A Study of Causal, Strategic, and Consequential Factors in Language Socialization for the Formation of Professional Identity among Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the causal, strategic, and consequential factors in language socialization that contribute to the formation of professional identity among language teachers, with a focus on uncovering how personal experiences, institutional conditions, and social interactions shape teachers' professional selves. The research employed a qualitative, exploratory design based on grounded theory methodology. A total of 11 Iranian EFL teachers and teacher educators with a minimum of five years of professional experience were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, institutional background, and teaching context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Persian or English depending on participant preference, each lasting 45 to 75 minutes. The interview protocol, developed through literature review and expert validation, covered areas such as perceptions of professional identity, institutional influences, and intercultural experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding following Strauss and Corbin's procedures to identify emerging patterns and construct a theoretical framework. The analysis revealed three major categories shaping teacher identity formation. Causal factors included educational experiences, personal characteristics, cultural values, and interactions with peers and colleagues. Strategic factors encompassed professional development activities, reflective practices, organizational support, and the integration of technology and networking opportunities. Consequential factors involved strengthened professional identity, improved teaching effectiveness, increased cultural adaptability, enhanced confidence, and higher job satisfaction, along with broader contributions such as promoting cultural diversity and social solidarity. These categories collectively highlighted the interdependent and cyclical nature of identity construction. The findings demonstrate that professional identity formation among language teachers is a dynamic and multidimensional process rooted in educational, social, and cultural experiences, operationalized through strategic actions, and leading to both personal and professional outcomes. Recognizing identity as a product of language socialization provides critical insights for teacher education, institutional policy, and professional development programs aimed at fostering resilient, adaptive, and sustainable teacher identities.

Keywords: Language teacher identity; language socialization; professional identity formation; grounded theory; EFL teachers; teacher development.

Introduction

The concept of language teacher identity has become a central focus in applied linguistics and teacher education research, given its profound influence on teachers' professional trajectories, pedagogical practices, and long-term commitment to the profession. Identity is no longer seen as a static attribute but as a dynamic, socially constructed, and constantly negotiated

phenomenon shaped by multiple contextual, cultural, and personal factors (1). For language teachers, professional identity is intricately tied to processes of language socialization, which involve learning from educational experiences, institutional cultures, interpersonal interactions, and broader socio-political forces. As teachers navigate these contexts, they continuously reconstruct their sense of self, making identity both a personal journey and a collective experience (2).

Scholarly research has consistently emphasized that professional identity formation is a multidimensional process that involves both individual agency and institutional structures. Teachers' identities are formed and reshaped by the conditions under which they work, the expectations of society, and the opportunities for professional growth available to them (3). Language socialization serves as a critical mechanism in this process, offering teachers the chance to internalize values, negotiate roles, and adapt their practices in ways that align with both personal and institutional demands. Importantly, identity is not merely a reflection of professional roles but also a site of contestation and negotiation where teachers make sense of their experiences and define their pedagogical orientations (4).

Recent studies underscore the significance of contextualized experiences in shaping language teacher identity. For example, novice teachers often enter the profession with expectations shaped by pre-service education, only to encounter tensions when their lived experiences diverge from institutional realities (5). The adjustment process, characterized by negotiations between personal beliefs and institutional mandates, is essential for identity development and long-term professional sustainability (6). Similarly, exposure to multicultural and transnational teaching contexts highlights how identity is continuously redefined, especially as teachers learn to reconcile linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical differences (7).

Teacher identity is also influenced by the broader educational and social environment, including issues of inclusivity, equity, and social justice. Research indicates that teachers working in marginalized or underrepresented contexts often need to navigate unique challenges, such as addressing students' diverse needs while maintaining their professional integrity (8). Social justice-oriented perspectives have pointed to the disruptions that inequities and power imbalances cause in teacher identity, making it clear that identity formation is deeply intertwined with moral and ethical dimensions of teaching (9). These insights highlight the importance of considering not only the pedagogical but also the socio-political aspects of identity development (10).

The dynamic interplay between teachers' personal experiences and structural conditions creates both opportunities and challenges for professional identity construction. Teachers often draw upon their past educational experiences and cultural backgrounds as resources to inform their practice, but these same elements may also generate tensions when institutional expectations conflict with personal values (11). Such tensions are especially evident in contexts where socio-political pressures, language ideologies, or institutional norms constrain teachers' autonomy. In these circumstances, collaborative reflection and peer interaction become powerful tools for negotiating identity and alleviating tensions (12).

Professional development and ongoing learning opportunities are frequently cited as essential in fostering sustainable teacher identities. Studies reveal that targeted training, reflective practice, and professional support networks contribute to teachers' ability to adapt to changing contexts while maintaining a strong sense of self (13). Continuous learning not only equips teachers with updated skills but also strengthens their capacity to resist professional burnout and disengagement (14). Furthermore, engagement in critical professional development activities, such as conferences, workshops, and collaborative projects, enables teachers to build professional networks and expand their perspectives, thereby reinforcing their identities as evolving practitioners (15).

The narratives of teachers themselves provide valuable insight into the lived realities of identity formation. For example, teachers' autobiographical accounts reveal how professional identity emerges from the intersection of personal histories, linguistic repertoires, and institutional contexts (16). Novice teachers, in particular, often experience a heightened sense of vulnerability as they reconcile their emerging professional selves with external expectations (17). These stories illuminate how

identity is not only about professional roles but also about constructing a coherent sense of self that aligns personal values with professional responsibilities (18).

Identity construction also extends beyond the classroom and into broader cultural and digital spaces. The advent of digital learning environments and the increasing reliance on online platforms during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have created new dimensions of identity, where teachers negotiate their professional presence in virtual spaces (19). This digital dimension reflects the multifaceted nature of identity, demonstrating how technological and social transformations reshape the ways teachers view themselves and are perceived by others. Moreover, the incorporation of digital tools into teaching practices requires teachers to adapt their roles, thereby reinforcing the fluid and evolving character of professional identity (20).

Cultural identity also plays a central role in shaping professional self-concept. Teachers working in multilingual and multicultural environments must navigate the complexities of cultural adaptation and integration, often using these challenges as opportunities for professional growth (21). Their ability to bridge cultural differences not only enriches classroom practices but also deepens their understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of language teaching (22). In this way, professional identity formation is closely connected to cultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, and a commitment to promoting inclusivity (23).

At the same time, identity development is not free from contradictions and tensions. Teachers may experience conflicting pressures between institutional demands, personal beliefs, and broader socio-cultural expectations (24). These conflicts can result in role anxiety, professional uncertainty, or dissonance in teaching practices (20). However, they also present opportunities for critical reflection and identity reconstruction, allowing teachers to redefine their roles in ways that better align with their values and contexts (2). In this sense, identity formation can be seen as both a challenge and a resource for professional development.

The importance of identity formation in teacher education cannot be overstated. Research demonstrates that fostering strong and sustainable professional identities contributes to teacher retention, enhances job satisfaction, and promotes more effective teaching practices (15). Teachers with well-developed professional identities are better equipped to navigate cultural diversity, address learners' needs, and contribute to institutional development. Moreover, strong identities empower teachers to engage in leadership roles and advocacy, positioning them as active agents of change in education (10).

Taken together, the literature reveals that professional identity among language teachers emerges from a complex web of causal, strategic, and consequential factors that are both deeply personal and socially situated. Identity is shaped by past experiences, current practices, and future aspirations, all of which interact dynamically within institutional and cultural contexts. It is also deeply influenced by broader structural conditions such as policies, ideologies, and socio-political realities (9). Exploring this phenomenon through the lens of language socialization provides an opportunity to better understand the processes through which teachers construct, negotiate, and sustain their professional identities.

This study aims to contribute to this growing body of research by investigating the causal, strategic, and consequential factors involved in language socialization and the professional identity formation of language teachers.

Methods and Materials

This study adopted a qualitative and exploratory design, with the primary goal of uncovering the causal, strategic, and consequential factors that contribute to language socialization in the formation of professional identity among language teachers. The qualitative approach was considered most appropriate, as it emphasizes depth over breadth and allows the researcher to capture the complex, context-rich, and nuanced narratives of participants' lived experiences. In alignment with this objective, purposeful sampling was employed to select 11 participants, all of whom were experienced Iranian EFL teachers

and teacher educators with at least five years of professional teaching experience in language institutes or universities. This selection ensured that the participants possessed a meaningful level of engagement in teaching practices and professional contexts, which enabled them to provide insightful perspectives on identity formation processes. Diversity was carefully sought in terms of gender, teaching context across both private and public institutions, and institutional backgrounds, thus enabling the data to represent a wide range of viewpoints and experiences.

Although the number of participants in this study may appear modest from a quantitative perspective, the decision was methodologically grounded in the principles of qualitative inquiry and guided by the concept of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation was achieved when no new themes, categories, or insights emerged from additional interviews. In this study, saturation occurred by the tenth interview, with the eleventh interview conducted to confirm the stability and consistency of the emergent patterns. The final coding indicated that the data collected were comprehensive enough to build a grounded and coherent conceptual framework, forming the theoretical basis for subsequent model development. Thus, the sample size of 11 participants was not only sufficient but also methodologically justified in terms of producing a rich and detailed understanding of professional identity construction.

Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews, which allowed for both consistency across participants and flexibility to explore individual narratives in depth. The interview protocol was developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature and designed to elicit insights into teachers' professional identity, socialization processes, and the influences shaping their professional selves. The protocol consisted of ten main open-ended questions, each supported by several probes and follow-up prompts to encourage elaboration and ensure depth in responses. The questions were structured around themes such as teachers' evolving perceptions of their professional identity, the impact of institutional culture and social norms, the role of interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and learners, the influence of teaching experience and professional training programs, and the conflicts or tensions encountered in their professional journeys.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, depending on the depth of responses, and was conducted either in Persian or English, according to the participant's preference. This bilingual approach ensured that participants could express their thoughts and emotions in the language they felt most comfortable with, thus enhancing the authenticity and richness of the data. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for detailed analysis. To ensure content validity, the interview protocol was reviewed by two university professors in applied linguistics and one expert in qualitative methodology. Their feedback led to minor revisions, primarily involving clarification of wording and refining the alignment of probe questions with the study objectives. A pilot interview was also conducted to assess clarity, flow, and effectiveness, after which final adjustments were made before initiating full-scale data collection.

The data were analyzed using the principles of Grounded Theory, a methodology particularly well-suited for exploring processes and generating theory directly from the lived experiences of participants. The analysis followed the coding procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), comprising three interrelated stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, the transcribed interviews were examined line by line to identify key concepts, categories, and codes that represented the participants' perspectives. This initial stage generated a large number of codes, capturing the richness and variety of responses. During the axial coding stage, connections were established among the codes by clustering them into higher-order categories, exploring relationships between causal conditions, contextual factors, strategies, and consequences. This stage allowed the researcher to identify how teachers' experiences of socialization interacted with institutional, interpersonal, and personal dynamics in shaping professional identity. Finally, in the selective coding stage, the emerging categories were refined and integrated into a coherent theoretical framework. The core category was identified, representing

the central phenomenon of identity construction through language socialization, around which other categories were systematically related.

This multi-stage coding process ensured that the findings were both deeply grounded in the data and theoretically structured, providing a comprehensive account of the complex interplay of causal, strategic, and consequential factors in the development of professional identity among language teachers. By adhering to the rigor of Grounded Theory procedures and validating the emerging categories against the data until saturation was reached, the study succeeded in generating a model that reflects the lived realities of teachers while offering theoretical insights for future research and practice.

Findings and Results

The findings of this qualitative exploratory study are presented in accordance with the coding process that began with open coding, continued through axial coding, and culminated in the integration of themes into selective categories. This section first introduces the results related to the causal factors category, which emerged as one of the central dimensions of the model of language socialization in the formation of professional identity among language teachers. The analysis of interview transcripts revealed a wide range of influences, conditions, and experiences that were clustered into this category. The causal factors highlight the roots and underlying conditions that initiate, shape, and direct the process of identity construction for language teachers.

Table 1. The axial codes related to the "causal factors" category

Open codes	Axial codes
Educational experiences	Causal factors in the pattern of language socialization in the formation of language teachers' professional identity factors
Social and cultural environment	
Interaction with colleagues (communications and interactions with teachers and educational staff)	
Learning models	
Feedback and evaluation	
Teaching methods	
Education and training courses	
Feedback from students	
Educational experiences	
Job experiences	
Educational workshops	
Specialized courses	
University programs	
Participation in school activities	
Cultural values	
Teaching and learning experience	
Innovation and professional development	
Colleagues and social networks	
Personal characteristics and motivations	
Cognitive ability	
Personality and emotional characteristics	
Family	
Friends and peers	
Communication and pluralism	
Collaboration in educational teams	
Educational philosophies and learning theories	
Career and professional challenges	
Access to resources and administrative and social support	
Influence on interpersonal interactions	
Create effective communication	
Exchange of experiences	
Adapting to culture and values	

Accepting multiple identities
Social and cognitive effects
The formation of self-awareness
Responding to learning needs
Self-learning and flexibility

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that a wide range of open codes were condensed into the axial code of causal factors in the pattern of language socialization in the formation of language teachers' professional identity. These open codes cover diverse domains, reflecting how identity construction is rooted in multi-layered influences. Participants emphasized that their educational experiences, including university programs, specialized courses, and educational workshops, played a decisive role in shaping their sense of professional self. Similarly, teaching methods, feedback and evaluation, and direct responses from students were highlighted as primary learning triggers that shaped their evolving professional identity.

The analysis also revealed the importance of social and cultural environments, with participants noting that cultural values, family, friends, and peers had a substantial impact on their professional orientations and beliefs. Furthermore, interactions with colleagues and social networks were reported as vital sources of socialization, offering opportunities for collaboration, exchange of experiences, and adaptation to institutional norms. These interactions not only provided professional learning but also helped teachers in negotiating multiple professional identities and adjusting to diverse teaching contexts.

Another dimension that surfaced strongly was the role of personal characteristics and motivations, such as cognitive ability, emotional traits, flexibility, and self-learning capacity. Teachers frequently linked their resilience in facing career challenges and their pursuit of innovation and professional development to these inner resources. Access to resources and support systems, both administrative and social, also featured prominently in shaping the conditions under which identity formation occurred, particularly by facilitating or constraining opportunities for growth and self-awareness.

Overall, the causal factors identified in this stage underscore that professional identity construction among language teachers is not a linear process shaped by one domain but a multifaceted phenomenon arising from the interplay of educational, social, cultural, personal, and institutional influences. The integration of these factors provides a comprehensive understanding of the roots of language teachers' identity formation, setting the foundation for examining the subsequent strategic and consequential dimensions in the process of professional socialization.

Table 2. The axial codes related to the "strategic factors" category

Open codes	Axial codes
Educational planning	Strategic factors in the pattern of language socialization in the formation of language teachers' professional identity factors
Pre-service training and preparation	
Vision and educational philosophy	
Clear definition of mission and goals	
The importance of moral values and principles	
Continuous professional development	
Developing teaching skills	
Organizational support and guidance	
Networking and cooperation	
Evaluation and feedback	
Positive organizational culture	
Establish relationships with other teachers and professionals in this field	
Identification and use of educational resources	
Participate in online groups	
Participation in conferences	
Counseling and social support	
Effective and continuous evaluation and feedback	
Inspirational educational leadership	
Choosing the right educational resources	

Books and online resources
Mass media
Social interaction
Use of learning strategies
Active learning techniques
Simulation of real situations
Self-regulation and evaluation
Setting learning objectives
Development of linguistic culture
Familiarity with history and culture
Understanding subcultures
Use of technology
Language learning applications
Creating supportive environments and access to appropriate resources
Training and professional development
Specialized training programs
Continuous training
Communication and cooperation
Teamwork and interaction
Organizational culture
Support innovation and creativity
Supportive learning environment
Determining career and professional goals
The centrality of students in the learning process
Development of relational skills
Practical experiences and internships
Application of learning
Supervision and advice
Support and cooperation with colleagues
Creating supportive environments
Acquiring new knowledge and skills
Teaching about cultural diversity
Attention to the needs of learners
Using new educational technologies
Creating opportunities for leadership and participation
Encouraging educational leadership
Participation in institutional decisions

The results presented in Table 2 highlight the strategic factors that language teachers identified as central in shaping their professional identity through socialization processes. Unlike causal factors, which reflected foundational influences and conditions, strategic factors emphasize the intentional actions, organizational supports, and developmental pathways that enable teachers to strengthen and sustain their professional roles. Participants described educational planning, pre-service training, and continuous professional development as central strategies that provided structure and direction to their career trajectories. They also underscored the role of organizational culture, supportive leadership, and institutional guidance, which created an enabling environment for growth, innovation, and collaboration.

The narratives revealed that active learning techniques, simulation of real teaching situations, and the use of technology were practical strategies that enhanced teachers' skills and adaptability. Similarly, networking and cooperation through conferences, online groups, and teamwork were seen as crucial avenues for sharing knowledge and fostering collective growth. Teachers also stressed the importance of self-regulation, setting professional goals, and ongoing evaluation, which helped them align their practices with both institutional expectations and personal teaching philosophies. Furthermore, exposure to cultural diversity, attention to learners' needs, and the development of relational skills were highlighted as strategic mechanisms that deepened teachers' sense of professional identity and responsiveness to the complexities of language education.

Overall, the findings indicate that strategic factors function as the practical and organizational mechanisms that translate foundational influences into professional growth. They serve as bridges between the broader causal conditions and the eventual consequences of identity construction, enabling teachers to actively engage in continuous learning, adapt to evolving educational contexts, and consolidate their professional identity.

Table 3. The axial codes related to the "consequences" category

Open codes	Axial codes
Strengthening the sense of professional identity	Consequences of language socialization model in the formation of professional identity factors of language teachers
Development of communication skills	
Deep understanding of the learning process	
Professional growth and personal development	
Career advancement opportunities	
Increase job satisfaction	
Reducing the rate of leaving the job	
Improving morale in the workplace	
Changes in teaching approaches	
Creating professional networks	
Adaptation of cultural identity	
Responding to students' needs	
Increasing teachers' self-confidence	
A sense of self-worth	
More effective decision making	
Influence on teaching style	
Developing a sustainable professional identity	
Improving the quality and method of teaching	
Increasing motivation and self-efficacy	
Improving teaching skills	
Developing language skills	
Increase language proficiency	
Improve communication skills	
Formation of cultural identity	
Formation of personal and social identity	
Communication between cultures	
Career and education opportunities	
Access to better education	
Strengthening society and social solidarity	
Increasing social solidarity	
Facilitate the exchange of information	
Cultural transformation	
Experience cultural changes	
Promoting cultural diversity	
Reducing challenges and tensions (identity challenges - language tensions)	
Using innovative methods	
Adapting to learning needs	
More commitment to the profession	
More passion in learning	
Strengthening relationships with students	
Creating a positive learning environment	
Development of critical thinking	
Development of managerial and teaching skills	
Identify and manage challenges	
Dealing with linguistic and cultural challenges	
Influence of culture and society	
The effect of education	
Influence of personal experiences	

The findings summarized in Table 3 demonstrate the broad spectrum of consequences that emerged from the process of language socialization in shaping the professional identity of language teachers. Participants consistently emphasized that this process led to a strengthening of professional identity, which was manifested in greater confidence, self-worth, and sustainability in their professional roles. Teachers described tangible outcomes such as career advancement opportunities, improved teaching approaches, enhanced communication and relational skills, and higher levels of job satisfaction and motivation. Beyond individual benefits, the consequences also extended to broader social and cultural dimensions, including the promotion of cultural diversity, the strengthening of social solidarity, and the facilitation of intercultural communication. Additionally, teachers reported that their professional growth through socialization contributed to better responsiveness to learners' needs, improved classroom environments, and more effective decision-making in educational contexts. Overall, the consequences category highlights that language socialization not only nurtures teachers' personal and professional development but also fosters institutional improvement and cultural enrichment, thereby reinforcing the central role of identity formation in language education.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the causal, strategic, and consequential factors that shape language socialization and contribute to the professional identity formation of language teachers. Through grounded theory analysis of semi-structured interviews with Iranian EFL teachers and teacher educators, three overarching categories were identified. Causal factors represented the foundational influences that initiated and guided identity construction, including educational experiences, personal characteristics, cultural values, and social networks. Strategic factors reflected the deliberate processes, institutional structures, and practices that teachers employed to sustain and strengthen their professional identity, such as pre-service and in-service training, reflective practices, continuous professional development, and the use of technology. Finally, consequential factors encompassed the outcomes of these socialization processes, ranging from strengthened professional identity and enhanced communication skills to improved teaching practices, increased cultural adaptability, and greater job satisfaction. Together, these findings highlight the dynamic and multidimensional nature of teacher identity construction, showing that it emerges from the interplay of personal, institutional, and cultural elements over time.

The identification of causal factors is consistent with earlier research, which has shown that professional identity development is deeply rooted in teachers' educational and experiential backgrounds. For instance, the importance of educational experiences and training programs resonates with findings that pre-service preparation and early teaching experiences significantly shape novice teachers' sense of self (6). Similarly, the role of social and cultural environments aligns with studies that emphasize how cultural values and institutional norms condition the professional trajectories of teachers (8). The significance of interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and peers corroborates research that highlights the relational dimension of identity formation, where collaborative reflection and social networks act as crucial mediators (12, 18). These findings confirm that identity is not constructed in isolation but emerges through participation in communities of practice, consistent with conceptual frameworks that view teacher identity as a process of negotiation across personal and social dimensions (1).

The results further revealed that strategic factors play a central role in enabling teachers to navigate the complexities of professional life. Teachers identified planning, organizational support, and continuous professional development as key strategies for maintaining and strengthening their professional identities. This reflects earlier findings where strategic engagement in reflective practice and professional learning was shown to enhance resilience and adaptability in the face of institutional pressures (13, 15). The use of technology, online resources, and digital platforms as strategic tools also resonates

with research on the growing importance of digital identity in teaching contexts (19). In particular, the findings emphasize that participation in professional communities, whether through conferences, online groups, or institutional decision-making, reinforces teachers' sense of belonging and professional legitimacy. This mirrors results from studies showing that such networking opportunities expand teachers' agency and enable them to position themselves as active contributors to educational reform (2, 10). Moreover, the emphasis on inclusivity, social justice, and responsiveness to students' needs reflects a broader trend in identity research that highlights the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching (9).

The category of consequential factors underscores the significant outcomes of language socialization for teachers' professional lives. Teachers reported gains in confidence, job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and cultural adaptability, along with strengthened commitment to their profession. These outcomes are in line with studies showing that well-formed professional identities contribute to teacher retention and reduce the likelihood of burnout and attrition (15). Teachers also highlighted how identity development led to deeper intercultural competence and cultural integration, which is consistent with findings that teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts fosters the construction of flexible and adaptive professional selves (21, 22). Additionally, the reported improvement in communication skills, teaching methods, and decision-making abilities aligns with studies linking identity development to enhanced pedagogical practices (16, 17). Importantly, participants described identity formation as a sustainable process that extends beyond the classroom to impact broader social and cultural contexts, echoing perspectives that see teacher identity as intertwined with cultural diversity and social solidarity (3, 23).

A notable contribution of this study is its illumination of the interdependence of causal, strategic, and consequential factors. Causal factors provide the foundation, strategic factors operationalize the process, and consequential factors represent the outcomes of identity formation. This cyclical relationship confirms that professional identity is not only shaped by past and present experiences but also continuously reconstructed in light of future aspirations and achieved outcomes (4, 20). The findings support the view that identity is both a product and a process—simultaneously grounded in historical experiences and dynamically evolving through ongoing professional engagement (7). In this sense, the study expands on previous conceptual frameworks by empirically demonstrating how these three dimensions interact to create a holistic and sustainable model of professional identity formation.

The results also shed light on the tensions and contradictions that teachers face in constructing their professional identities. Participants reported challenges such as reconciling institutional expectations with personal values, adapting to cultural differences, and managing role conflicts. These findings echo earlier research on teacher identity tensions, which show that socio-political pressures and institutional mandates often clash with teachers' professional autonomy and sense of self (11). Role anxiety and uncertainty, particularly among novice teachers, further reinforce the view that identity development is fraught with emotional and cognitive struggles (20). However, the findings also suggest that these tensions can serve as catalysts for reflection and growth, enabling teachers to critically examine their roles and redefine their professional selves in ways that align more closely with their beliefs and contexts (24).

The emphasis on ethical and social justice dimensions in teacher identity is another significant outcome of this study. Participants described how their professional identities were shaped by commitments to inclusivity, equity, and responsiveness to student diversity. These perspectives resonate strongly with recent scholarship highlighting the need for identity frameworks that incorporate moral and ethical self-formation (9, 10). For many teachers, identity was not only about professional roles but also about advocating for students, challenging inequities, and promoting cultural diversity. This suggests that identity formation in language teaching cannot be understood without considering the broader socio-political and ethical contexts within which teachers work (14).

Another important dimension highlighted by the findings is the role of professional communities and networks in sustaining identity. Teachers emphasized the value of interactions with colleagues, participation in professional development activities, and engagement in communities of practice. These findings align with studies that stress the relational aspect of identity formation, showing how peer collaboration and institutional support foster resilience, confidence, and long-term commitment (12, 18). The results also point to the transformative potential of leadership and mentorship, where inspirational educational leaders and supportive institutional cultures enable teachers to flourish. This resonates with research showing that positive organizational environments foster innovation, creativity, and professional fulfillment (8, 15).

Taken together, these findings make several contributions to the literature on teacher identity. First, they confirm and extend previous research by demonstrating how causal, strategic, and consequential factors interact in the identity formation process. Second, they highlight the importance of socio-cultural, ethical, and digital dimensions in shaping contemporary language teacher identities. Third, they provide empirical evidence of how identity development contributes not only to individual growth but also to institutional improvement and cultural transformation. These insights underscore the need for holistic approaches to teacher education that address both the personal and contextual aspects of identity formation (5, 13).

While the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of language socialization and professional identity construction, it is not without limitations. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 11 participants, all of whom were Iranian EFL teachers or teacher educators. Although theoretical saturation was achieved, the findings may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different national, cultural, or institutional contexts. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to biases such as selective recall or social desirability. Third, while the grounded theory approach allowed for in-depth analysis, the absence of longitudinal data limits the ability to capture how identities evolve over extended periods of time. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution, with recognition of the contextual specificities of the participants.

Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across different cultural and institutional contexts, thereby enabling comparative analyses of teacher identity formation. Longitudinal research designs would also be valuable for tracing the evolution of professional identity over time, particularly as teachers navigate key career transitions or changes in institutional policies. Additionally, integrating multiple data sources such as classroom observations, reflective journals, and digital artifacts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction processes. Research could also explore the intersectionality of teacher identity with factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-political positioning, further deepening our understanding of the complexities of identity negotiation in language teaching.

In terms of practice, the findings underscore the importance of designing teacher education programs that address both the causal foundations and strategic supports necessary for identity formation. Institutions should prioritize reflective practices, mentorship, and opportunities for professional collaboration, enabling teachers to construct resilient and adaptable professional identities. Providing continuous professional development and integrating digital tools can further strengthen teachers' capacity to navigate contemporary challenges. Equally important is fostering supportive organizational cultures that value inclusivity, social justice, and innovation, ensuring that teachers feel empowered to grow both professionally and personally. Ultimately, recognizing teacher identity as a dynamic and multifaceted construct can guide policies and practices that sustain teachers' commitment, enhance teaching quality, and promote cultural enrichment in education.

Authors' Contributions

Not applicable.

Declaration of Interest

The author of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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