Towards a Critical Language Teacher Identity: Contributions of a Critical Teacher Education Course

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Abstract: The importance of language teacher identity has been widely recognized recently as teachers' professional development is highly influenced by the ways teachers view themselves. Critical orientation towards identity has also received considerable attention recently. Thus, the present study investigated the effect of a Critical Teacher Education Course (CTEC) on EFL teachers' identity (re)construction. The participants included thirteen teachers who were first interviewed using a 20-question interview checklist whose items enabled the researchers to elicit teachers' professional identity with a focus on critical pedagogical orientation. The teachers then attended an in-service CTEC held for ten sessions. The course was primarily dialogue-based where different premises of transformative education and critical pedagogy were introduced and discussed. This was followed by the second interview session in which the teachers were asked the same questions as the first interview. In the meantime, the teachers were also required to critically reflect on their classroom practices through reflective journals. The data were subjected to content analysis (inductive category development). The findings of the study revealed that prior to their participation, the teachers viewed teaching English as a neutral act unaffected by contextual factors, whereas after the CTEC, they became more aware of the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that might affect the whole process. Secondly, compliance with the rules and regulations, policies, and the status quo marked teachers' identities. However, they changed to more integrative teachers with critical orientations after CTEC. The findings might imply that EFL teacher training/education programs become more localized, dialogic, interaction-based, negotiation-oriented, and integration-driven.

Keywords: Critical Teacher Education Course, Critical Language Teacher Identity, Critical Pedagogy, EFL Teachers, Identity.

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Introduction

The movement towards the constructivist and critical approaches to teacher education does not approve of the traditional view considering teachers as consumers of knowledge who only practice others' theories; instead, it views teachers as active participants who can theorize about their practice and apply their own theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Thus, teachers are believed to bring with themselves prior teaching experiences and personal beliefs and theories, which, to a great extent, determine their classroom behavior and action (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). The focus of research in this movement covers a wide range of domains from teachers' beliefs, decision-making, and problem-solving, to content knowledge, practitioner knowledge, etc.

The sociocultural and constructivist approaches to teacher learning and education have also resulted in a surge of interest in teacher professional identity especially around the turn of the new millennium, positing that teacher development is mainly a process of reshaping or constructing professional identity (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Thus, the field experienced an epistemological shift from the traditional cognitivist perspectives to language education, and particularly teacher education, to critical and sociocultural perspectives (Miller, 2009). Recent discussions on teacher identity accentuate the inseparability of language teaching from social language use in classrooms, and the "centrality of situated meanings within repertoires of social practices, involving specific social and institutional contexts and membership" (Miller, 2009, p. 173). Hence, in investigating teacher identity, such issues as agency and power cannot be neglected and, as Miller (2009) notes, a critical dimension with sociological underpinnings has increasingly been added to the sociocultural facet. This critical orientation towards Language Teacher Identity (LTI) largely shapes the framework of the present study, which was adopted both in designing the course and the items of the interview.

Morgan (2017) views LTI as a key element of the knowledge base of language teacher education, which highlights the importance of research in this realm. He goes on to recommend more research to be undertaken on critical and social dimensions in language teacher education settings. Similarly, Kubota (2017, p. 214) also draws attention to this gap by stating that "examining critical language teachers' identity shifts will illuminate their fluid understanding and implementation of criticality" which can accordingly pave the way for practical exploration of critical language teaching.

Although the process of English education in Iran is ideologically and socio-politically oriented (Eslamdoost, King, & Tajeddin, 2019), the process of EFL teachers' identity construction,

especially the critical dimension, has not been paid due attention, which justified the need to conduct the present study to delve into the issue to fill the research gap felt.

Review of the Related Literature

Language Teacher Identity

The literature on language teacher identity has relatively a short history. That is, by a cursory look at the literature, it can be understood that it appeared in the 1990s, which is said to be the social turn in Applied Linguistics. Two main lines of thinking exist to account for the proliferation of research on identity studies and especially the ones focusing on language teacher identities (Varghese et al. 2005). The first line of thinking came as the popularity of classroom-based research increased, showing that classrooms are very complex contexts and that teachers play a pivotal role in the construction of classroom practices. Therefore, more emphasis was laid on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, etc., which revealed that these attitudes should not be considered separately and that teachers' whole identity is at play. This line of thinking, thus, views teacher identity as a determining factor as to how language teaching is carried out in the classroom. The second line of thinking coincided with the emergence of sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions of teaching (Pennycook, 1994, 2001), holding that teachers should not be viewed as neutral players in the classroom. However, their positionality with regard to their students and the broader social context in which the teachers are situated need to be considered. (Varghese et al., 2005). The present study draws mainly upon the second line of research on language teacher identity mentioned above though it also takes some ideas from the first line of reasoning especially with regard to the crucial role of teacher identity in directing teaching and class activities.

Teacher identity is not a fixed and predetermined process, but rather, it is a dynamic process of construction and reconstruction as teachers start to learn to teach (Trent, 2010). That is to say, teacher identity is influenced by both internal factors such as motivation and emotion and external factors such as context and previous experiences (Izadinia, 2013). It can influence teachers' decisions about what they teach, how they teach, and how they communicate with colleagues and pupils (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop 2004). Teachers' professional identity is believed to develop over time as student teachers gain an understanding of values, knowledge, skills, and practices required in the profession (Chong, Ling, & Chuan, 2011) and are greatly influenced by student teachers' previous experiences as being pupils themselves observing the work and practices of teachers they admired. According to Hoffman-Kipp (2008), teacher

identity is "the intersection of personal, pedagogical, and political participation and reflection within a larger sociopolitical context" (p. 153). In line with this argument, Nordstrom (2020), adopting narrative research qualitative inquiry, probed the challenges and experiences of one Swedish teacher of a community language school in Australia. The results revealed that the sense of teacher identity of community language school teachers took place through negotiation and intersection of people, language ideologies, and power relations in a wider educational and sociopolitical context.

More recently, more attention is drawn to the critical aspect of language teacher identity. Morgan (2017), for instance, holds that the work on language teacher identity has reflexive and transformative elements. Historically, our identities are molded by power relations and a professional knowledge base that determines the way we think or act. The reflexivity leads to critical awareness that can help us act against the limitations imposed by the historical power relation and knowledge base, thus encouraging transformative actions. In other words, language teacher identity is a crucial source of agency for social transformation. Similarly, Kubota (2017) holds that critical approaches encourage a "transformative vision, inviting learners to problematize unequal relations of power and to pursue social justice".

Critical Teacher Education

Richards (1989) draws our attention to the distinction between teacher education as training and teacher education as development. The former characterizes the traditional approaches to teacher education that are still practiced in different settings throughout the world while the latter describes more recent alternatives. To elucidate the distinction, he examines five aspects of teacher education, namely approach, content, process, teacher roles, and teacher-educator roles. In teacher education as training, it is believed that the features of effective teaching can be described in discrete terms and are known as rules and principles that are prescriptive in nature. The content of such programs revolves around teachable and observable aspects of teaching and includes specific skills and techniques. Teachers here are viewed as having deficiencies and thus should learn the proper ways of teaching either through modeling the behaviors of teacher educators or observing more experienced teachers. Therefore, they are viewed as imitators and passive recipients of knowledge or apprentices. Moreover, in teacher education as training, the teacher educator is an expert, model teacher, or source of information.

On the other hand, in teacher education as development, the view of teachers' having deficiencies is totally abandoned, and instead, their prior knowledge and experience play a

crucial role in the process of implementing the course. Development is regarded as a life-long process during which teachers inquire, discover, and create their own theories about teaching. In Richards' terms "development does not, therefore, necessarily seek to bring about any specific changes in teacher' behaviors but to increase awareness, deepen understanding of causes and consequences, and to broaden perceptions of what is and is not possible" (p. 6). Teachers play an active role in such programs and are in continuous collaborative relationships with the teacher educators who themselves play the role of collaborators, facilitators, or consultants. The teacher education as training reminds us of the banking model of education in critical pedagogical terms while teacher education as development is more in line with the tenets of transformative education, which formed the basis of the critical teacher education course designed in the present study.

Drawing on the 20 principles proposed by Crawford (1978) as the basis of critical pedagogy in ESL/EFL, Crookes and Lehner (1998) designed a critical teacher education course that focused particularly on ten out of the twenty principles they found more important. The main principles included the development of critical thinking, the focus of the life situations of the learners expressed in the themes of their reality, the focus on dialogue as forming the content of the educational situation, and the recognition of class as a social entity and resource. Moreover, learners are regarded as the producers of their own learning materials and possess the right to make decisions, while the teacher poses problems and participates as a learner among learners to contribute ideas, experiences, opinions, and perceptions to the dialogical process.

Abednia (2009) applied the principles of CP suggested by Crawford (1978) to offer a tentative proposal for transformative L2 teacher development, drawing also upon Richards' (1989) components of teacher education as discussed above. The principles proposed by Crawford (1978) focus on different aspects of critically-informed educational programs influenced mostly by Freiran critical pedagogy. Abednia (2009) claimed he reviewed the literature fully to make sure of the comprehensiveness of the principles and found no new principles emerged. As Crawford's principles provide a theoretical foundation for ELT in general, Abednia (2009) made an attempt to classify the principles into Richards' teacher education model categories consisting of approach, content, process, teacher roles, and teacher educator roles.

The principles emphasize the importance of a problem-posing pedagogy in which, instead of solving problems, teachers, in this regard teacher educators, problematize the taken-

for-granted situations and ask learners (i.e. teacher learners) to reflect on them by trying to find historical, socio-political, and cultural reasons for those problematic aspects of our lives. The aim of such programs is expected to be an increase in teachers' critical thinking that would ultimately result in their critical consciousness. Probably the main tenet of critical pedagogy with regard to content is that the real lives of participants in the programs are of crucial importance in designing the curriculum. In other words, teacher learners' local needs and concerns and their real-life situations form the content of the course rather than some decontextualized needs determined externally.

In addition, 'dialogue' is the main technique in a problem-posing pedagogy and is probably the prerequisite to it. Dialogue empowers learners to participate democratically in educational and sociopolitical contexts (Shor, 1992). Dialogue paves the way toward transformation and an egalitarian education and society if it is also accompanied by higher-order reasoning and thinking skills. This dialogic nature of critical pedagogy also removes the asymmetrical power structure existing in educational settings for a long time. In addition to dialogue, reflection is highly emphasized in the principles. For teachers to be able to transform, they need to engage in reflection on their own actions or that of others. These principles also reject the traditional role of the teacher in the transmission model of education or the one Freire (1973) calls the banking model, in which teachers are considered omniscient knowers whose knowledge needs to be imparted or transmitted to the brains of students who attend the learning context with a blank mind. Here (i.e., in the transformative model), the role of the teacher (or teacher educator) is that of a problem poser who engages in dialogue with students, commenting on their ideas, and learning from their life experiences.

Previous Research Findings

A few studies can be found in the literature that investigated the effects of instruction on teachers' identity development or (re)construction. For instance, to investigate teachers' professional identity development over a four-year period, Chong *et al*. (2011) compared the perceptions of teachers as they entered the undergraduate program with their perceptions at the point of graduation. Their main aim was to see if it was possible to establish a baseline understanding of teachers' perceptions about teaching that had been influenced by their prior experience of being a student and to see if any changes could happen as a result of participating in the program. The participants of the study included 105 teachers who participated in both entry and exit surveys. The only instrument used in the study to collect the data was a five-

point Likert scale questionnaire in which the items sought teachers' opinions and beliefs about teaching and teaching profession. The results showed that teachers' beliefs in values of teaching remained significantly unchanged. They maintain that this consistency in teachers' beliefs about the value of teaching after 4 years is "noteworthy and speaks well of their personal belief system and values about teaching and is essential if they are to stay in the profession they have chosen in the long run" (p. 34). The main implication as they discuss is that "while intrinsic beliefs remain durable, the reality of the classroom especially during the practicum attachments would have an impact on their sense of efficacy as a teacher and in turn affects their sense of identity as well" (p. 35).

Nuske (2015) adopted a case study design to investigate the effect of critical teacher education on novice teachers' identity and conception of criticality. More specifically, the study was conducted to observe the outcome of a critical teacher training course in an MA TESOL program in a university in the United States that registered varied groups of international and American students in a two-year program. The course revolved around three main principles that encouraged the premises of critical approaches, the materials introduced by the instructor of the course were in line with those principles and the main technique employed was dialogic interaction. The researcher triangulated the data to counteract the effect of the observation phenomenon. However, the primary means of eliciting novice teachers' perception was a sequence of interviews including an initial interview being held at the beginning of the course, a mid-semester interview, and a follow-up interview held four months later to trace changes in their perceptions. The participants included a female Chinese student teacher and a female American one. The results showed that "the circumstances of individuals' lived experiences can predict the degree to which they will be receptive to critical concepts", thereby concluding that "experiences of being othered are a necessary precondition for the development of critical faculties" (p. 305). It was found that the Chinese student teacher tried to import the Western ingrained ideology of natives being the owners of language, while the American teacher tried to remove the image of native speaker superiority.

Similarly, in an attempt to examine Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity, Abednia (2012) conducted a case study on seven students in a teaching methodology course in a B.A. program. In fact, he was interested in investigating the professional identity construction of Iranian EFL teachers as a result of participating in a transformative teacher education course. Different instruments and procedures were used for collecting the data such as interviews, teachers' journals, researchers' journals, and focus group discussions in a critical teacher

education course, with the interview being the main instrument to show the shift in teachers' components of identity. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively adopting grounded theory. The results revealed three main changes in teachers' professional identity from "conformity to and romanticization of dominant ideologies to critical autonomy, from no orientation or an instrumentalist orientation to a critical/transformative orientation of teaching, and from a linguistic and technical view to an educational view of second language education" (Abednia, 2012, p. 707). In a similar vein, in a more recent study, Sardabi, Biria, and Ameri (2018) also examined the effect of a critically-informed teacher education course on teachers' professional identity. The comparison of pre-program and post-program interviews with teachers revealed two major shifts in their identity. Prior to the course, their identity was marked by an attitude of compliance and a superficial view of ELT. However, after the course, the teachers developed voice and formed a humanistic view of the profession.

Significance of the Study and the Research Question

As Eslamdoost et al. (2019) argue, the process of English education in Iran is politically and ideologically loaded and shaped; however, the process of EFL teachers' identity construction in such a context is not well addressed. That is, although language teacher identity has recently received some attention in Iran (Abednia, 2009, 2012; Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2019; Soodmand Afshar & Moradifar, 2021), *critical* teacher identity in the world in general and in Iran, in particular, has not received due attention. The present study, thus, aimed at uncovering the effect of a critical teacher education course on teachers' critical identity construction. In other words, attempts were made to answer the following research question:

> What changes can be observed in Iranian EFL teachers' identity as a result of participating in a critical teacher education course?

Method

Participants

The teachers who participated in this study were all EFL teachers teaching English in a private language school. There were thirty teachers in total actively teaching English in that institute who were invited to participate in the study. Eighteen teachers showed willingness to take part. However, as they were called upon, sixteen of them appeared and were then interviewed. The reason why some teachers did not accept the invitation to take part in the study was personal as participation was on a voluntary basis. Therefore, the researchers respected their decision

for not participating. After the interview, they were asked to participate in the critical teacher training program. Thirteen teachers managed to attend all the sessions and participated in the second interview. Therefore, these thirteen teachers constituted the final participants of the study in the qualitative phase. They included six males and seven females, all of whom had at least one year of teaching experience.

The participants of the study were selected based on convenience sampling procedures, meaning that they were selected based on their availability. It should be noted that the participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis. That is, if any of them did not intend to participate in the study for any reason, they were thanked and assured that their job condition would not be affected by their non-attendance in the study. The demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of the Participants*

Teachers' pseudonyms	Gender	Academic degree	Age	Years of teaching experience	Institution they worked in
1. Mina	female	M.A	39	17	University, private language institute
2. Sima	female	M.A	38	15	University, private language institute
3. Sara	female	M.A	34	10	private language institute
4. Maryam	female	B.A	38	8	private language institute
5. Asal	female	M.A	29	6	private language institute
6. Marjan	female	M.A	30	3	private language institute
7. Zahra	female	B.A	33	1	private language institute
8. Reza	male	M.A student	31	11	Public school, private language institute
9. Ahmad	male	M.A	31	10	Public school, private language institute
10. Naser	male	M.A	31	9	Public school, private language institute
11. Hossein	male	M.A student	30	6	private language institute
12. Arash	male	M.A student	24	5	private language institute
13. Mehdi	male	M.A	30	5	private language institute

Instrumentation

Semi-structured Interviews

By reviewing the research on teacher identity, it becomes clear that in the majority of the cases, an interview has been the main instrument for capturing the changes in teachers' identities (Izadinia, 2013). Moreover, an interview as an instrument in qualitative research allows

researchers to obtain an in-depth and rich picture of participants' opinions and attitudes that would not be otherwise collected using other methods of data collection. This study also used interviews, along with some reflective practices, as its main instrument to investigate possible changes in the participants' identities. Some checklists (e.g., Abednia, 2012) were already available to elicit teachers' professional identity. However, since the purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' critical identity construction, a new protocol was designed, adopting and adapting some questions from the available frameworks especially from Abednia (2012) and adding new items to incorporate a critical dimension in the framework to suit the purpose of the study. According to Kubota (2017, p. 212), "a critical teacher identity can be characterized by a firm commitment to social justice, which influences pedagogical orientation. Critical teacher identity is informed by philosophical underpinnings of critical approaches to language pedagogy". To be more precise, such concepts as social justice and provision of equal learning opportunities, transformative vision, power relationship, and adaptation to the status quo and imposition, which were either not highlighted or missing in the existing frameworks, but were among the main principles of critically-informed pedagogy, were added to the framework. The sources from which these new items were extracted included Crookes (2013), Freire (1970, 1973), and Pennycook (2001). Then, the interview protocol was validated by seeking two experts' judgment and was then piloted with three teachers similar to those of the study to make sure the items were not ambiguous before they were used to collect the data. The final version of the interview checklist included 20 questions that can be found in Appendix 1.

Reflective Journals

The teachers who attended the interview sessions were also required to keep reflective journals in which they reflected on their classroom practices considering the critical (e.g., social, cultural, political, and socioeconomic) aspects of their teaching. The teachers were not trained to keep the journal and the journals did not have a fixed and strict structure given the explorative nature of the study. More specifically, they were required to reflect on their relationship with their students, their teaching practices, their focus on and assessment of the responsibility students took in the class and in the society, the role of materials, etc. Each participant submitted three journals during the implementation of the study that lasted two months. The teachers taught approximately 15 sessions during this period.

Intervention

The CTEC mainly drew upon Abednia's framework (2009) as discussed in the previous section (see 2.2). Thus, the purpose of the course was to develop teachers' critical thinking (approach) by presenting situations to them as problems (i.e. problem-posing pedagogy) upon which they were asked to reflect. Their reflections were read aloud in the class and were discussed causing the second round of reflection stimulated by materials coming from learners that formed the content of the course. Dialogue formed the context of the course. The teacher educator steered clear of lecturing and instead tried to pose problems and engaged the participants in the dialogue. Then, he participated in dialogues as a student teacher, sharing ideas and commenting among them (teacher role). Dialogic discussion (Hawkins & Norton, 2009) is believed to be an important principle of a critical SLTE (second language teacher education) course and very much in line with the sociocultural view of learning and development, which was also the main method of instruction in the critically-informed language pedagogy adopted in the present study.

At the beginning of the course, the participants were asked to write about their educational background and the educational context in which they had studied at all levels, that is, from early school to university. It became obvious they had mainly experienced the transmission or the banking model of education throughout their educational lives since all teachers referred to a system of education in which they were only regarded as the recipient of knowledge. For example, Arash wrote,

> *in all stages from primary school up to now that I am an M.A. student, the teachers have decided what to study and how. I mean they lectured in front of the class all the time and we were considered good students if we accepted all they said and memorized them.*

Then, we introduced the model discussed above and asked the participants to reflect on it, discussing the positive and negative points associated with such a model and comparing it with the traditional model to which they have been exposed. Not surprisingly, some of the teachers (especially the ones working in public schools as well) found the transmission model effective and advantageous. Next, we tried to problematize the status quo of the educational system, their lives and career situations by posing further questions. The participants were asked to further reflect on their classroom practices that were the result of the banking model of education and were then asked to act on the findings of their reflection. As Abednia (2009)

argues, a teacher development course "can claim to develop transformative intellectuals only when it inspires teachers to act on the findings of their reflection. This can be best realized if teachers are encouraged to put their ideas into action in their own classes" (p. 273). In another session, we asked teachers to reflect on their expectations of our in-service program and their reflections were again read aloud in class, showing that most teachers expected us as teacher educators to teach them the best ways of teaching different language skills and components. We asked them to think about the social, cultural, and educational reasons of why they formed such expectations in their minds and then we engaged them in dialogues, discussing the reasons. They were warned against such a model whose ultimate result is an undemocratic educational system. In other sessions, first, we discussed teachers' reflections coming from their life situations and then we introduced the premises of critically-informed language pedagogy (i.e. the CTEC) using such sources as Freire (1970, 1973), Pennycook (2001), and Crookes (2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

First, teachers were invited to attend the first interview session, which lasted from 30 to 50 minutes. It took the researchers three weeks to interview the teachers. Then, after two months, the interviewed teachers were invited to attend an in-service teacher education program (i.e. the CTEC discussed above). The course was held for ten sessions, with each session lasting between 70 and 90 minutes. We met every week for nearly two months. Then, after nearly a month, the post-training interview sessions were held. Thirteen teachers managed to attend all the sessions in the program and participated in both interviews. It took us two weeks to interview all thirteen teachers and each interview lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded for further analysis. Of course, in all the stages of data collection, the teachers were informed that they were recorded and it was done with their consent.

The data collected from the interviews and teacher training course sessions were transcribed fully and were then analyzed using the inductive content analysis approach. That is, the transcribed interviews along with the reflective journals were subjected to inductive content analysis to find the common themes and the recurring patterns of the teachers' responses.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the interview sessions along with the results obtained from teachers' reflective journals and the recorded focus group discussions revealed that the teachers developed a critical identity that included three components, namely, the development of voice, moving from full adaptation and compliance to integration, and from being submissive and obedient to becoming more autonomous.

Language teacher identity is believed to be affected by such factors as prior teaching and learning experiences, values, beliefs, or even gender and religion (Olsen, 2008; Cook, 2009; Motha, 2014; Varghese, 2017). Given this, as stated previously, the teacher participants of the study have grown up in a context where conformity and adaptation are expected and even praised. In this view, teachers' contribution is limited to the operational part of the instruction (Ben-Peretz, 2001), which, thus, forms the content of teacher training courses. Therefore, the identity of teacher participants of the study who had experienced such a context, as evidenced by their views expressed in the first interview and the first journals they wrote, was initially marked by conformity, adaptation, and obedience prior to their participation in the CTEC. However, they developed a critical voice and awareness and became more autonomous and integrative.

Most of the teachers interviewed were unaware of the fact that sociocultural and political factors could affect their teaching. When asked to reflect on how they were influenced by such factors, most of them claimed that they were not interested in politics and that their teaching was only affected by educational factors, and even when they agreed that the above-mentioned factors could affect their teaching, they were not able to explain how they could. For instance, Naser said,

> I have never thought about whether these factors might influence the way I teach or treat my students. To me, as a teacher, the educational factors are of crucial importance and such other factors as political, cultural, and economic ones are of little interest and importance because they do not affect my students' learning.

Most other teachers held similar views. However, as the analysis of the second interview and their last reflective journals indicated, the teachers became more aware of the role social, cultural, and political factors could play in their teaching. Arash commented, "It goes without saying that those factors [e.g., social, cultural, political, etc.] affect teaching because you are

working with students and students are directly dealing with socio-economic and cultural factors". Zahra referred to her first language as an important cultural factor that could contribute to the way she interacted with her students. Asal drew attention to the way she avoided some challenging topics due to the fact that they were culturally or religiously inappropriate. Therefore, the course seems to have enabled the teachers to develop an awareness of factors affecting their teaching beliefs and practices and accordingly to develop a voice. These remarks and findings here can be corroborated by the results of Nordstrom (2020), which revealed that the sense of teacher identity of language teachers was shaped through negotiation and was affected by the ideologies and power relations existing in a wider educational and sociopolitical context.

It was also observed that adaptation marked teachers' identity to a great extent prior to attending the CTEC. This finding is also corroborated by the results of the study by Soodmand Afshar and Donyaie (2019) in which most participants agreed that adaptation was acceptable behavior. Freire (1973) strongly disapproved of adaptation, attributing it to the animal realm displayed by humans. In the pre-course interview session, the majority of teachers stated that they could easily adapt to any teaching situation, although some teachers stipulated some conditions. Marjan said, "when you are teaching somewhere, you have to obey their rules and adapt to their regulations because as a good teacher you need to know how to adapt yourself to many teaching contexts to succeed". Sima explained "I am an adaptable person and I can adapt to any teaching situation. As a teacher, it is necessary to adapt to situations and conditions". She went on to suggest that,

> ... . If the educational system is good and the materials you are provided to teach are up-to-date, then it is not necessary for teachers to have freedom since fruitful results would be obtained only by following the rules and adapting to regulations.

In a similar vein, Zahra believed that "sometimes we have to adapt. We need our job". Still, Naser suggested, "if you want peace in your workplace, you have to show adaptation; otherwise, you might run into conflicts with your supervisors or managers".

However, there was a shift in teachers' identity in this regard after attending the CTEC and the teachers' identity was marked by what Freire (1973) calls *integration* which is defined as "the capacity to adapt oneself to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality" (P. 4). For instance, Sima who said she could adapt to any teaching situation stated that "I try to be logical and in some situations, it is not possible to adapt". Arash

said, "to be frank, you fool yourself by adapting to teaching situations and contexts you find contrary to your beliefs and expectations". Most of the other teachers had similar ideas and claimed they could only adapt to situations they found rational and would try to change the situations that were unacceptable to them.

Finally, it was found that teachers became more critically autonomous after taking part in the CTEC. Prior to their participation, they tended to accept institutional rules uncritically and were unlikely to challenge authoritative power. Asal said, "I accept all the conditions imposed by authorities if they are experienced". The same idea was expressed by most other teachers. Ahmad believed if teachers opted to keep their jobs, they had to abide by the regulations imposed by the managers and authorities. In fact, he found the rules quite effective, as they led to some standard methods of teaching which were observed by all the teachers. He went on to suggest that if all teachers conform to the regulations of the institute where they teach, "students do not get confused, once their teacher is replaced by a new one". In other words, almost all teachers seemingly advocated standardization in the educational context, which can result in less confusion on the part of the learners. However, in contrast to what the participants said prior to attending the CTEC, Canagarajah (2017, p. 70) warns us that, "language teachers are not clones of one another".

After attending the CTEC, however, the participants seemed to have gone through some changes. Arash, for instance, asserted that he could no longer work for "managers who are inconsiderate or so strict". He went on to suggest that he would get out of the places where he had no freedom. He further commented, "when you are under pressure, you cannot actualize your full potentialities". Similarly, Mina held that,

> It is impossible for me to work for someone who does not understand us and wants to tell me what to do and what not to do all the time. First, I talk to that manager and then if nothing changes, I will leave.

Similarly, Naser asserted, "rules are there to be broken if they do not sound logical to me. After all, we are the teachers who spend most of our time with students in class". Finally, they came to view standardization as something that can stifle teachers' creativity to a great extent.

The above excerpts can support Borg's (2009) claim that teacher professional identity is heavily influenced by teacher education. This claim, which was corroborated by the results of the present study, has also gained support by the findings of some other similar studies. For

one, Soodmand Afshar and Donyaie (2019) found that EFL teachers constructed and reconstructed their professional identity through participation in consciousness-raising interactive workshops on reflective journal writing. Kubota (2017) argues that this critical orientation, which was observed in teachers' identity in the current study, can help teachers move toward emancipation and transformation of the status quo to achieve socially just education. She also believes that "teacher and teacher educators who endorse such orientations tend to have an identity with a distinct ethical commitment, which guides their pedagogical practices" (p. 212).

Concluding Remarks and Implications

With the status of English in the world today and the growing need to learn it as an international language (EIL), teachers need to be aware of such issues as the sociocultural context of teaching, agency, domination and power relationship, the native/non-native binary as well as the kind of pedagogy which is culturally, socially, and politically loaded if they are to transform the status quo and move towards a just and democratic education. As Dewey (1916, cited in Carson, 2005, p. 1) maintains, "it is not the place of the school to educate citizens for a democracy, rather it is the role of the school to create the public for a democratic society", and at the heart of schools lies the pivotal role of the teacher. Although as Johnston (1999) argues, teachers are not social activists and are not thus expected to go to extremes to bring about radical changes, if they add critical dimensions to their instruction and encourage their students' critical thinking and reasoning, the students tend to experience a just and democratic education and thus develop a democratic mind, which might later be transferred to the society at large. They can, thus, develop the capacity to fight oppression, inequity, and dominant ideologies later in life. This is the way teachers can play their roles as cultural workers (Freire, 2005) and as transformative individuals (Giroux, 1992).

As indicated by the results of the current study, teachers thus need to attend some teacher training courses, like the one held in the present study, to unlearn (Botelho & Gibson-Gates, 2008) the premises of the banking model of education to which they might have been exposed during the whole course of their profession and learn new methods of teaching and learning which are more in keeping with the critical approaches. Thus, policymakers, curriculum developers, syllabus designers, materials writers, and most importantly teacher educators should emphasize the crucial role of interaction, negotiation, and integration in the process of constructing and reconstructing foreign language teachers' critical identity. Further, the

normalization and standardization procedures in education which are highly emphasized in teacher training/education courses these days, and which were believed by the participants of the study to form the structure of the educational context of the present study, should be replaced by more localized approaches which allow the teachers to question the status quo, to engage in dialogues with their students, policymakers, and managers to make their voices heard in their community. Dantas-Whitney and Waldschmidt (2009) warn against viewing language education as a nonlocalized activity in which the individual needs of students are neglected in the belief that there can be a tailor-made one-size-fits-all framework that can be adopted in all (EFL/ESL) settings and contexts to help students succeed. Instead, they stress that teachers regard teaching as a situated activity wherein the needs of the learners should be sought when making decisions. They further maintain that teaching should not be viewed as a neutral act and that social, cultural, political, and economic factors should also be taken into account.

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Appendix

Interview questions to capture possible changes in teachers' identity

1. In the contexts you are teaching, do you think socioeconomic factors affect your teaching? How?
2. In the contexts you are teaching, do you think cultural factors affect your teaching? How?
3. In the contexts you are teaching, do you think political factors affect your teaching?
4. How has your educational background affected your teaching beliefs and conducts?
5. How do you describe yourself as a teacher?
6. What type of teacher do you want to be in the future?
7. What is your purpose of teaching EFL?
8. What are your main responsibilities as a teacher toward yourself?
9. What are your main responsibilities as a teacher toward your students?
10. What do you think the characteristics of good/ successful EFL teachers are?
11. What do you want to change about the present situation so that it is more in line with your pedagogical ideas?
12. How much freedom do you feel you have in choosing what and how to teach?
1. How free should you be in doing so?
13. To what extent do you affect the context where you work and to what extent does it affect you?
14. Who has power in your classroom and how is it expressed?

15. Can you adapt yourself to every teaching situation? Is it necessary to adapt?

16. Do you accept the conditions imposed by authorities? Why?

17. Do you try to change the things you do not like in your job?

18. Can teachers contribute to the social transformation of the larger world? How?

19. How important is it to provide equal learning opportunities for all learners? Is it possible to do so?

20. Should all teachers behave in a uniform way to move toward standardization? Why or why not?