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EFL Teacher Identity Construction During Online Learning: Challenges, Adaptations, and Pedagogical Implications

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ABSTRACT

The development of online learning and digital technologies has influenced the formation of EFL teacher identity. This literature review investigates the development of EDL teacher identity during online learning. This review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and subtleties of EFL teacher identity construction in the online learning context. The selected studies were collected through a systematic approach. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the unique challenges encountered by EFL instructors during online learning, their adaptation and transformation in identity construction, and the pedagogical implications for effective online language teaching. The results emphasized the importance of addressing challenges, supporting EFL teachers in professional development, and implementing effective teaching methods in online language learning. These findings contribute to the improvement of EFL teacher preparation, pedagogical practices, and online learning support systems.

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1. Introduction

The incorporation of online learning platforms and digital technologies has revolutionized the field of education, including EFL instruction. The global COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online learning in recent years, resulting in a significant shift toward remote teaching and learning environments (Auf & Hamdi, 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Weda et al., 2022). This transition to online learning has presented EFL instructors with unique challenges and opportunities, which have had an impact on the formation and growth of their professional identities. Understanding how EFL instructors construct their identities within the context of online learning is essential for effective pedagogy, teacher development, and student outcomes (Yuan & Liu, 2021; Yaumi et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2019).

Teacher identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct that encompasses the beliefs, values, and roles that educators maintain for their profession and themselves. In teaching English as a foreign language, teacher identity substantially impacts instructional practices, language teaching methodologies, and student interactions (Wijaya, 2022). Nonetheless, the transition to online learning introduces a new set of circumstances that can influence the formation of EFL teacher identity. The virtual environment presents obstacles such as technological requirements, limited nonverbal signals, and altered teacher-student dynamics, requiring EFL instructors to adjust their pedagogical approaches and negotiate their professional identities within this online context.

In the field of English language education, the construction of EFL teacher identity during online learning has emerged as a topic of increasing interest and significance (Aboud, 2020; Sato & Chen, 2021). As the adoption of online learning platforms and digital technologies increases, effective pedagogy and teacher development must comprehend how EFL instructors navigate and construct their professional identities in the online environment. This section summarizes the research literature on EFL teacher identity construction during online learning, highlighting key findings, themes, and theoretical perspectives.

Recently, numerous studies have investigated the factors that impact EFL teacher identity formation in online learning environments (Cheng, 2021; Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018; Ludwig & Tassinari, 2021; Swanti, 2020). These include technological proficiency, pedagogical beliefs, language proficiency, cultural contexts, and prior teaching experience. Research indicates that the proficiency of EFL instructors in using digital tools and their beliefs regarding the

efficacy of online instruction significantly influence the formation of their identities. In addition, cultural factors, such as the teacher's native language and cultural heritage, can influence how EFL instructors perceive and negotiate their professional identities in the online space (Day, 2018).

Aside from those factors, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators face numerous obstacles when constructing their professional identities through online learning (Naz et al., 2023; Urrohimah, 2022; Hichour, 2022). These obstacles include limited nonverbal communication, difficulties establishing rapport with students, adapting instructional strategies to the online environment, and managing technical issues. These studies have highlighted the need for EFL instructors to navigate the virtual space and find ways to surmount these obstacles while maintaining their professional identities.

Up to this point, the transition to online learning requires adjustments and transformations in the identities of EFL teachers. As they navigate the online environment, EFL instructors acquire new skills, roles, and perspectives, according to research. Fallah et al. (2021) stated that to engage and motivate students in the virtual environment, they may need to redefine their roles as facilitators, use different instructional strategies, and alter their teaching approaches. The existing professional identities of instructors are negotiated with the demands and affordances of the online learning environment during the process of identity construction.

It is important to note that online EFL teacher identity formation has implications for pedagogical practices. Studies have demonstrated the significance of providing EFL instructors with professional development opportunities that emphasize the development of technological skills, pedagogical strategies for online instruction, and the promotion of a sense of community in the virtual classroom (Karimi, 2011; Van Ha & Murray, 2021). Creating supportive and collaborative online learning environments that promote student engagement and enable meaningful teacher-student interactions is crucial for EFL teacher identity formation and effective online language instruction.

To date, the literature on EFL teacher identity construction during online learning relies on numerous theoretical frameworks, such as communities of practice, sociocultural theory, and identity theory (Handley et al., 2006; Paul, 2002, Prat & Back, 2013; Steinert et al., 2019). These theoretical perspectives shed light on the social, cultural, and individual processes involved in EFL teacher identity formation and aid researchers in comprehending the complexities and dynamics of identity formation in the online learning context.

Despite the increasing prevalence of online learning in EFL education, a thorough comprehension of how EFL instructors construct their identities during online instruction is required. A systematic review of the existing literature can provide valuable insights into the factors, difficulties, adaptations, and pedagogical implications associated with EFL teacher identity construction in the online learning context. Hence, this review aims to provide a comprehensive comprehension of the complexities and subtleties of EFL teacher identity construction in the online learning context by examining these areas. This review examines and synthesizes the research literature on EFL teacher identity construction during online learning, focusing on the challenges EFL teachers face in constructing their identities during online instruction, the adaptations and strategies teachers use to navigate the online environment, and the pedagogical implications of effective EFL teaching in the digital realm. The findings of this review have implications for EFL teacher training, professional development programs, and online learning environments.

2. Methodology

A systematic approach was used to select databases for the literature review, including Google Scholar and Science Direct (Rossi et al., 2018). These databases are known for their coverage of educational research and relevant disciplines for EFL instruction and online learning. By using these databases, the researchers aim to gather a comprehensive collection of studies on EFL teacher identity construction during online learning.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the selected studies, inclusion criteria were established, specifically focusing on EFL teacher identity formation in the context of online learning. Additionally, to gain a comprehensive understanding of how EFL teacher identity is formed during online learning, studies employing quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as mixed-method approaches, were considered.

The steps to collect the data were as follows. The first step was document retrieval. In this step, the researchers used some related keywords to collect the relevant studies, such as EFL teacher identity and online learning. The studies selected were limited to 2018-2023 publications to provide more insight into the current trends. The second step was data extraction. This step involved systematic collection of relevant information from selected studies, including

authors, publication year, research design, sample characteristics, data acquisition methods, main findings, and theoretical frameworks, for a comprehensive research overview. Tables were used as the instrument.

The next step was data synthesis by using thematic analysis. This analysis method was extensively employed in qualitative research to identify and analyze recurring themes, patterns, and trends in the selected studies (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). This method helps analyze data and identify key themes in EFL teacher identity construction during online learning. Some stages were taken in the analysis process, including data familiarization through repeated readings, note-taking, and memo-writing. The themes were then identified and grouped, and their boundaries and content were defined. Thematic maps or models were created to illustrate the relationships between themes, and the narrative was written to provide illustrative examples.

After extracting and synthesizing the data, a thorough analysis was conducted. The findings were analyzed and organized into a narrative that reflects the challenges, adaptations, influencing factors, and pedagogical implications associated with the construction of EFL teacher identities during online learning. This analysis will provide a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of the landscape of research and facilitate the identification of key themes and implications. In the concluding phases of the systematic review, the implications of the findings were discussed and contextualized within the context of EFL teacher education and online language instruction. In addition to teacher training, professional development, and effective pedagogical practices in online learning environments, the ramifications will also address other crucial areas. Based on the synthesized findings, recommendations were made to support the identity construction of EFL instructors and improve online pedagogy. These recommendations will guide the development of effective strategies and initiatives that contribute to the development of EFL teacher identity formation during online learning.

3. Result and Discussion

The results and discussion of the answers to the research questions are presented in the following.

3.1. Challenges in EFL Teacher Identity Construction during Online Learning

In the literature, some challenges faced by EFL instructors during online learning have been identified when constructing their professional identities. The lack of nonverbal communication in the virtual environment was identified as a significant obstacle. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reported having difficulty interpreting and responding to nonverbal signals, which are essential for comprehending students' comprehension, engagement, and emotions (Naz et al., 2023; Urrohimah, 2022). This limitation posed difficulties in establishing meaningful teacher-student relationships and adopting instructional strategies based on visual and kinesthetic signals. As a consequence, instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) had to investigate alternative modes of communication and devise novel approaches to encourage student engagement and participation.

Interestingly, another challenge was establishing rapport with students in an online environment (Hichour, 2022; Zhang, 2023). EFL teachers said that they needed time and interaction to build rapport and trust with their students. However, the virtual environment frequently hindered the development of rapport because it lacked the informal interactions that are common in traditional classrooms (Sulaimi, 2022). EFL teachers needed to establish opportunities for personal interactions and create a supportive online learning environment to tackle this obstacle.

3.2. Adaptations and Transformations of EFL Teacher Identity during Online Learning

EFL teacher identity as a consequence of online learning. EFL instructors were capable of redefining their duties and responsibilities to accommodate the online environment. They transitioned from being the primary providers of knowledge to facilitators of learning, assisting students in navigating online resources and engaging in collaborative activities (Celebi & Eraldemir-Tuyan, 2022). This transformation necessitated that EFL instructors acquire new technological skills, such as using learning management systems, video conferencing tools, and digital resources effectively.

In addition, EFL teachers' pedagogical approaches exhibited adaptability (Raducu & Stanculescu, 2021). They investigated and utilized a variety of online instructional strategies and tools to create interactive and engaging learning environments. Collaborative activities, online discussions, virtual simulations, and multimedia resources were integrated into the online learning environment to promote student engagement and improve language learning outcomes. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have also adopted a more learner-centred approach, tailoring instruction to meet the specific requirements of each pupil and providing personalized feedback.

3.3. Influencing Factors on EFL Teacher Identity Construction during Online Learning

Several factors were found to influence the identity formation of EFL teachers during online learning. Teachers' proficiency in utilizing digital tools and platforms had a significant impact on their ability to acclimate to the online environment and effectively construct their identities, making technological competence a crucial factor (El-Masry & Alzaanin, 2021). Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who possessed a higher level of technological competence exhibited greater confidence in integrating technology into their lessons and were more likely to experiment with innovative online teaching techniques (Rachman et al., 2023; Hidayat et al., 2023).

Pedagogical beliefs also played a significant role in the construction of EFL teacher identities (Yang & Wang, 2022). Teachers with a constructivist or student-centered pedagogical orientation were more likely to embrace the opportunities provided by online learning and modify their teaching practices accordingly. Teachers with a more traditional or teacher-centered approach, on the other hand, may encounter difficulties in adjusting their instructional methods and redefining their roles in the online environment.

Cultural contexts and prior teaching experiences were additional factors that influenced the construction of EFL teacher identities (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019). The cultural perspectives and experiences of teachers influence their beliefs regarding effective language instruction and their expectations of student conduct. In addition to influencing teachers' perceptions of students' requirements and language-learning strategies, the cultural diversity of online classroom students also affects teachers' perceptions of students' cultural backgrounds.

3.4. Pedagogical Implications for Effective EFL Teaching in the Digital Realm

The results of this analysis have many educational implications for successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in the online learning setting. Initially, it is imperative for professional development programmed to prioritize technical training to augment the digital literacy and competency of EFL teachers. Equipping teachers with opportunities to develop essential technological skills and knowledge will enable them to confidently traverse the virtual environment, proficiently integrate digital technologies, and enhance student learning experiences.

Secondly, creating a sense of community and connection in the virtual classroom is essential. EFL teachers should use methods that encourage interaction between students and between students and teachers, such as icebreakers, group projects, and online discussion forums. Establishing a supportive and inclusive online learning atmosphere will help build a positive teacher identity and enhance student participation and motivation.

Third, EFL teachers must adjust their teaching methods to fit the online learning environment. This might include using student-centered approaches, integrating multimedia materials, and utilizing interactive online resources to encourage active student involvement. Offering guidance on effective online teaching methods and exchanging best practices can assist EFL instructors in their teaching adaptations and professional development.

Additionally, the implications of the review go beyond individual EFL instructors to the field of EFL teacher education and online language instruction. It emphasizes the importance of integrating online teaching methods and digital literacy into teacher education programs to prepare future educators for the digital environment. Institutions should provide ongoing professional development and support systems for EFL teachers to improve their technological skills, teaching strategies, and online identity development.

To summarise, this review study focuses on the building of EFL teacher identity during online learning. It examines the problems encountered, the observed adaptations and transformations, and the influential factors involved. The results emphasise the significance of tackling these difficulties, assisting EFL instructors in their professional growth, and applying efficient teaching methods in the online language learning environment. EFL teachers may enhance their identities, stimulate student engagement, and facilitate good language learning outcomes in the digital realm by comprehending and addressing the distinct requirements and advantages of online learning.

The review on EFL teacher identity construction in online learning delves into challenges like limited nonverbal communication and rapport-building difficulties with students, aligning with Sutami et al., (2022) study emphasizing evaluation and assessment challenges in online teaching. Despite these hurdles, teachers exhibit resilience by redefining roles, adopting new strategies, and effectively integrating technology. It stresses the necessity for robust training programs to boost digital literacy, aiding teachers in navigating online platforms and engaging students. Creating a supportive online community through icebreakers, collaborations, and discussion forums is pivotal, alongside adapting instructional methods, utilizing multimedia resources, and sharing successful practices.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the review highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the challenges faced by EFL teachers in constructing their professional identities during online learning. By recognizing the need for technological competence, fostering a sense of community, and adapting instructional approaches, EFL teachers can navigate the online learning landscape effectively and promote successful language learning experiences. The findings of this review provide valuable insights and guidance for EFL teacher education, professional development initiatives, and the design of effective online language teaching practices.

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