



VISUALS SPEAK: Using drawings to unravel perceptions of the language teaching profession

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Abstract

Agency and professional development are highly linked to the teachers' professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Apart from that, teaching beliefs and assumptions might have an immense impact on one's perceptions of the teaching profession, thereby influencing practices and behaviors. For this reason, uncovering how teacher identity is formed could be helpful to highlight views and concerns regarding professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers. With this in mind, in this present study, the drawings and memos obtained from the in-service and senior pre-service EFL teachers were investigated and the visual content analysis was adopted to gain an insight into their understanding of the teaching profession. Consequently, the findings illustrated that perceptions of pre-service and in-service EFL teachers are mainly centered around teachers' attitudes towards learners and teacher roles.

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1. Introduction

Erik Erikson says: "In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity." In a word, identity defines who you are, what you like/detest, and what you approve/disapprove. Shortly, a human being collects or discards some particulars of life throughout his life and forms the identity of himself. Essentially, identity is mainly based on one's personal beliefs, values and needs. It evolves frequently through gaining experiences, lessons drawn from the past and changing perspectives as a result of interpersonal relations. The expectations of others and self might also bring about an identity change. Briefly, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions are incorporated into identity development.

One may have multiple identities; that is to say, the identity could belong to personal and professional roles and responsibilities. For example, while one can have a parental role in his family life, he could be in the administrative position in his job. Although these

identities could work in congruence with each other, they may sometimes be in conflict, thereby dominating one another.

Specifically speaking of professional identity, teachers do not come to the teaching settings with a blank slate; in other words, they have varying beliefs and values about how teaching and learning happen and they rely on the personal and professional experiences brought by them (Gabrys-Barker, 2010). Therefore, teacher identity development cannot be deemed as unchanged. Coupled with the shifting educational developments and trends, the teachers' own approaches to the educational practices also change, which may subsequently influence teacher identity. For this reason, it is unique and it develops over time.

In this present study, the conceptualization of teacher identity for pre-service and in-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers was investigated; therefore, the findings would benefit to the field of study since teachers' understanding of the profession, their own stance towards learners, and the challenges posed by the contextual settings could be uncovered.

2. Literature review

2.1. Language teacher identity

Longman Exams Dictionary (2006) defines the word 'identity' as "the qualities and attitudes that a person or group of people have, that make them different from other people" (p.759). Identity is focused on someone's traits and/or behaviors which are peculiar to them. This uniqueness might stem from physical features, capabilities, skills such as special abilities and social positions (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Essentially, identity may stumble upon the past, now, or the future (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012) which means that identity is formed through a continuous pursuit of change. In parallel, teacher identity is not static; on the contrary, it seeks a dynamic process where the beliefs, assumptions and roles with regard to teaching practices are fragile and exposed to a frequent change.

Teacher identity encompasses a broader concept regarding varying cultural and social roles as a result of interactions with colleagues and learners (Richards, 2008). Varghese, Morgan, Johnson and Johnson (2005) state that teacher identity is multiple, inconsistent and it is strongly linked to the social, cultural and political background, and that it is built and sustained through establishing an interaction. In other words, teacher identity is not one and only; contrarily, it stands on various identities. According to Pennington and Richards (2016), top-down instructional implementations such as teaching in accordance with a fixed syllabus or a course book could pose some constraints on the teaching process and cause teachers to undertake different roles and responsibilities, thereby creating a conflict for teachers. This could form different identities that teachers do not like to have,

but the contextual settings may force teachers to be engaged in making certain accommodations. In the same vein, Reeves (2018) indicates that a teacher could define himself as a communicative language teacher and at the same time he might be a supporter of grammar-based teaching. In line with this, one can conclude that a teacher might be assigned various identities as a result of the educational limitations, experiences, and circumstances.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) put forward that emotion is a part of self, so it is intertwined with identity, indicating emotions play a key role in identity development. That is to say, identity construction has an affective aspect; the attitudes, feelings, and perceptions might compel teachers to perform some behaviors or discard them, thereby resulting in decision-making process. Therefore, developing an insight into the teacher identity is beneficial for drawing a well-established frame for teacher development (Olsen, 2008). Knowing teachers' opinions, values, and beliefs in relation to teaching practices might spark a broader understanding of the dynamic nature of the profession, which might be helpful to pinpoint the pitfalls in educational practices, improve the conditions and provide guidance for effective teacher development.

As seen, in this frame, language teacher identity is handled through incorporating different aspects regarding teachers' language knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, educational contexts where the teaching is conveyed, teachers' personal views in relation to teaching practices, and their attitudes towards learners including learner-teacher interaction. Thus, it will be relevant to note here that there are certain factors to be considered for teacher identity construction. In a word, a teacher, whatever his ideals are, might develop several identities that contradict with his assumptions and expectations, which may be resulted from educational policies, cultural framework, and teachers' own gainings from educational background or experiences.

According to Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000), 'teaching context', 'teaching experience', and 'the biography of the teacher' are the main factors which are estimated to have an impact on teachers' perceptions of professional identity. In short, teacher identity is closely related to the teaching environment, teaching experience and personal understanding and perceptions of teaching practices and decision-making processes. These factors are elaborated by Pennington and Richards (2016) and they list the competences which help for creating language teacher identity as follows:

1. Language-related identity: This refers to the language proficiency of the language teacher; that is to say, as the foreign language teaching process includes both a subject to be taught and a medium through which that language is communicated, the language teachers are supposed to be equipped with certain language skills.
2. Disciplinary identity: It includes the content knowledge including principles, methods and approaches in conjunction with language teaching pedagogy.

3. Context-related identity: Varying instructional settings and conditions are tantamount to language teacher identity. According to Pennington and Richards (2016), there are two kinds of conditions: a) favoring conditions that refer to ideal teaching contexts in terms of class population, instructional aids, etc., and b) disfavoring conditions including disadvantageous situations for teaching such as growing class size or lack of school equipment. Consequently, identity may be developed by considering these conditions.

4. Self-knowledge and awareness: It is related to the personal beliefs, goals and values with regard to teaching.

5. Student-related identity (Student knowledge and awareness): This dimension of identity refers to the teachers' attitudes and reflections towards learners.

As the language teacher identity has several aspects, Pennington (2015) molded frames of teacher identity including 'Practice-centered frames' and 'contextual frames'. As the frames reveal, practice-centered dimension includes 'instructional', 'disciplinary', 'professional', 'vocational' and 'economic'; on the other hand, contextual frames are in relation to 'global', 'local' and 'sociocultural' facet of language teacher identity ("Practice Centered Frames" & "Contextual Frames"). To start with components of practice-centered frames, the instructional identity is closely linked to teacher roles, instructional methods that the teachers adopt, and teacher-student relationships. The second component, which is disciplinary identity, involves the specific field of study which the teacher has a liking or inclination for. The professional identity is improved through attending professional organizations which provide support and facilitate collaboration among members. Additionally, professional identity refers to the experience gained over years and collegial relations that colleagues build as a result of sharing and exchanging those experiences. While vocational identity is about how much a teacher is committed and attached to his profession, economic related aspect of teacher identity is in relation to the rewards, professional status, academic practices one attends, and economic factors for choosing the profession. Apart from practice-centered frames, there are also contextual frames covering global, local and sociocultural aspects. The global side of the teacher identity refers to the teachers' experiences with and inclination towards international arena such as cultural and linguistic diversity, the global status of English and international practices of instruction. On the other hand, local identity is related to the contexts posed by the institution, society and country, and teacher knowledge regarding the constraints by those contexts. Additionally, the sociocultural identity is linked to a teacher's all-embracing sociocultural stance in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. Overall, teacher identity framework offered by Pennington (2015) is quite comprehensive and it is covered broadly since the identity is considered from several dimensions.

Apart from the aspects specific to teacher identity development with regard to vocation, teacher knowledge, student-related factors, instructional settings and so forth, Richards (2008) emphasizes native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) teachers bear

different teacher identities. He says that NS teachers are mostly preferred by language learners and they are seen superior to NNS teachers. For this reason, NNS teachers may feel inferior and incompetent.

To conclude, teacher identity encompasses a broader and complicated concept, and could not be maintained steadily as there are so many facets to be considered including personal and professional dimensions. Being drilled by the demands of students, administrative staff at school and workload, a language teacher, regardless of being a NS or NNS, possibly forms different but unique teacher identities. Developing an understanding of the teacher identity and investigating the link bolstered between identity and related factors may be of concern for enhancing and improving teacher development. Some internal or external dimensions affecting identity formation including administrative implementations by the government or local educational bodies, educational settings, collegial environment, teachers own perceptions with regard to their competences and profession could be primarily highlighted in order to enhance teacher motivation and efficacy.

3. Method

3.1. Purpose of the study

The main aim of the present study is to investigate how pre-service and in-service EFL teachers conceptualize the identity through teaching profession and document the differences in perceptions, if any.

3.2. Research design

In order to investigate the personal perceptions regarding language teacher profession for pre-service and in-service EFL teachers, the participants were asked to draw what it means to become a language teacher and their drawings were accompanied by writing memos on what they figured. For this reason, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is generally used on small samples to explore the personal experiences and perceptions with regard to any event or action (Smith & Osborn, 2003) was employed as a research design in this present study. That is to say, the drawings and the memos about the content of the drawings were analyzed and interpreted via IPA comprehensively.

3.3. The setting and participants

21 senior students studying English Language Teaching (ELT) department at a state university in Turkey and 21 in-service EFL teachers teaching in different cities across Turkey attended in this present study. The participants were selected by employing convenience sampling as it was considered to enable participant availability. The main reason why the senior students was recruited only for the study was that they took the 'School Experience' course in the 2018-2019 fall semester. To put it simply, the senior students were assumed to be more familiar to the school setting as they were engaged in observing English lessons and interacting with language students, language teachers and

administrative staff already, which could increase the credibility in collecting data with regard to personal perceptions of being a language teacher. Some brief information about the in-service EFL teachers was illustrated in the following table:

Table 1. Information about the in-service EFL teachers

Teaching experience	f	%
1-5 years	13	61.9
6-10 years	7	33.3
11 years and above	1	4.8
Total	21	100

The table pointed out that the majority ($N=13$; 61.9%) had teaching experience between 1-5 years. Few of them ($N=7$; 33.3%) taught English for 6-10 years whereas only 1 (4.8%) participant had at least 11 years of teaching experience.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The pre-service and in-service EFL teachers were asked to draw about what was being a language teacher like and to write short notes about the content of the drawing. In a word, drawings were used as the main data collection method which was supported by memos in order to interpret the visual data briefly and the participants were told that the quality of their drawings would not be considered and that the content would be focused (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011). Thus, the participants were assured that they could be comfortable while drawing. The draw-and-write technique is considered as exploratory and useful as it might be used for many research fields (Mair & Kierans, 2007).

As for the data analysis procedure, the drawings and the memos collected from participants were analyzed through open-coding. The qualitative data derived from visual and verbal data were coded, the codes were compared with each other and, subsequently, they were classified under certain categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). To note, inter-coding reliability was employed through hiring one field expert apart from the researcher in order to conduct the coding process.

4. Findings

The qualitative data emerging out of visual and verbal data were coded and classified under 4 main categories: 1) Concerns regarding the teaching profession, 2) Concerns regarding the context, 3) Attitudes towards students/learners, and 4) Roles of EFL teachers. The first category, concerns regarding the teaching profession, is related to the attitudes of EFL teachers towards the profession, expectations from the profession and job satisfaction. Secondly, the concerns regarding the context imply the conditions regarding

the teaching settings including class size, school climate, instructional equipment, collegial relations, instructional methods and techniques. The third category which is related to attitudes towards students/learners is linked with the opinions and teacher behaviors towards students and language learners. Finally, roles of EFL teachers, as the name suggests, denote what teachers think their responsibilities and duties in instructional settings are.

4.1. Findings regarding the pre-service EFL teachers

In this part, the categories derived from the data regarding the pre-service EFL teachers were highlighted in the following table and presented with some sample drawings illustrated by the participants:

Table 2: Conceptualizations of pre-service EFL teachers

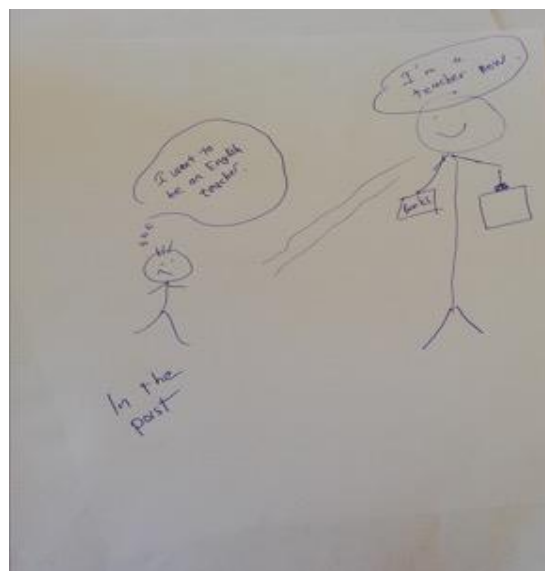
Categories	f
Concerns regarding the teaching profession	5
Concerns regarding the context	4
Attitudes towards students/learners	12
Roles of EFL teachers	10

As the table above presents, the identity is mostly related to the attitudes towards students/learners ($N=12$), which is followed by the roles of EFL teachers ($N=10$). In the following part, the sample illustrations depicting each category were shown.

- **Concerns regarding the teaching profession**



Drawing 1-Participant 3



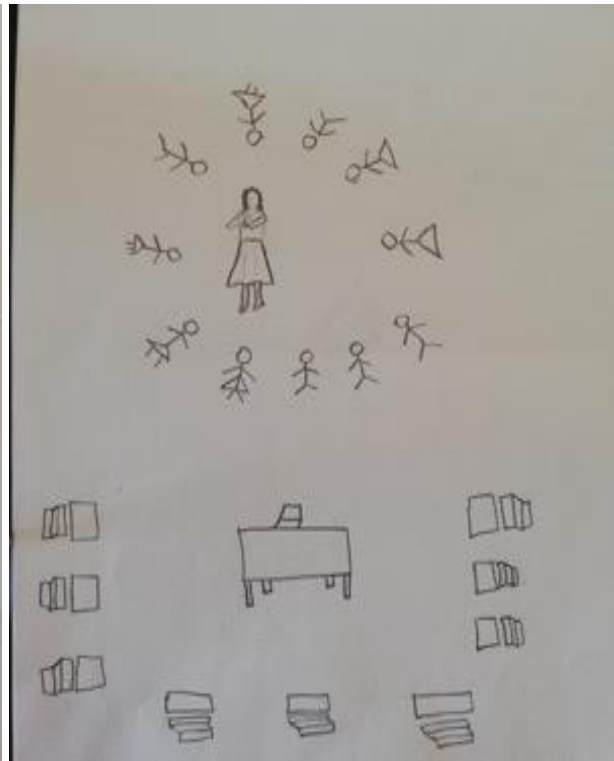
Drawing 2- Participant 8

In the first drawing, a language teacher is depicted as awaiting before the computer for the exam results to be announced. In Turkey, the ELT department graduates are required to sit for a national standardized exam which is Public Service Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) in order to be appointed to work as teachers in state schools. As the person in the drawing is waiting for his/her KPSS score; s/he might look distressed. On the other hand, in the second drawing, the participant would like to talk about his/her dream job as teaching English. S/he drew himself/herself as being a little kid saying “I want to be an English teacher” and then drew his/her current position indicating s/he is a teacher right now. Therefore, it could be clear that the participant dreamt of being a language teacher and that s/he is willing to pursue a career in teaching.

- **Concerns regarding the context**



Drawing 3- Participant 9



Drawing 4-Participant 2

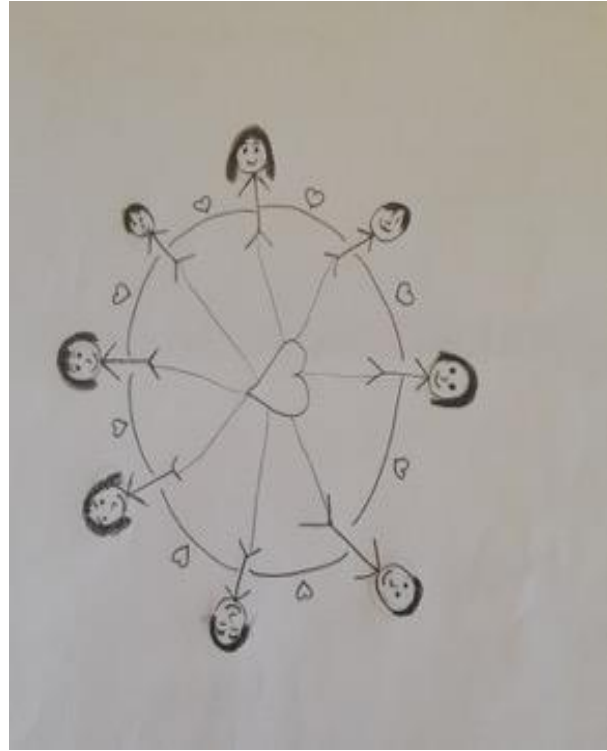
In drawing 3, the class size is small and each student is studying on his/her own computer, which indicates the setting is technologically equipped. The teacher image is shown as bigger than the students and she is caressing the students' head, which is a sign of affection and care. Similarly, in drawing 4, a teacher who interacts with her students in a well-designed sitting arrangement that promotes communication is seen. Circled by her

students, she is placed in the center and the interaction seems to be built positive and collaborative.

- **Attitudes towards learners/students**



Drawing 5-Participant 17



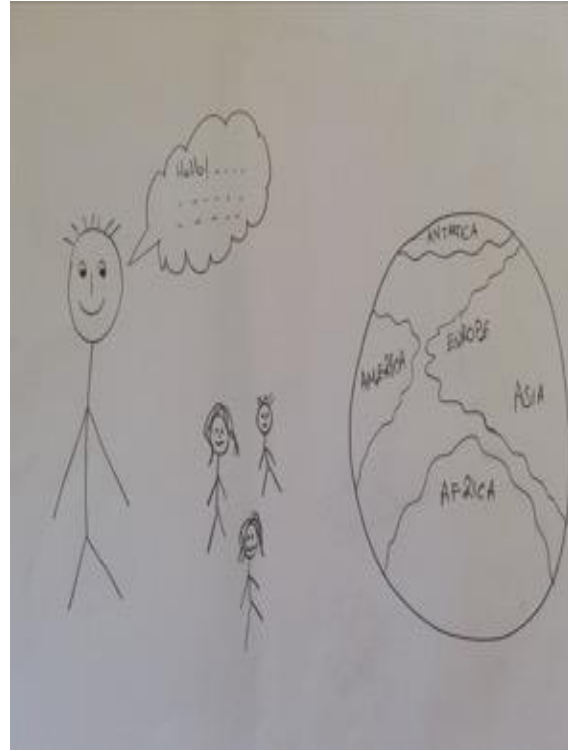
Drawing 6-Participant 16

In drawing 5, a teacher is depicted as opening the door to a student and holding an umbrella for his student to keep the rain away. The drawing appears to be designed in a metaphorical sense and describes a teacher who supports and helps his students. Likewise, the positive attitude is shown in drawing 6, as well, indicating teaching is loving all of the students. The heart icon ‘♥’ is inserted among the kids quite often, expressing the love and affection for them.

- **Roles of EFL teachers**



Drawing 6-Participant 7



Drawing 8-Participant 7

Within the sub-category of roles of EFL teachers, two sample illustrations were presented. In drawing 6, the participant draws a language teacher who enlightens the world with her knowledge. Additionally, in drawing 8, a language teacher who helps his/her students to become world citizens is presented by the participant. To put it simply, the students come from different continents but speak a common language, which is English, and the teacher helps them to interact with each other by teaching them English to make them belong to the world community.

4.2. Findings regarding in-service EFL teachers

In this part, findings derived from the visual and verbal data were shown and presented with some sample produced drawings.

Table 3. Conceptualizations of in-service EFL teachers

Categories	f
Concerns regarding the teaching profession	3
Concerns regarding the context	4
Attitudes towards students/learners	5
Roles of EFL teachers	12

As the table above shows, identity is mostly related to the roles of EFL teachers ($N=12$) for in-service teachers. In the following part, some illustrations depicting each category were shown.

- **Concerns for teaching profession**



Drawing 1-Participant 16 (10 years of teaching experience)



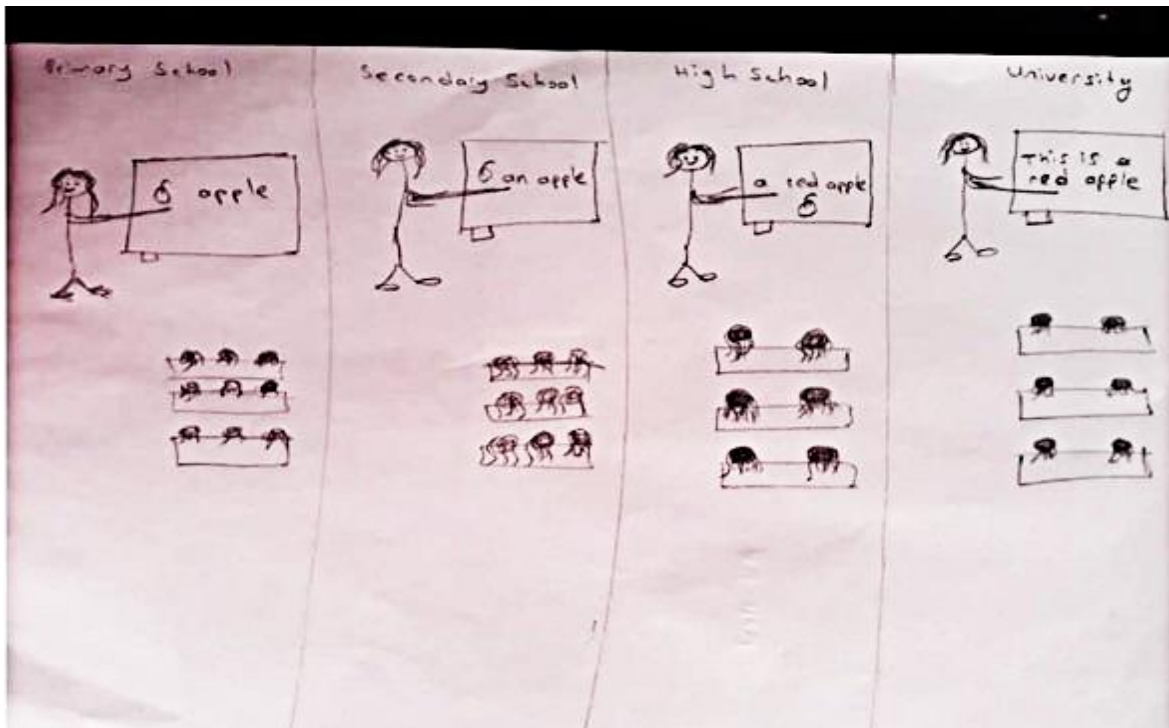
Drawing 2-Participant 19 (2 years of teaching experience)

In both of the drawings above, it appears that language teaching is seen as discovering the world through learning world cultures.

- Concerns related to the context



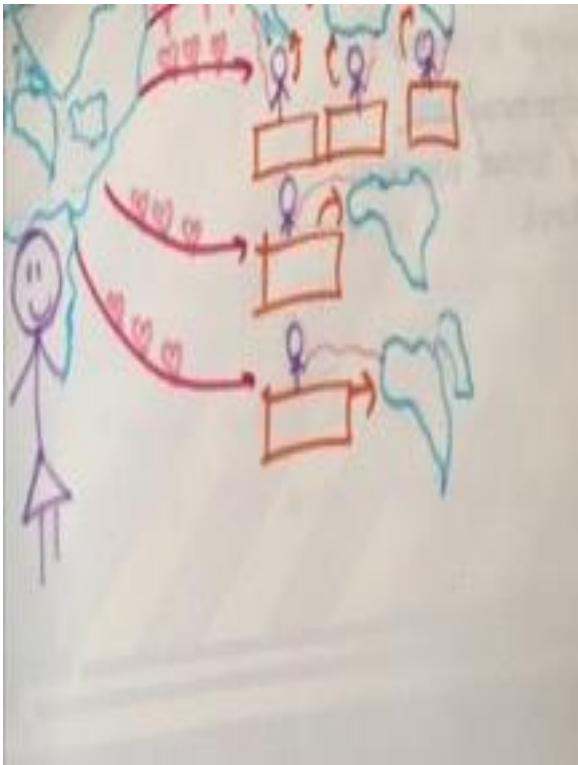
Drawing 3- Participant 21 (8 years of teaching experience)



Drawing 4- Participant 5 (10 years of teaching experience)

In drawing 3, the participant drew a language teacher who voiced contextual constraints in terms of students (“I wanna willing students but they don’t believe vitality of foreign languages”), time (“I’ll develop my speaking skills and enrich my vocabulary but I dunno how and I haven’t enough time”), administration (“I hope, one day Ministry can include English teachers or foreign language teachers in serious language facilities”), and training (“Constructivism shouldn’t focus only on students training but on lecturers too. That’s why I feel myself inadequate”). The participant wrote about these contradictions in speech balloons and called them as ‘utopic dreams’, implying that s/he believes they will not come true. In a similar vein, in drawing 4, a language teacher who teaches the same subject using the same materials to all of the grades is portrayed. The participant indicates in the memo verbally that teaching the same lesson content by using the materials which serve the same purpose all the time hinders a teacher’s improvement and causes burnout. It seems that the uniformity of the material use is highlighted in this drawing.

- **Attitudes towards students/learners**



Drawing 5- Participant 15
(having 2 years of teaching experience)



Drawing 6- Participant 10
(Having 5 years of teaching experience)

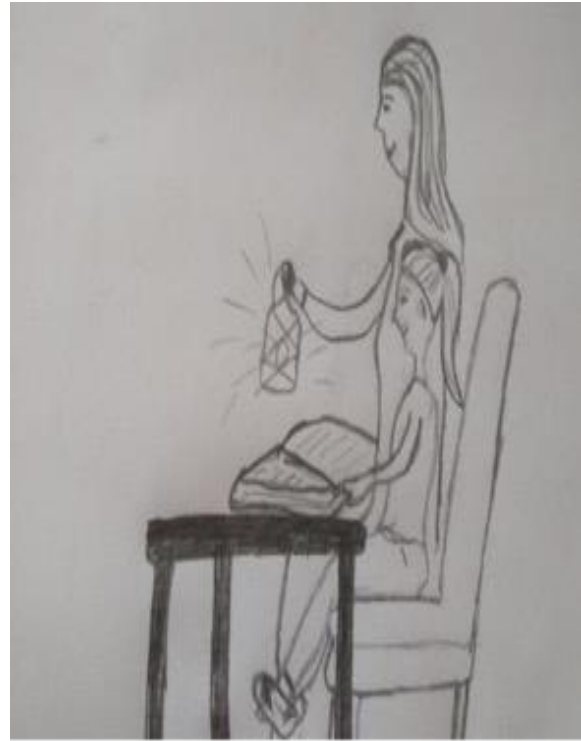
Drawing 5 reveals that the teacher has a positive attitude towards students, which is clear from the heart icon ‘♥’. It seems that the teacher teaches different cultures to

students with love and care through English. As for drawing 6, the participant indicates in the memos that each English learner should be treated as someone who is a newbie to the learning, thereby implying that the teacher should be welcoming with tolerance.

- **Roles of EFL teachers**



Drawing 7- Participant 3
(Having 2 years of teaching experience)



Drawing 8- Participant 8
(Having 1 year of teaching experience)

As drawing 7 illustrates, language teacher is seen as a guide since the participant notes that “Teacher is a compass”. On the other hand, in the drawing on the right-hand side, the teacher holds a light, implying that the teacher is a knowledge provider and she enlightens the students.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The findings generally revealed that teacher identity perceptions are mainly based on teacher attitudes towards students/learners ($N=12$) and teacher roles for pre-service EFL teachers ($N=10$) whereas in-service EFL teachers associate it with teacher roles ($N=12$) and teacher attitudes towards students/learners ($N=5$). For pre-service and in-service EFL teachers, teacher roles mainly consisted of ‘knowledge provider’, ‘guide’ and ‘supporter’. These findings are in parallel with the current literature (Asmalı & Çelik, 2017; Göksel & Söylemez-Rakıcıoğlu, 2018; Kavanoz, 2016) where the role of knowledge providing is one of the main roles ascribed to language teachers.

Specifically, while all pre-service EFL teachers concentrated on ideal classroom settings which are convenient for language teaching, in-service EFL teachers indicated contextual constraints. This could be due to the fact that the teacher candidates have not started the profession yet and that they are not acquainted with the real field, therefore, they just focus on the ideal components. Since in-service EFL teachers have already entered into the field, drawing on the experiences they have, they mention the constraints and issues. This distinction could be attributed to the gap between theory and practice; that is to say, pre-service teachers own the theories, which means they theoretically know the pedagogical implementations; however, practice speaks! Teaching practices in real classroom settings for a period of time may change the way how you perceive the profession in terms of opportunities, constraints and several other factors including parental collaboration, administrative support and collegial relationships.

One of the striking facts emerged out of the drawings is that pre-service EFL teachers ($N=12$) emphasized attitudes towards learners in their drawings and notes more than in-service teachers did ($N=5$). Accordingly, an EFL teacher should be loving, caring, supportive and collaborative for the learners. This could be due to the fact that teacher candidates are well-equipped with the pedagogical theories emphasizing the affective dimension of teaching and that the in-service teachers are engrossed in the real settings with varying student profile, which would make them be cautious in this aspect.

Furthermore, for both parties, it could be said that the concerns regarding the profession are generally positive. In-service EFL teachers mentioned their job was quite valuable since it could provide world knowledge; they teach but they learn at the same time. On the other hand, pre-service EFL teachers generally thought that English teaching was their dream job. Only 1 teacher candidate highlighted the centralized examination administered for teacher candidates in Turkey. One could infer that the examination could cause stress and pressure for the teacher candidate. According to Salinas (2017), there are micro and macro contextual factors which impact EFL teacher identity. Micro contextual factors consist of student-teacher relationship, work climate, sense of appreciation and need for professional improvement whereas macro contextual factors are mainly related to the demands by educational authorities such as national examination, bureaucracy, teacher assessment, instructional programs, and supervision. That said, the central examination implemented for pre-service teachers could be handled within the macro-contextual factors affecting teacher identity conceptualization.

To conclude, representation of teacher identity for pre-service and in-service EFL teachers seems to be dependent on certain dimensions related to the profession, context, attitudes towards students/learners, and teacher roles. That is to say, teacher identity is exposed to the influence of one's core beliefs, perspectives, conceptions and labels that s/he affixes to the issues. For this reason, it is open to change and is molded continuously.

6. Implications

The results of the current study have important implications for understanding how teacher identity is represented for pre-service and in-service EFL teachers. Firstly, for social studies, apart from quantitative data, visual data could also be used as non-verbal cues are incorporated and interpreted for a detailed understanding of the field of study.

The findings derived from this study might help us to conclude that pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' teacher identity conceptions are mainly related to attitudes towards learners/students and teacher roles. In addition to those two components, the concerns related to profession and context are also voiced. In a word, some constraints posed by the contextual factors are indicated by in-service EFL teachers. As previously mentioned, one of the teachers said that s/he would like to have more training opportunities to improve herself/himself while the other one said s/he always teaches the same subject with the same materials all the time, which causes burnout for him/her. Therefore, the major finding is that the language teachers should be encouraged for professional development activities in order to improve their teaching knowledge, skills and practices. These training activities or programs should be available across the country and be molded in accordance with their needs (Arslan, 2018). To add, transnational exchange programs should be incorporated into the professional development process as they may have an impact on professional identity formation (Küçükali, 2017) and encouraging the use of action research may be beneficial for teacher development (Yüce, 2019).

Furthermore, teaching low-level students all the time could hinder teacher development; for this reason, additional courses could be developed for low-performing language students during semester holidays so that their English level could be improved. This might be beneficial for language teachers as well since student achievement will be raised and the lessons could be more challenging by pushing both teachers and students, which could prevent monotonous lessons and teacher boredom.

7. Limitations

This study, like the ones in the social sciences, has some potential limitations. Firstly, teacher identity refers to an umbrella term and covers a broader domain; however, this study addresses to a limited part that is mostly related to how EFL teachers and candidates perceive the profession. For this reason, a comprehensive study could also be conducted in a way that includes other aspects of identity concept. Secondly, the participants of the study were recruited from only one university in Turkey, so the number of participant pre-service and in-service teachers was limited. Therefore, the study could be conducted with a large size of population from different universities and cities across Turkey. Last but not least, this study was carried out by including visual data and memos the participants produced, so some other data collection methods such as observations and

interviews could also be utilized in order to obtain more generalizable results regarding the field of the study.

ENDNOTE

*This study was partly presented at GlobELT 2019: 5th International Conference on Teaching and Learning English as an Additional Language which was held in Kyrenia/Northern Cyprus between the dates of 11-14 April, 2019.

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