Reshaping Teacher Professional Identity through Critical Pedagogy-Informed Teacher Education

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Considering the significant position of critical pedagogy in teaching English as a foreign language, there is a need for in-depth investigations of novice teachers' professional identity construction through the interaction with critical notions introduced in teacher education programs. As the impact of such programs on novice teachers' professional identity in an EFL context has remained underexplored, this study intends to address the gap. This study examines the role of a teacher education program informed by the principles of critical pedagogy in influencing novice EFL teachers' professional identity construction. Participants were 9 novice EFL teachers whose process of professional identity construction was analysed through reflective journals, class discussions, and semi-structured interviews before and after the program. Results of the study revealed two major shifts in participants' professional identity. Before the program their identity was characterized by "an attitude of compliance" and "a narrow view of EFL teaching". However after the program they "developed voice" and "adopted a humanistic conception of teaching".

Keywords: critical pedagogy, critical pedagogy-informed teacher education, novice EFL teachers, professional identity, teacher education

INTRODUCTION

The last two or three decades have witnessed a growing awareness of the educational theories of second language teaching and teacher education (Conagarajah, 2005; Crookes, 2009, 2015; Norton & Toohey, 2004). However, such an interest in the

educational side of teacher preparation and development is relatively recent (Abednia, 2012; Crookes, 2013; Lake, 2016; Sharma & Phyak, 2017). For long, the mainstream L2 teacher education viewed teaching as a process-product model in which the goal was "to understand how teachers' actions led -or did not lead- to student learning" (Freeman, 2002, p. 2). Such a view toward teacher education, which is grounded in behavioural and positivist conceptions (Akbari & Dadvand, 2011; Blackwell, Futrell, and Imig, 2003; Johnson, 2006), regarded learning to teach as mastering the prescribed content (Cochran-smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009; Richards, 2008; McInerney, 2007) along with the relevant techniques (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Teachers' agency and prior beliefs were overlooked as they were seen as conduits to students (Johnson, 2006). They were merely expected to practice experts' theories presented to them in teacher preparation programs (Khatib & Miri, 2016; Kubanyiova, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Safari & Rashidi, 2015).

The predominant transmission paradigm in teacher education began to decline when increasing awareness of the complex nature of teacher learning led to the emergence of constructivist views of teacher development (Crookes, 2009, 2013; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). In light of the new interpretations of the process of teacher learning, teachers' are viewed as "active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). They are seen as capable of developing their own philosophy and generating their own theories of practice. The role of teacher education programs, therefore, is to influence teacher cognition which would in turn result in a change in teachers' practices (Borg, 2011; Khatib & Miri, 2016; Miri, Alibakhshi, & Mostafaei-Alaei, 2016). This shift of scope has resulted in enriching the profession with teacher-related issues, such as teacher cognition, which is their knowledge base, beliefs and thinking processes (Borg, 2003), as well as teacher professional identity (e.g. Korthagen, 2004; Lee & Schallert, 2016; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010).

Teacher professional identity is conceptualized as a complex, dynamic process (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Trent, 2010) through which teachers deal with their professional functions (Lee & Schallert, 2016), that is, how they undertake their roles within the limits of their abilities and values (Maclean & White, 2007). The significant effect of teacher education on teachers' professional identity formation is not deniable. There seems no argument that the success of the teacher education program, which is evaluated in terms of the influence on student teachers' beliefs along with their actions (Korthagen, 2004), is largely determined by the teachers' professional identities which are shaped and reshaped throughout the program.

From an educational perspective personal and professional dimensions of teacher professional identity, which deal with teachers' role and function rooted in professional standards, portray only part of the picture; political factors of teachers' lives also play a crucial role in forming their identity (Mockler, 2011). Consequently, the need to go beyond the conception of professional identity at the micro-level of what works to the macro-level concerns of transformational education (Freire, 2005) was perceived.

Teacher education with a critical agenda intends to tap into the political, ethical, and emancipatory dimensions of teaching (Akbari, 2008b; Jay & Johnson, 2002). Primarily grounded in the works of Paulo Freire (1972), critical teacher education intends to prepare teachers who are empowered to transform the unjust status quo; teachers who can play an active social role by creating the context for positive action and by drawing the attention of their students to the less privileged. With a heightened awareness of their professional roles and identity which incorporates the social, cultural, and political realities of their environment, teachers are both able and willing to explore possibilities for change (Akbari, 2008a).

Literature Review

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the critical conceptualization of language teaching consistent with the trend in mainstream education (e.g. Crookes, 2009, 2010, 2013; Gray, 2013; Hawkins, 2011; Ko, 2013; Lake, 2016). Several scholars have explained their attempts to conceptualize or formulate critical pedagogies according to particular contexts (e.g., Aukerman, 2012; Crookes, 2010, 2013; Kubota & Miller, 2017; Ricento, 2006; Shor, 2009). There are also accounts of critical language teaching practices in which the central themes revolve around cultivating learners' critical consciousness and encouraging the development of learners' voice (e.g., Abednia & Izadinia, 2013; Benesch, 2009; Sadeghi, 2009; Wachob, 2009).

Despite such illuminating studies in which authors have tackled the issue drawing on their personal experiences of critical practice, finding instances of "critical language teacher education practices" as highlighted by Hawkins and Norton (2009), is relatively difficult (P.3). That is, the processes through which student teachers are provoked to develop a critical perspective of pedagogical practices, and the way this new conception might transform their professional identity have not been addressed adequately in the literature.

Similar to the situation in mainstream ELT, very few accounts of critical pedagogy-informed language teacher education are reported in Iran. In one of the studies, Abednia (2012) attempted to implement the principles of critical pedagogy in a university methodology course to explore changes in student teachers' professional identity. He discussed the shifts in participants' autonomy, voice, and critical orientation in light of the transformative nature of the course. More recently, Khatib and Miri (2016) investigated the growth of multivocality in an EFL teacher's practice after participating in a critical teacher education. They observed that the teacher had developed a repertoire of strategies helping him to enhance multivocality in his classroom following the teacher education.

Teacher identity, as a lens through which student teachers' mental status (Hawkins & Norton, 2009), as well as their ideological dilemmas are inspected, has received noticeable attention in teacher education in recent years (Beijaard, Meijer, Morine-Dershimer, & Tillema, 2005; Korthagen, 2001; Lee & Schallert, 2016). Nonetheless, in the studies which have investigated the role of educational theories in the process of identity formation, especially in EFL contexts, critical approaches are largely left out

despite their extensive discussion in mainstream teacher education (Sharma & Phyak, 2017). That is, despite the fact that a growing body of literature within ELT (e.g., Abednia, 2012; Goldstein, 2004; Pennycook, 2004; Willett & Miller, 2004) has addressed the current move from teacher education with a multicultural agenda to teacher education with a social justice agenda (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009), very few attempts have been made to explore the contributions of a critical teacher education, particularly in an EFL context, to the process of student teachers' identity formation.

In this article we attempt to contribute to this line of research by examining the ways in which EFL teachers are inducted in a critical approach to teacher education and the impact of this new perspective on their professional identity construction. Therefore, due to the paucity of research in this area and because of the dominance of the banking model of L2 education in Iran, the present study is aimed at exploring the components of Novice EFL teachers' professional identity before and after the program. It, also, is intended to investigate the processes through which they construct and reconstruct their professional identity. To address the above-mentioned objectives, the present study sets out to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the components of novice EFL teachers' professional identity before the CP-informed teacher education?

2. What are the components of novice EFL teachers' professional identity after the CP-informed teacher education?

3. How does novice EFL teachers' professional identity evolve over time?

METHOD

Setting and Participants

The data presented in this study were taken from a larger project aimed at investigating the effects of a CP-informed teacher education on novice teachers' professional identity, and the way it impacted their classroom practice, their attitude toward material development and incorporating culture into L2 teaching. In order to explore the process of professional identity (re)construction of the participants in this study, a qualitative research was designed because it will allow the researchers to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the process of identity formation.

The participants who are reported in this study attended the above-mentioned teacher education program. They were 9 novice EFL teachers who were teaching general English courses at three branches of a language institute in Tehran, Iran. Purposive sampling was chosen for the selection of novice teachers. To be more specific, novice teachers were chosen for the study because the first years of teachers' practice are considered as one of the important stages in which they can be easily influenced by the instruction provided in teacher education. Four of the participants were males whose ages ranged from 22-26 years old, and five of them were females with the age range of 21-26 years old. Five of them had a B.A in English while the remaining 4 were senior B.A students. Although they held three different university majors in English, they had all passed the same courses related to teaching methodology in their BA. Another factor which the participants had in common was the fact that they were interested in teaching

English and they all were at an advanced level of language ability as their recruitment documents indicated. Participating teachers' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

The framework was implemented in an in-service teacher education program at the central branch of the language institute, Tehran. Gaining the permission of the manager of the institute, a teacher education program incorporating CP principles were conducted and novice teachers (less than three years of practice) of the three branches were invited to participate in the program. Participation in the research was voluntary, and the teachers' informed consent was obtained prior to participation in the study. All the participants were ensured that their anonymity would be maintained and that their information would be kept confidential.

What makes Iran a distinctive context for this research is that, the dominant education system of the country is rooted on the banking model of education. In other words, the participants in our study had experienced a transmission model of education at both school and university. In such a milieu, a one-size-fits-all policy dictates a predetermined syllabus in which learners are expected to regurgitate the content of instruction transferred from the teacher. As a result of being educated in this educational context, learners develop traditional habits of studying which are often resistant to change in the future.

Table 1
Participating Teachers' Demographic Information

Teacher	Gender	Age (years)	Degree	Major	Experience (years)
T1	Male	22	BA	Translation	3
T2	Male	22	BA	English literature	1.5
T3	Male	26	BA	English literature	2
T4	Male	24	Senior BA student	English literature	2.5
T5	Female	21	BA	Translation	.5
T6	Female	23	Senior BA student	Translation	1
T7	Female	22	BA	TEFL	1.5
T8	Female	23	Senior BA student	TEFL	1.5
T9	Female	22	Senior BA student	Translation	1

The Critical EFL Teacher Education Program

In order to conduct a CP-informed teacher education course, Richards' (1989) model of teacher education, consisting of approach, content, process, teacher roles and teacher educator roles was adopted as the underlying framework. Then the components of critical language pedagogy proposed by Crookes (2013) based on Freire's perspective on CP were mapped onto this model. What follows is an elaboration of how this incorporation took place.

Approach: The program attempted to help novice teachers to develop a critical perspective toward their real concerns. This could empower them to be engaged in the effort to shape their values and beliefs, and to produce their own critical philosophy of language teaching which would eventually lead to adopting an orientation toward action

(Crookes, 2013). That is, being engaged in the process of critical reflection will provide an opportunity for the student teachers to examine their attitudes and assumptions which will consequently, result in examining their teaching practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1999).

Content: The syllabus followed in the course was negotiated with the student teachers. Through a critical needs analysis of student teachers' genuine concerns, their needs and expectations of the course, which formed the backbone of the course materials, were identified. Also, student teachers' narrative accounts of their teaching practices were incorporated into the content of the program.

Process: A participatory approach in which critical dialogue was the fundamental element was adopted in conducting the course. Participants were encouraged to address issues discussed in the class in the light of their experiences as both learners and teachers. Rather than transferring the content of information through lectures, topics were posed as problems, and they were asked to reflect on issues through a dialogic process, while reconsidering the basis for their assumption.

Teacher educator's role: A shift of position occurred from that of an expert to collaborator, from a trainer to consultant. In an attempt to maintain a democratic context in class, the teacher educator coparticipated in the learning process, problematizing the pedagogical concerns and engaging in discussion of possible solutions with student teachers.

Teacher's role: In addition to the critical discussion of the problems posed, student teachers were considered as participants in negotiation of the content of the syllabus. Likewise, they were regarded responsible for assessing their own learning, making decisions and enacting accordingly.

Data Collection and Analysis

The following steps were taken in order to conduct the study.

Initially, an interview was arranged to capture novice teachers' professional identity before the program. The interview framework functioned as the main instrument to explore the process of professional identity (re)construction of the participants. The framework of the interview was developed after a thorough review of the literature on teacher identity. Izadinia's (2013) conceptualization of teacher identity, proposed as a result of reviewing 29 studies on student teacher identity, served as the primary frame of the interview. The components contributing to the development of teacher identity were *cognitive knowledge*, *sense of agency*, *self-awareness*, *critical consciousness*, *teacher voice*, *confidence* and their *relationship with colleagues, pupils and parents*. To complement the proposed framework *task perception* and *future perspective*, two components derived from Kelchtermans's (1993) classification of teacher identity were also incorporated. Due to the commonality between self-awareness and confidence the two constructs were integrated into one which was called *self-efficacy*. Finally, career biography was added to the above categories as it has proved to play a significant role in the development of professional identity (Geldenhuys & Oosthuizen, 2015).

The semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the participants in their workplace. Each interview lasted 40 to 50 minutes. The language of the interview was English; however, participants could switch to Persian whenever they felt they had to explain something confusing or ambiguous. It was assumed that they would be able to elaborate on their responses without being hindered by deficiencies in their English proficiency. In the cases in which Persian was used, their answers were translated into English verbatim trying to avoid any changes in the participants' intentions.

Next, the critical EFL teacher education framework discussed above was implemented in a 15-week program of professional development. The class met twice a week for 90 minutes each session. Initially, student teachers were asked to express their concerns and expectations of the course which helped the researcher identify the topics related to their real life experiences. Selection of topics and the readings were done considering the suggestions made by student teachers during the class. Prior to each session they were asked to read the assigned papers and book chapters. They were also stimulated to find connections between the content and their first hand experiences. This was presumed to help us to create a more dialogic context in the classroom through the distribution of power between teacher educator and student teachers. Also, it facilitated their engagement in critical discussions of the topics in the class. In order to maintain the critical environment of the classroom the teacher educator attempted to problematize the major issues covered every session by raising questions and encouraging them to analyse those issues from a personal perspective.

They were also encouraged to find ways in which they could most effectively put those issues into practice in their own classes and write their insights into the issues in reflective journals every two weeks. Individual reflective journals are a "potential tactic" which could provide an opportunity for novice teachers to contemplate on how to apply the critical concepts in the "intended future teaching context" of their practice (Nuske, 2015, p. 285). Following the CP-informed program the post-course semi-structured interview was conducted to explore shifts in participating teachers' professional identity.

All the pre-course and post-course interviews were transcribed and thoroughly reviewed along with the reflective journals written by the participating teachers throughout the course. In order to look closely into the process of the participants' professional identity formation, recorded instructional sessions and class discussions as well as the teacher educator's reflective journals were also utilized.

Analyzing the data involved a process of inductive and deductive reasoning common to a grounded theory (GT) approach. It is believed that GT helps to construct theoretical explanations of the social processes through data collection and data analysis simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006). This is in line with the main aim of the study, which is investigating the process of professional identity formation. To ensure dependability of the data, another researcher was asked to check the codes extracted from the pre-course interview in the initial coding stage to determine if he would arrive at the same conclusion. The investigator triangulation, therefore, helped to heighten our confidence in the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Construction of their professional identity: Attitude of compliance (Intended to perpetuate the status quo)

Novice teachers' professional identity depends largely on some internal factors such as the assumptions they make of their profession and the external factors including the context of their teaching (Hsiao, 2018). In their attempt to construct their professional identities they draw on the recollections of their own schooling (Intrator, 2006), as well as their teacher training experience. Having experienced a transmission model of education in which all the decisions were being made for them, the majority of participating teachers were unable to voice their independent opinions on matters of even highly relevance to their career. In addition, the functionalist approaches to L2 education impose an uncritical treatment of the sociopolitical conditions (Alford & Kettle, 2016). This was observed in the ideas they expressed in the pre-course interview as well as their early class discussions and journals. The emerging themes referring to the reasons for novice teachers' uncritical voice and compliance were associated with more powerful forces, namely the supervisors or managers, the theoreticians, and the materials developers.

T3's comment is a typical example of many of their earlier opinions on issues of authority: "we are not allowed to interfere with the decisions of the supervisor and manager". Describing the qualities of a successful teacher T4, similarly, refers to learners' satisfaction which is achieved primarily through "obeying and following the rules of the institute". As an example of the rules she had to adhere to, T9 pointed out that

> We should conduct the class as stated by the fixed lesson plans which are given to us by the supervisor at the beginning of every term. We are evaluated in terms of the extent to which we practice according to those plans.

Most of the participating teachers reported on the ways in which they became assimilated into the rigid and dominating culture of their language centre by adopting its norms and values. They tended to adopt an attitude of compliance early in the course as they experienced the ways in which language centres operated. Unhappy with such an environment predominating over the language centres, T1 expressed his recently adopted indifference to the problems he faced: "I have tried to talk to them but they didn't take my ideas seriously, so I think the best thing to do is not bother". Most of the teachers held negative attitudes toward challenging the authorities in their institutes believing that they "know better" as T2 put it. Therefore, they espoused an attitude of compliance and conservatism, assuming it would eventually help them succeed in the job.

Beliefs about the superiority of imported textbooks were also widely held among the participants when they referred to native English theoreticians as the ones who should design ELT materials. They had defined their relationship to materials they used in their classes as passive consumers who did not assume to have the right to make even the slightest changes in the materials they used. As evidenced in the ideas they expressed, they obviously lacked confidence in either the locally-produced textbooks or their own

right to prepare any type of materials. T4, for example, believed to be a competent teacher as he was following every step of the "teacher's guide when writing the lesson plan". Similarly, T5 defending the reliability of the teacher's guides, argued that experts who had designed the textbooks "know how to teach the book better". Elaborating on the adequacy of the ELT textbooks written by the English native writers, T6 and T8 believed that locally-produced materials or teacher-prepared materials would not enjoy the same efficacy level as the well-known textbooks available in the market. When asked if they ever considered preparing the materials adapted for their own classes, T8 said that: "there is no need to design the materials because we have access to many great textbooks that are written by the experts… For preparing the material we should have the expertise".

The same uncritical attitude was observed early in the program when the class was engaged in a discussion of the decontextualized methods. Many of the participating teachers like T2 wanted to know "the best method" to teach. They would persistently ask for the right method or techniques to apply in order to improve their practice. When they were asked to critique the methods based on their perception and practice, their comments both during the discussions and in their reflective journals were primarily focused on either the total approval of alternative methods, or the descriptions of theoretician's opinions; that is, they did not seem to be able to take a critical perspective in order to voice their independent ideas and identify the drawbacks of the conventional methods. The attitudes of the participants early into the program aligns Nuske's (2015) observation that teachers who have not exercised critical thinking as learners, fail to question the taken for granted assumptions of the prevailing system, become operatives of the imposed system and begin to reproduce the same unequal structures.

Reconstruction of their professional identity: Developing a voice (Unveiled the role of imposed rules and imported theories in language teaching)

Analysis of the class discussions and reflective journals toward the end of the program and the post-course interview suggests that novice teachers began to revise the uncritical position they had adopted earlier and developed a critical teacher voice. They became aware of the uncritical perspectives they had adopted toward foundational conceptions of language teaching and started to reconsider the unquestioned assumptions they had taken up before and early in the course.

Interestingly enough, T1 who had explained his futile attempt to talk authorities into allowing L1 use in his classes, said he quit working for that institute because "the atmosphere was very strict, and they wouldn't listen to the teachers' ideas". T4 also criticized his rather indifferent position saying:

> I thought if I followed what my colleagues were doing, I would have fewer problems but now I think every class is unique and maybe the way they are teaching will create a problem in my class.

Other teachers, including T6, showed a similar shift in the way they treated institutional constraints:

> Some of the policies of the institutes are limiting a teacher's freedom of choice. For example they decide about the textbooks, the number of sessions, and even whether we should fail or pass a student at the end of the term.

The shift in participating teachers' voice echoes Nuske's (2015) assertion that if novice teachers' are expected to "facilitate the empowerment" of their learners, they need to become "advocates for themselves first" (p.291).

Coming to realize the disempowering force of their previous conceptions, most of the participating teachers started to question the attitude of compliance they carried early into the course. T8's heighted awareness prompted her to develop her own theory of practice saying "as the teacher of the class, I know my students' needs, and I can choose the method or strategy which suits them". T3's and T7's level of criticality went further to encompass the general system of education in the country, as T7 believed: "the teacher-centred approach in language classes is the same approach h which is taken in our schools… If we want to make some changes, we should start from our schools". This is in line with Kumaravadivelu's (2003) description of practicality which encourages "teachers to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize" (p.37).

While their earlier journals did not reflect any critical views, their comments toward the end of the course showed their depth of engagement with the concepts and the way they attempted to use those ideas in creating a professional image of themselves as autonomous teachers. T9, for example, wrote that her ultimate intention was to establish the English classroom as a place in which students could reach more critical understandings of meaningful issues in their lives:

> The institute where I teach is located in the suburb of Tehran, and my students are mainly from poor families. If there is a topic in the book which is not related to their lifestyle, I ask them to compare it with their own culture and tell me which one is better.

Other teachers seemed to have further expanded the scope of their criticality to include a critique of the current ELT textbooks. T5, who had argued for the superiority of imported ELT textbooks because they were "written by native speakers", stated that "they need to be adapted" as they are not "in some cases related to the interest of our learners". Likewise, T2 expressed his confidence in preparing the materials related to the culture of his learners with a critical touch: "one session the topic was marriage…I took a reading from the internet about the customs in different parts of Iran and asked the students to express their opinions about them". ST2's willingness to exercise his agency, which was due to his changed identity, mirrors Kumaravadivelu's (2012) view that individuals' identity determines their capacity to exercise their agency. These reflections demonstrate a significant change in novice teachers' pedagogical priorities, as they started to appraise the value of different teaching methodologies, ELT materials, and policies adopted by institutions in terms of their empowering potential for learners. They appeared to have changed their prior complying attitudes and embraced a critical perspective through which they were able to reconsider their positions and rights. In line with Kubota and Miller's (2017) assertion, novice teachers' professional identity

seemed to have transformed "through problematizing taken-for-granted" assumptions underlying power structures (p. 212).

Construction of their professional identity: A narrow view of EFL teaching (Assumed teacher as an instructor)

The roles and responsibilities teachers assume are another issue to be considered when evaluating their allegiance to the conventional or critical approaches to education. This theme concerns the extent to which EFL novice teachers' views of the scope of their teaching changes after the CP-informed teacher education program.

The EFL/ESL teachers who have experienced a banking model of education as learners have internalized the belief that their role is primarily confined to the efficacy issues such as implementing the right techniques and strategies, transferring the linguistic knowledge to the learners, (Pennycook, 2001) and emphasizing the discourse of "native speakerism" (Nuske, 2015, p.296). In fact, they have distanced themselves from the wider sociocultural and political dimensions of their practice.

Mainstream applied linguistics' obsession with linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of language learning has also aggravated the situation. That is, second language education has mainly concerned itself with explaining the what and how of second language acquisition at the cost of neglecting the educational commitments of language teaching (Abednia, 2012). This has resulted in the growing interest, in teacher training programs, in conveying the effective techniques to teach the language or manage the class while losing sight of broader issues of education, such as educating teachers to be agents of social change (Hawkins, 2011) with the aim of preparing learners to adopt a critical perspective toward the issues in their life.

A narrow view of EFL teaching was observed in the early-course data of the participants especially in the pre-course interview. They seemed to have defined the responsibilities of EFL teachers mainly in terms of their mastery of the linguistic system and the techniques to transfer the knowledge of the language to their learners. When describing the qualities of an ideal language teacher, most of the participating teachers, including T3, referred to language proficiency as the most important criterion:

> I should work on my language ability, especially my speaking… I guess my reading is much better than my speaking… If I improve my language, I can get better classes and also a better payment.

T2 and T4 also showed similar attitudes when they referred to having a personal plan to improve their grammatical and vocabulary repertoire as they believed to be the first and foremost characteristic of a language teacher. As T7 was describing her journey to the language teaching profession during the first interview, it became evident that the discourse of native speaker proficiency had strongly dominated her conceptions of language teaching:

> I really try to sound like an American when speaking; my students are very impressed with my accent. I think if you have some mistakes in your speaking, they easily lose their faith in you.

This observation aligns with Guerrero and Quintero's (2009) stance that the teaching of English has been regarded, mainly, as a neutral activity whereby the teacher's role is limited to teaching the skills. Aside from an emphasis on language-related attributes of an EFL teacher, what seemed to concern the novice teachers most was the efficacy of their teaching methods. When asked to explain about the challenges they had encountered as teachers, many of them pointed to their occasional failure in conveying the subject matter effectively. For example, T1 reported:

> In the first week of my teaching English, I had some difficulty teaching the grammar. Some of my students were confused, and told me they didn't comprehend the lesson. From that time, I tried to explain the grammatical points by giving many examples.

Similarly, T3 believed that his criterion for judging his teaching is "learners' comprehension". T5 and T6 assumed that being equipped with the knowledge of different methods and theories would enable them to become competent teachers. Likewise, T8 characterized successful language teaching in terms of the ability to apply the "right method" at the right time. Creating a "balance" in the teaching of the four skills was what concerned T9 in her evaluation of her practice. During the first interview and the early-course data, almost all of the participating teachers failed to address the humanistic and transformative objectives of ELT education.

The last theme concerning the participants' view of their responsibility as an EFL teacher was related to their attitude toward ELT materials. The impact of the technical-rational discourse of mainstream ELT was evidently noticed in participants' agenda here too. When asked to evaluate the textbooks they had been teaching, they failed to include social and cultural objectives into their agenda. T1 and T5 were concerned about the inadequacy of writing practice in *The New Interchange*. T6 commented that she liked *The American English File* as each language skill is given enough room for practice. T9 also believed that the "integrated "presentation of skills in *Top Notch* promotes learners' communicative ability. The rest of novice teachers' evaluation of the textbooks they had covered dealt largely with one or more of the four language skills. There was no mention of the cultural or social values of the content of the textbooks, nor the contribution of those series to learners' critical consciousness. The ideas expressed by the participating teachers corroborate Borg's (2017) conception of a narrow view of teacher identity focusing, "exclusively on institutional matters such as planning and delivering lessons, managing the classroom, and assessing the students (p. 128).

Reconstruction of their professional identity: A humanistic conception of teaching (Acknowledged the social/cultural responsibilities of a language teacher)

As a result of participating in the CP-informed teacher education program, novice teachers began to redefine their roles and responsibilities toward learning and learners. As evidenced by the data collected from the participants toward the end of the program and the post-course interview, almost all participating teachers acknowledged that their perceptions of their role as an EFL teacher had changed. The most recurrent theme in their account of their responsibility was their conceptualization of teaching as a mission.

T2, who had highlighted grammatical competence and vocabulary knowledge as the key elements in a teachers' self-development, held that:

> I thought that language teaching was about focusing on the practice of different language skills for everyday situations, but I realized that I have more responsibilities than just teaching the language. A language teacher can have a great influence on the minds of learners.

T1 and T6 also admitted that they too had had a distorted picture of the teaching profession before the course and had reconsidered their pedagogical priorities believing in their role as a model for promoting critical thinking. Similarly T7, who used to be very proud of her language proficiency, expressed her concern about the society, at large, underestimating a language teacher's role:

> A language teacher's role is misunderstood in our society and even among the professionals. They really think it is an easy job and they don't take our social and cultural responsibilities seriously.

Another commonly shared belief after reconsidering their technical definitions of EFL teaching concerned the transformative role of a teacher. T9, whose main pedagogical priority was allocating equal class time to each skill, wrote, in her final journal, that she was going to "raise learners' awareness of the issues both in their local culture and the target language culture". In his attempt to describe his professional responsibility, T2 expressed his concern about learners' uncritical assimilation of undesirable aspects of the English culture. Therefore, he held that he was determined to develop learners' consciousness of such challenging issues. Revising her prior assumptions about an EFL teacher's domain of influence, T5 pointed out that:

> One of the challenges that we should overcome in our society is the unequal opportunities given to males and females. If I want to transform the society, I need to start changing my own students' first.

Interestingly enough, novice teachers' opinion of learners' needs also shifted away from mere consideration of their cognitive needs to one prioritizing their affective needs and wants. Their consideration of learners' emotions dominated their late-course journals and seemed to operate as a crucial determinant of their educational choices in their practice. For example, T4 commented that:

> I try to understand my students' feelings … if I realize that they have a problem which is affecting their performance in the class, I talk to them after the class. They feel better when they see that you care.

Participants' perceptions of ELT materials also changed in light of their broader definition of EFL education. Several teachers admitted that market-oriented textbooks rarely contain the topics which deal with real concerns of Iranian learners. T2, T6 showed their willingness to compensate for the absence of such topics by introducing the materials which would promote the dialogic atmosphere of the class. Similarly, T1 expressed his genuine interest in bringing the unsafe topics "relevant to the social and cultural needs of learners" to his class believing they would encourage learners to "engage in meaningful discussions" which would ultimately result in their critical

understanding of those issues. The changes these participants went through represent, in Mockler's (2011) view a more humanistic conception of ELT in which emotional and personal aspects of teaching are also considered. In fact, they became aware of the moral and ethical dimensions of their responsibility. This corroborates Kubanyiova and Crookes' (2016) position who argue that awareness of "broader values and purposes" of L2 education is, now more than ever, an integral part of L2 teachers' roles (p. 120).

CONCLUSION

The study presented evidence supporting the role of teacher education programs with a critical agenda in shaping teachers' professional identity given the opportunities to voice their concerns through dialogue and critically reflect on contentious issues related to profession. The program set up conditions for novice teachers to become conscious of powerful structures exercising control over their conceptions and expectations of teaching. In light of the critical dialogues and reflective journals most of teachers proved to have become critical of their most fundamental assumptions of L2 learning and teaching and some even became critical of the society in which such means of oppression are reified and practiced. In addition, they began to broaden their conceptualizations of their profession in light of the critical position they adopted and shifted toward a more humanistic perspective in which they acknowledged their social, cultural, and moral responsibilities.

In light of the findings, teacher educators are suggested to maintain constant sensitivity to the challenges student teachers' undergo in the early ears of their practice. They should set the ground for novice teachers to become critically engaged with the issues related to their practice through reflection. Teacher educators should, also, take into account that cultivation of critical identity requires, before anything else, an exclusive attention to the voices of student teachers. To prevent the reproduction of the culture of silence in classrooms, teacher educators need to adopt a democratic attitude in their own classes. As student teachers' professional identities are already constructed before entering the course, teacher educators should avoid direct confrontation with them keeping in mind that marginalizing their prior identities might "weaken teachers' identification and participation not only in teacher education programs, but also in the teaching profession itself" (Mirzaee, 2017, p. 18). Novice teachers should also be involved in a perpetual process of reflecting on their past schooling experiences and question their normative assumptions of teaching which have principally remained untouched.

Despite its contributions, the limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. The generalizability of the findings to other contexts and to participants with different sociocultural backgrounds should be done with some caution. Furthermore, the role of teachers' life histories in their willingness to incorporate critical principles in their practice warrants further investigations.

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