Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal
IEEPJ
University of Hormozgan
Online ISSN: 2588 - 4395
Homepage: https://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

Integrating Language Socialization and Professional Identity: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Iranian EFL Teachers' Role Negotiation in Educational Contexts

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Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 25 Jul. 2025
Received in revised form 13 Aug. 2025
Accepted 14 Sep. 2025
Published online 01 Dec. 2025

Keywords:
Language Socialization,
Professional Identity,
EFL Teachers,
Role Negotiation,
Mixed-Methods Approach

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates how language socialization influences the development of professional identity among Iranian teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Methods: A mixed-methods design was employed to examine how language socialization practices interact with the development of professional roles as teachers negotiate their identities across diverse educational settings. Data were collected through qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys administered to Iranian EFL teachers.

Results: The findings reveal that professional identity formation is shaped by multiple factors, including cultural norms, institutional practices, and personal experiences. Teachers employ various strategies to negotiate tensions between their personal expectations and institutional performance demands. The results also indicate that professional identity is continuously redefined through ongoing socialization processes, alongside teachers' individual agency.

Conclusions: The study highlights the complex relationship between language socialization and professional identity development. It underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of teacher identity and offers valuable implications for teacher education and professional development programs for EFL teachers.

Cite this article: Hadi, S., Rezvani, E., Salehi, H. & Tabatabaei, O. (2025). Integrating language socialization and professional identity: a mixed-methods analysis of Iranian EFL teachers' role negotiation in educational contexts. *Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal*, 7 (4), 1-16.

DOI: https//doi.org/ 10.22034/7.4.1

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Publisher: University of Hormozgan.

DOI: https// doi.org/ 10.22034/7.4.1

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Introduction

The concept of a professional identity has attracted increasing interest from EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers because of its significant role in determining teachers' teaching practices, their career paths, and the extent to which they are successful as teachers. A teacher's professional identity is not just the result of someone's internally held beliefs, views and values, but is also the result of their lived experience as well as being constructed through social interactions with their peers, the cultural norms of their respective societies, and the institutional norms set by the schools they work for. Language socialization, which refers to the informal and often unintentional ways in which teachers develop their skills and knowledge of how to communicate with others in their professional environments (e.g., language, culture and pedagogical competence), significantly affects how teachers form and change their professional identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 176; Duff, 2017, p. 255).

Most of the previously published studies on the issue of a language teacher's identity and teacher identity development have primarily utilized qualitative research methods, and relied on narrative and/or contextual methodologies as an approach to collecting data. The research indicates that through their active engagement in communities of practice, teachers develop an identity as educators by negotiating their positions within the complex interactions between their personal aspirations and the requirements of the institution (Wenger, 2023, p. 308 As identity development is complex and involves many different factors, identity development in non-Western contexts especially Iran, should be addressed with a more refined approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Also, the processes by which educators negotiate rle as they incorporate their own agency into the activities imposed upon them by their educational environments, as described by Moradkhani & Ebadijalal (2024), have been under-represented in the literature (p. 13). This article attempts to fill this gap by examining the effect of language socialization practices on the professional role negotiation practices used by Iranian EFL educators. The study uses a mixed-methods approach including qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, to offer a well-rounded understanding of the various factors that influence the professional identity of instructors. By utilizing both rich narratives and statistical information, the purpose of this study is to provide insight into how teachers of English to speakers of other languages create their professional identity and how each is reshaped through socialization

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processes and through a teacher's agency. The value of this research project derives from its addition to the existing literature on teachers' identities, and will specifically address the landscape of Iranian education as a non-Western educational context. Specifically, this study will demonstrate how cultural, institutional and contextual influences have all intersected to impact on the identity that Iranian EFL teachers construct for themselves (Namaziandost et al., 2024, p. 381). The results produced by this research will be valuable not only to teacher education but also in building effective systems for both teacher training and teacher professional development in Iranian education contexts by demonstrating the practical elements of developing teachers' agency and capacity for responding to change in dynamic educational reform efforts (Moradkhani & Ebadijalal, 2024, pp. 24-25).

Material and Methods

The methodology used in this research consisted of a mixed-methods approach to explore how language socialization relates to the creation of an identity for EFL teachers working in Iran. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods provided a comprehensive picture of the influences on how teachers negotiate their roles across multiple educational environments. This approach enabled researchers to discover the lived experiences of teachers, as well as to quantify the key elements influencing their professional identities.

The research design consisted of a sequential explanatory approach whereby qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews prior to carrying out the quantitative data collection (using a structured survey). Both qualitative and quantitative findings were analyzed together to gain greater insight into the themes and dimensions related to language socialization and professional identity creation for EFL teachers in Iran. A 62-item questionnaire that contained empirical evidence from interviews was designed, based on the qualitative analysis, for the purpose of collecting quantitative data. The integration of both types of data permitted richer data analysis and verification of the identified variables, and contributed to a more holistic understanding of the focus of this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Participants

The sampling of study participants was conducted via purposive sampling from within a population of 213 Iranian EFL teachers. Through this type of sampling, participants were assured

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to have an array of diversity among their education level, experience level and professional practice. This method allowed for the selection of a representative sample for the purpose of generalization within the Iranian context. Characteristics of the 213 teachers were summarized in the following demographic categories:

- Gender: 77% Male, 23% Female
- Age: 28% 25-35 years old; 51% 36-45 years old; 21% 46 years or older
- Educational Level: 32% Bachelor's Degree; 46% Master's Degree; 22% Doctoral Degree
- Years of Teaching Experience: 12% 6-10 years; 24% 11-15 years; 22% 16-20 years; 24% 21-25 years; 18% greater than 25 years.

As a result of the diversity in the teacher sample, a range of experiences and perspectives of teacher professional identity development through various teaching career stages will be reflected in the study's data.

Instrumentation

The study used two different tools of data collection, a semi-structured interview guide and a survey questionnaire consisting of 62 items.

1) Semi-Structured Interviews: A review of the current literature and feedback from subject matter experts was used to create the interview protocol. The qualitative interviews were designed to provide an understanding of teachers' experiences with language socialization, perceptions of their professional identity, and the contextual factors that impact their negotiation of this role. The qualitative interviews investigated areas such as institutional influences, cultural expectations, and teacher-student and peer-teacher interactions.

2) Quantitative Measurements of Language Socialization and Professional Identity (Surveys): To measure five dimensions of language socialization and professional identity, the quantitative measurements (e.g., the questionnaire) were designed to measure five different dimensions/factors of language socialization and professional identity: causal; contextual; strategic; intervening; and outcome variables. All of the survey's 62 items were developed in the Persian language (the first language of all of the teachers). Thus, the items provided a degree of clarity and a degree of cultural relevance. Using a rating scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), participants rated each item on the scale. The survey was validated through a pilot study with a small sample of teachers to establish its validity and reliability.

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Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process consisted of two distinct phases:

1) Qualitative Phase: In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with 11 Iranian EFL teachers, selected to represent various lengths of time in the teaching profession and have roughly equal representation from large and small institutions, giving us ample views on this issue. All interviews (45-75 minutes in length) were conducted in either Persian or English, per the participants' preference. All interviews were recorded after obtaining the participant's consent, transcribed precisely and analyzed using qualitative coding.

2) Quantitative Phase: A total of 213 out of 300 potential research subjects were used to create and send out a 62-item survey based upon data from the qualitative research phase. To reach different parts of Iran, an online survey was sent out to make it easier for participants to have access to the survey. Participants in the survey were given details for why the survey was being conducted and all participated after they signed a consent form for participation. Following completion of the survey, the responses collected from the participants will be analyzed**.**

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to analyze the qualitative data, employing the techniques of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify key themes and key categories associated with language socialization and formation of professional identity, which in turn were used to guide the construction of the survey instrument. Quantitative data were tested for construct validity and reliability of the measurement model via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) before the implementation of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques to assess direct and indirect relationships among latent variables in the model, as well as the mediation of strategic professional actions between context and identity outcomes. CFA and SEM were accomplished using AMOS software, and multiple goodness-of-fit indices were calculated (CFI, RMSEA, and Chi-square divided by degrees of freedom) to assess model fit. Direct and indirect pathways were assessed for significance using both path coefficient and critical ratio (CR) values to ensure statistically valid and reliable relationships among the factors.

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Results

The objective of this study is to investigate the role of language socialization in the development of professional identity for Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers; in particular, that involves examining how interactions between the socialization processes and the development of the professional roles of the teachers take place via various educational contexts. In this regard, the aim of this study is to help us understand how socialization processes influence how teachers develop and renegotiate their professional identities in order to balance their personal aspirations with the institutional and systemic requirements of the educational system.

A mixed-methods design was utilized which included both quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a thorough description. The qualitative data (from extensive interviews) was used to generate rich, narrative data, whereas the quantitative data (through the structured survey) was utilized to quantify the broader patterns exhibited by teachers when negotiating their professional identities. This combination of qualitative/quantitative data allowed for a comprehensive view of how teachers negotiate their professional identities. This study adds to the expanding amount of literature regarding professional identity formation, challenging and reconstructing within the context of the educational system through consideration of both individual agency (personal motivators and strategies) and institutional expectations (demands placed on teachers by schools and/or educational authorities). How teachers' professional identities are developed is multi-faceted in nature as various factors influence their professional identities, including both causal and contextual factors (e.g., background, environment) and strategic or active measures they take (e.g., professional development opportunities and collaborative work with peers) and psychological resilience (capacity to cope with stress and adversity). All the themes discussed are important in how teachers establish, negotiate, and reshape their professional identities in different educational contexts; however, such as in Iran, where several cultural, political, and social factors impact educational systems, and therefore how professional identity develops are significantly different than those seen in Western educational systems. The purpose of the remainder of this section is to provide a thorough examination of all of the findings including starting with the quantitative data that provides an understanding of the sample's makeup and predicts future implications and ending with a qualitative discussion of how the quantitative data is then transformed into qualitative data and what is being discussed in terms of the factors influencing

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the development of teachers' professional identity and the dynamics of their professional environment.

Quantitative Data and Demographic Representation

Survey results have yielded a large amount of quantitative data regarding demographic characteristics in the respondent pool. Given the importance of understanding how these different characteristics contribute to a larger trend and pattern associated with a particular profession (i.e., EFL teachers in Iran), this descriptive statistical information will serve as a vital building block for the results presented in the analysis section. The information included in Table 1 provides an overview of the total sample of respondents across the numerous different characteristics that were investigated. This information will provide essential context for interpreting the survey responses in the subsequent analysis.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Gender, Age, Education Level, and Work Experience

Gender	Frequency	Frequency percentage
Man	165	77%
woman	48	23%
Total	213	100%

In the data presented in Table 1, we were able to see the age distribution of this sample. The majority of respondents (51%) are found to fall into the age category of 36 to 45 years old. This age range is typically representative of mid-career professionals that would be highly experienced in their teaching careers, and well-established with regard to their current position. The age range of 25 to 35 years old (28%) shows there is a cohort of slightly younger respondents that are still fairly early in their careers, but still capable of providing a wealth of experience. The age difference among the respondents allows the study to provide a broad perspective of the various stages of development of professional identity and help provide a more complete picture of how professional identity develops over time.

The representative gender of the sample, presented in Figure 1, shows that the vast majority of the participants were male (77%) and, in comparison, females only made up 23%. While, again, this has been a common phenomenon across many educational systems, it still does allow for a significant amount of information to be shared concerning the experiences and challenges of both male and female teachers that exist in the Iranian system. Even with the majority of the sample

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being male, the inclusion of female respondents allows for the experiences of the formation of professional identity from a gendered perspective to be included in the study.

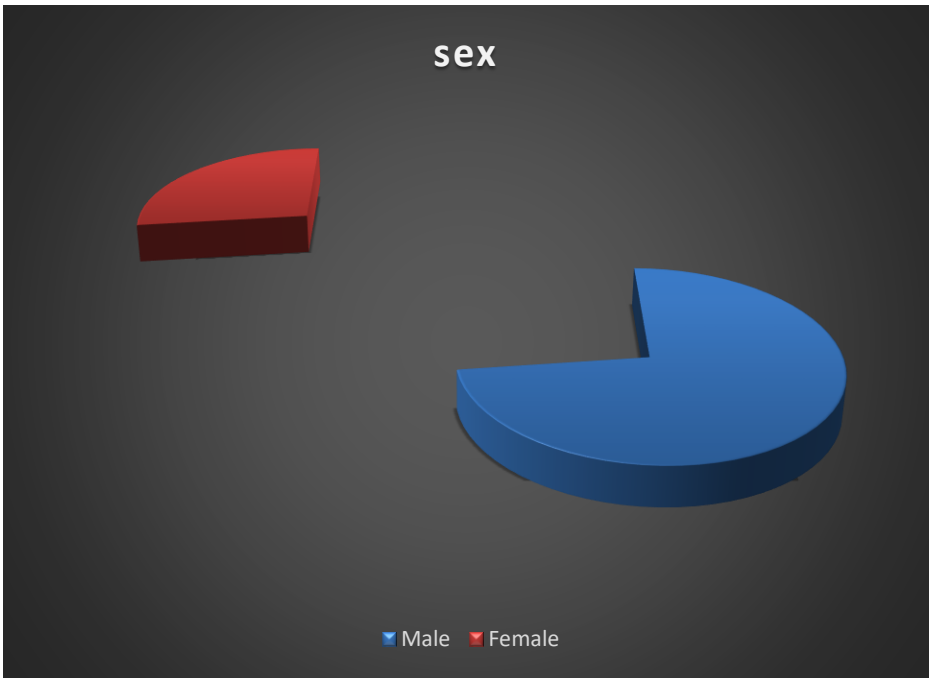

Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

Analyzing the distribution of participants by gender, the pie chart included in Figure 1 shows that there is an imbalance between male and female participants. Understanding this difference is imperative to establishing a context for how gender could affect the perceptions that teachers have about their professions, and how they develop their identities in a profession that is predominately occupied by males. This distribution also allows for exploration of gender-related differences that exist between teachers' interactions with institutional norms, as well as the cultural expectations that are imposed on teachers.

Causal and Contextual Influences among Professional Identity

The major themes that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of this research study focused on the level to which causal and contextual influences play a major role in shaping the professional identities of teachers. These influences provide the building blocks on which teachers develop their professional roles and identities. A teacher's self-concept is initially shaped through

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many causal influences (e.g., one's own experiences, their culture, or previous forms of education). The data shows that teachers entering the profession with higher levels of academic achievement coupled with supportive/encouraging family or community backgrounds tended to have clearer and more confident professional identities early in their career progression. This early experience is viewed as a lens for the way in which they view their roles and responsibilities in education. Additionally, the study indicates that many contextual factors, including institutional culture, organizational rules and peer relationships, have an even larger effect on teachers' professional identity development. The SEM analysis indicates that teachers' professional identities are more impacted by the workplace environment than by any aspects of their personal and or academic backgrounds. Institutional policies shaped how teachers navigated their roles; thus, teachers' professional identities were also influenced by the support received from peers. These findings also support Wenger's (2023) Sociocultural Theory that indicates that the professional identity of teachers is always negotiated within a community of practice where teachers integrate personal values and the realities of their institutions. Through the dynamic process of negotiating a professional identity each day through the feedback they receive from their experiences in their work environment, teachers change their identity frequently based on the way they perceive themselves as professionals. Table 2 illustrates the relationship between institutional culture and professional identity through a bar chart. As illustrated by this chart, teachers who work in an environment that supports their individualized needs and has the same values as they do, create a positive and coherent professional identity. Whereas teachers who work in an environment that has conflicting values/expectations with those of the institution have a difficult time reconciling their professional identity with the expectations imposed on them by the institution.

Table 2. Influence of Institutional Culture on Professional Identity

Axial codes	Free codes
Causal factors in the pattern of language socialization in the formation of language teachers' professional identity factors	Educational experiences
	Social and cultural environment
	Interaction with colleagues (communications and interactions with teachers and educational staff)
	Learning models
	Feedback and evaluation
	Teaching methods
	Education and training courses
	Feedback from students
	Educational experiences
	Job experiences
	Educational workshops

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	Specialized courses
	University programs
	Participation in school activities
	Cultural values
	Teaching and learning experience
	Innovation and professional development
	Colleagues and social networks
	Personal characteristics and motivations
	Cognitive ability
	Personality and emotional characteristics
	family
	Friends and peers
	Communication and pluralism
	Collaboration in educational teams
	Educational philosophies and learning theories
	Career and professional challenges
	Access to resources and administrative and social support
	Influence on interpersonal interactions
	Create effective communication
	Exchange of experiences
	Adapting to culture and values
	Accepting multiple identities
	Social and cognitive effects
	The formation of self-awareness
	Responding to learning needs
	Self-learning and flexibility

In table 2, the bar chart illustrates how institutional culture significantly affects the development of professional identity. The results show that teachers who report a strong alignment between personal values and institutional culture experience greater professional identity coherence, while those in less supportive environments experience more role ambiguity.

Strategic Actions and Teacher Agency

According to the findings of this study, strategic professional actions have a crucial role in negotiating and creating professional identities. Teachers utilize role negotiation methods, including, but not limited to: reflective practice, peer collaboration, and participating in professional development initiatives. Through these actions, teachers can remain autonomous in the way they navigate their professional autonomy relative to the demands of the educational system. Strategic actions give teachers the ability to express their agency and exert control over their professional roles, which can be restricted by institutional policies or expectations. For example, reflective practice enables teachers to analyze/critique the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, negotiate how their pedagogy aligns with the requirements established by their

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institutions, and subsequently develop appropriate teaching practices; peer collaboration creates an environment where teachers can provide one another with support, share ideas, and discuss issues, thereby strengthening their sense of professional identity.

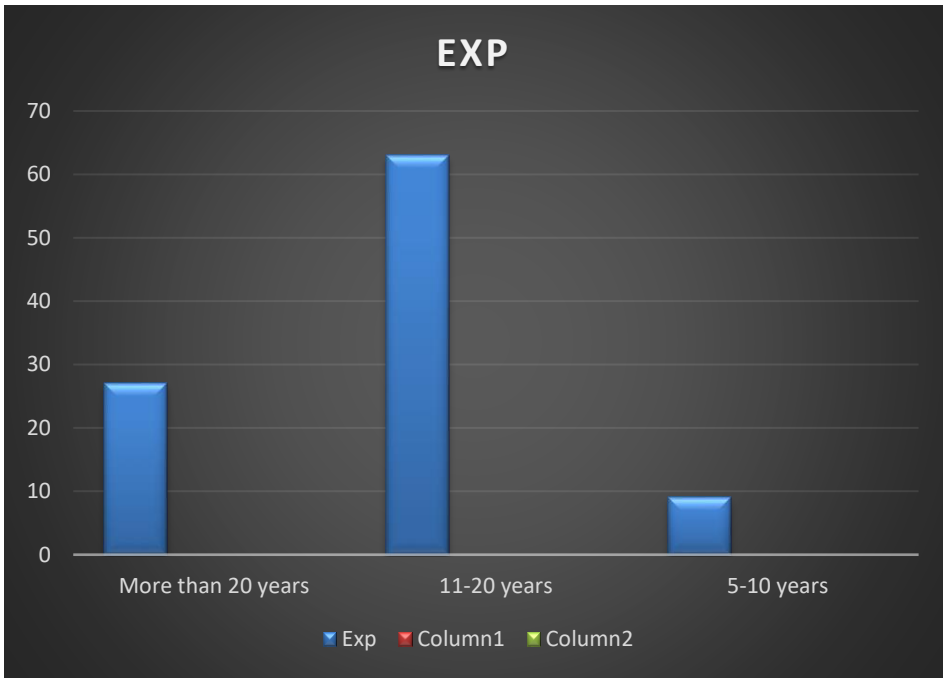

Figure 2. Teachers' Engagement in Strategic Professional Actions

Figure 2 depicts how frequently teachers engage in different strategic actions to negotiate their roles. Reflective practice (45%) and collaboration with peers (35%) are the most common strategies employed by teachers. The findings suggest that collaboration and self-reflection are vital components of teacher identity development, as these actions help teachers confront institutional challenges, build resilience, and maintain agency in shaping their professional roles. This finding supports the work of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), who argue that teacher identity is not passively shaped by external forces but is actively constructed through deliberate actions. Teachers who engage in these strategies are better equipped to adapt to changing educational environments and redefine their professional identities over time.

Mediate Variables: Professional Identity Are Psychological Resilience and Social Support. The two major mediating variables in the creation of a professional identity for teachers are

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psychological resilience and social support. Teachers who received emotional support from a variety of sources, including colleagues, mentors, and institutional networks, reported greater levels of professional resilience, which allowed them to cope with stress, role conflict, and burnout in their careers. Emotional resilience also allowed these teachers to remain committed to continuing professional development despite facing difficulties along their journey. Similar results were found by Moradkhani & Ebadijalal (2024), who demonstrate that social networks and emotional support provide avenues to reduce teacher stress and improve teacher well-being. Teachers who identify having solid emotional support have a greater feeling of belonging to their profession as well as a positive view of themselves within their roles of being a teacher.

Table 3. Social Support and Professional Resilience

Axial codes	Free codes
Intervening factors in the pattern of language socialization in the formation of language teachers' professional identity factors	Changes in educational policies
	Technology and educational innovations
	Cultural and linguistic differences
	Social expectations and parents
	Changes in the student population
	Language and cultural challenges
	Cultural prejudices
	Educational resources and facilities
	Lack of organizational support
	Lack of educational resources
	Unsustainable educational policies
	Negative organizational culture
	Environmental pressures
	Negative attitudes
	Cultural and social restrictions
	Educational policies and regulations
	Educational standards
	Performance evaluations, and parental and community expectations
	Communication problems
	Lack of systematic evaluation
	Cultural rejection
	Psychological factors (anxiety - low self-confidence)
	Social and cultural factors (cultural conflicts - language discrimination)
	limited access to resources (unsupported environment - limited access to resources)
	Economic factors (financial limitations - need for work)
	Technological factors (inadequate access to technology - improper use of technology)
	Lack of professional development opportunities
	Not holding training courses
	Lack of space for continuous learning
	Lack of effective communication
	Lack of respect for teachers' opinions and experiences
	Classroom challenges
	Problems related to student behavior
	Job pressures and stress

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	Imbalance between work and personal life
	Lack of diversity in teaching methods
	Failure to use innovative methods
	Negative social expectations
	Lack of training and professional development
	Dim and unsupportive environments
	Lack of encouragement to innovate
	Lack of constructive feedback
	Ineffective educational policies
	Lack of awareness of professional identity recognition
	Dim and unsupportive environments
	Social and cultural discrimination
	Lack of equal opportunities
	Family and social pressures
	Defects in educational policies and programs
	Lack of support and guidance
	Inadequate technologies and technical problems

In table 3, the chart shows the relationship between social support and professional resilience. The data suggest that teachers who report high levels of support from peers and institutions also report higher levels of resilience and greater success in overcoming professional challenges.

The results of this research highlight how teacher education and professional development programs should focus on providing teachers with opportunities for peer collaborative work, critical reflection on their teaching practice, and institutional support so that they can create adaptive and resilient professional identities. These results also emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development in a way that is reflective and collaborative in nature, as well as providing institutional support. In addition, the teacher education programs in non-Western countries, such as Iran, must take into consideration each country's unique cultural and institutional factors, which influence professional identity development for EFL teachers. The professional identity of an EFL teacher in Iran results from both his/her personal and professional aspirations, but also from the cultural expectations of the institution. Consequently, it is also important for teacher education programs to be culturally relevant, i.e. designed specifically to meet the needs of the teachers in each context.

Discussion

The research has thoroughly examined the relationship between language socialization and how Iranian EFL teachers form their professional identities. The use of multiple methods, including

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interviews to gather qualitative data and surveys to attain quantitative data, has enabled this research to identify the main elements defining teachers' professional identities within the extraordinarily different educational system/context/culture of Iran. The results of this research suggest that the formation of teachers' professional identities is affected by several factors: causal, contextual, strategic, and intervening; all of which are dynamic/constantly evolving. The teachers were shown to negotiate the definition of their professional identity at the intersection of their individual aspirations (expectations they place on themselves) with those that are placed upon them (expectations placed on them by the institution). The research found that reflective practice and collaboration with peers (strategic practices) are significant mediators of teacher professional identity development, as they provide agency for teachers within institutional constraints, and provide an opportunity for teachers to redefine themselves professionally. These practices are important in developing teacher autonomy and resilience through institutional support and professional development opportunities. Context is also very important in forming teachers' identities; teachers in institutions that encourage their professional development and have clearly defined values are more likely than others to have a positive experience when developing their professional identity. In contrast, teachers working in less conscious or rigid educational venues might struggle on how to reconcile their personal sense of self with that which is expected of them as they work within institutional parameters. Overall, results from the current study provide an important contribution to our understanding of language teacher identity, particularly in non-Western contexts. Researchers identified the need for teacher preparation programs to be contextually specific; they emphasize both developing teaching skills and supporting professional identity development from a navigational perspective. Establishing programs that promote reflective practice, collaborative learning, and institutional support for teachers will assist them in developing their professional identity and adapting to the changing educational environment. This research also suggests that a need exists for future research to explore the long-term development of teacher identity through longitudinal studies and to examine how larger socio-political and technological factors affect the development of professional identity. Future studies that address the complexity of the socialization process of language teachers and the complexity of professional identity development will allow researchers to better understand how educators are able to navigate their professional roles in increasingly complex and diverse educational systems.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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