From EFL to ESL Context: The Impact of Sociocultural Environment on Teachers' Professional Identity Development

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ABSTRACT

Teachers, like other professionals, are sometimes bound to change places of living, particularly when such a change takes the teachers to an entirely different country with a distinctive culture. This paper aims to trace three Saudi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers who moved from Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) to pursue their professional careers further. The main objective of the paper is to examine how the sociocultural context influences the professional identity formation of EFL teachers. The data of the study were collected through classroom observations and in-depth interviews that were then analyzed thematically. Findings of the study led to the emergence of four distinctive themes that include language-related identity, context-related identity, practiced and responsive teaching skills, and membership in Communities of Practice. Findings underscore the dynamic nature of language teacher identities as participants find themselves in different English language teaching contexts. Additionally, the findings highlight the important role of professional settings in supporting teachers' professional identity development.

Keywords: professional identity; community of practice; sociocultural environment; ESL setting; Saudi schools

INTRODUCTION

The influence of change of environment on teacher identity is an area that has remained under-researched (Dang, 2013). Teachers, like other professionals, are sometimes bound to change places of living, particularly when such a change takes the teachers to an entirely different country with a distinctive culture. Wenger (2010) argued that teacher identity is fluid and dynamic, as it could change depending on the environment one finds himself/herself in. Nevertheless, some teachers suffer from identity crisis when they migrate from one environment to another (Sarasa, 2016; Tsui, 2007). English language teachers are among those affected by this movement as English language is the most widely spoken language globally and taught all over the world by native and non-native English teachers.

Teacher identity is fluid and dynamic (Aneja, 2016; Yazan, 2019) can be influenced by the school context (Ahmad & Abdul Samad, 2018; Goktepe & Kunt, 2020). A few previous studies have investigated how a change of sociocultural environment affects teachers' professional identity construction and formation (Mora, Trejo & Roux, 2016; Scotland, 2014; Xu, 2013, Trent, 2012). However, these studies tend to focus on change of environment within English as a Second Language (ESL) settings and did not take into consideration a change of environment from the EFL to ESL context, as in the case of the Saudi teachers moving to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) from Riyadh (Saudi Arabia). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established

schools in various countries around the world where Saudi EFL teachers are appointed by the Saudi Ministry of Education and sent to those schools across the world. These Saudi EFL teachers often find themselves in a new professional setting which could affect their professional identity development.

Hence, this study seeks to fill in the gap in the existing literature by trailing three Saudi EFL teachers posted by Saudi Ministry of Education to a Saudi school in Malaysia. This study also aims to understand how change of their professional environment from EFL to the ESL setting affects their professional identity formation and how their views on various aspects of their professional teaching career came to be influenced by change of the professional environment.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

One of the theoretical frameworks proposed in explaining the role of social contexts in the identity formation was Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on *community of practice*. A *community of practice* is defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as a group of individuals who engaged in mutual endeavours which are related to common enterprise and a shared repertoire and history. Wenger (1998, 2010) viewed *community of practice* as a form of social learning system with emergent structure, complex relationships, self-organization, dynamic boundaries where a constant negotiation of identities and cultural meaning takes place.

The identity formation of professional teachers is a process that begins from classrooms which are then enhanced with the practitioners putting their models of practice into test then modify them through experience and reflection. Identity formation is a product of learning which is produced through both participation and reification (Wenger, 2010). It is the interplay of participation and reification that combines to create a social history of learning (combining both individual and collective aspects) to give rise to a community. The participants of such community who define "regime of competence" which refers to the criteria employed in identifying a member and what is expected of him/her (Wenger, 2010). It is this history of learning that transforms into an informal and dynamic social structure for the participants which is called a *community of practice.*

A change of environment in this sense then requires one to adapt, reenact and perhaps reconstruct his/her identity. Wenger (2010) explains this by stating that participants have their own experience of practice from the previous environment that sometimes may not fit the regime of competence in the new environment they are moving into. This may require realignment as the participant requires renegotiating what he comes along with against what he found in his/her new environment in which the person had to adjust him/herself. Some workplace environments are more rigorous, challenging and gives the person better chance at becoming more competent in his/her chosen profession (Yang & Jang, 2020).

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL SETTING

Previous studies (Loo, 2018; Mora, Trejo, and Roux 2016; Trent 2012; Xu, 2013) examined how inexperienced teachers in various educational environments responded to new school contexts and negotiated their professional identities. Their results showed the essential effects of previous learning and working experiences of language teachers in influencing their practise and self-perceptions of language teaching. For example, in their decision making in classroom teaching, the new teachers referred to their previous language teachers as a framework of reference and they also made attempts to incorporate what they had gained in classroom experience from teacher education programmes. The new teachers built a contextualised

understanding of language teaching and learning by deliberately making parallels between their previous and current experiences and experimenting with a variety of newly learned teaching concepts, which opened new possibilities for their identity development.

In the context of this study, one must consider context shift as the process which generated the enactment of novel communicative practices or professional imaginations and led to the development of the emerging identity. It is important to understand the interrelationship between the ESL and the EFL contexts and the effects they have on the teachers' identity concept. A harmony between ESL and EFL makes the concept of identity very complicated. Hence, it is important to consider the global phenomenon in the local context. Acceptance or resistance of the emerging identities helps in developing more unified world professionalism. However, it also generates a fragmented community of practice in local settings.

In a context shift scenario, identity indicates a selfhood which is used for resisting and researching the original roots. The shift has its basis in the uneven development of community of practice. Hence, one must address the professional factors which help in the development of the teachers' localized identities. Such a constitution of the local identities is transformed from a global perspective regarding the new context i.e. Malaysia. Professionalism shares similar processes which involve experience circulation and acceptance of the power relationships that arose and had the characteristics of the ESL, based on the diffused *community of practice* (Mora, Trejo & Roux, 2016; Trent, 2012; Xu, 2013).

To understand the concept of language teacher identity, Pennington and Richards' (2016) conceptualize language teacher professional identity through two levels of competences, "foundational and advanced competences required for language teaching" (p. 1) as well as through the way language teachers integrated their personal experience and attributes in forming professional identity in teaching profession. There are six components in the foundational competences of language teacher identity – language related identity (language competency and native or non-native English-speaking background); disciplinary identity (pedagogical content knowledge gained through experiences and educational course); context-related identity (environmental or contextual factors); self-knowledge and awareness (the ability to notice strengths and weaknesses); as well as student-related identity (teacher knowledge and awareness which influence students' performance). Whereas, the three components in the advanced competences construct include; practiced and responsive teaching skills which refers to teacher's capacity to transfer their knowledge into practice; theorizing from practice which is identified by teachers' ability to theorize and situate their practice within the body of knowledge; and membership in communities of practice and profession when teachers recognize themselves as important part of the TESOL community.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

As the aim of this study is to explore the impact of the change of environment on EFL teachers' professional identity formation, we employed a qualitative case study design. The case study offers insight into the phenomenon being studied, teacher learning, as it exposes real-life situations. The main research question for this study is: How do the different professional settings influence the Saudi EFL teachers' professional identity development?

THE PARTICIPANTS

Three EFL teachers (Najwa, Ismail, and Majid) who were on placement in a Saudi School in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia by the Saudi Ministry of Education participated in this study. They

were selected based on a convenience sampling. The summary of demographic information of the selected participants is illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Summary of Demographic Information of Participants

Name	Gender	Educational background	Years of working in Saudi schools in Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh
Ismail	Male	Bachelor's degree, English Education	7 years (Riyadh) 3 years (KL)
Najwa	Female	Bachelor's degree, English Literature	3 years (Riyadh) 3 years (KL)
Majid	Male	Bachelor's degree, English language and Literature	10 years (Riyadh) 2 years (KL)

The Saudi School in Kuala Lumpur was established in 1991 under the management of Saudi Ministry of Education and the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs who are responsible in providing the school with teaching staff, facilities, teaching materials and resources, as well as in supervising the teaching and learning processes at the schools. The school follows the Saudi Ministry of Education in all their rules and regulations and use the Saudi curriculum and syllabus. The school has twenty-nine classrooms equipped with the latest instructional tools and facilities. The maximum number of students in each class is twenty-five students. The school is well-equipped with several science and computer labs, a library, two auditoriums, as well as indoor and outdoor sport courts to cater to its current 451 Saudi students and 208 Non-Saudi students.

DATA COLLECTION

In this study, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were employed as the methods of data collection. As for the data analysis, a thematic analytical approach was employed in analyzing the data collected via the interviews and classroom observations. The participating teachers were asked to evaluate and describe their perspectives on factors that have an impact on professional identity formation. All the interviews were audiotaped and immediately transcribed. Besides, the study utilized classroom observation by observing two classes for each of three teachers. Classroom observation allows the researchers to describe and write down actions and interactions, following the behaviour of subjects in individual classroom settings. The data collection was completed within 12 weeks and until data saturation as a prolonged engagement to ensure trustworthiness.

DATA ANALYSIS

Marshall and Rossman (2006) seven procedures of data analysis were followed which include: (1) organizing the research data; (2) submerging in the research data; (3) establishing themes and categories for the research data; (4) coding the research data; (5) providing interpretations to the research data; (6) finding other possible interpretations; and (7) writing the research outcomes.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses the findings made by this study. The findings presented herein were the results of rigorous coding process as recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2006). The coding process led to the emergence of four distinctive themes from the data on the impact of change from EFL to ESL context on Saudi teachers' professional identity, which are language-

related identity, context-related identity, practiced and responsive teaching skills, and membership in community of practice. Each of the four themes is discussed below. Most of the discussions involved original excerpts from the data to ensure that the original views of the teachers remained unaltered and undistorted.

LANGUAGE-RELATED IDENTITY

The first theme identified from the data was language-related identity resulting from change of environment from EFL to ESL context among the participating Saudi teachers. Richards and Pennington (2016) argue that language-related identity is one of the foundational competences for ESL/EFL teachers. There is a certain language proficiency threshold and communicative competences level that ESL/EFL teachers must achieve to ensure effective teaching.

This study captures how context shifting from Riyadh to KL altered participating teachers' language related identity. For Ismail, teaching in KL requires him to have excellent English language proficiency as the lessons are conducted fully in English. Whereas in Riyadh, the level of language proficiency required was not as high as in KL since the Ismail shared the same mother tongue with his students and Arabic was used as the medium of instruction. To ensure teachers' good English language proficiency, Ismail was assigned by the head of the KL Saudi school to enroll into language proficiency classes. He was positive about attending proficiency classes, as he believed his proficiency has improved through these platforms.

> I think after moving from Riyadh to KL, my English proficiency has improved a lot because the atmosphere in the KL is encouraging me to develop my abilities in English language. I have been attending professional English class in British Council and from a university in KL sponsored by the school.

As for Najwa, in addition to the courses offered by the school, she voluntarily took the initiative to enroll in online proficiency courses for teachers to enhance her English proficiency. Najwa asserted that she used to feel that her proficiency was adequate when she was teaching in Riyadh and she was not under any pressure to enhance her proficiency. The situation is different now in KL as she asserts that,

> Many of my students in KL speak English as their mother tongue. They are very fluent with native-like proficiency. So, I have to keep up with this. So, from time to time I open BBC learning English. Also, I have recently came across a website, edx.org... Besides attending those courses sponsored by the school.

Majid believed that the ESL context in KL contributes to his English language proficiency improvement. Besides the proficiency courses sponsored by the school, he believed that the ESL environment play a significant role in enhancing his proficiency as living in Malaysia allows him to practice and use the language on a daily basis and virtually everywhere, which is not the case in Riyadh. He explained:

> Being abroad makes you use the language a lot. In second language environment like Malaysia, like KL, because English can be used everywhere and you can use it in everyday life in Malaysia. But, if you go back to Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, you wouldn't use it in everyday life. That's why some situations in Malaysia, KL, requires me to use English and it makes me learn more things everyday about English language.

For nonnative EFL teachers, good English language proficiency has always been viewed as a standard that defines teachers' ability. Pennington and Richards (2016) argue that nonnative-English teachers might give too much attention to their nonnative status which makes them feel concerned about their language proficiency. Fan and de Jong (2019) argue that, teacher may lose confidence of their own capacity if they feel that their level of English proficiency to be lower than their students. Through language, power relations are constructed, sustained, and challenged. Yazan (2018) asserts that language proficiency forms an integral

part of teacher identity both as teacher and user of the language. This is because, it informs their instruction and their roles in supporting students' language development to be successful users of the target language. In this study, the participating teachers acknowledge the importance of having good English language proficiency in ensuring effective instruction. The participants are positive about school's effort in developing teachers' good English language proficiency by sponsoring proficiency courses for the teachers.

CONTEXT-RELATED IDENTITY

Richards (2012) argues that although different teaching contexts create different opportunities for teachers' classroom practices, it also creates different constraints and challenges that teachers must deal with. Teaching context could provide teachers with both favouring and disfavouring conditions. While favouring conditions allow teachers access to positive experience and affordances that support teaching and learning via good facilities, resources, efficient administrators, and good scheme for career growth, disfavouring conditions force teachers to deal with negative experience and challenges such as large class size, limited facilities and resources, inefficient administrators, and poor scheme for career growth.

With regard to the impact of change of environment from EFL to ESL context on the participants' context-related identity, Najwa found that being an EFL teacher in ESL context enabled her to feel more empowered as the school environment is friendlier and both teachers and administration are more culturally and ethnically diverse. The environment is also more competitive, with over one-third of the 64 teachers in the school holding either master's degrees or PhD's. This environment motivates her to professionally develop as she clarified:

> Once I started teaching in the Saudi school in Kuala Lumpur, I noticed that there are huge differences in the positive sense. To begin with, the school environment is much friendly. The teaching and administration staff are from different countries. We as English teachers are more into cultural varieties and internationalism. Furthermore, the staff have got adequate academic qualifications. 20 of them have master's degree while 5 have PhD. This can be considered as a competitive advantage in our school that has great influence on me. It makes me really motivated to pursue my studies. You know, Malaysia is an open country with lots of academic and professional development opportunities. There are numerous prestigious universities which offer masters and PhD programs in teaching English. Secondly, the classroom sizes are smaller than in Saudi Arabia. This advantage provides me with the chance to adapt to various personality traits. The Saudi students are from different parts or regions in Saudi Arabia and from other countries too, and that gave me a chance to learn about their personalities and attitudes so that I know how to adopt various teaching situations. This gives me the opportunity to understand myself and to what extent I am able to discover my educational potentials and adopt changes for unexpected learning situations.

Additionally, the small class size enables her to maximize her teaching capacity in catering to students' different personalities, which help her to ensure her teaching effectiveness.

On the contrary, Majid found that the cultural diversity and competitive environment in his school to be overwhelming and challenging at times. He argues that, although the class size is relatively small, having to cater to students' differences requires more time and effort for him to prepare suitable lessons. Additionally, students' high English proficiency causes him to move from his comfort zone, as he had to make sure his instruction is free from grammatical error. Nevertheless, he understands his own responsibility in ensuring his professional development. He made his points clear in the following words:

> The English language teachers here come from different cultural backgrounds and the students also come from different sociocultural background. This makes teaching at Saudi School in KL more competitive and challenging for teachers to be more knowledgeable and updated with new teaching methods. Of course, sometimes I feel nervous, but I have to develop myself as a language teacher by applying many vocabularies and terms to cope up with students' expectations.

As for Ismail, being in ESL context enriches his perspective on the importance of the subject he is teaching and the role of English language in different contexts. He argued that the difference lies in that English in Malaysia is considered as a second language whereas in Saudi Arabia is considered as a foreign language. In addition, he found that these differences require different needs pertaining to teaching and learning. To cater to students' needs, Ismail had to make adjustment in his teaching approach and practice. He made the following remark:

> The needs can be different of course from one environment to another. In Saudi Arabia we have EFL environment, while like students or people don't speak English on streets. So usually we placed more importance on teaching English for academic purposes. But it is totally different environment here in Malaysia. People speak English in everyday life, even like students from Saudi Arabia when they go out they have to speak English all the time. They can practice it in the market, they practice in the car, they practice at the airport, go to the cinema, talk to friends, and so on. So, the needs are different because they really use English for communication. So as teachers, we have to adjust to the needs.

On the other hand, Najwa believed that she gained a better understanding about the differences between learners in different context. She asserted:

> An ESL classroom - in Saudi school in Kuala Lumpur - remains in a country where English is the leading language. The students are immigrants or site visitors. The class is generally of combined nationalities, so students do not share an indigenous language or a typical culture. Outside the classroom, students have a certain, functional need for English, and enough opportunity to utilize it. Students have comprehensive daily direct exposure to English-speaking culture, although their understanding might be limited by their language abilities. Nonetheless, an EFL class- in Saudi Arabia - remains in a nation where English is not the leading language. Students share the very same language as well as society. The teacher could be the only English speaker they have direct exposure to. Outside of the class students have very few chances to make use of English. For some, being good in English could not have any obvious useful advantage. Pupils have limited exposure to English-speaking culture, most often via an altered lens like television or songs. Efficient lesson preparation should take them into account.

All three teachers also think that there is a difference in the multicultural nature of the backgrounds of the students. In Malaysia, the students are comprised of multicultural and multiethnic backgrounds and their language proficiency is also higher, which makes the students more competitive compared those in Saudi Arabia. This implies that the environment and the context of teaching are likely to contribute to the identity formation of the teachers. For this, the teachers also gave their views on the environments (i.e. Riyadh and Kuala Lumpur) and its contribution to the teachers' EFL identity today. Ismail opined that being first an EFL teacher in Riyadh helped him a lot in becoming a good teacher. However, now being in KL he needs to improve his abilities to qualify as an ESL teacher. He explained:

> As a teacher in Riyadh, teaching English as a foreign language help me a lot to be a good teacher. But, as I moved to KL, the situation is different because I am teaching now English as second language and I find it challenging, because I am teaching native speakers of English language because English is their first language. So, this makes me so eager to improve my abilities, to be qualified enough, to, to teach English as a second language in KL.

Najwa shared the same view as she claimed the two environments have had different impacts on her English teaching career. She further claimed that teaching in KL developed her teaching skills. She gave a detailed account on her view:

> The classroom environment (variety of students' social and cultural backgrounds) was a positive and motivating feature. In other words, my students do accept extra learning material. The other thing is that discussion sessions are much livelier because many students express their ideas based on their unique learning and social backgrounds. You can imagine the amount of vocabulary that will be used in such classes due to variety of ideas. In such situations, I start to recall vocabulary I learned many years ago. In addition, teaching in Kuala Lumpur has consolidated my values in the field of education. I have become more responsible and committed. I have also become more critical about learners' attitudes during learning process. I can attribute this to the school administration's care about teaching English. The present

experience has made me able to develop wise judgements regarding progress in my career. This wisdom is embodied in my decision to establish an academic institution to teach English.

Najwa further added that the class size in KL is quite motivating to provide extra materials or offer more intensive teaching for certain topics. It is also motivating to have students with different learning capabilities. She elucidated:

> In both contexts, the teacher is supposed to meet all the educational needs of students. Mostly, I need to take into consideration the students' learning outcomes. I believe the main factor which affects this aspect is teaching performance. In this sense, I truly observe that I do not leave any student behind. Because of their new environment (living in Malaysia), students must realize the importance of English language and I must offer high quality English classes through which students gain confidence to communicate with in the new environment.

The responses given by the teachers revealed that all three teachers think that students' needs vary from one environment to another. What the students in an ESL environment like the KL need are quite different from the needs of students in an EFL environment like Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the teachers also gave their opinions on the selection of teaching method based on learning settings (i.e. KL/Riyadh). Likewise, they gave their views on the extent to which they consider different learning settings (KL/Riyadh) in their choice of teaching methods. Ismail stated that he considers that different teaching methods are required in the two settings to a great extent. He elaborately stated:

> To a great extent, teaching in Riyadh affects my choice of the methods because the situation is so different in when teaching the EFL context – I need to employ many methods to teach the students, and involved a lot of explanations, and materials to help them understand the information in English language. But in KL the situation is different, the students are high level and the second language context is so different and we focus more on the contents rather than the methods.

The responses of the teachers above indicated that their environment of teaching influences them in various ways. The setting may also influence them on their adopted teaching methods. To find this, the teachers discussed how being in KL or Riyadh influences their adopted teaching methods. Ismail claimed that he has more flexibility in choosing teaching methods in KL because of the relative higher level of the students and learning English as a second language. He explained:

> Being in KL is giving me more flexibility to choose the methods of teaching English because the students high level and they learn English as a second language, not a foreign language. But in Riyadh, the Saudi Arabia, the situation is different, the methods are limited, and I need to use effective and very fast methods to teach them because I have just 45 minutes everyday.

To sum up this section, all teachers thought that being EFL teachers overseas helped them a lot in understanding their professional identity as the school environment is friendlier and both teaching and administrative staff are more culturally and ethnically diverse. Moreover, the participating teachers are thankful to have a lot of resources and facilities with LCD projectors and screens in every class as well as small number of students and helpful administrators. In addition, teachers argue that the difference lies in that English in Malaysia is considered as a second language whereas in Saudi Arabia is considered as a foreign language. Teaching English language in Saudi schools in Malaysia is more competitive because of the competitive nature of the environment where the schools are. Finally, the responses given by the teachers revealed that all three teachers think that students' needs vary from one environment to another. What the students in an ESL environment like the KL need are quite different the needs of students in an EFL environment like Saudi Arabia and that affects the teaching methods selected.

PRACTICED AND RESPONSIVE TEACHING SKILLS

Pennington and Richards (2016) recognize practices and responsive teaching skills as one important aspect in advanced competences of language teacher identity. Practiced and Responsive teaching skills require teachers to integrate their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge with contextual characteristics and knowledge in making informed decisions pertaining to teaching and learning (Lee, Azman, Mohd Noor, 2018). Different context may require different teaching approach. Hence, teachers' adaptability and flexibility are needed to cater to these differences particularly on pedagogical reasoning and skills.

In this study, the participating teachers' perspectives were sought about their thoughts on whether teaching overseas (Kuala Lumpur versus Riyadh) requires different teaching skills. every effective teacher requires good inter-personal skills along with effective speaking and strong presentation skills. Teaching skills include all of these and more such as great organizational skills. For Najwa, teaching English in KL had given her the opportunity to develop teaching skills to ensure effective instructional practices which she never had when she was teaching in Riyadh. She explained:

> Definitely, working in Saudi school in Kuala Lumpur is a precious opportunity. It has upgraded my teaching skills. However, the common goal between the two places is related to my responsibility towards students. I have never changed my main goal of teaching (to make my students successful in English). The school here has provided me with skills and equipment for effective teaching technique. I didn't get this advantage back in Riyadh.

Since she is given the autonomy to design her lessons and due to relatively small class size, Najwa argued that the classroom environment in KL is positive and a motivating feature in her choice of teaching methods. She elucidated in the following:

> The classroom environment in KL (variety of students' social and cultural backgrounds) is a positive and motivating feature in my choice of teaching methods. Students expect extra learning material. Due to the fact that English language is taught as a second language for students in KL, students are more interactive in class discussion sessions because many students express their ideas based on their unique learning and social backgrounds.

As for Majid, teaching students from cultural background in Saudi school in KL allow him to develop responsive teaching skills as he gained more understandings about his ESL and EFL learners. He was glad that his colleagues and school administrators are very supportive in helping him to cater to students' differences. He maintained that:

> When you are teaching students from different background, you need to know how to deal with different cultures. At first it was challenging cause you are so used to having students who you know very well, like your own children. Luckily, senior teachers help me here, share their experience, and the school too, very supportive.

Ismail regards his experience in teaching English in KL Saudi School as very valuable as he gained new pedagogical knowledge and develop more practiced and responsive teaching skills. Besides his teaching experience in KL Saudi school, he acknowledges the courses provided by the school to improve his language proficiency as well as teaching skills play important role in his professional development as an ESL/EFL teacher. He believed that he should continuously learning so that he could apply his newly gain teaching skills when he returns to Riyadh one day.

> Actually, I think I need to improve myself as EFL teacher because I will go back to Saudi Arabia, my country, and to Riyadh, and I need to improve my abilities by experiencing teaching, I need to bring new methods, new styles to benefit my Saudi students there.

In the field of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE), the professional identity development of ESL/EFL teachers has transformed from a transmission-oriented approach to a constructivist perspective on teacher learning, particularly on what knowledge and skills needed to ensure practiced and responsive instructions (Othman & Senom, 2020). In this study, participants engage in teacher learning from their current teaching experience in KL Saudi School. They viewed the changes in professional setting as an opportunity for them to learn and to improve their teaching. This reflects participants adaptability and flexibility in delivering their instructions.

MEMBERSHIP IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (COP)

Another important aspect in advanced competences of language teacher identity is teachers' associations with their professional Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger ,1998). These communities of practice could be as close and small as their English language panels in school or online English teachers' discussion groups, to national level professional bodies such as Malaysian English Language Teaching Associations (MELTA), to international level like TESOL, IATEFL or MLA organizations. To gain membership in CoP, teachers participate in sharing and exchanging insights and perspectives, beliefs and values, professional practice, and research findings.

This study explores the impact of change in professional setting on their membership in CoP. When asked how she situates herself within the CoP. Najwa believed that she is more involved now as teachers from different countries and different educational levels in KL Saudi School participate in active interactions and collaborations. She said:

> In our school, teachers are from different countries and of different educational levels. These are some of the schools' great advantages. The interactions among teachers are really effective. There is a high sense of cooperation. In other words, the staff in our school is professional. The school admin always seeks to encourage teachers to collaborate to find solutions to any problem, we share our experience and opinions. Based on my experience, one meeting with the school admin and other English teacher is equal to an intensive training course. During such meetings, I see that I learn significant tips on how to deal with various problems in school (whether teaching, academic achievement, motivation).

When asked to compare the communities of practice between both contexts, Majid argued that more rooms for communication between teachers in KL where they discuss formally or casually, sharing their experiences in relation to new teaching methods or other matters of their concern. He elucidated further:

> Well, actually there is a very big difference between the two contexts since in Riyadh, we didn't really sit with each other sharing our own experiences regarding the new teaching methods and discussing about students' progress like we do in KL. We speak English so I feel more professional. In the Saudi Arabia, we discussed unrelated and random topics in Arabic language.

In terms of understanding the professional relationships, the participating teachers were asked to describe their professional relationship with their peers, professional organization and wider professional community. Ismail began by claiming that there are more chances to engage with different organizations and communities in Malaysia. He explained:

> Actually, in Malaysia, I have a lot of chances to interact with my peers and professional organizations for English Teachers like international TESOL and British Council, and also I can contact with a wide of professional community and get benefits from them for my teaching. But in Saudi Arabia the situation is different, the chances are not too much to engage with these people.

As for Najwa, she claimed that she has quite a professional relationship and there is respect among them. She claimed:

> It is quiet professional in the sense that I do have effective communication with everyone I come into contact with. There is remarkably mutual respect. And this is the main reason how the job gets done at the right time and in an effective way. Because of this respect, there is a high sense of trust. When the school admin appoints a new task for me, I just appreciate as a kind of trust. The nice thing in our school is that we are open to exchange experiences. We listen to each other. We share knowledge as well. We understand each other. And this what has made me survive in this school. I avoid misunderstanding to keep trust and cooperation intact.

As for teacher Majid, he claimed to have also been in touch with language institutions that are based in Malaysia. He made his point clear in the following words:

> We are in touch. Like we are in touch with the local level, like with the society work and other language centres. We are in touch with other language centres here, because sometimes we develop some courses for the kids and we take some case studies, you know, and collaborate with other school, like Malaysian government school, international school, we shared language camps and activities. We do some programmes and support each other, and we have some visits just to develop to see how we can reach the international level like them.

Additionally, the participating teacher teachers shared their view on their current professional development and growth as ESL/EFL teachers. Ismail asserted that he was satisfied with his knowledge and his performance in teaching English language as a foreign language or as a second language. He elaborately explained:

> I feel that I have developed my skills, developed my knowledge. I get a lot of information, especially after moving from Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, to Saudi school in Kuala Lumpur, and I feel more confident, and I feel I am more satisfied about my knowledge and my new methods of teaching English language a foreign language and as a second language.

Najwa sees herself as professional and responsible. She said *"I can say that I am committed and responsible. However, there is still a lot to learn"*. A similar response was also given by teacher Majid who feels that he is doing good so far and that he is responsible and committed to his career. He claimed that *"Ah, my professional identity I think I don't want to say perfect, but I am doing good so far. I am responsible and committed to my career"*. To encapsulate, although the participating teachers are placed in a new and foreign professional setting, they were able to situate themselves within the larger Communities of Practice by participating actively through collaboration and sharing knowledge and practice. Having a strong sense of identity through the ownership of CoP membership gave the participants more rewarding and fulfilling teaching experience, which could result in teacher retention.

CONCLUSION

Language teacher identity is increasingly viewed as a vital dimension of second language teacher development and teaching practices. This study reveals that the change of professional setting impact teachers' professional identity development, particularly on their language-related identity, context-related identity, practiced and responsive teaching skills, as well as membership in communities of practice. The findings are consistent with those made by Gu and Benson (2015) and Yang and Jang (2020) who found that teachers' identity formation is largely shaped by the sociocultural change that they experience. This indicates the nature of language teacher identity that are dynamic and fluid as they adapt to different English language teaching contexts. Additionally, this study recognizes favouring conditions of professional setting such as small-classroom size, students' positive attitudes, affordances for professional development programmes, supportive colleagues and school administrators, good teaching facilities and resources, environment; to be vital in facilitating teachers' professional identity development.

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