

Investigating Factors Detrimental to Students' Construction of English Language Teacher Identities

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In English Language teaching, the identity of teachers is pivotal in creating a congenial environment for learning. It indicates the individualized and professional features that frame the way an ELT teacher approaches their practice of instruction. Multiple numbers of factors can influence teacher identity. Teacher's personal backgrounds, scholarship, experience, social and cultural values along with personal beliefs are some among them. All these contribute to designing the manner by which a teacher interacts with his students, tests students' knowledge and drafts the lesson plan. Instructor's approach to language learning and teaching also determines a teacher's identity. Some teachers prefer to adopt Grammar Translation Method while others may center on learning by doing or Communicative Language Teaching. The selection of these methods can show the conceptual understanding of the teachers related to how to develop the linguistic proficiency of students and the role of language in communication.

Keywords: detriment, pluralistic, efficacy, deleterious, disengagement.

Introduction

Identity formation is a complex and highly contextual process because it is influenced by myriad factors and occurs over a period of time. Teacher identity, constructed by the learners, can be a determinant

in delivering the contents and imparting the skills effectively in the classroom as it gets involved in almost all instructional practices. Since the teacher learner interaction is a regular process during the course of study and continued even after the educational period, the identity assumes a lasting influence on the learners.

The factors constructing teacher identities are intricately relative and pluralistic in nature. The high relativity of the factors makes the students take longer time to fix the teacher identity which depends on many factors like teacher's personal background, scholarship, experience, communicativeness, social and cultural values, pedagogic practices and personality traits like approachability (Beijaard 66). In short, the learners formulate teachers' identities after a careful evaluation of multiple factors which are not exclusively related to knowledge of the contents being taught but include other socio-cultural elements.

In language classrooms, the teacher identity plays a detrimental role in ensuring effective instruction and skill mastery of students. It becomes all the more crucial in English Language Teaching (ELT) context because there will be numerous occasions in which the teacher and learners have to interact, engage and collaborate each other to ensure acquisition of Learning Outcomes (LO) and Target Language Skills (TLS). In addition, the learner's approach to the teacher and the teacher's willingness to allow interaction and learner autonomy in an English classroom will have vital impact of language skill acquisition.

This paper aims to explore and analyze the factors which play a key role in constructing English teachers' identities by ESL learners at undergraduate level in Kerala, a Southern State of India. The study also tries to understand the educational implications of the student-formulated teacher identities on efficacy of learning, teacher education courses and faculty development programs.

Literature Review

The notion of identity implies dual perspectives on one's self. On the one hand, it means what a person thinks of his or her self with all its strength and weakness. On the other hand, it implies others' perspectives on his or her self and how he or she thinks about those

views. Though a clear-cut definition of ‘teacher identity’ is not done, most researchers have the view that it means the totality of how one perceives oneself as a teacher and how others look at one as a teacher. (Losano, Fiorentini& Villarreal 42).

Teacher Identities, either self-constructed or assigned by others, is crucial to the subjects they teach and their relationship with the learners (Ahmad 31). This further implies that those teachers’ identities play a vital role in taking and making critical decisions about their profession and their selection of teaching methods. Studies have shown that teachers’ identities also have a significant influence on their performance and career advancement (Gu, M., & Benson 14). There are many factors that influence constructions of teacher identities and they can be summed up as follows.

Socio cultural Factors

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals’ perceptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. Socio cultural factors such as societal norms, values and beliefs can have a significant impact on students’ ELT identity construction. Cultural attitudes towards language learning and teaching may influence students to adopt certain teaching approaches or methods, which may not align with current pedagogical practices. For example, in some cultures, a teacher-centered approach is emphasized, inhibiting students from adopting student-centered and communicative teaching methodologies.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is a crucial aspect of ELT identity construction. Prospective teachers must possess a high level of linguistic competence to effectively teach English. A deficiency in language proficiency can lead to a lack of confidence, creating barriers in expressing ideas and implementing effective language teaching strategies. This deficiency can be particularly detrimental in multilingual or diverse classroom settings.

Teaching Methodology

Another detrimental factor is the limited exposure to diverse teaching methods during the training phase. Teacher education programs often focus on theoretical aspects of language teaching, neglecting the practical application of various methodologies. Without

experiencing a range of teaching strategies, aspiring teachers may feel ill-equipped to adapt their approach to different learning styles and classroom dynamics (Swan 59). This limitation can inhibit the development of a versatile and adaptable teacher identity.

Learner factors

A better understanding of the language and culture of learners can influence the teacher's identity. It is highly desirable for an ELT teacher to identify and distinguish the linguistic and cultural identity of their students so as to assimilate the same into the teaching learning process. A teacher's identity can also regulate their attitude to address demands of the students, embracing the diversity in caliber, style, capacity and background. As a whole, teacher identity in ELT is a multiplex idea that leaves a significant impact on the teaching learning process. A positive learning circumstance can be created by a well-built teacher identity that subsequently culminates in better student performance. Along with these, factors like attitude, motivation, and the social and cultural background that the student is in too can contribute to the formation of teacher identity among students.

A proper understanding of one's concepts and values about instruction and the capacity to communicate these to their pupils and colleagues form components in constructing teacher identity. Moreover, readiness to change and adapt to manage the novel challenges that emerge in the classroom is also needed from a teacher for the formation of a positive teacher identity. Ability to create an encouraging and delightful learning environment for pupils is a vital element in teacher identity. Creating a sense of oneness in the classroom leads to building relationships with one's students. To attain all these, commitment to be up to date in language teaching regarding the latest trends and practices in ELT is required from a teacher. In short, effective ELT teachers are those who are capable of building a positive and strong teacher identity.

Other factors

There are various deleterious factors that adversely affect forming a positive teacher identity. If the administration, parents or colleagues fail to provide enough support for the teacher, the segregation and detachment experienced will make it difficult to form a strong

sense of teacher identity. It is very important if the teacher is provided with enough resources including funding to implement effective teaching strategies by incorporating technology to enhance the quality of teaching learning process. In case the situation is adverse, it can negatively influence the positive energy of teachers. Constraints at the institution level like rigid syllabus, inelastic assessment pattern etc. can sensor a teacher's ability to be creative and innovative. In such a situation, a teacher may feel frustrated and fail to form a proper teacher identity. Heterogeneity of class rooms is a fact that a teacher confronts. In such a classroom, if the students' behavior is challenging and the teacher fails to manage the class that can question the identity of the teacher itself. It kills the confidence of teachers. If a teacher works in a context which is culturally and linguistically different from one's own, negative energy may creep into his mind, especially if the teacher is not trained to manage the strange situation. A sense of disengagement experienced by the teacher can, definitely, act as another detrimental factor.

A teacher has to be up to date in using the latest technology in teaching. If the opportunities to access the technology are limited, it can cause frustration and a feeling of inadequacy which leaves a negative impact on the formation of teacher identity. Overwork and inability to maintain healthy life-work balance causes burnout and results in affecting a sense of identity as a teacher. Pressure to conform to specific teaching practices can limit the teacher's autonomy. Hence, formation of a positive teacher identity is the by-product of a congenial environment.

Role of Students' perceptions

Perceptions of students play a vital role in shaping the identity of a teacher. It means how students assess the performance, behavior and communication of the teacher in a classroom. This perception of students, in fact, directly affects teacher identity. A teacher is always energized by positive feedback from students. It enhances the teacher's self-efficacy and confidence (Sarasa 49). Such a positive stroke, in turn, strengthens their professional identity. Perception of a student regarding the strategies adopted by a teacher or the teaching methodology can also contribute to shaping the teacher's identity. If

Q. No	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you formulate opinions about the English teachers who teach you?	154	11
2	Do you discuss with your classmates your views about the English teachers?	163	2
3	Do you consider your English teachers' method of teaching to construct his/her identity?	140	25
4	Do you consider your English teachers' content knowledge to construct his/her identity?	139	26
5	Do you consider your English teachers' ability to effectively communicate in English to construct his/her identity?	132	33
6	Do you consider your English teachers' rapport with students to construct his/her identity?	140	25
7	Do you consider your English teachers' approachability in and outside the classroom to construct his/her identity?	152	13
11	Do you think your opinion about your English teacher undergoes changes over the years?	124	41
12	Do you think your views about your English teacher are constructed largely by what he/she does in the English classroom?	112	53

Question No	10
How will you prioritize the following factors in forming your opinions about your English teachers or their teacher identities? Please arrange the following factors to show your priorities. Use the letters to show your preference. Eg B E C A....	First Preference
Rapport with students	43
Method of teaching	44
Content knowledge	13
Ability to effectively communicate in English	27
Approachability in and outside the classroom	38

students feel comfortable with a teacher or identify him as approachable and really caring, it strengthens the teacher's identity as a competent and successful instructor. At the same time, students prefer to keep themselves away of engages in little discussion with a teacher who is not an approachable character. Style of teaching is

another component that falls under the role of student's perceptions in forming a teacher's identity. Teachers who get positive feedback on their style like engaging the students in the classroom and being highly energetic may experience more confidence in their identity as a teacher. This positive attitude can enhance a sense of belonging to the student community by the teacher. Insisting on learn by doing in the classroom can promote this. Proper feedback by the students enables a teacher to identify the strengths and areas that need improvement. It can contribute to the professional growth of a teacher. This process of self reflection, in due course; contributes to the formation of student's perception.

Context and Methodology

The study used a quantitative method to collect the data and a questionnaire consisting of 13 questions to assess the factors influencing student's construction of teacher identities was administered to 200 students. Of the 13 questions, twelve were multiple choice and the last question provided space to express the respondents' views and further observations in descriptive paragraphs.

Data analysis

Conclusion

The construction of an English language teacher identity is a dynamic and multi-faceted process. Aspiring educators encounter numerous challenges on their path to becoming proficient and inspiring teachers. Inadequate language proficiency, limited exposure to diverse teaching methods, minimal classroom experience, cultural and societal perceptions, and a lack of professional development opportunities are among the factors that can detrimentally impact this process. To address these challenges, it is essential for teacher education programs and educational institutions to provide comprehensive language training, diverse pedagogical experiences, and meaningful classroom opportunities. Moreover, efforts must be made to promote the value and respect associated with the teaching profession in society. By mitigating these detrimental factors, we can empower aspiring English language teachers to construct strong, confident, and effective teacher

identities that positively influence the language learning experiences of their students.

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