Investigating the Effects of English Language Teachers' Professional Identity and Autonomy in Their Success

Ali Derakhshan* iD
Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran

Christine Coombe iD
Associate Professor of General Studies,
Dubai Men's College, the United Arab Emirates

Ali Arabmofrad iD
Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran

Mohammadsadegh Taghizadeh iD
PhD Student of Applied Linguistics, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Because of the importance of instructor success in the adequacy of instruction and learning, this study aimed to explain the impact of two factors, namely language teachers' professional identity and autonomy, with respect to their success. To this end, 190 Iranian EFL teachers, including university lecturers and language institute teachers, participated in this study. As for data collection, the Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire (TAQ), the Teacher Professional Identity Scale (TPIS), and the Characteristics of Successful Language Teachers Questionnaire (CSLTQ) were distributed among the respondents. Using Cronbach's alpha estimates and correlational analyses, the reliability of the questionnaires and the associations among the TAQ, TPIS, and CSLTQ were examined, respectively. The results of Pearson correlations revealed that there were significant positive correlations among all three teacher factors. These findings were also confirmed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results; teacher success was predicted positively and significantly by both professional identity and autonomy. Outcomes of this research suggest that teachers' professional identity and autonomy are highly beneficial to their success. This study also outlined the elements of teachers' professional identity that could be more useful for their success. In the end, relevant pedagogical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Teacher professional identity, Teacher autonomy, Teacher success, English language teaching

*Corresponding author's email: a.derakhshan@gu.ac.ir

INTRODUCTION

Needless to say teachers are considered as the most important component of any system of education, and the adequacy of education depends on the effectiveness of the teachers in that educational system (Aubrey & Coombe, 2010; Coombe, 2014, 2020; Pishghadam, Derakhshan, & Zhaleh, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that a large number of educational studies have addressed the characteristics of successful language teachers. A number of these studies have tried to provide a more complete understanding of instructor effectiveness than the one that just attributes importance to professional characteristics like management skills and language proficiency. While language proficiency and management skills are consistently considered as indispensable factors in research studies, it would appear that they are not thought to be the essence of effective teaching. Notwithstanding the fact that language proficiency and management skills are fundamental requirements of a language teacher (Bremner, 2019), what is taken in by the learners may not depend so much on his/her content knowledge or skill but rather on his/her personality or the nature of the personal relationships between the teacher and the students (Brosh, 1996).

As an endeavor to keep up with the advancements in cognitive sciences and psychology, the large number of studies in language education research has scrutinized the influence of language instructors' personality features on their instructional performance and career effectiveness. Among the studies done in this line of research, studies focusing on language teachers' multiple intelligences (Chan, 2003; Pishghadam & Moafian, 2007), professional development (Elsheikh, Coombe, & Effiong, 2018), emotional intelligence (Derakhshan, Saeidi, & Beheshti, 2019; Dev, Nair, & Dwivedi, 2016; Khodadady, 2012; Naqvi, Iqbal, & Akhtar, 2016), creativity (Arifani & Suryanti, 2019; Khodabakhshzadeh, Hosseinnia, Moghadam, & Ahmadi, 2018), stroke, credibility (Pishghadam et al., 2019), conceptions of intelligence, ambiguity tolerance (Zhaleh, Ghonsooly, & Pishghadam,

2018), and self-efficacy (Bembenutty, 2007; Fathi & Derakhshan, 2019; Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011) can be referred to. Nevertheless, there exists a research gap within this line of inquiry as the role of instructors' professional identity and autonomy for their successful practice is less investigated by previous researchers.

The concept of identity is explained in terms of a unique set of one's own characteristics perceived in comparison to that of other individuals (Pennington & Richards, 2016). In other words, identity is related to people's conception of who they think they are, and what other people think them to be. Recently, many scholars have investigated the concept of language teacher identity (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Ostad, 2016; Labbaf, Moinzadeh, & Dabaghi, 2019; Mora, Trejo, & Roux, 2014; Morgan, 2004; Pavlenko, 2003). Moreover, this area is still a promising arena for research compared to the body of research devoted to learner identity (e.g., Ha, 2008; Norton & Toohey, 2011). It is, therefore, asserted that investigating identity and its role in teacher education contributes to the acknowledgment of how it is to be an instructor in today's educational settings and aids to dissolve conflicts between the person and the context in which he/she lives (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004).

In educational settings, professional identity is reflected on as being complicated and dynamic, which makes a balance between professional self-image and the perceived roles teachers play at work (Coldron & Smith, 1999). Concerning the significance of understanding teachers' professional identity, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) believed that understanding identity is the key to understanding language teaching. As Fogle and Moser (2017) also acknowledged, understanding teacher multiple identities is critical to gain deeper insights into the factors that affect teachers' decision-making processes, attitudes, and beliefs. Hence, it may be concluded that professional identity is an influential factor in teachers' level of motivation (Richardson & Watt, 2018), self-efficacy (Azim, 2017), commitment (Troman, 2008), as well as effectiveness (Khalid, 2015). As such, how teachers perceive their professional identity and the variables

contributing to these perceptions is worthy of academic investigation.

Another essential predictor of teacher success can be teacher autonomy. According to the Vygotskian model of learning, promoting teacher autonomy is essential to the creation of a learner-centered environment, which is one of the essential prerequisites of having a successful language classroom. In fact, in such a classroom environment, both individual differences and individual needs of learners can be addressed which can lead to teachers' successful practice (Tort-Moloney, 1997).

There exists a large number of studies on the influential function of teacher autonomy in educational settings (Benson, 2007; Esfandiari & Kamali, 2016; Parker, 2015; Roul, 2002). Smith (2000) defined instructor autonomy as "the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes for oneself as a teacher in cooperation with others" (p. 89). Later, Aoki (2002) also described instructor autonomy as "the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching" (p. 111). A teacher who is autonomous may perceive to be more motivated as the teacher selects what to teach, which in turn provides him/her with the feelings of happiness and satisfaction as he/she goes forth in his/her profession (Esfandiari & Kamali, 2016). In addition, the good feeling that the instructor attains from his/her career can result in his/her increased work efficiency.

A large number of empirical research has been done to date to investigate various cognitive, affective, and personality characteristics of successful teachers (e.g., Bembenutty, 2007; Chan, 2003; Dev et al., 2016; Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011; Khaja, Suryanti, & Wardhono, 2019; Kim, Jörg, & Klassen, 2019). Nevertheless, the roles of teachers' professional identity and autonomy have received scant research attention. Moreover, no empirical study has investigated the role of these concepts simultaneously. Therefore, the present study aimed to fill this lacuna by investigating language instructors' autonomy and professional identity in order to shed more light on these concepts and their contributions to teacher success variable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Professional Identity

Teacher identity has gained considerable attention in educational research, and it is a subject introduced rather recently. The concept of identity has taken on many meanings in the literature across a number of perspectives. Gee (2000) defined teacher identity as "an important analytic tool for understanding schools and society" (p. 99). It is stated that teachers' identity can be implemented as a frame through which aspects of teaching can be investigated (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Despite the fact that defining identity is a difficult task because of its multifaceted and dynamic nature, there appears to be a consensus that identity is a relational phenomenon that teachers themselves adopt or are assigned to (Miller, 2009).

The utilization of the term 'professional' aids distinguishing professionals from non-professionals. Teacher professional identity is the means through which teachers define their professional characteristics (Lasky, 2005). More recently, Borg (2017) defined teacher professional identity in terms of the professional roles teachers and others believe they should fulfill. Teacher professional identity relates to an individual's identity and self-concept that originates from a teacher's understanding of and reflection on his/her career-related experiences (Pinar, 2012). The professional identity of teachers is affected by various factors and is constructed historically, contextually, and socially (Barkhuizen, 2016; Hamilton, 2013; Kao & Lin, 2015). In the teaching context, professional identity is built on three factors: (1) skills related to one's range of specialization; (2) moral integrity; and (3) expertise in pedagogical terms (Carr, 2005).

It is stated that teachers' professional identity can affect their improvement and performance rates (Barrett, 2008; Miller, 2009; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Based on this logic, some scholars have investigated teachers' professional identity in association with professional development as well as teaching quality (Beauchamp &

Thomas, 2009; Labbaf et al., 2019; Mora et al., 2014; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Xiong & Xiong, 2017). Labbaf et al. (2019), for instance, have examined the extent to which the teachers' professional identity factors affect their teaching quality. To this end, 143 EFL instructors and students contributed to semi-structured interviews, and subsequently, based on the thematic analysis of the interviews, a questionnaire was developed and completed by the participants in their study. Consequently, they have found that teacher professional identity factors have considerable effects on teachers' teaching quality. In a similar vein, Mora et al. (2014) examined the interplay among teachers' professional development, agency, and identity. Through implementing this case study, they found that teachers' professional identity and agency play essential roles in teachers' professional development. As their study was done qualitatively, any generalization of the findings should be made cautiously.

Teacher Autonomy

In congruence with the significant role of instructor professional identity, there are some other significant attributes that can lead to teachers' improved practice, such as their specialized knowledge, codes of professional ethics, and autonomy (Carr, 2005). Regarding the definition of autonomy, Pitt (2010) recommended that in the European and North American philosophy and modern social theory, autonomy is a "vexed, complex and contradictory concept" (p. 1). This factor is assumed not to be a natural attribute of people, rather it is learned and relies to some degree on people's inherent abilities (Reich, 2002).

Hoyle and John (1995) regarded autonomy as a pivotal factor in education and recommended the essentiality of considering the nature of teacher autonomy. In an attempt to find a practical definition of this concept, Little (1995) provided the following explanation:

Teachers may be autonomous in the sense of personal responsibility for their

teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of teaching process, and exploiting the freedom from that this confers. (p. 179)

Instructor autonomy tends to be defined rather diversely in language teaching contexts, on the one hand, and in broader educational contexts, on the other hand, which refers to instructors' freedom. In the research literature of the language teaching field, there exists a higher degree of emphasis on instructor autonomy as a work-related feature and the association between learner and teacher autonomy. Early research on the concept of autonomy explored the potential effect of changing teachers' responsibilities in new modes of practice like self-access.

Nevertheless, the concept of instructor autonomy was explained in the instructional context and was linked to the notion that learner autonomy can be attained through pedagogical dialogues through which instructors exert their autonomy (Little, 1995). Most of the research literature, related to the language teaching profession, views instructor autonomy as a job-related feature, accounting for an individual's ability to monitor his/her professional development (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2007; Smith & Erdogan, 2008). There also exists less enthusiasm to distinguish this feature from instructors' capability and inclination to facilitate autonomy among their students. Aoki (2002), for instance, suggested that teacher autonomy can be explained better when compared to learner autonomy:

If learner autonomy is the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own learning . . . teacher autonomy, by analogy, can be defined as the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching. (p. 111)

This researcher considers the analogy not to be sound as it does not highlight the relevance of instructor autonomy to teachers' ability to advocate the development of learners' autonomy. Newer literature indicates

that teacher freedom, as an element of teacher autonomy, is worthy of focus and research. Examining autonomy in the classroom context has brought about new challenges as to defining the responsibilities of teachers who play a mediating role in the educational institution-students' relationships. Instructors' attempts to advocate autonomy within the classroom context are usually limited by instructional variables that are not controllable by the teachers themselves (Benson, 2007; Trebbi, 2008; Vieira, 2003). Recent research on teacher autonomy has also balanced the relationship between teachers' professional characteristics and their freedom, which is mainly understood to happen as a result of teachers' self-directed professional growth and their inclination toward engaging in the process of institutional modification beyond the constraints of their educational context (James, 2002; Smith, 2000).

In a similar vein, Huang (2005) described teacher autonomy as "teachers' willingness capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning" (p. 206). Individuality is not the central focus of this definition. In contrast, Raya, Lamb, and Vieira (2007) de-emphasized the social aspect of teacher autonomy. They noted that a teacher who is autonomous is capable of being free, accepting social responsibility, and seeing education as an arena for (inter)personal control and social change.

Along with the developments toward the definition of teacher autonomy, several researchers have examined the probable relations among instructor autonomy and other variables like teacher burnout, teacher work-related development, job satisfaction, and assessment practices. For example, Varatharaj, Abdullah, and Ismail (2015) examined perceptions of 471 Malaysian trained teachers with regard to autonomy and their effects when assessing students in the classroom. The results revealed that autonomous instructors tend to insert favorable assessment practices in the classroom. Moreover, in a case study lasting for three years done on four novice Chinese EFL instructors, Xu (2015) examined the joint impact of collaboration and autonomy on instructors' professional growth. Results of data obtained from written journals, interviews, as well as classroom

observations revealed a positive association among teacher professional growth and autonomy, as well as student-teacher collaborations.

More recently, Esfandiari and Kamali (2016) studied the relationships between teacher autonomy, work satisfaction, and burnout. To this end, three questionnaires were distributed among 207 language teachers. The results revealed that teacher work satisfaction showed a negative but insignificant association with burnout, while it was negatively and significantly related to teacher autonomy.

Teacher Success

The concept of teacher success can be defined as the extent to which an instructor is effective. What qualities contribute to teachers' success has been an important issue for many researchers active in the area of educational research (e.g., Bremner, 2019; Brown, 2009; Coombe, 2014, 2020; Elizabeth, May, & Chee, 2008; Liakopoulou, 2011; Pishghadam et al.; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2019). In a study focusing on characterizing features of effective language teachers, Brosh (1996) specified the primary features of a successful language teacher as being knowledgeable, maintaining sufficient information regarding the target language, being a good classroom organizer, being capable of providing good explanations, and being available to students both in and out of the classroom. Similarly, Tamblyn (2000) specified characteristics of effective teachers as being creative, having sufficient content knowledge, providing positive reinforcement to students, being flexible and a risk-taker, respecting students, being caring toward learners, having a sense of humor, and finally, being proud of his job as a teacher.

Subsequently, Coombe (2014) has suggested 10 characteristics of highly effective teachers as including having a calling to the profession, having the requisite professional knowledge, having personal qualities like empathy, being an effective instructor, having good communication skills, and so forth. She stated that there is no order of importance in her top 10

list, except for the first quality. She also believed that "effective teachers are driven and passionate about what they do and feel a "call" to teach as well as a passion to help students learn and grow" (p. 2). According to Coombe (2014), "calling" is one of the prerequisites of being a good teacher without which teaching is just another profession.

Similarly, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) identified features for successful teaching practice and categorized them into the following parts: (a) techniques for classroom management and teaching and (b) personal features (Elizabeth et al., 2008). Regarding teachers' personal characteristics, several researchers have investigated various characteristics which may lead to teacher success. For instance, Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009), in an attempt to characterize effective English language teachers, have found that teachers' personality is the most significant predictor of their success (based on students' viewpoints).

In a similar vein, Kim et al. (2019), in a meta-analysis, reported the existence of a significant positive relationship between instructors' personality and job-related outcomes. Toussi, Boori, and Ghanizadeh (2011) also checked the link between EFL instructors' self-regulation and their success among 76 EFL teachers in Iran. To assess teachers' self-regulation, the Teacher Self-Regulation Scale (TSRS) (Capa- Aydin, Sungur, & Uzuntiryaki, 2009), was distributed to the participants. In order to evaluate teachers' performance, the Characteristics of Successful Iranian EFL Teachers Questionnaire (CSTQ) (Moafian & Pishghadam, 2009), was given to the learners of those teachers. They found a significant link between EFL instructors' self-regulation and success. In a similar fashion, Khodabakhshzadeh et al. (2018) examined the influence of teachers' creativity on their effectiveness. A sample of 325 Iranian EFL teachers was randomly chosen and was assessed based on their responses to the ELT-CS and the teaching effectiveness scale. After analyzing the data, they found a significant link between the five components of creativity and the teacher success variable.

Moving beyond the listing of teachers' personal characteristics, it

should be stated that few studies have addressed teacher professional identity and autonomy as critical factors impacting teachers' effective practice. Hence, this study seeks to attend to this gap by investigating language teachers' success with regard to their professional identity and autonomy.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

All in all, based on the paucity of research on the predictability of teacher success by two of their own psychological variables of teacher autonomy and professional identity, the current research attempted to examine, first, the potential association between Iranian EFL teachers' autonomy and professional identity subscales on the one hand, and their success on the other hand, and second, the predictability of Iranian EFL teachers' success by their professional identity and autonomy variables. In this regard, two research questions were posited:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity and autonomy subscales and teacher success?
2. Do Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity and autonomy significantly predict their success?

METHOD

Participants

The participants who took part in this study were selected based on convenience sampling. They were English language teachers with BA, MA, and PhD degrees ranging in their years of experience from 5 to 21. The sample included 66 males (34.7%) and 124 females (65.3%), aged above 22. The respondents were chosen based on their willingness to take part in the study. The general aim of the study was also explained to the participants, and they were reassured that their information would remain confidential and be utilized only in the present study research.

Instrumentation

To collect data for the present study, three instruments were utilized. They are described as follows:

Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire (TAQ). To evaluate language teachers' autonomy, the Teacher Autonomy Questionnaire (TAQ), designed by Pearson and Hall (1993), was employed. This scale is employed to identify how much autonomy teachers perceive themselves to have and includes 18 items. The TAQ uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging in answers from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire consists of two subscales, namely General Autonomy (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17) and Curriculum Autonomy (items 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 18). Cronbach's alpha reliability of .80 for the scale was presented in Pearson and Moomaw's (2005) study. The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was .78.

Teacher Professional Identity Scale (TPIS). Perceived teacher professional identity was assessed via Kao and Lin's (2015) Teacher Professional Identity (TPIS) scale. This scale involves 22 items to which participants provide their responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale consists of six subscales, namely Self-Expectation (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Teachers' Duties (items 6, 7, 8), External Influential Factors (items 9, 10, 11, 12), Pedagogy (items 13, 14, 15), Instructional Skills and Knowledge (items 16, 17, 18, 19), and Teachers' Citizenship Behavior (items 20, 21, 22). The Cronbach's alpha reliability of this instrument was estimated to be .86 in this study.

Characteristics of Successful Language Teachers Questionnaire (CSLTQ). Designed and validated by Babai and Sadeghi (2009), the Characteristics of Successful Language Teachers Questionnaire (CSLTQ) was used to investigate teachers' perceptions of the attributes of a successful

language teacher. The CSLTQ comprises eight factors in the form of 46, 5-point Likert-type items ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The reliability of the CSLTQ was estimated to be .93 in the present study.

Data Collection Procedure

For gathering the required data, the electronic form of the three above-mentioned questionnaires, namely TAQ, TPIS, and CSLTQ were sent via Email, Telegram, and WhatsApp to 350 English language professors/teachers teaching English at schools, universities, as well as language institutes in Iran. Out of the 350 questionnaires sent to the teachers, only 190 of them were completed and sent back to the researchers, equating to a response rate of .54.

Data Analysis

In order to assess whether our data was distributed normally or not, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run (Pallant, 2016). Cronbach's alpha was also used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaires. To investigate the associations among teachers' professional identity, autonomy, success, and their underlying components, the Pearson correlation procedure, through SPSS software version 20, was run. Then, to determine the impact of teacher professional identity and autonomy in teacher success, SEM was used, through AMOS 24 software.

RESULTS

First, to examine whether the data are normally distributed or not, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run. This test is typically employed to examine if the data distribution deviates from a comparable normal distribution. In case the p-value is higher than .05, it is concluded that the sample is normal. However, if the p-value is smaller than .05, it is

concluded that the distribution is not normal. Table 1 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 1: The Results of K-S Test

	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Teacher Success	.07	190	.08
Autonomy	.06	190	.15
Professional Identity	.08	190	.07

According to Table 1, significance values reported for all of our variables are larger than .05, showing that our data are distributed normally with regard to the three variables of the study.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of teachers' success, autonomy, and identity, including the number of participants, the mean, and the standard deviation.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Success, Autonomy, and Identity

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Teacher Success	190	79.00	230.00	199.26	16.14
Autonomy	190	40.00	90.00	61.43	8.32
Identity	190	59.00	110.00	90.46	9.06

According to Table 2, teacher success has a mean score of 199.2, autonomy has the mean score of 61.4, and identity has a mean score of 90.4.

To examine if any significant links exist between teachers' professional identity and autonomy subscales and teachers' success, Pearson Correlation was used.

Table 3: Results of Pearson Correlation between teachers' Professional Identity and Autonomy Subscales and Teacher Success

		Teacher success	Autonomy	Identity
Teacher Success	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N			
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.27**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		
	N	190		
Professional Identity	Pearson Correlation	.57**	.39**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	
	N	190	190	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results presented in Table 3 demonstrate a positive significant correlation between teacher success and professional identity (r =.57, n =190, p = .000, α= 0.01). Furthermore, it is shown that there is a positive significant link between teacher success and autonomy (r =.27, n =190, p = .000, α= 0.01). Finally, it was found that autonomy correlated positively and significantly with professional identity (r =.39, n =190, p = .000, α= 0.01).

To determine the impact of instructors' professional identity and autonomy in their effectiveness, SEM was used. To check whether our data fit the proposed model, some fit indices were assessed. The first one is the Chi-square/df ratio which must be smaller than 3. The second, third, and fourth ones are the Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Good Fit Index (GFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), respectively, all of which are to be smaller than .90. The last one is the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) which must be smaller than .08 (Kline, 2011). Goodness of fit indices results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Goodness of Fit Indices

	X2/df	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Acceptable fit	<3	>.90	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	2.85	.91	.93	.90	.05

From Table 4, we can see that our data resulted in acceptable goodness of fit indices. Hence, it can be concluded that the proposed model had an acceptable fit with the empirical data.

Figure 1 provides the model of interrelationships among teachers' professional identity, autonomy, and success.
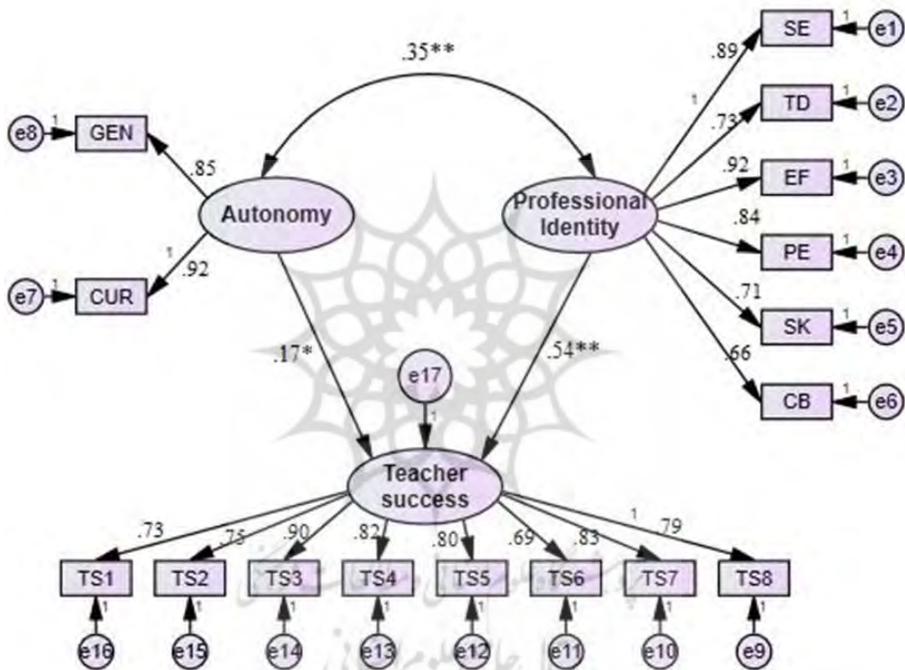
Figure 1: The Model of the Interrelationships among Teachers' Professional Identity, Autonomy, and Success

To examine the causal path from our independent variables to our dependent variable, the standardized estimates were assessed. As it can be seen in Figure 1, teacher success is predicted positively and significantly by both professional identity (β= .54, p<0.05) and autonomy (β= .17, p<0.05).

Moreover, there exists a positive significant correlational path between professional identity and autonomy (β= .35, p<0.05).

DISCUSSION

This research attempted to investigate the associations between teachers' professional identity, autonomy, and their success, and more specifically, to examine the roles of instructors' professional identity and autonomy in their success. Regarding the first research question, the outcomes of correlational analyses pointed to a significant and positive correlation, first, between instructor autonomy and teacher success, and second, between teacher professional identity and teacher success. The relationship between autonomy and teacher success is unsurprising as a teacher who is autonomous may be more motivated as s/he has the freedom to select the materials he/she wants to teach, resulting in his/her happiness with the profession (Esfandiari & Kamali, 2016). The teachers' happiness with their career can bring about progress in their instructional performance.

In addition, based on what Smith (2000) has stated, if teachers' practice is to be considered as successful, he/she must maintain a desired level of autonomy in order to be able to fulfill learners' diverse needs. In fact, teachers and learners must receive the same amount of space, flexibility, care, autonomy, and respect in the instructional context. He also argued that educational supervisors and managers whose decisions affect the classroom environment, should hear teachers' voice and ideas. In other words, instructors and their principals should build their relationships based on equality, bi-directional care, and respect for being able to maintain an effective and positive educational context.

The relationship between professional identity and teacher success may be explained by the fact that teacher professional identity is a key in understanding teacher success and effectiveness since it is strongly linked to how teachers view themselves and the roles they are expected to fulfill (Varghese et al., 2005). Additionally, Cheung (2008) argued that teacher

professional identity is associated with the beliefs and views teachers have about their rights and responsibilities, which lead them to become more successful.

This result is in line with the claim of Fogle and Moser (2017), who stated that professional identity is an influential factor for teachers' commitment and effectiveness. The present study, when examining the subscales of professional identity—external influential factors, self-expectation, pedagogy, teachers' duties, teaching knowledge and expertise, as well as instructors' citizenship behavior, revealed a variance in teacher success from the highest to the lowest degrees, respectively. To be put in simpler terms, influential external factors play significant roles in teachers' success.

Concerning the second research question, the predictive role of instructors' autonomy and professional identity for their quality teaching was investigated through SEM analysis. The results showed that teachers' success is predicted positively and significantly by their professional identity. In fact, how teachers construct their professional identities affect their academic success. This is because teacher professional identity is known to profoundly affect the pedagogical choices and decisions that teachers make in their teaching (Agee, 2004). This result corroborates Labbaf et al.'s (2019) findings, which showed that teachers' identity can predict the effectiveness of their teaching. Additionally, this finding supports the ideas of Huang and Benson (2013), who found that teachers' professional identity development paves the way for their improved work effectiveness. It is also indirectly in agreement with the findings of Beijaard et al. (2004), who suggested that instructors' professional identity can be a key factor in their professional development and their attitudes towards educational changes and policies.

Teacher success is also predicted positively and significantly by teachers' autonomy. In other words, teachers' autonomy plays a crucial role in their level of success as evaluated by themselves through self-report. One probable line of explanation can be based on the rationale that effective

teachers are those instructors who are autonomous in the sense of accepting high levels of responsibility when engaged in their job, being as effective as they can be, inserting high degrees of cognitive and affective control when teaching, and reaching the autonomy that these feelings confer (Little, 1995). This finding is in agreement with Parker's (2015) findings which showed that teachers with higher degree of autonomy are more successful in their profession. This is also in accordance with Roul's (2002) observations, which demonstrated that college instructors who are more autonomous are more successful in comparison to their non-autonomous counterparts. The SEM analysis also revealed a positive significant correlational path between autonomy and professional identity. It shows that in addition to the predictive power of these variables, there are also significant relationships between them. It can be argued that those teachers who have established their identities more firmly in their profession and have been accepted in their community of practice, can more effectively and autonomously go for their professional and personal needs and goals.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The outputs of this research, supported by the literature, lead to a major theme: teacher success is predicted positively and significantly by instructors' autonomy and professional identity. In other words, teachers' professional identity and autonomy play crucial roles in their level of success as evaluated by the teachers themselves.

The results of this study can be informative and useful for language teachers. As put forward by Ramos (2006), autonomous teachers who release themselves from constraints exerted by administrators or educational systems and turn these constraints into opportunities for change, not only can promote the autonomy and achievement of their learners but also, as revealed by the findings of the present study, can significantly enhance their own effectiveness. Therefore, teachers are highly recommended to acquire institutional knowledge in order to address constraints on teaching and

learning effectively and to confront institutional barriers and constraints in socially appropriate ways. However, they should be aware that teacher autonomy does not mean freedom from all constraints. Furthermore, teachers should constantly interpret and re-interpret their professional identity in order to become more successful in their profession. The outputs of the present research can also suggest valuable pedagogical recommendations for teacher education programs. Such programs should highlight the importance of autonomy and professional identity to help instructors improve their effectiveness.

Naturally, all studies have some limitations similar to the present one. One limitation related to the present study is that the sample was relatively small. Hence, the present research can be replicated with more participants in order to understand if the same or similar findings can be found. The next limitation has to do with the present study context, which was only Iran. Thus, any generalization of the findings should be made cautiously. Therefore, Future research should can concentrate on other EFL contexts to explore any probable changes in the results. Furthermore, in the present study, the nature of data collection and analysis was solely quantitative. In future investigations, it might be possible to triangulate the data, through including some interviews or focus groups, to obtain deeper, more comprehensive findings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Ali Derakhshan   (iD)   http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6639-9339

Christine Coombe   (iD)   http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7105-1644

Ali Arabmofrad   (iD)   http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0191-2717

Mohammadsadegh Taghizadeh   (iD)   http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4229-6500

References

Agee, J. (2004). Negotiating a teaching identity: An African American teacher′s struggle to teach in test-driven contexts. *Teachers College Record*, *106*(4), 747-774.

Aoki, N. (2002). Aspects of teacher autonomy: capacity, freedom, and responsibility. *Learner Autonomy*, *7*(7), 110-124.

Arifani, Y., & Suryanti, S. (2019). The influence of male and female ESP teachers' creativity toward learners' involvement. *International Journal of Instruction, 12*(1), 237-250.

Aubrey, J., & Coombe, C. (2010). The TESOL Arabia conference and its role in the professional development of teachers at institutions of higher education in the United Arab Emirates. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, *8*(3), 53.

Azim, M. (2017). Being a teacher: Developing self-efficacy and teacher identity through self-reflective techniques in teacher education programs. *Journal of Education and Practice, 8*, 7-14.

Barkhuizen, G. (2016). Understanding language teachers′ sense-making in action through the prism of future self-guides. In M. Kubanyiova (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research* (pp. 108-114). New York, NY: Routledge.

Barrett, A. M. (2008). Capturing the difference: Primary school teacher identity in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *28*(5), 496-507.

Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher

education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *39*(2), 175-189.

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*(2), 107-128.

Bembenutty, H. (2007). Teachers' self-efficacy and self-regulation. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, *11*(1), 155-162.

Benson, P. (2007). Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*, *40*(1), 21-40.

Borg, S. (2017). Twelve tips for doing teacher research. *University of Sydney Papers in TESOL*, *12*(3), 163-185.

Bremner, N. (2019). What makes an effective English language teacher? The life histories of 13 Mexican university students. *English Language Teaching*, *13*(1), 163-179.

Brosh, H. (1996). Perceived characteristics of the effective language teacher. *Foreign Language Annals*, *29*(2), 125-136.

Brown, A. V. (2009). Students' and teachers' perceptions of effective foreign language teaching: A comparison of ideals. *The Modern Language Journal*, *93*(1), 46-60.

Capa-Aydin, Y., Sungur, S., & Uzuntiryaki, E. (2009). Teacher self-regulation: Examining a multidimensional construct. *Educational Psychology*, *29*(3), 345-356.

Carr, D. (2005). Making sense of education: *An introduction to the philosophy and theory of education and teaching*. London, UK: Routledge.

Chan, D. W. (2003). Multiple intelligences and perceived self-efficacy among Chinese secondary school teachers in Hong Kong. *Educational Psychology*, *23*(5), 521-533.

Cheung, H. Y. (2008). Measuring the professional identity of Hong Kong in-service teachers. *Journal of In-service Education*, *34*(3), 375-390.

Coldron, J., & Smith, R. (1999). Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *31*(6), 711-726.

Coombe, C. (2014). 10 characteristics of highly effective EF/SL teachers. *Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers: Quarterly Journal, 28*(4), 2-11.

Coombe, C. (2020). Quality education begins with teachers: What are the qualities

that make a TESOL teacher great? In J. D. M. Agudo (Ed.), *Quality in TESOL and teacher education from a results culture towards a quality culture* (pp. 171-184). New York, NY & Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Derakhshan, A., Saeidi, M., & Beheshti, F. (2019). The Interplay between Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions of intelligence, care, feedback, and students' stroke. *IUP Journal of English Studies*, *14*(3), 81-98.

Dev, S., Nair, S., & Dwivedi, A. (2016). Emotional intelligence of instructors and the quality of their instructional performance. *International Education Studies*, *9*(5), 40-47.

Elizabeth, C. L. M., May, C. M. H., & Chee, P. K. (2008). Building a model to define the concept of teacher success in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(3), 623-634.

Elsheikh, A., Coombe, C., & Effiong, O. (Eds.) (2018). *The role of language teacher associations in professional development*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Esfandiari, R., & Kamali, M. (2016). On the relationship between job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and teacher autonomy. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, *8*(2), 73-98.

Fathi, J., & Derakhshan, A. (2019). Teacher self-efficacy and emotional regulation as predictors of teaching stress: An investigation of Iranian English language teachers. *Teaching English Language*, *13*(2), 117-143.

Fogle, L. W., & Moser, K. (2017). Language teacher identities in the Southern United States: Transforming rural schools. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *16*(2), 65-79.

Gee, J. P. (2000). Chapter 3: Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, *25*(1), 99-125.

Ghanizadeh, A., & Moafian, F. (2011). The relationship between Iranian EFL teachers′ sense of self-efficacy and their pedagogical success in language institutes. *Asian EFL Journal*, *13*(2), 249-272.

Ghanizadeh, A., & Ostad, S. A. (2016). The dynamism of teachers′ identity: The case of Iranian EFL teachers. *Sino-US English Teaching*, *13*(11), 831-841.

Ha, P. L. (2008). Teaching English as an international language: Identity, resistance and negotiation. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 10*(5), 364-367.

Hamilton, S. E. (2013). Exploring professional identity: The perceptions of chartered accountant students. *The British Accounting Review*, *45*(1), 37-49.

Hoyle, E., & John, P. (1995). *Professional knowledge and professional practice issues in education*. New York, NY: Cassell.

Huang, J. (2005). Teacher autonomy in language learning: A review of the research. *Research Studies in Education*, *3*, 203-218.

Huang, J. P., & Benson, P. (2013). Autonomy agency and identity in foreign and second language education. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *36*(1), 7-28.

James, C. N. (2002). Exploring and defining teacher autonomy: A collaborative discussion. In A. Mackenzie & E. McCafferty (Eds.), *Developing Autonomy: Proceedings of the JALT CUE 2001 Conference, Shizuoka, Japan* (pp. 217-222). Tokyo, Japan: JALT.

Kao, Y., & Lin, S. (2015). Constructing a structural model of teachers′ professional identity. *Asian Journal of Management Sciences & Education*, *4*(1), 69-81.

Khaja, F. N. M., Suryanti, S., & Wardhono, A. (2019). The influence of blended in-service teacher professional training on EFL teacher creativity and teaching effectiveness. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 25*(3), 126-136.

Khalid, F. (2015). The dimensions of identities and its roles in shaping teachers′ effectiveness. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 6*(3), 306-314.

Khodabakhshzadeh, H., Hosseinnia, M., Moghadam, H. A. & Ahmadi, F. (2018). EFL teachers' creativity and their teaching′s effectiveness: A structural equation modelling approach. *International Journal of Instruction, 11*(1), 227-238.

Khodadady, E. (2012). Emotional intelligence and its relationship with English teaching effectiveness. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, *2*(10), 2061-2072.

Kim, L., Jörg, V., & Klassen, R. M. (2019). A meta-analysis of the effects of teacher personality on teacher effectiveness and burnout. *Educational Psychology Review*, *31*(1), 163-195.

Labbaf, A., Moinzadeh, A., & Dabaghi, A. (2019). Professional identity and teaching quality: The case of Iranian EFL teachers. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, *11*(24), 201-225.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency, and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*(8), 899-916.

Liakopoulou, M. (2011). The professional competence of teachers: Which qualities, attitudes, skills and knowledge contribute to a teacher's effectiveness. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *1*(21), 66-78.

Little, D. (1995). Learning as dialogue: The dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy. *System*, *23*(2), 175-181.

Miller, J. (2009). Teacher identity. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education*, (pp. 172-181). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Moafian, F., & Pishghadam, R. (2009). Construct validation of a questionnaire on characteristic successful Iranian EFL teachers. *Pazhuhesh-e Zabanha-ye Kharej*, *64*(2), 27-36.

Mora, A., Trejo, P., & Roux, R. (2014). English language teachers' professional development and identities. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *16*(1), 49-62.

Morgan, B. (2004). Teacher identity as pedagogy: Towards a field-internal conceptualization in bilingual and second language education. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *7*(2-3), 172-188.

Naqvi, I. H., Iqbal, M., & Akhtar, S. N. (2016). The relationship between emotional intelligence and performance of secondary school teachers. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, *38*(1), 209-224.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, *44*(4), 412-446.

Parker, G. (2015). Teachers' autonomy. *Research in Education*, *93*(1), 19-33.

Pavlenko, A. (2003). "I never knew I was a bilingual": Reimagining teacher identities in TESOL. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, *2*(4), 251-268.

Pearson, L. C., & Hall, B. W. (1993). Initial construct validation of the teaching autonomy scale. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *86*(3), 172-178.

Pearson, L. C., & Moomaw, W. (2005). The relationship between teacher autonomy and stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and

professionalism. *Educational Research Quarterly*, *29*(1), 38-54.

Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher identity in language teaching: Integrating personal, contextual, and professional factors. *RELC Journal*, *47*(1), 5-23.

Pinar, W. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Pishghadam, R., & Moafian, F. (2007). Role of high school teachers' multiple intelligences in their teaching success. *Foreign Languages Research Quarterly*, *42*(1), 22-35.

Pishghadam, R., Derakhshan, A., & Zhaleh, K. (2019). The interplay of teacher success, credibility, and stroke with respect to EFL students' willingness to attend classes. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, *50*(4), 284-292.

Pitt, A. (2010). On having one's chance: Autonomy as education's limit. *Educational Theory*, *60*(1), 1-18.

Ramos, R. C. (2006). Considerations on the role of teacher autonomy. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *8*(3), 183-202.

Raya, M. J., Lamb, T., & Vieira, F. (2007). Mapping pedagogy for autonomy. In I. Shotlecove, J. Miliander, & T. Trebbi (Eds.), *Pedagogy for autonomy in language education in Europe* (pp. 19-56). Dublin 2, Ireland: Authentik Language Learning Resources.

Reich, R. (2002). Opting out of education: Yoder, Mozert, and the autonomy of children. *Educational Theory*, *52*(4), 445.

Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. G. (2018). Teacher professional identity and career motivation: A lifespan perspective. In P. Schutz., J. Hong., & D. Cross Francis. (eds), *Research on teacher identity* (pp. 37-48). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Roul, S. K. (2002). *A comparative study of teacher effectiveness of autonomous and non-autonomous college teachers in relation to their mental health, organizational climate, and students' achievement* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). Kurukshetra University, India.

Shishavan, H. B., & Sadeghi, K. (2009). Characteristics of an effective English language teacher as perceived by Iranian teachers and learners of English. *English Language Teaching*, *2*(4), 130-143.

Smith, R. (2000). Starting with ourselves: Teacher-learner autonomy in language

learning. In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions* (pp. 89-138). Harlow, UK: Longman.

Smith, R., & Erdogan, S. (2008). Teacher-learner autonomy: Programme goals and student-teacher constructs. In T. Lamb, & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and teacher autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses* (pp. 83-102). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tajeddin, Z., & Alemi, M. (2019). Effective language teachers as persons: Exploring pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs. *TESL-EJ*, *22*(4). Retrieved April 2019 from http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume22/ej88/ej88a3/.

Tamblyn, P. (2000). Qualities of success: Lessons from a teaching career. *Education Canada*, *40*(1), 16-19.

Tort-Moloney, D. (1997). Teacher autonomy: A Vygotskian theoretical framework. *Centre for Language and Communication Studies*, *48*(2), 1-54.

Toussi, M. T. M., Boori, A. A., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2011). The role of EFL teachers' self-regulation in effective teaching. *World Journal of Education*, *1*(2), 39-48.

Trebbi, T. (2008). Freedom–a prerequisite for learner autonomy? Classroom innovation and language teacher education. In T. Lamb & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Learner and teacher autonomy: concepts, realities, and responses* (pp. 33-46). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Troman, G. (2008). Creativity and performativity in teaching and learning: Tensions, dilemmas, constraints, accommodations and synthesis. *British Educational Research Journal, 34*(5), 619-633.

Varatharaj, R., Abdullah, A. G. K., & Ismail, A. (2015). The effect of teacher autonomy on assessment practices among Malaysian cluster schoolteachers. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, *5*(1), 31-36.

Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, *4*(1), 21-44.

Vieira, F. (2003). Addressing constraints on autonomy in school contexts: Lessons from working with teachers. In D. Palfreyman & R. C. Smith (Eds.), *Learner autonomy across cultures* (pp. 220-239). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Xiong, T., & Xiong, X. (2017). The EFL teachers' perceptions of teacher identity:

A survey of "Zhuangang" and "Non-Zhuangang"primary school teachers in China. *English Language Teaching*, *10*(4), 100-110.

Xu, H. (2015). The development of teacher autonomy in collaborative lesson preparation: A multiple-case study of EFL teachers in China. *System*, *52*(9), 139-148.

Zhaleh, K., Ghonsooly, B., & Pishghadam, R. (2018). Effects of conceptions of intelligence and ambiguity tolerance on teacher burnout: A case of Iranian EFL teachers. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 9*(2), 118-140.