Identity and Motivation of English Language Teachers in Pakistan: Insights from a Contextual Perspective

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Abstract

This study investigates the identities and motivation of English language teachers at universities in Lahore, Pakistan, focusing on how these elements influence each other and change over time. Through interviews with 30 teachers, the research identified key aspects of their identities, including socio-political, academic, and professional dimensions, and noted differences based on academic background, public and private sector, and qualification. Teachers highlighted the importance of personality traits like humor and care, as well as skills like using instructional technology. They were motivated by the prestige of English in Pakistan and their connection to the global English-speaking community. The study also observed that experience leads to professional growth, linking teachers' identities to the broader status of English, hinting at linguistic imperialism.

Introduction

Research on English language teacher identity has grown recently, highlighting two key aspects: visible factors like classroom teaching and interactions, and invisible factors such as beliefs and emotions (Richards, 2006; Clarke, 2008). Teacher identity begins to form when individuals choose teaching as a profession, evolving through training and classroom experience (Britzman, 2001). This identity is influenced by participation in professional communities, commitment to their roles, and engagement in broader networks (Wenger, 1999). Additionally, teachers' beliefs and practices are shaped by their own experiences as students, with these preconceptions playing a significant role in their professional development (Borg, 2006). Pakistan, with a population of around 207.8 million, is a multilingual and multicultural country. About 36.9% of the population lives in urban areas, while 63.1% resides in rural regions (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The largest cities include

Karachi (15.7 million), Lahore (12.2 million), and Islamabad (1.1 million). Ethnically, Punjabis make up 44.7% of the population, followed by Pathans (15.4%), Sindhis (14.1%), and other groups. The majority (96.4%) are Muslim, with Sunnis being the largest group. The literacy rate stands at 59.7%, and education accounts for 2.8% of the GDP (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2010, 2015, 2017). British colonization played a key role in spreading English in Pakistan, where it was used to create an elite class aligned with British values (Boampong, 2005; Hickey, 2004). After Pakistan's independence, English remained a dominant language, integral to education and society (Jilani, 2009; Shamim, 2008). Although only 3-4% of Pakistanis are fluent in English, around 17.29% are literate in the language (Rahman, 2007). English is compulsory in schools and the medium of instruction at universities (Hafeez, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2009). However, teaching methods are often outdated, and there is dissatisfaction with the English proficiency of graduates (Shamim, 2011). However, the demand for English teachers has grown, making it a valued and lucrative profession in Pakistan. English teachers play critical roles across various disciplines, contributing significantly to education and research (Yasmin & Islam, 2018).

Problem Statement

This study explores the identity and motivation of English language teachers in Pakistan. A teacher's identity significantly influences their teaching approach, yet it is often overlooked, leaving a critical area for improving education underexplored. This understanding is especially vital in second or foreign language classrooms, where socio-cultural and political factors continuously impact teachers' and students' perspectives on language, learning, and the broader world.

Research Question

- What are the academic and professional identities of English language teachers in Pakistan?
- How do these identities impact the motivation of English language teachers?
- How do the identities of English language teachers evolve with their professional experience?

Significance of the Study

The formation of an English language teacher's identity is a complex process involving the development of personal and professional beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and teaching practices. This study aims to contribute to the existing research on English language teacher identity and motivation in several ways. It focuses on the transformation of teachers' identities, examines the factors involved in shaping these identities, and explores the socio-political influences on teacher identity and motivation in Pakistan. The findings could be valuable for developing training programs for English language teachers and may stimulate discussions among administrators, policymakers, and educators regarding teachers' academic and professional development.

Framework

The Douglas Fir Group (DFG) framework, developed by researchers across disciplines, examines how cultural (macro), institutional (meso), and classroom (micro) factors influence language learning and teaching

(DFG, 2016). It highlights the interconnectedness of these levels, particularly how they shape teacher identities and language practices. While the framework traditionally focuses on students, this study emphasizes the importance of teacher identity within this structure, suggesting that effective language learning occurs when classroom practices are supported by both institutions and society.

Literature Review

Applying identity concepts in education involves understanding how identities are shaped by social roles and interactions within a community (Mead, 1934; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Norton (1997) highlights that identity in education reflects how individuals see their connection to the world and their opportunities. Educational settings bring together diverse cultures, which influences both teachers' and learners' identities (Vagan, 2011). Identity theory, by Stryker and Burke, explains that identities are formed through assigned roles within social contexts. In schools, teachers' identities are shaped by their interactions and the expectations of colleagues and administrators. Situated identity theory further explores how community norms influence individual behavior and identity (Alexander & Wiley, 1981). The formation of an English language teacher's identity is a complex, evolving process shaped by their experiences and training. This identity develops as teachers move from being students to active members of a teaching community, influenced by their participation and interactions (Britzman, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Teachers' core identities and sub-identities affect their teaching approaches and self-perceptions (Gee, 2001). Their beliefs about teaching, influenced by personal and external factors, significantly impact their instructional practices (Thompson, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Teachers' knowledge is dynamic and grows through their classroom experiences, reflecting both general principles and specific contexts (Grosman, 1995). Attitudes shape behavior and impact teaching. Positive attitudes boost teaching motivation, while negative ones hinder it (Allport, 1935; Triantis, 1971; Oxford, 2001). Humor can enhance the learning environment by making students more comfortable (Smuts, 2016). Caring, seen as a moral duty, supports student potential and builds relationships (Pang, 2005). Moreover, teachers' beliefs about teaching are often deeply held and resistant to change (Pajares, 1992). Research shows that while these beliefs usually influence classroom practices, inconsistencies can arise between what teachers say and do (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Li & Walsh, 2011). Teacher training programs focus on language proficiency and pedagogical methods but may not fully integrate with broader educational theories, affecting teachers' professional development and identity (Johnson, 2009). Additionally, distinguishing between literature and linguistics backgrounds can impact teachers' professional identities and perceptions of their skills (Kaplan, 1999; Bartels, 2005). Prospective English teachers with language or linguistics qualifications are less common and are often overshadowed by those with literature degrees (Blake & Shortis, 2010). University programs might offer minimal focus on language teaching methods, especially if staff expertise is in literature (Bluett et al., 2004; Giovanelli, 2014). Teachers frequently express concerns about their grammar knowledge and may even develop a negative attitude towards it, preferring literature-

focused aspects of teaching (Sangster et al., 2013; Watson, 2012). The identity of English teachers is strongly linked to their passion for the subject and their belief in its transformative power (Beijard, 1995; Goodwyn, 2002). This passion drives their motivation to teach and significantly influences their professional identity (Ellis, 2003; Goodwyn, 2010).

Professional identity begins to form during teacher training and is shaped by personal and social factors (Winslade, 2002; De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002). Difficulty in balancing personal and professional identities can lead to high attrition rates among new teachers (Alsup, 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Research on English language teacher attrition shows that around 16% leave or switch institutions within five years (Gray & Taie, 2015). Alsup (2006) and Rodgers and Scott (2008) explore how teachers' identities develop and change over time. Brewer (1991) links teachers' sense of belonging to social identity theory, which influences their self-perception and institutional relationships. Hogg (2006) defines institutional identity as teachers' connection to their teaching organizations, a concept expanded by Ghafar Samar et al. (2011) to reflect teachers' evolving sense of belonging within their institutions. Danielewicz (2001) emphasizes that teacher identity involves both self-perception and external recognition. Freeman (2017) supports the idea that high language proficiency is crucial for effective teaching. Pavlenko (2003) found that teachers identify with various roles, often struggling with expectations of native-level pronunciation (Block, 2014). Beckett and Stiefvater (2009) and Lee (2010) highlight that foreign teachers may feel inadequate due to perceived gaps in sociolinguistic skills and language proficiency.

Harris (1982) argues that teachers' social class does not determine their professional behavior but suggests that teachers from working-class backgrounds might retain their class identities in their teaching roles. He controversially claims that the pursuit of professionalism has distanced teachers from other workers, a view disputed by Lawn and Ozga (1988), who believe professionalism can enhance teachers' autonomy. Religion's role in language teaching is examined on both societal and individual levels. Christianity's influence on global English teaching has been scrutinized for potential missionary motives (Edge, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). On a personal level, a teacher's religious beliefs can shape their identity, though it's problematic to generalize Christian teachers as part of broader conversion efforts (Varghese & Johnston, 2007; Wong, 2009).

Motivation is crucial for both learners and teachers, influencing their engagement and persistence (Dörnyei, 2001). Key motivational factors for teachers include intrinsic motivation (personal fulfillment), extrinsic motivation (job conditions), autonomy (freedom in teaching methods), relationships (supportive work environment), self-acceptance (achieving goals), and institutional support (resources and guidance) (Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008; Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt, 2001).

Research Method and Design of the Study

This study used qualitative methods to explore complex social issues in depth, unlike quantitative methods that often oversimplify (Heigham & Croker, 2009). Qualitative research seeks to understand human behavior from the

participants' perspectives and involves methods like semi-structured interviews, which provide rich, detailed insights (Nunan, 1992; Heigham & Croker, 2009). This approach is flexible and inductive, aiming to generate insights from data rather than testing pre-existing theories (Heigham & Croker, 2009; Consumes, 1997). Bryman (2004) narrates that qualitative research requires a mindset of transparency and flexibility. Interviews are a key qualitative tool, offering detailed and personal data about respondents' beliefs and motivations (Bhandari, 2020). Despite criticisms from quantitative-focused views, interviews are seen as valuable for co-constructing knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mann, 2011). The study used a 24-statement interview guide to explore English language teachers' identities and motivation in a Pakistani context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed insights, though the researcher controlled the process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The sample included 30 teachers from ten universities in Lahore, selected using convenience sampling. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved identifying and organizing themes from the data (Nunan, 1981).

Findings, Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Most interviewees chose English language teaching willingly and felt supported by their families, viewing it as a global career (Mead, 1934; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Some entered the profession out of necessity, showing a shift in their identity over time (Varghese et al., 2005). Private sector universities were noted for better incentives and training, enhancing teachers' skills,

while public sector institutions faced challenges and limited resources. Despite the benefits of private sector jobs, many preferred the job security of public sector positions (Marx, 1976; Ovetz, 1996). The promotion of English by private institutions was seen as a marketing strategy and a form of linguistic imperialism (Islam, 2018; Norton & Kamal, 2003). Public sector teachers were criticized for inadequate training and resources, affecting their performance, a point also highlighted by Harris (1982), who linked productivity issues to state constraints and job security. Two primary reasons were identified for the emphasis on an English literature background for English language teachers. First, a degree in English literature is often required for college teaching positions, while degrees in linguistics or language are less valued (Giovanelli, 2014; Watson, 2015). This preference reflects a conservative, colonial-era mindset prevalent in Pakistan, which favors literature degrees despite the growing need for language teachers (Blake & Shortis, 2010). Respondents also indicated that both literature and linguistics are crucial for effective English language teaching (ELT) and recommended a more balanced national curriculum. Additionally, foreign-qualified English teachers in Pakistan are given special status due to their international exposure and skills, a preference linked to colonial attitudes and 'white supremacy' (Block, 2014). While foreign degrees are highly esteemed, local teachers may possess comparable abilities (Denardi et al., 2017; Kalaja et al., 2015).

English language teachers generally felt that their role aligns with their personal identity and brings them honor (Danielewicz, 2001). They found social advantages in speaking

English, which enhanced their professional status (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Institutional affiliation was considered important by many, as being associated with prestigious institutions boosts their professional credibility (Hogg, 2006; Samar, 2011). However, some teachers argued that personal intellect and personality, rather than institutional prestige, are more critical for effective teaching. The role of an English teacher extends beyond instruction to include counseling, empathy, and humor, which are vital for engaging students and managing the classroom (Allport, 1935; James, 2004; McNeely, 2015). Teachers also highlighted the importance of caring for students and providing accessible resources (Garza, 2007; Nieto, 2004; Pang, 2005). Many teachers reported a lack of basic training in technology, which hampers their ability to integrate it into their teaching. They recognized the need for technological skills and modern pedagogical techniques to enhance their teaching effectiveness (Kupetz & Ziegenrneyer, 2005). Most respondents stressed the importance of preparation for English language teachers, as being unprepared can quickly damage their reputation (Winslade, 2002 in Cattley, 2007). Professional identity is shaped by social standards and contextual factors, developing notably during the practicum (De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002 in Cattley, 2007; Ten dam & Bloom, 2006).

Some teachers see their role as a sacred duty, intertwining professional and socio-religious identities, reflecting broader influences of religion and ideology on teaching (Varghese & Johnston, 2007; Wong, 2009; Edge, 2003; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). A socio-economic divide exists between teachers from rural and urban backgrounds, affecting their linguistic skills and pronunciation. Wealthier teachers often have better exposure to English, impacting their professional identity (Alsup, 2006; Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). The colonial legacy also affects attitudes toward English, enhancing the status of English teachers compared to those of other languages (Mead, 1934; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). This disparity in treatment between school and university teachers highlights societal biases in Pakistan (Vagan, 2011; Scotland, 2014).

English language teachers often feel honored by their profession, with their identities shaped by both personal perceptions and societal views (Danielewicz, 2001). They see English-speaking skills as providing social advantages and reinforcing their professional identity (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

Intrinsic motivation plays a key role, driven by a personal connection to teaching and the high status of English in Pakistani society (Dörnyei, 2001; Kassabgy, Boraie, & Schmidt, 2001). Many teachers are inspired by their own past educational experiences, which strongly influence their current roles (Johnson, 1999; Danielewicz, 2001). Some teachers view teaching as a legacy and a source of pride, particularly when recognized for their proficiency in English, reflecting the socio-economic prestige associated with the language (Norton & Kamal, 2003; Islam, 2018).

There are differing views on the impact of age and experience on professional identity. While some argue that experience enriches teaching, others emphasize the importance of youthful

energy and enthusiasm (David, 1972). Most teachers agree on the need to integrate literature into language teaching, recognizing the value of evolving teaching methods that include both literature and language (Pajares, 1992; Burns, 1992). This highlights the dynamic nature of professional identity and the influence of pre-service experiences on teaching perspectives (Beijaard et al., 2004). The researcher encountered several limitations in the study. Time constraints and spatial limitations affected the completion of the research. The study also lacked face-to-face interviews and observations of participants. Additionally, the sample size was small due to time restrictions and the impact of the coronavirus, and the study was limited to English language teachers from universities, affecting the generalizability of the results.

The study, which focused on the identity and motivation of English language teachers using a qualitative design, suggests several avenues for future research. Future studies could employ mixed methods or case studies and extend over a longer period to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' identities are formed and transformed. Collecting data at different stages of teachers' careers could provide more insights into the factors influencing identity development. Further research could also explore the impact of teachers' identities on their teaching performance by gathering data from both formal and informal settings where teachers interact regularly. A mixed-method approach could be used, including interviews with teachers and questionnaires from their students. Workshops could be organized to discuss the findings and their implications. Additionally, quantitative research involving larger samples and longitudinal studies could provide a more comprehensive view of how teachers' identities and motivations evolve over time.

The study investigated English language teachers' identities and motivations in Pakistan, focusing on how these factors interact and evolve over their careers.

1. **Teacher Identity:** Teachers showed diverse identities, with many choosing the profession voluntarily and feeling a strong connection to it. Those with English literature backgrounds faced challenges due to a preference for literature degrees over linguistics in hiring, causing difficulties for linguistics-trained teachers. Private sector teachers reported better incentives and training than public sector teachers, who often lacked resources and felt more job security.

2. **Motivation and Professional Identity:** Teachers viewed their profession as prestigious and linked to a global community, enhancing their intrinsic motivation. They felt honored and confident, viewing their work as both a personal and socio-religious duty. Their motivation was influenced by their educational backgrounds and the global importance of English.

3. **Career Progression and Motivation:** Teachers entered the field with high motivation, inspired by past positive experiences. They maintained motivation throughout their careers, feeling a strong alignment between their personal values and their teaching roles. Many viewed teaching as a legacy and felt proud when

4. recognized for their proficiency.

The study suggests that future research should use mixed methods, extend over longer periods, and include diverse data sources to further explore the relationship between teacher identity and motivation and their impact on teaching performance.

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