The Factors Influencing the Professional Identity of English Teachers: A Systematic Mini Review

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Abstract: Although previous research has confirmed that professional identity plays a significant role in teachers' effectiveness and job satisfaction, the specific factors influencing the professional identity of English teachers remain unclear. More studies on these influencing factors are needed, especially in some undeveloped regions. This paper explores various factors affecting the professional identity of English teachers, focusing on individual, societal, and educational system aspects. Through the analysis of twenty studies, both quantitative and qualitative, the results indicate that professional identity is shaped by a dynamic mix of social, environmental, and personal factors, evolving through internal and external influences. The study emphasizes the need for increased societal support, improved work conditions, and addressing individual teachers' needs. It highlights the importance of a holistic approach to foster the professional growth and well-being of English teachers, suggesting that nurturing their professional identity requires a comprehensive strategy considering various influencing factors.

Keywords: Professional identity; English teachers; Influencing factors

1. Introduction

With the advent of globalization and the increasing importance of English education, there are higher demands on the training and development of English teachers. However, current issues include low societal respect for teachers, constant shifts in educational policies, and limited resources and support, all of which negatively impact English teachers' professional identity, job satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness. The professional identity of English teachers specifically relates to their recognition and perception as educators who teach English. It includes their commitment to the teaching profession, their belief in the value of teaching English, and their perception of their role and significance within the educational system. Research on teacher professional identity has laid a solid foundation, but specific studies on English teachers are limited. Most research focuses on broader teacher communities, lacking systematic investigation into English teachers as a group. This study explores influencing factors and ways to enhance it. By researching the factors influencing English teachers' professional identity, targeted interventions can be developed to enhance their sense of identity, improve job satisfaction, and boost teaching effectiveness. By examining existing literature and identifying gaps, the paper aims to provide valuable insights for teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders in English education, contributing to the discourse on professional identity and informing strategies for improvement.

2. Materials and methods

Several stages of this review followed the recommendations set out in the PRISMA protocol.

2.1 Searching strategy

Literature searching was conducted on 12 January 2024. The articles are all selected from web of science and SSCI. Because the data and information in them are accurate and valuable. We restrict the time range from 2010-2024, because we need the latest information. A Boolean search strategy was used to identify articles that included the following keywords: ("English teacher or English teachers") AND ("professional identity" or "career identity").

2.2 Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Studies were included based on the following criteria: (1) The study concentrated on English teachers; (2) Influencing factors were independent variables; (3) The dependent variable should be career identity; (4) The study should be written in English; (5) Full-text was available; (6) The studies were published in scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals; (7) The studies should be empirical. (8) Educational research

The studies were excluded if they met the following criteria: (1) Studies focused on non-English teachers; (2) Dissertation thesis; (3) Instrument validation studies; (4) Gray literature; (5) Review studies.
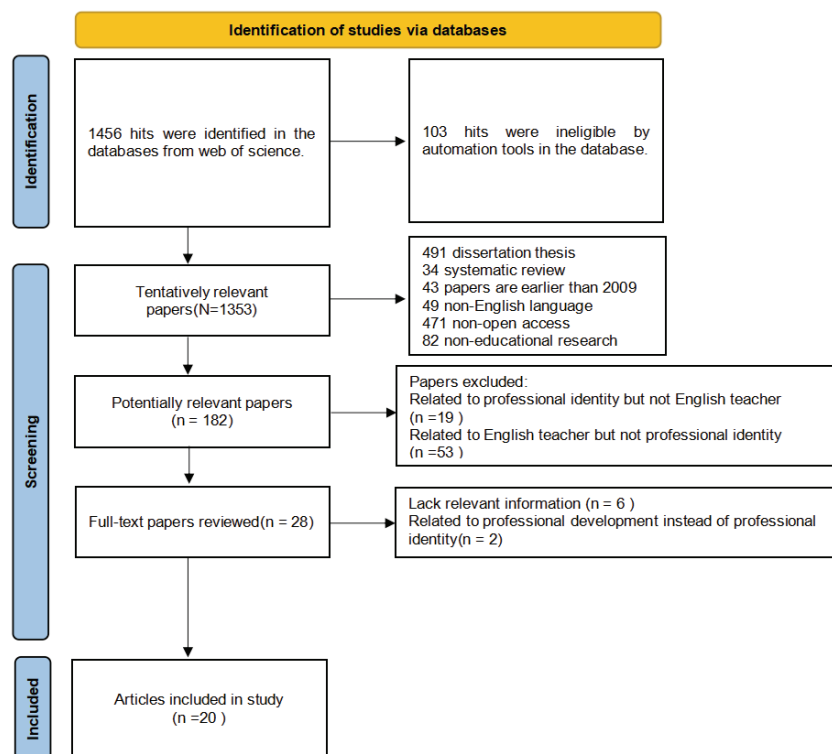
2.3 Study selection

Figure 1 PRISMA flowchart

After initial searching for the literature (Figure 1), a total of 1456 titles were identified where 103 hits were ineligible by automation tools in the database. After the tentative selection, 182 studies were selected as being potentially relevant to the present study. After carefully reading the abstracts of the articles, 28 articles were kept for full-text reading. After reading the full text, studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria or met the exclusive criterion were trimmed. Finally, 20 articles were kept for the present study (Table 1).

Table1 Description of reviewed studies

Author(date)	Location	Design	Size	Features	Measures	Outcomes	Analysis	Main findings
John Trent, 2012	Hong Kong Institute of Education	qualitative research	a series of interviews and meetings.	service secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong	in-depth interviews and recordings of partnership meeting	Teachers experienced professional development through the partnership partially as identity conflict	teacher identity	Identity conflict inhibits the professional development
Alberto Mora, Paulina Trejo, Ruth Roux, 2014	Mexico	case study methodology	2 English teachers.	at a Mexican English center	three in-depth phenomenological interviews	English teaching certifications, played a significant role in shaping professional identities.	identity, agency, and professional development	English teaching certifications simplifies teaching ability and professional development.
Carmen Helena Guerrero Nieto Bryan Meadows, 2015	USA	qualitative analysis	2 groups of participants	nonnative English-speaking teachers	analyzing on-line dialogues on Schoology	Expert vs. novice roles significantly shaped the participants' positions	critical pedagogy and professional identity.	the importance of teacher education programs in developing healthy professional identities
María Cristina Sarasa, 2016	Argentina	narrative inquiry	24 sophomores	an undergraduate English Teacher Education Program	collecting field texts over 18 months	Co-authoring of imagined future teacher identities and their envision of becoming EIL teachers.	construction of professional identities in EIL	Emerging teacher identities are fluid and situated, shaped by personal, educational, and social experiences.
Angela Mary Gayton, 2016	Scotland, France, and Germany	qualitative study	13 foreign-English teachers	foreign-English teachers from three countries	interviews	Importance of considering the subject area and its valuation by stakeholders as fundamental to teacher identity	linguistic imperialism perspective	Teacher identity is influenced by societal and internal perceptions of the importance of English

Author(date)	Location	Design	Size	Features	Measures	Outcomes	Analysis	Main findings
Amy Wanyu Ou Michalle Mingyue Gu, 2023	Southeast China	meta-methodology, ethnographic discourse	2 teachers (Ye and Ming, pseudonyms)	Chinese-English bilinguals, English as a second English	class observations, interviews with participants	Translanguaging approaches were influenced by institutional policies, teaching beliefs and English strategy	nexus analysis	the importance of teacher professional identity in teaching practices under support
Noble Po Kan Lo Bryan Ka Ho To, 2023	Hong Kong	quantitative and qualitative research	193 educational professionals from secondaries	secondary teachers teaching English as foreign English	survey and semi-structured interviews	Diverse perspectives among teachers regarding professional development and teaching roles	teacher identity development and CPD	teachers' challenges in self-identity and skills in adapting to the digital teaching environment
Takaaki Hiratsuka, 2023	Japan	narrative interviews.	8 in-service JTEs.	JTEs in schools varying in demographics	snowball sampling, interviews, content analysis	JTEs lack of competence and feel overworked	English teacher identity, reflexive identity	JTE's professional self-esteem and workload and better support and professional development for JTEs
Nashid Nigar, 2023	Australia	phenomenological narrative analysis	16 participants	non-native English-speaking teachers in Australia	interviews and multiple follow-ups for narratives.	NNESTs professional identities negatively impacted by native-speakerism and discourses.	neo-racism, post-colonialism, multi-culturalism.	The professional identities of NNESTs require more support and recognition to overcome challenges.
Abdul Muhammad Kamarul Kabinlan, 2023	Malaysia	phenomenological research	10 pre-service teachers in TESOL	earning a Bachelor's degree in TESOL, teaching practicum	interpretative phenomenological methods.	Reflection facilitated the re-conceptualization and development of their identities as TESOL teachers.	dialogical approach	dynamic nature of teacher identity and importance of critical incident in professional development.
Fika Megawati Iswahyuni Nur Mukminatien, 2023	East Java, Indonesia	qualitative research	15 pre-service English teachers	These pre-service teachers experienced teaching practice.	interviews, self-reflective reports thematic analysis	SEL contributes significantly to the development of pre-service English teachers' identities	SEL and CASEL framework	Integrating SEL principles into teacher education can better prepare pre-service teachers for the teaching.
Yaregal Mulu; Tadesse Adinew; Wolyie Jeylan; Abera Admasu, 2022	Ethiopia.	qualitative hermeneutic research	2 EFL Teachers	two EFL teachers.	structured individual interview	Shaped by a personal agency and challenging contextual conditions.	postmodern approach	Influenced by personal attributes and external environmental.
Taye Emmanuel Akinmulegun and Naciye Kunt, 2022	Northern Cyprus	qualitative research narratives	7 participants.	EFL teachers, doctoral and undergraduate students, MA	autobiographies, journals, interviews, field notes, email	Participants are positive towards their personalities and abilities as non-native English-speaking teachers.	social identity theory	Native-speaker ideology influenced the self-image, self-efficacy and teaching beliefs of teachers.
Shanshan Yang, Dingfang Shu and Hongbiao Yin, 2022	China	qualitative research	10 college English teachers.	participants teaching college English, qualifications.	narrative Frames In-depth Interviews	Identity negotiation: disheartened performer, miserable follower, strenuous accommodator, integrator.	emotional resilience	Academics in higher education face significant identity tensions due to the emphasis on research excellence.
Raziyeh Fallah, Azizeh Chalak, and Hossein Heidari Tabrizi, 2021	Yazd, Iran	qualitative research	35 English teachers.	teaching experience ranging from 2 to 20 years. Persian-speaking.	semi-structured interviews,	The study revealed four main characteristics affecting teachers' Professional Identity in online classes	socio-cultural theory	the dynamic nature of teachers' professional identity in response to rapid changes in teaching modes
Shima Abedi Ostad, Afsaneh Ghanizadeh Maryam Ghanizadeh	Mashhad	quantitative and qualitative approaches	198 English Foreign English (EFL) teachers	teaching experience ranging from 1 to 22 years	three questionnaires Four interviews	Job satisfaction plays a positive and significant role in shaping teachers' professional identity	teachers' professional identity	dynamic interrelationship between EFL teachers' professional identity and their commitment

Author(date)	Location	Design	Size	Features	Measures	Outcomes	Analysis	Main findings
Tzu-Bin Lin, Li-Yi Wang, and Mu-Yu Wang, 2018	Taiwan	quantitative and qualitative approaches	258 preservice English teachers	female, aligns with the national demography of English teachers	questionnaires and Semi-structured interviews.	Majority believed that NESTs are good at teaching phonology-related skills pronunciation, speaking, and listening.	relationality nests	Preservice teachers accepted native speaker norms, particularly in phonology-related competence.
Narges Sardabi, Reza Biria, and Ahmad Ameri Golestan, 2018	Tehran, Iran.	qualitative research	9 novice EFL teachers	between 21-26 years old with a mix of male and female teachers	post-course semi-structured interviews	Two major shifts in participants' professional identity. Their identity was characterized.	critical pedagogy	The CP-informed teacher education program influenced the novice EFL teachers' professional identity.
Wendy Li and Peter I. De Costa, 2017	Jiangxi province, China	qualitative case study.	1 focal full-time English teacher	bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in tourism.	classroom observations, interviews	The study revealed how Ms. Q negotiated her professional identity and teaching responsibilities.	job-crafting perspective on teacher agency	ongoing conversation about how English teachers negotiate their professional identities and agency

3. Result

After specifically analysing and categorizing factors influencing professional identity among some English teachers, the author believes that there are roughly three aspects, encompassing eight dimensions, just as the table 2 shows.

Table 2 The factors influencing the professional identity of English teachers.

Type	Specific Factors
Social Factors	Salary and Benefits
	Social Status
Work Environment	Teaching Workload
	In-Service Training
	Promotion Opportunities
	Interpersonal Relationship
Individual factors	English Proficiency
	Professional Motivation

3.1 Societal factors

3.1.1 Salary and benefits

The famous Czech educator Comenius praised teachers as "the engineers of human souls, " and the teaching profession is often considered "the most glorious profession under the sun." In recent years, many countries have taken significant measures to elevate the social and economic status of teachers, recognizing their crucial role in education. In China, the "Teachers' Law" stipulates that the average salary of teachers should not be lower than the national average salary of civil servants, with provisions for gradual increases and regular promotions. However, the reality is starkly different, especially for primary and secondary school teachers, whose social status often remains low and even sometimes regarded with disdain. Ideally, teachers should be very satisfied with their work and have a high sense of professional identity. Contrary to this ideal, many teachers experience deficiencies in material rewards and spiritual recognition from society, which adversely affect their work mood and quality. Research indicates that English teachers, in particular, suffer from relatively low economic and social status. This lack of recognition and inadequate compensation contribute to their low professional identity, lack of commitment to their jobs, and thoughts of leaving the profession[1]. The low social status of English teachers is primarily due to the perceived low status of the English subject and the insufficient economic treatment of teachers, highlighting how salary and benefits are critical factors influencing their professional identity.

3.1.2 Social status

Compared to the past, the social status of the teaching profession has decreased significantly[2]. Teachers often mention that although their profession is stable, their income level is still low compared to other professions in society. Generally, the social status of a profession is determined by its economic standing, professional status, and prestige. As a professional group, English teachers' income reflects the basic economic condition of their profession. Additionally, the professional prestige of English teachers serves as an indicator of their general professional status, reflecting public value orientations. Historical studies have shown that the professional prestige of primary and secondary

school English teachers has significantly declined over the past decade, especially compared to professions like doctors and lawyers. Middle school English teachers, in particular, rank towards the bottom among more than twenty professions in terms of prestige. According to social identity theory, the formation of English teachers' professional identity follows three basic principles: social categorization, social comparison, and positive distinction. If teachers perceive their profession's social status as low, they may compare their professional group's rights and status with other professional groups. If their professional group is not seen as superior, it might lead to thoughts of distancing themselves from that group, which is extremely detrimental to the development of a strong professional identity. In summary, improving the social status of English teachers is crucial not only for increasing the social prestige of the profession but also for encouraging teachers to have more positive evaluations of their work. This, in turn, aids in the formation and development of their professional identity.

3.2 Work environment

3.2.1 Workload

The shortage of English teachers often results from an overwhelming workload. Around 70% of school teachers have weekly teaching hours exceeding 18, with some even surpassing 20, including cross-grade teaching. In contrast, teachers of other subjects generally have lighter workloads, typically teaching only 1-2 classes. Additionally, many English teachers are not solely dedicated to teaching English but also have to take on other subjects or administrative tasks. These teachers face challenges such as teaching across grades, handling numerous classes, dealing with diverse content, large class sizes, excessive homework and teaching multiple subjects. Faced with these challenges, teachers often feel overstressed and burnt out, leading to a loss of interest in teaching. The heavy workload and excessive teaching hours limit teachers' time to study the curriculum thoroughly and prepare lessons, hindering the development of their research abilities and professional growth. Modern English teaching requires adequate resources and equipment, such as relevant books, audio tapes, instructional charts and flashcards, with multimedia teaching and English activity rooms being ideal. However, due to financial constraints and school size, many countries lack these resources, leaving teachers dissatisfied with their working conditions. While developed countries generally have better resources, even they face shortages in multimedia classrooms and English materials for teachers with heavy class schedules[3]. In developing countries, limited investment in English education and poor schooling conditions exacerbate the lack of teaching resources. This situation adversely affects the effectiveness of teaching activities, diminishes interest in English among teachers and students, and adds significant stress to teachers, reducing their initiative and enthusiasm. Thus, the high workload and inadequate support significantly impact English teachers' professional identity, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction.

3.2.2 In-Service training

Professional development support includes various activities organized by schools that contribute to teachers' professional growth, such as expert lectures, young teacher skill competitions, and mentorship projects. Many English teachers appreciate these training activities because they help refine their teaching skills and understand new pedagogical concepts. Additionally, the guidance and support from experienced colleagues in addressing professional challenges significantly enhance teachers' sense of professional efficacy and commitment to their work. School-provided professional development plays a critical role in shaping teachers' professional identity for two main reasons. Firstly, from an organizational management perspective, it represents institutional support. This is crucial for teachers, especially those transitioning into the profession, who often face confusion and identity crises. Timely organizational support can ignite teachers' passion and strengthen their sense of belonging and identity. Secondly, from the perspective of professional development stages, the support aligns with the needs of teachers in the early and capacity-building phases of their careers. Teachers at these stages seek recognition from leaders, colleagues, and students. Adequate support and encouragement from the school can facilitate their professional growth and motivation[4]. Thus, in-service training is essential for fostering a positive professional identity among English teachers by providing the necessary support and recognition throughout their careers.

3.2.3 Promotion opportunities

The current structure of English teacher titles tends to be low, and many teachers are particularly concerned about their titles due to difficult evaluations and limited promotion prospects. This negatively affects their enthusiasm for teaching. The challenges in title evaluation stem from several issues: a lack of a robust educational evaluation system, incomplete management mechanisms, and a lack of scientific work evaluation and corresponding reward and punishment systems for English teachers. Additionally, English teachers often have a heavy teaching load, but their workload is not properly recognized, and they are not prioritized in various excellence evaluations. Furthermore, many English teachers are not specialized in English, making it harder to match their qualifications with the subject they teach during title evaluations[5]. The "seniority" phenomenon in title evaluations also prioritizes awards and teaching experience, overlooking teachers' qualities, professional levels, and achievements. This has led to unfairness in title evaluations, further reducing English teachers' enthusiasm for teaching. These factors

collectively impact English teachers' professional identity by creating a sense of inadequacy and discouragement, highlighting the importance of fair and comprehensive promotion opportunities in fostering a positive professional identity.

3.2.4 Interpersonal relationships

School interpersonal relationships refer to the stable psychological connections teachers form through constant interactions with others. These relationships can be categorized into student-teacher, teacher-colleague, and teacher-administrator interactions. Research shows a strong positive correlation between teachers' interpersonal relationships at school and their professional identity, indicating significant influence. Harmonious relationships with students and colleagues help teachers navigate contradictions, setbacks, and anxieties, promoting growth and resilience. According to social role theory, the network of roles surrounding a teacher, including students, parents, and administrative staff, is crucial. The ability to establish stable and harmonious relationships directly impacts teachers' willingness to continue in their roles. Good relationships foster psychological well-being and job satisfaction, enhancing teachers' commitment and interest in teaching. Conversely, strained relationships can lower job satisfaction and weaken teachers' motivation, leading to reduced commitment and interest in their work[6]. Therefore, positive cooperation, mutual support, and effective communication with partners are essential for teachers to better understand education and form a strong professional identity.

3.3 Personal factors

3.3.1 English proficiency

English proficiency primarily includes the teacher's command of the language, oral expression ability, and mastery of English teaching skills such as classroom organization and questioning techniques. This proficiency represents the comprehensive manifestation of the teacher's English and teaching capabilities, determining their deep understanding of the subject. High professional quality is crucial for conducting effective English education and creating high-quality classes, thus providing students with professional guidance. A teacher's professional quality significantly impacts their professional identity. Lack of confidence in one's English teaching abilities can diminish job enthusiasm, especially for novice teachers with limited experience. These teachers might struggle to find a sense of achievement in their work when they perceive a decline in teaching quality. According to the teacher career cycle theory, recognition from school leaders, colleagues, and students is a key driving force for novice teachers. If teachers cannot meet others' expectations due to limited abilities, they might experience frustration, leading to decreased professional efficacy and subjective well-being. Conversely, a teacher with strong professional skills can confidently and effectively manage teaching, resulting in a higher level of professional identity[7]. Furthermore, the enhancement of English teachers' professional quality relies heavily on support for professional development from schools. While this study found that professional development support impacts teacher identity, further investigation is needed to determine whether it mediates the relationship between professional quality and identity. Overall, English proficiency plays a critical role in shaping the professional identity of English teachers by affecting their confidence, teaching effectiveness, and ability to meet professional expectations.

3.3.2 Career motivation

Teacher career motivation refers to the reasons and driving forces behind an individual's choice to pursue, persist in, and excel at a teaching career. Motivations can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations, such as a genuine love for the profession or a belief that their character, interests, and abilities align with teaching, often lead teachers to develop a strong professional identity. These teachers have a clear understanding of why they want to be educators and are fully committed and enthusiastic about their work, viewing teaching as a lifelong career[8]. Conversely, teachers with extrinsic motivations, such as those driven by family reasons, limited career options, or attracted by the stability of the teaching profession, typically exhibit lower levels of professional identity and higher emotional exhaustion. They may view the job merely as a means of survival and lack a deep understanding of the profession. While the impact of career motivation on professional identity is significant, it can vary. This variation may stem from the complexity of motivations, as most teachers' reasons for entering the profession are not singular. Additionally, initial motivations might change post-entry due to external factors, causing fluctuations in identity. Some teachers, even those with initial impure motives, can develop positive career motivations and a strong professional identity due to positive feedback or affection from students. Despite the complexity and dynamism of career motivation, having a positive and proactive professional motivation is crucial for the development of a teacher's professional identity. Only when teachers establish a positive professional outlook and a genuine love for their chosen career can they fully engage in their work and develop a strong sense of identity.

4. Discussion

This mini-systematic review explores the multifaceted factors influencing the professional identity of English teachers, considering societal, work environment, and individual aspects. Twenty studies, both quantitative and qualitative, were analyzed to understand how these factors interplay in shaping teachers' professional identities. The study highlights the significant impact of societal factors such as salaries,

benefits, and social status, which play crucial roles in job satisfaction and identity formation due to the importance of social recognition and material compensation. Work environment factors, including workload, in-service training, promotion opportunities, and interpersonal relationships, also substantially affect teachers' professional identity. High workloads and limited growth opportunities can lead to teacher exhaustion, aligning with Self-Efficacy theory. Individual factors like English proficiency and career motivation are decisive; confident teachers with intrinsic motivations often have a stronger professional identity. These findings suggest future research should focus on enhancing the educational environment and societal support to strengthen teachers' professional identity. However, the study has several limitations, such as a narrow scope of the literature review and a predominant focus on qualitative studies. Future research should expand to include diverse languages and databases, employ mixed-method approaches for better generalizability, and explore cultural, contextual, and technological impacts on English teachers' professional identity. Additionally, distinguishing between different sub-groups, such as primary, secondary, or tertiary level teachers, and considering ESL versus EFL contexts could provide a more nuanced understanding. The study also suggests incorporating perspectives from other stakeholders, like students, parents, administrators, and policymakers, for a holistic understanding of the factors influencing teachers' professional identities. By addressing these limitations, future research can provide more comprehensive strategies for supporting and enhancing the professional identity of English teachers across various educational contexts.

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