ESP instructors?

Research Question Two: What model can be constructed for the professional identity of Iranian medical ESP instructors?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This study used grounded theory for analyzing the data. The selection of each of the qualitative approaches depends on the phenomenon under the investigation and research questions. If there is limited knowledge about a topic or no sufficient and appropriate theories to explain or predict the behavior of a group, a grounded theory approach is a valuable method. According to the materials presented about professional identity in the introduction section, professional identity is a concept that starts to construct during the training period of the person or even before that period. Furthermore, based on the existing symbols, it is defined through the social interactions of individuals. Therefore, studying this issue and achieving a theory that arises from the existing realities of our society is possible through using a grounded theory study. The grounded theory approach used in this study is

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the approach of Corbin andStrauss (2015). In this approach of grounded theory, three coding processes (opening, axial and selective) are used, but its difference with Strauss & Corbin (1998) model is in presenting categories in the axial and selective stages of the coding paradigm. In Strauss & Corbin (1998) approach, axial coding and selective coding were classified into the six general categories: causal conditions, context, core category, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. However, in Corbin & Strauss (2015) approach, these categories have been summarized into context, process, strategies, core category, and consequences.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study were twenty ESP instructors (fourteen females and six males) who were teaching ESP courses at various Iranian medical universities. All of the participants held PhD in applied linguistics. The participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 5 to 30 years, with a mean of 17.45. Their ages ranged from 38 to 68, with a mean age of 39. 65. The sample included eight ESP instructors from Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, four ESP instructors from Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences, four ESP instructors from Bushehr University of Medical Sciences, and four ESP instructors from Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences. In this study, theoretical sampling was utilized, and data saturation was the guiding principle for recruiting the sample. After interviewing twenty ESP instructors, this study obtained data saturation.

3.3. Instruments

Generally speaking, data represent realities, concepts or instructions. If the data explain the traits and realities in words (not in numbers), they are called qualitative data. Such data are collected through observation, interviews or are extracted from documents and the like (Ary et al., 2019). The primary data collection instrument in this study was semi-structured interview. Interview questions were divided into three sections: a) general and straightforward questions to reduce the interviewees' anxiety and encourage them to cooperate with the interviewer; b) the second group included the main questions of the research in which general and comprehensive questions were first asked and then, the following questions were asked according to the interviewees' answers and the course of the interview; c) the last group involved in-depth and follow-up questions which were used for completing the data.

3.4. Data collection Procedure

Following the review of the related literature, semi-structured interviews were carried out to yield an in-depth understanding of ESP instructors' professional identity. In the very beginning, the participants were informed about the aim of the study, and their consent was obtained. Furthermore, the researchers requested the particiapnts' consent for recording the interviews to analyze the data. In order to establish rapport, the researchers first asked general and straightforward questions from the participants. Then, core questions related to the aim of the research were asked, and according to the interviewees' answers and the course of the interview, in-depth and follow-up questions were asked. Given that it might be difficult for the partcipants to express and discuss their thoughts and ideas in English, the interviews were conducted in their mother tongue, Farsi. In this study, thirteen out of the sixteen face-to-face interviews lasted for about forty minutes, and the two others lasted one hour.

3.5. Data Analysis

Immediate data recording is a prerequisite for the researcher's success in creating grounded theory approach, and field notes encompass a substantial amount of grounded theory data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). All personal interviews were transcribed and then transferred to MAXQDA 2020 and analyzed. Memos according to the situation were written beside the code, category or sub-category and were used in the subsequent interviews, categories, and data interpretations. In the current study, the researcher, through taking part in the field and interviewing the participants, described the scene, participants' interactions with other colleagues, conversations between them, and their non-verbal behaviour. He used these field notes to complement the data collection and completion of the existence brakes in categories and the concepts derived from the data. Therefore, to prevent misinterpretation of the data and to complete their theoretical richness, the researcher wrote field

notes immediately after conducting each interview. Along with the interview analysis, field notes were also analyzed. They were a confirmation of the participants' statements. In the current study, after each interview and during the analysis of each interview to discover the relationships between the categories and the related concepts, the researcher wrote memos regulary. These memos were the researcher's views and assumptions about the processes presented in the data and the processes of obtaining them, and they were recorded in the researcher's mind as soon as their formation. They acted as a guide for the continuation of the job and helped generate the theory. The memos of the current study provided ideas about questions raised in the following interview, ideas on how to continue sampling and the specifications of the following samples, ideas about the features and other possible dimensions of a concept, ideas about the possible relationships between two or several concepts. Regarding the coding process, three types of coding, including open, axial, and selective, were used (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

4. Results

4.1. Data Analysis for Identifying Concepts and Contextual factors

In this stage, the researcherlooked for a collection of contexts and situations that influenced the participants and led to their actions and reactions. In this study, context included the categories of "individual characteristics", "professional expectations", "ESP instructor's attitudes towards his profession", "job tensions", and "external factors".

4.1.1. Individual Characteristics

One category that provides context for a person's tendency to a particular profession and sets the preconditions for forming professional identity in the individual is individual characteristics. The individual characteristics mentioned by the participants included personality traits, talents, and interests. It seems that the foundations of the first sub-category, personality traits, have been laid in childhood and these features show themselves in the behavior and actions of the teachers in the class. For example, one of the participants said

" *I have been a happy and lively person since I was a child.....I still try to have happy and fun classes with my students.*"

4.1.2. Professional Expectations

Becoming a professional begins with a series of expectations from that profession. In this study, these expecations have been categorized under the titles of "empowerment", " the climate of the organization", and " job satisfaction".

Empowerment has been categorized into four sub-categories: (a) acquiring content knowledge, (b) acquiring pedagogical knowledge, (c) practical learning of teaching skills, and (d) textbooks analysis. Regarding acquiring content knowledge, one of the participants said,

"*I expected that all courses that we studied during teacher training program would be relevant with the courses that we were supposed to teach"*.

Regarding the second category, the organization's climate, ESP instructors believed that this category had two features: (a) supportive atmosphere and (b) scientific environment. For example, one of the participants said,

"*I expected the university and department environment to be comfortable and friendly, and senior colleagues transfer their experiences to novice instructors.*"

The third category, job satisfaction, includes two characteristics: (a) social status and (b) welfare enjoyment. Regarding social status, instructors expect that this profession enjoys a high status in society. One of the participants mentioned that

"*one of the influencing factors in my choice was that I thought the job of teaching at university enjoyed a high status in society..... teaching at university should be one of the top jobs in society*".

4.1.3. Attitudes towards ESP Teaching Profession

Based on the influence of various internal and external factors, teacher considers a specific feature or features of the profession as the primary and fundamental feature of teaching profession and believes that teaching profession is known based on this feature. These features include: (a) the role and responsibility of the teacher, (b) teaching profession honor, and (c) difficulty of teaching.

Regarding the role and responsibility of the teacher, the participants consider this profession with widespread roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities have been explained according to the following sub-categories: (a) teacher is the main focus of education, (b) the educational role of the teacher, (c) guiding and facilitating learning, (d) care and fidelity, (e) teacher as a subject specialist, (f) teacher as a teaching specialist, (g) teacher as a pattern of behavior, and (h) teacher as a lifelong learner.

One of the participants, for example, said, "*To be a good teacher, you need to put yourself in the learning environment every moment, and you should not think that teacher should only teach, and learning is student's responsibility.*"

Another concept that participants mentioned concerning their perception of the teaching profession was the honor of the teaching profession. In other words, they consider the profession as an honorable job, and their reasons for this inference have been explained as follows: (a) creating inner satisfaction and (b) raising good people. One of the participants mentioned that

"*The teacher's job is important not because of teaching, but I think the importance of teacher's job is that he educates and raises good people for society*".

The third concept about a person's perception of his professional identity as a teacher refers to the difficulty of the teaching profession. One of the participants expressed that

"*teaching is a stressful job. One of its reasons is that the teacher may face new and unpredictable conditions and incidents in class and university. Some teachers might have chosen this profession due to this issue. On the other hand, some might have considered this job simple at first, but after a while, they become aware of its stressful nature.*"

4.1.4. Job Tensions of Teachers

ESP instructors encounter tensions during professionalization. The obtained tensions in this study were categorized as: (a) organizational tensions, (b) student-related tensions, (c) colleague-related tensions, and (d) tensions related to the role of the teacher. Tensions or tension-created situations that teachers face during their services, especially during their first years of teaching, influence the formation of their professional identiy. One of these types of tensions can be put forward as organizational tensions. One of the organizational tensions that overshadow the proper formation of professional identity is the lack of facilities in the universities. It creates this feeling in the person that he cannot meet his expectations of himself as a teacher. One of the participants expressed that

"*during teacher education program, we learned the importance of using teaching aids and educational technology in teaching the second language, but the colleges where I teach do not have these facilities like the Internet and smart classes.*"

Another tension would be the financial problems. It refers to insufficient salaries of teachers compared with other professions, which induces the sense of insignificance and low social status of this profession. A participant said that

"*teachers' most important job tension is their insufficient salaries. Anyway, it cannot be denied that when financial problems exist the teacher does not have enough motivation to be serious and diligent in his work and it leads to society. I have seen many times that even our tiny benefits have been postponed.*"

How teachers are organized and the distribution of classes and the lessons is another matter that causes stress and tension for teachers, especially for novice teachers who would like to prove themselves to their colleagues. Neglecting the educational role of teachers by the authorities leads to the incomplete formation teachers' professional identity. Contradicroty organizational expectations are also one of the things that confuse teachers in playing their role as a teacher and a proper understanding of their own professional identity.

The second type of tension that affects teachers' professional identity is teachers' tensions with the students. These tensions include: (a) non-acceptance by students, (b) disrespect towards teachers, (c) control and care of students by teachers, and (d) maintaining the emotional distance between teacher and his students. For example, to be recognized as a teacher, teachers need to be accepted by the students, and if it does not happen, they experience job tension. A participant said that

"*students did not accept me during the early sessions and tried to detect my weaknesses. I had lost my passion and enthusiasm because I could not obtain students' approval and appreciation.*"

4.1.5. External Factors

The next contextual factors in the formation of teachers' professional identity are external factors which include: (a) modeling, (b) family upbringing, (c) similar teachingexperiences, (d) external motivation, (e) the attitudes of society towards the teaching profession, (f) the hidden curriculum and (g) the organizational atmosphere of the universities.

(a)Modeling: The first sub-category of external factors is modeling an individual from people around him. Parents who were school teachers or university professors have created interest in this profession in their children, and this image has not been erased from the person's mind. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that

"*My father had the honor of being a university lecturer. From the beginning of my life, I got used to the job teaching, and the image that I had in my mind regarding my future job, I can say that it was this job*".

(b)Family education: along with the work of an individual's relatives, and its related experiences in childhood, one of the most important factors that influence the choice of his future job and his professional behaviors would be the family education of the person. The family in which individual was born and grew up. Participants expressed that their family education and the behaviors of their relatives have affected their interests in the teaching profession. For example, a participant stated that

"*My mother's family were educated. When one of them came to our home, they brought a book for us. They really encouraged us to read books of various topics. For example, my uncle always encouraged me to teach whatever I have learned from the books to my friends and classmates. His advice was like a teacher. He taught me that when I teach a thing to a person I would gain to things; that thing would remain in my mind and I have taught something new to a person*"

(c)similar experiences in English teaching: Another category that, according to the participants has played a role in their professional identity is similar experiences in English teaching. This category has been divided into two separate sections of teaching English at university to other students and teaching English to relatives, friends or family members. Many of the participants have had such experience, and in more cases this job has been started from assisting a professor in performing some tasks. For example, one of the participants expressed that

"*When I was a PhD student, one of my professors selected me as his assistant to teach some of his B.A courses in some sessions or if students had questions about chapters or points of those courses they could ask me. In the last year of my PhD program, I marked the papers of his MA students, and I remember that I covered several sessions of an MA course that he was unable to come to class*".

(d)External Motivation: Another sub-category of external factors in the selection of the job and the occurrence of job-related behaviors regarding the teaching profession is external motivation, and

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includes the following sub-categories. The first step for entering the process of becoming a professional is the selection of that profession. The participants of the study explained their experiences on how they decided to choose the profession of university lecturer and also the involved factors in that selection. They mentioned the influence of people around them as one of the influential factors in their selection. At this stage, because the person does not have a clear and precise idea of the job, those who are around him can have an effect on his choice. This influence has sometimes been in the form of insistence, and the individual has obeyed their wishes. For example, one of the participants said,

"*I did not want to be a language teacher. I wanted to study in the field of information technology. But, my father insisted that I should become a teacher. So, I became a language teacher because of my father's insistence.*"

(e) the attitudes of society towards the teaching profession: Another sub-category in the concepts related to external factors is the attitude of society towards the teaching profession. According to the beliefs of the participants the attitude of society towards the teaching profession is that society thinks that this job is more appropriate for women, and individuals like their daughters and wives to become a teacher if they are supposed to work outside of the home. One of the participants expressed,

"*My family insisted that I become a teacher. They thought that it is the best job for a woman, because she can perform her job, the house chores, and her family.*'

(f)Hidden curriculum: Another experience that participants mentioned in the form of various categories, and can be considered as one of the contexts of the formation of ESP teachers' professional identity, is the prevalence of hidden curriculum in EFL teacher training programs. One of these experiences is to address the individual as a student teacher caused him to be differentiated compared to other university students, and caused the sense of being a teacher in the participant:

"*When I entered the university I just saw myself a student, and thought that I was supposed to learn some theoretical materials.....But from the beginning of my entrance into the university I and some students who had the scholarship of ministry of education were called student teacher. This title was a flip that I was not a pure student, and addressing me with this title meant that being a student and gaining knowledge was intertwined with my teaching profession. They were the two sides of the same coin of my identity.*"

(g) The organizational atmosphere of the universities: Another sub-category of external factors in the occurrence of behaviors related to the teaching profession is the organizational atmosphere of the university and college. The existence of a supportive organizational atmosphere in the department and college and the support of novice ESP instructors by experienced colleagues have created a positive feeling and encouragement among participants towards the ESP profession. For example, one of the participants stated that

"*Some of the experienced professors called me 'my son'. With the help and warm support of those professors, I learned a lot of things about teaching ESP courses, and I made huge progress in teaching. Finally, as a result of great efforts, I could get the approval of the head of the department, my colleagues, and students.*"

4.2. Conceptualization of the Process

The process of teacher's professional identity includes: (a) learning to teach, (b) strategies against job tensions, and (c) acceptance in the teachers' community

4.2.1. Learning to Teach

The process of professionalization of English teachers begins with learning to teach, which includes the features such as theoretical courses and the practice of teaching practically. Theoretical courses refer to the courses that particiapnts took at the tertiary level in order to learn to teach. For example,

teaching methods course was one of the beneficial courses participants studied. One of the participants said

"*one of the useful courses that I took was teaching methods. In that course, I became familiar with different teaching methods that an English teacher can use in the class.*"

　　　　Another category of the concepts related to learning to teach was the practice of practical teaching of teachers that participants talked about and revealed that it has affected the formation of their professional identity. Regarding the practice of practical teaching before the beginning of their formal teaching, one of the participants stated that "in order to become sure that I am ready to become an English teacher and I can be called an English teacher, I needed to be involved in practical teaching. I could not achieve this purpose during my BA and MA programs. However, during my PhD program, I was able to become a teaching assistant. In that position, I experienced real teaching practically. When I was recruited as a university lecturer, that great experience helped me perform my first formal teaching sessions with less anxiety and more confidence."

4.2.2. Strategies Against Job Tensions

Teachers develop strategies to deal with job tensions and the emotions associated with them in order to prevent their professional identity from being damaged. In this study, the explored strategies have three characteristics: (a) consultation with others, (b) finding a solution by the individual himself, (c) job promotion, and (e) facing a stressful situation.

　　　　One of the strategies that participants used to deal with job tensions was consultaion with others. They consulted with their colleagues and attempted to follow their practices. One of the particiapnts stated that

"*I consult with both experienced and young colleagues. From my point of view, young teachers have new ideas and methods for teaching and they are worth learning.*"

　　　　The second strategy to deal with the tensions participants stated is finding a solution by the individual himself. This strategy is often obtained by studying appropriate sources, searching the Internet, participating in conferences, and interacting in social networks. One of the participants expressed that

　　　　"*I try to cope with tensions related to my job by taking part in international and national conferences and also by studying different sources which help me to improve my knowledge, skills, personality. I am sure that these strategies help me to play the role of an effective English teacher.*"

4.2.3. Acceptece in the Community of Teachers

The last step in becoming a professional in the teaching profession is an attempt to become a member of the teachers' community, which begins from the onset of service in the college. This stage has the following characteristics: (a) acceptance of the person as a professional English teacher by the head of the department, (b) acceptance of the person as a professional English teacher by his colleagues in the department, and (c) acceptance of the person as a professional English teacher by his students. One of the particiapnts stated his own experience in gaining acceptance by the head of the department as follows:

"*in different situations, I was trying to gain the trust of the head of the department. I was trying to adjust myself to new students and the new environment. In order to make learning materials easier, I used various teaching methods and approaches. I gained the trust of the head of the department by working hardly and seriously. I was able to convince him to give me the ESP courses of graduate students.*"

4.3. Consequences

The consequences of contextual factors, processes, and strategies in forming ESP teachers' professional identity have been categorized under two general categories: (a) playing the role of an ESP teacher and (b) emotions caused by tensions.

4.3.1. Playing the Role of an ESP teacher

This stage of the formation of teacher professional identity encompasses five features as follows: (1) *professional role*. According to what has been inferred from the participants, the professional role includes job conscience, responsibility, planning, interest in reading and doing research, job commitment, sincerity, and creativity. For example, one of the participants expressed that

"*high job conscience, conscientiousness and giving importance to one's job is one of the most obvious characteristics of a good teacher…. Well, I have always tried to do whatever task assigned to me well.*"

(2) *teacher character*. It is another characteristic that reflects in playing the role of a teacher and in the process of changing to a professional teacher, and participants believed that from the perspective of others a teacher is known according to the following features: patience, kindness, compassion, teacher appearance, practicality and adherence to ethical principles. For example, one of the participants stated that

"*I try to be patient in the classroom and I do not become angry for every small and trivial thing, and I am always being careful about my judgments in order not to make any early judgment which might lead to an irreparable decision .*"

(3) *teacher skills*. They are considered as the third feature, which has been extracted from the participants' statements under the following topics: classroom management, rhetorical skills, self-assessment, ability to communicate, using technology, and educational design. One of the participants stated that

"*my most important ability is classroom management, and I believe that if a teacher cannot manage his class appropriately, he cannot achieve his pedagogical goals in the class.*"

(4) *authority*. Participants believe that the strategies that teachers use can lead to teacher authority in the college and class. In other words, a teacher must have authority in college and class. One of the participants stated that

"*imagine a class that contains forty students and they are naughty because they are at the peak of energy and emotions in their early adulthood. Especially with the presence of the teacher students' energy for teasing and making jokes multiply. Teasing the teacher is very enjoyable for some of the students, and many of them prefer this to the lesson. In this situation, I have authority, and I do not allow them to disturb the cohesion and character of the class.*"

(5) *popularity*. In addition to authority, the popularity of the teacher among students is another sub-category that participants mentioned it. From the point of view of one of the particiapnts

"*the teacher's behavior, actions and speech should be such that he becomes popular among his students and colleagues. I think I do have this popularity.*"

3.3.2. Emotions Caused by Tensions

When teachers face professional tensions, depending on the type of tension, they experience different emotions. In this section, these emotions have been categorized as: (a) helplessness, (b) lack of confidence, (c) anger, (d) lack of security, and (e) lack of motivation.

One of the emotions that teachers experience in the face of professional tensions is a feeling of helplessness. In this situation, they feel that they cannot do anything as a teacher. One of the participants said that

"*I feel helplessness when I cannot do anything to solve my problems as well as my students' problems.*"

Another feeling that occurs in teachers in the face of professional tensions is lack of confidence. Regarding this situation, one of the participants stated that

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"*in the early years of my teaching at university I had low self-confidence because my knowledge level was low and also my teaching experience was low*."

The following figure demonstrates the playing role of a teacher and emotions caused by job tensions as the consequences of contextual factors and strategies.
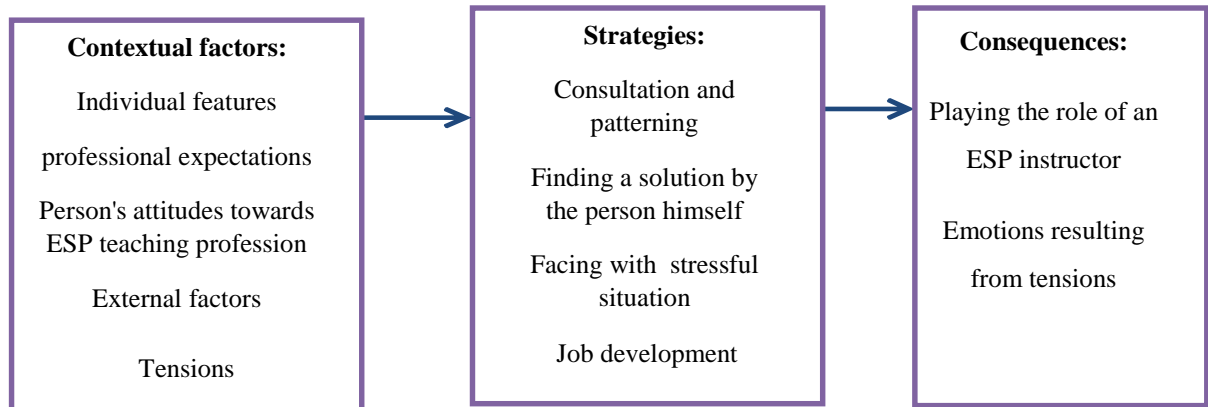
| **Contextual factors:**

Individual features

professional expectations

Person's attitudes towards ESP teaching profession

External factors

Tensions | → | **Strategies:**

Consultation and patterning

Finding a solution by the person himself

Facing with stressful situation

Job development | → | **Consequences:**

Playing the role of an ESP instructor

Emotions resulting from tensions |

Figure 2. The Consequences of Contextual Factors and Strategies

4.4. Theoretical Integration

The last step in the study based on grounded theory approach is the integration of categories around a central phenomenon which is called theoretical integration. According to the data analysis and the review of this study's observations, it seems that the participants' main concern was "playing the role of an ESP instructor" and this common and recursive concern was obvious in the experience of all of the study's participants. Once the participants' main concern was identified, the second step in this study was to examine how participants faced this problem? And how did the participants solve this problem? Which concept or category as a central concept has affected other variables? An in-depth exploration of the findings and the relationships among the categories and considering the participants' measures to solve this problem led to the identification of the central phenomenon of the study. Therefore, "acceptance in the community of ESP instructors" was conceptualized as the central variable. Because if teachers can become a member of the ESP instructors' community or in other words, they are accepted as professional ESP instructors by others, it shows the fact that they have been able to play the role of an ESP instructor well, and also they have answered the most basic challenge of their profession which is not being accepted by the members of the community. In fact, the central variable is an attempt that the participants take to achieve their perception of their professional identity. So, "acceptance in the community of ESP instructors" links the categories to each other and can be considered as the central category or variable. In fact, doing all learning and activities before entering the service and during the early years of teaching is due to this reason that the person can become a member of the teachers' community.

Considering all of the above mentioned points, Figure 3 shows the central phenomenon (acceptance in the ESP community) of the ESP instructor's professional identity, the contextual factors (individual characteristics, professional expectations, the teacher's attitudes towards an ESP teaching profession, professional tensions, and external factors) of the formation of the ESP instructor's professional identity, the processes of its formation (learning to teach and strategies to fight tensions), and consequences (playing the role of an ESP teacher and emotions resulting from tensions).
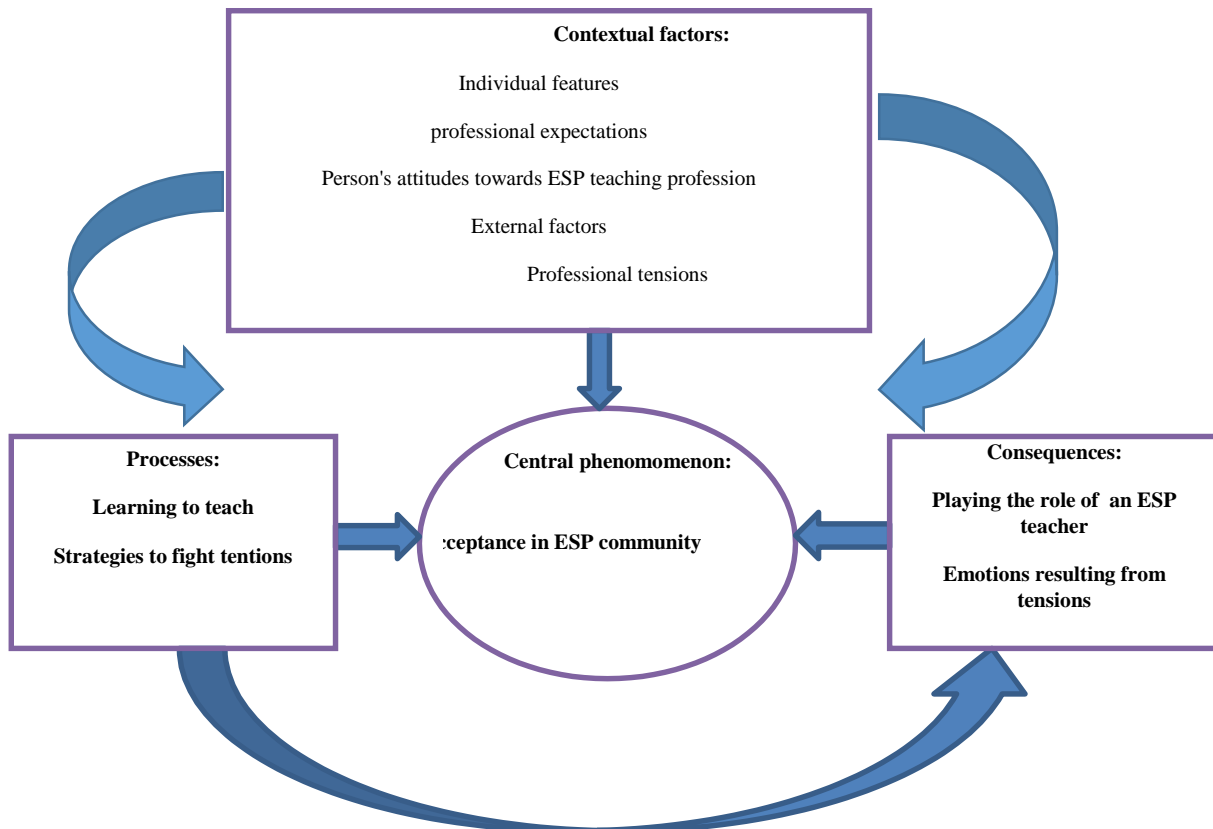
Figure 3. The Formation of an ESP Instructor's Professional Identity

5. Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

The purpose of the current study was to propose a model of medical ESP instructors' professional identity as well as the elements of their professional identity. To this end, the researchers continued in-depth interviews with the participants until they achieved theoretical saturation. Then, the collected data were analyzed based on Corbin and Strauss' (2015) model of grounded theory.

The findings of the study revealed that the first category in the contextual factors was individual characteristics, which is composed of interests, talents, and the personal characters of a person. This finding is in line with Motallebzadeh and Kazemi's (2018) study. Their study found a significant relation between professional identity and factors such as experience and personal characteristics. In addition, Day, Elliot & Kington (2005) asserted that not only teachers' personal lives and emotional and practical aspects of teaching play a role in the formation of teachers' professional identity but also personal features of teachers like their self-esteem and interest play a part in teachers' professional identity construction.

The second contextual factor that emerged in this study was teachers' professional expectations. Individuals begin the entrance into any job with some expectations. The participants of this study stated their expectations in the forms of empowerment, the expected organizational atmosphere, and job satisfaction. This variable is associated with attitude towards the profession of teaching variable. Based on the findings, the participants considered theoretical education programs in the forms of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, textbooks analysis, along with the practical practice of teaching as the most important factors in their future profession. The recruitment of university instructors depends on some capabilities that part of them must be created during the university's study period. It seems that the match between educational materials (which are offered in the pre-teaching preparation courses) and the teachers' required skills is the most important professional expectation of teachers in order to empower them. These findings are consistent with the findings of

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Hersi's (2018) study. After examining the EFL courses provided for Saudi EFL teachers, they expressed the main problem of the teachers in this way that most important and sensitive responsibilities of an EFL teacher such as class management and teaching skills have not been taught in the curriculum. In addition, student teachers did not consider the available practical courses in the university to be sufficient for their future teaching profession.

The second sub-category about tachers' professional expectations is their expected organizational atmosphere in the college and university. They expect a supportive atmosphere, especially in the early years of their practice in the college and university, and to enjoy the support of experienced teachers. One of the important factors in reducing the stress of novice teachers in the first months of their practice is the supportive programs of the university and colleagues. In this situation, more experienced teachers play a constructive role in supporting new teachers, and they can provide helpful advice for them. These supportive programs can help novice teachers acquire the necessary skills and adjust themselves to the new environment. In addition to supportive programs, new teachers expect to face a scientific atmosphere in the university and department and to see that their colleagues are carrying out research about the educational issues and problems of the university and department. They also expect the organizational programs and facilities to prepare the ground for them to perform these activities. The result of this study corroborates the results of Smagorinsky, Moore, Cook, Jackson, & Fry (2004) and Flores and Day (2005) studies. They consider the existence of a rich scientific environment in the university as necessary for developing the faculty members' professional identity.

The next contextual factor in the formation of teachers' professional identity is external factors, which include: patternability, family education, similar teaching experiences, motivation, and the attitude of society towards the teaching profession. This variable is directly related to individual characteristics, professional tensions and learning to teach. This finding confirms the finding of Freese (2006) study. He found that the realities of the teaching profession as one of the external factors play a role in teachers' perceptions of their identity. In addition, Ghanizadeh and Abedi Ostad (2016) emphasized the role of educational theories as an effective external factor on the teacher's professional identity. Moslemi and Habibi (2019) defended this idea that professional identity is one of the elements of social identity.

The gained experiences during the schooling, the concept of how to teach, and the ability to judge the patterns of good and bad teachers enable the future teachers to build a predefined concept about the thing that creates the person a teacher (Johnson, 2009). On the other hand, another aspect of identity lies outside the school and in one's family and social roles. Family expectations and relatives can become sources of motivation or tension and pressure on a person's sense of his identity (Day & Kington, 2000). A similar teaching experience causes teachers accept the traditional teaching methods of their good teachers and do not have a solid student-centered teaching pattern. However, schooling memories were not the only things that participants pointed out as the cause. The findings revealed that the teaching level of the teachers, especially those of experienced teachers have influenced their attitudes. With these results, the following implications are offered.

1. In the recruitment and training of teachers, their emotional, cognitive, and social features should be explored as the determining factors of identity.

2. Teachers' beliefs can play a vital role and can have a positive or negative effect on their performance. Therefore, planning to deepen positive beliefs or changing the negative beliefs seems necessary.

3. Important results of this study are the need to know the life history of a person, his schooling experiences, pre-service education, teacher's workplace, and in particular the culture the university

and college and its influence on the formation of professional identity. Based on this fact, teacher educators should be allowed to research on these issues.

4. Given the important role of teachers' beliefs on their professional identity, opportunities and activities should be designed in teacher education programs that make it possible to bring to the surface the previous beliefs of the teachers and give this opportunity to the teachers to reflect on these beliefs. If teacher educators could bring the pre-perceptions of the student teachers to the surface, they would be the source of a lasting impact.

5. Overall, the findings of this study can be a preliminary for the preparation of development programs for EFL teachers in order to have a successful transition to ESP practice.

Every study suffers from several limitations. First, in qualitative research, the participants may not express all of their experiences. This was beyond the control of the researcher. Nevertheless, the researcher tried to control it through creating an effective relationship. Second, due to the complexity of the human subject, like all the social science studies the collected data in this study might have suffered from some degree of pollution. Third, even though the findings of the current study suggested significant evidence for the nature of ESP instructors' professional identity, obtaining more insights into the process of ESP instructors' professional identity formation could be obtained through a longitudinal study. To put it in a nutshell, as ESP instructors' professional identity is a multidimensional phenomenon which encompasses social, cultural, and managerial factors of teachers conducting the current study in a short period of time (about six months) was difficult.

Future studies can be conducted by employing a different research approach (e.g. ethnographic research and mixed methods research) and a different instrument (e.g. an observation) because of the complexity nature of professional identity. Second, the differences between professional identity of ESP instructors' male and female can be investigated. Third, the differences between university, school, and English language institute teachers' professional identity can be examined as the other subject. Fourth, the differences between experienced and novice ESP instructors' professional identity can be researched as another subject.

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