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Impact of Recruitment Pathways on EFL Teachers' Identity Shifts During the Induction Year: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the identity shift of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Iran during the induction year, focusing on two major recruitment pathways. Farhangian University is a state-run teacher training institution offering a four-year program, while Article 28 is a fast-track Ministry of Education initiative providing short-term training for teachers from varied backgrounds. Employing activity theory as the conceptual framework, this study examines how these pathways influence the shift of teachers' professional identities, the determinants impacting their career trajectories, and the challenges encountered during their initial year of teaching. Through narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews with three Iranian EFL teachers, it was found that teacher identity is dynamic and influenced by various factors such as previous teaching experience, institutional expectations, and socio-cultural issues. The findings indicated that the teacher trained at Farhangian University benefited from structured pedagogical preparation, while Article 28 teachers often experienced sudden identity changes due to insufficient pre-service training. The study also emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to balance theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experience, provide stronger institutional support, and encourage professional collaboration. Along with some recommendations for further research, the implications for L2 teacher education programs, EFL teachers, and school administrators are discussed. The findings offer valuable insights that inform ongoing discourse on enhancing teacher education programs and devising strategies to mitigate teacher shortages.

Keywords: Activity Theory, Article 28, EFL Teacher Identity, Farhangian University, Teacher Shortage

Introduction

The question "Who am I?" resonates deeply with teachers, as their self-perception, encompassing beliefs, values, and classroom roles, is critical in shaping their identity. Research suggests that identity construction cannot be fully understood without considering meaningful interactions with colleagues, students' parents, and the surrounding environment (Beijaard et al., 2004). As such, "identity is not something one has, but something that develops during one's whole life" (p. 107). Over the past two decades, language teacher identity has emerged as a significant area of interest in empirical studies, highlighting that the formation of identity is an evolving, continuous, and progressive process (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Assessing the shift of teacher identity enables teacher educators to gain insights into the transformations teachers undergo and adapt educational resources to address their specific requirements (Haghighi Irani et al., 2020). This assessment becomes particularly significant when considering the early stages of a teacher's career, where professional growth is most dynamic and vulnerable.

Understanding this shift, particularly through the first year of teaching (often termed the induction year) is essential, as this period represents a crucial stage in a teacher's career during which their professional identity begins to become more established.

Simultaneously, the global issue of teacher shortages has become a longstanding issue affecting education systems worldwide (Craig et al., 2023). This shortage threatens instructional quality and student outcomes, as teacher quality is a key predictor of student achievement (Williams III et al., 2022). To address shortages of educators, some educational systems have adopted alternative recruitment pathways that emphasize rapid placement over comprehensive pre-service training. Teacher educators contend that many of these alternative routes often prioritize speed over thorough preparation, leaving teachers inadequately trained for classroom demands (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Such rapid preparation programs often leave novice teachers inadequately equipped, potentially influencing their professional growth and identity shift. The interplay between inadequate preparation and identity formation warrants further exploration, particularly during the critical induction year.

In Iran, two primary recruitment pathways have been established to mitigate teacher shortages: Farhangian University, which offers extensive, multi-year educational programs in various fields, notably, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (Tavazoei & Razmjoo, 2021), and the Ministry of Education's Article 28 employment plan, a fast-track program designed to address immediate staffing needs (Hejazi et al., 2024). While both pathways aim to prepare teachers for similar roles in schools, their contrasting structures and objectives offer a unique opportunity to study the interplay between teacher preparation and identity formation. Understanding how these approaches address teacher shortages and their impact on professional identity formation provides valuable insights into broader educational challenges. However, while much research has focused on teacher identity broadly, less attention has been given to how specific recruitment pathways and their socio-cultural contexts influence this process, particularly during the vulnerable induction year.

This study aims to investigate how the recruitment pathways of Farhangian University and Article 28 influence the professional identity shifts of novice EFL teachers in Iran during their induction year. This focus is particularly relevant given the backdrop of teacher shortages, which necessitate programs like Article 28 to address staffing challenges. These shortages not only impact teacher preparation but also shape the broader context of identity formation for novice educators. By applying activity theory, the study explores how mediational factors at individual and social levels shape identity trajectories. Through the narratives of the participating teachers, this research seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the challenges and support systems they encounter, offering implications for teacher education and retention strategies in the face of global teacher shortages. The findings are a valuable addition to the discussion about how to resolve the issue of teacher shortages while ensuring sustainable professional identity shift, making the study relevant for policymakers and educators worldwide.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What is the impact of Farhangian University and Article 28 recruitment pathways on the professional identity shifts of novice EFL teachers during their induction year?
2. What factors, including the challenges encountered, shape the identity shifts of novice EFL teachers recruited through Farhangian University and Article 28 during their induction year?

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives on Language Teacher Identity

Researchers have studied teacher identity from many different perspectives (McConnell, Tian, and Yazan, 2023). One challenge in defining language teacher identity arises from various ways "the concept" has been interpreted over time. In the early to mid-20th century, identity was primarily used in psychoanalysis to describe an individual's unique self-image (Freud, 1961/1909, as cited in Olson, 2008). In this context, identity may have once been viewed as an independent concept shaped solely by the individual. However, it has evolved over time to encompass not only personal aspects but also social and professional dimensions of one's self. Teachers build their identity through engaging with social and cultural contexts (Gholami et al., 2020).

Identity reflects the interplay of personal beliefs, social contexts, and teaching experiences (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). According to Akkerman and Meijer (2011), in postmodern approaches, identity is no longer viewed as a singular, unified framework but rather as fragmented, reflecting the multiple social worlds in which individuals participate. Teachers' identity can be considered dynamic, evolving through engagement in different communities and contexts. For instance, an individual may take on the identity of a teacher when entering the classroom and embody the identity of a colleague in the teachers' lounge (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

A holistic understanding of a teacher's professional shift recognizes that becoming a language teacher involves not only acquiring pedagogical knowledge and skills but also shaping one's professional and personal identity (Yazan, 2024). Through analyzing the literature on teacher identity, Yazan (2018) attempted to aggregate different definitions and theories regarding the concept of teacher identity, including teacher cognition, teachers' engagement in communities of practice, contextual influences, teacher biographies, teacher emotions, and teacher learning. While each plays a role in shaping identity, teachers' learning experiences and teaching practices are the focus of this study as they play a central role in the dynamic shifts that occur during novice teachers' induction year. This connection between identity, learning, and teaching suggests that understanding teacher identity is crucial for designing effective teacher education programs. By better understanding how teachers perceive themselves

and their roles, and how this role might evolve over time, more relevant and impactful teacher education programs can be created (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Novice Teachers' Identity Shift through Teacher Education Programs

Developing a professional identity is a critical aspect of novice teachers' transition into the teaching profession. Teacher education programs (TEPs) are indispensable for this transition, as they equip pre-service teachers with the pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills, and reflective tools necessary for effective practice (Boojari et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond, 2000). When such training includes authentic teaching experience, it can substantially improve novice teachers' sense of efficacy and preparedness (Faez & Valeo, 2012).

Examining these programs through the framework of teacher identity and their effects on pre-service teachers' professional shift, Mingyao (2022) found that emotional feedback during practicum strongly impacts pre-service teachers' motivation and a sense of self. Similarly, Nguyen and Yang (2018), using activity theory, showed that professional identity develops through interactions with mentors, supervisors, and students, involving ongoing negotiation and adaptation. Shi and Senom (2024) conducted a study on Chinese EFL teachers' identity evolution after participating in teacher education programs. The results suggested three phases of identity evolution before, during, and after teacher education programs due to socialization, reflection, and practical support in the program.

While interpersonal and institutional influences are important, the actual entry into real classrooms often acts as a turning point in novice teachers' identity shift. Real classroom encounters often challenge pre-service teachers' prior assumptions. Zhu et al. (2019) illustrated how student teachers' metaphors about teaching change from idealized to more grounded representations after field practice. Similarly, Nghia and Tai (2017) showed that the gap between expectations and real conditions requires novice teachers to adapt and negotiate their beliefs and practices, an identity-shaping process that often goes unaddressed in rigid programs.

Building on these findings, the teacher education programs at Farhangian University and through the Article 28 recruitment pathway provide unique contexts for exploring the evolution of professional identity among EFL teachers during their induction years. Both programs aim to prepare novice teachers for the realities of the profession, albeit through distinct approaches and structures, which may influence the identity formation process in different ways. Induction programs for novice teachers are crucial for their career shift and professionalism, given their diverse responsibilities, which encompass transferring knowledge, acting as role models, facilitating instruction, evaluating student performance, and assessing and designing curricula (Kadel, 2023). Hoominian Sharifabad et al. (2021) investigated the process of professional identity formation among pre-service EFL teachers of Farhangian University through a Vygotskian sociocultural lens. The results indicated that student-teachers' professional identities are not static and influenced by personal beliefs, cultural context, their own self-image, learning environment, practical experiences, and the guidance of mentor teachers. Regarding teachers' identity evolution through TEPs, Haghighi Irani et al. (2020) examined pre-service teachers' professional identity transformation throughout a structured teacher education program divided into three phases: initial engagement, in-depth study, and active practice. The study revealed significant shifts in teacher identity during the program, with teachers moving from merely evaluating teaching outcomes to focusing on effective teaching delivery and classroom practices.

Despite the value of these findings, several gaps remain unaddressed. For instance, while studies such as Nguyen and Yang (2018) and Nghia and Tai (2017) have highlighted the dynamic nature of pre-service teacher identity shift during internships, less attention has been given to the critical induction year, which marks the transition from training to practice. Moreover, research on teacher identity shift often focuses on Western or East Asian contexts (e.g., Mingyao, 2022; Shi & Senom, 2024), leaving the major portion of the global south countries underexplored. Consequently, the distinct structural and contextual differences between Farhangian University and Article 28 recruitment pathways in Iran, and their influence on novice teachers' identity trajectories, remain largely overlooked. While activity theory has been applied to analyze teacher identity in various contexts (e.g., Hoominian Sharifabad et al., 2021; Haghighi Irani et al., 2020; Karimi and Mofidi, 2019), few studies use this framework to compare teachers recruited through different pathways. By addressing these gaps, the current study provides valuable insights into the professional identity shift of novice EFL teachers in Iran and contributes to the broader understanding of how socio-cultural and contextual factors shape teacher identity.

Activity theory

Rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, activity theory provides a multidimensional lens through which to explore human action, learning, and identity. It emphasizes the interplay between individuals and their socio-cultural environments, offering a comprehensive framework to examine how teachers' identities change through their engagement with institutional, interpersonal, and material elements (Engeström, 2001; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). At the core of activity theory is the activity system, which includes six interconnected components of subject which refers to the individual or group engaged in the activity (e.g., novice EFL teachers during their induction year); object denotes the goal that the subject is going to achieve (e.g., the transformation of a professional identity influenced by recruitment pathways and teaching experiences); tools include both physical and conceptual tools used to achieve the object (e.g., training and curriculum provided by the TEPs); rules are social norms and institutional policies (e.g., expectations set by Farhangian University or Article 28 recruitment programs); community refers to the group or organization to which the individuals belong while participating in or carrying out the activity (e.g., EFL peer teachers at Farhangian University and Article 28, stakeholders, school administrators, and mentors or supervisors); and

division of labor refers to the allocation of tasks and responsibilities among members of a particular community, including their designated roles and the dynamics of power relations within the group (e.g., L2 teaching) (see Figure 1). These components constantly interact, and contradictions or tensions often arise within or between them. For instance, a novice teacher might experience conflict between their personal teaching beliefs (subject) and the rigid curriculum mandated by the education system (rules), or between their theoretical knowledge from pre-service training (tools) and the unpredictable realities of large classrooms (object) (Nguyen & Yang, 2018). According to Engeström (2001), such contradictions are not simply obstacles, they are driving forces for change within the activity system.

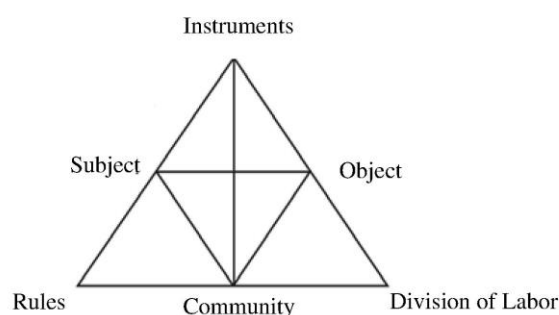
A key mechanism within activity theory is mediation, the use of tools to navigate or resolve contradictions. Novice teachers use available tools, such as peer collaboration, technology, prior experience, or even informal support networks to bridge the gap between institutional demands and their own teaching identity. This process is particularly critical during the induction year, when new teachers are adapting to their roles in unfamiliar institutional and social settings (Hoominian Sharifabad et al., 2021).

Activity theory highlights that novice teachers' identities are shaped by the cultural and institutional context of their recruitment. For instance, Farhangian University emphasizes reflective skills, while Article 28 focuses on adaptability. These contrasting approaches lead to different identity development paths (Haghighi Irani et al., 2020). Furthermore, activity theory's emphasis on historicity provides valuable insights into how teachers' prior experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal histories influence their professional identity. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the diverse trajectories of novice EFL teachers in Iran, whose identities are shaped not only by their current contexts but also by their individual and collective histories as learners and educators (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019).

Accordingly, our study used activity theory as it offers a multidimensional perspective on teacher identity shift, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between individual agency and sociocultural structures.

Figure 1

Complex model of an activity system (Engeström, 2015, p. 203).



By examining novice EFL teachers' induction experiences through the lens of activity theory, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how professional environments, mediational tools, and institutional structures, shaped by different recruitment pathways, contribute to identity formation. It also explores how teachers manage the tensions between their initial self-perceptions and the professional roles they are expected to adopt during their first year of teaching.

Method

Context and Participants

Teacher shortage in Iran is primarily addressed through two major pathways: Farhangian University and Article 28, both of which aim to prepare educators for public schools. Farhangian University, a formal teacher training institution offering structured pedagogical education, and Article 28, a policy allowing non-education graduates to enter the teaching profession after

passing exams and brief pedagogical workshops. These two pathways represent the primary means through which English teachers are prepared and deployed in public schools across the country (Hejazi et al., 2024; Tavazoei & Razmjoo, 2021).

To examine how various recruitment pathways into teaching affect shifts in novice teachers' professional identities during their induction year, three Iranian EFL teachers currently teaching in Kermanshah, a city in western Iran, were deliberately chosen through purposive sampling (Ary et al., 2019). Narrative inquiry does not follow strict rules for determining sample size, as the focus is on exploring the narrator's culture, experiences, and identity (Sarfo et al., 2021). Therefore, selecting three participants aimed not at generalization but at gaining rich, contextual insights into how novice teachers' identities evolve during their induction year across varying institutional settings. These participants were treated as an individual narrative case to reflect key variations in recruitment pathways and prior teaching experience. Ali, a 25-year-old teacher from Farhangian University, Maryam, a 30-year-old teacher recruited via Article 28 with no prior teaching experience, and Mohammad, a 32-year-old teacher recruited via Article 28 who had completed teacher training courses (TTCs) and taught in private language institutes but had no experience in teaching in the public-school sector, participated in the study. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to ensure participants' confidentiality and comply with ethical standards. The data collection process was conducted between October and December 2024, allowing for insights into teachers' experiences at different points in their professional journeys.

Design and Instruments

This study adopted a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to examine how the professional identities of novice EFL teachers are shaped during their induction year, with a particular focus on the recruitment pathways through which they entered the profession. Therefore, the purpose was not to compare two statistically balanced groups but to generate in-depth, contextually situated narratives of professional experience. While not longitudinal, the study collected data at a single point in time using two instruments of a narrative frame and a semi-structured interview.

Narrative inquiry focuses on human experiences as shared through stories, providing a framework to explore how individuals perceive and interpret their world (Clandinin, 2006; Webster & Mertova, 2007). As Xu and Connelly (2009) noted, "thinking narratively means that everything needs to be seen in temporal flow. Narrative phenomena are not seen as existing in the here and now but, rather, are seen as flowing out of the past and into the future" (p. 223). By analyzing participants' stories, this study sought to uncover how individual and contextual factors shape the formation and evolution of their professional identities.

The narrative frame consisting of 12 open-ended prompts, designed to elicit written reflections on their motivations, induction-year experiences, identity shifts, and the influence of recruitment pathways (Appendix A). Grounded in activity theory and narrative inquiry, the prompts were reviewed by a domain expert to enhance its clarity, coherence, and alignment with the study's objectives. The expert feedback, consistent with Shenton's (2004) guidelines for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research, strengthened the credibility and confirmability of the instrument by ensuring it elicited rich, relevant, and authentic narratives.

To gain deeper insights into participants' narratives, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The interview questions were individually tailored based on responses to the narrative frame, allowing participants to elaborate on critical incidents, identity shifts, and the influence of **contextual and institutional factors**, such as mediating tools, community norms, and role expectations, as framed by activity theory. To ensure clarity and relevance, the questions were reviewed by a domain expert (Appendices B-D).

The combination of these instruments provided rich, self-reported insights into how novice teachers understand and articulate their evolving professional identities within differing institutional contexts.

Data collection and data analysis

To address the research questions, data were collected in two phases, using two qualitative instruments: a written narrative frame and a follow-up semi-structured interview. Each participant was asked to complete a narrative frame in Word format, which invited them to reflect on their experiences with one of the two major recruitment pathways, Farhangian University or Article 28. Participants were given clear instructions and ample time to ensure thoughtful and detailed responses.

Following the completion of the narrative frames, thematic analysis was applied to identify emerging patterns related to professional identity shift. These initial themes informed the design of individualized semi-structured interview questions, allowing for deeper exploration of the unique aspects raised by each participant. The interviews were conducted in Farsi, the participants' native language, and guided by open-ended prompts focused on identity shifts, institutional experiences, and critical incidents. Each interview lasted between 25 and 40 minutes, was audio-recorded with permission, and later transcribed for analysis. This dual-method approach enabled a richer, multi-layered understanding of participants' identity shift by combining written narratives with spoken reflections.

The data analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model for thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing up. Both narrative and interview data were analyzed using this framework to ensure methodological consistency. The analysis was conducted in two stages, corresponding to the two data sources. To enhance credibility and dependability, a second researcher reviewed the coded data after the initial analysis. A collaborative discussion was held to compare interpretations,

resolve discrepancies, and refine the coding framework, ensuring alignment with the participants' lived experiences. As emphasized by Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis is a recursive and flexible process, allowing for movement between phases as needed to capture the complexity of participants' identity shift.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, including their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. They were also assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to protect their identities and maintain ethical standards.

Results

This study aimed to investigate how EFL teachers' identity develops through different pathways of Farhangian University and Article 28 in the light of activity theory and to identify the key factors that influence this shift. The results are outlined below to address the research questions explored in this study.

Identity Shifts of EFL Teachers During the Induction Year

Focusing on the first research question on how EFL teachers' identity evolves through the two recruitment pathways, the findings from narrative frames and interviews reveal that at the beginning of their careers, all three teachers perceived their roles as **knowledge transmitters, authoritative figures, and supporters** responsible for inspiring students. However, as they encountered classroom realities, their **perspectives evolved**, leading to shifts in their teaching philosophies and professional identities. **As Mohammad, an experienced teacher from Article 28, mentioned in the narrative frame:**

"As I started my teaching, I believed that my role as an EFL teacher was to be an authority and primary source of knowledge. I thought of myself as a person who must create hope, cover the syllabus, use class time effectively, and transmit knowledge. Reflecting on my teaching journey, I now see myself as a teacher who should not only transfer materials related to teaching English but also focus on students' emotional aspects. I continued teaching based on the rules of the Ministry of Education rather than being flexible in teaching and materials of teaching."

Similarly, Ali, an experienced teacher from Farhangian University, noted in the narrative frame:

"As I started my teaching, I believed that my role as an EFL teacher was to create hope and zeal for life and studying in my students, to finish books, to fill class time, and to transmit knowledge. Now, I think of myself as a teacher far from my idealistic role and unable to do what I had envisioned because of the school environment."

Maryam, an Article 28 teacher without prior experience, also reflected in her interview:

"As I started my teaching, I found that real classes are different from what I had in mind. I thought students' levels were suitable, but after entering this profession, I found the opposite. Some approaches I learned through Article 28 were not practical. I couldn't use them due to the expectations of the principal and school members. I now see myself as knowledgeable in teaching, but contextual factors do not let me show my abilities. I see myself far from the ideal teacher I had envisioned."

However, the extent to which this shift occurred varied among the teachers. The analysis indicated that the Article 28 teacher with no prior experience demonstrated the most **dramatic shift** in her professional identity. Entering the profession with an idealized perception of teaching, she quickly realized the gap between her expectations and the classroom realities. The absence of prior teaching experience and lack of practical training in her pre-service program left her feeling overwhelmed and unprepared. Maryam stated in her interview:

"The first thing all teachers faced at the beginning was that we were confused and didn't know what to do. I tried to search the Internet to use better teaching methods, use teaching aids such as PowerPoints and videos to be a creative teacher. I was really stressed because I didn't know anything and I couldn't teach. We were given a book to go to class with a large number of students to teach. Now after two months, I accepted that I have entered the teaching field which things may happen that are beyond my control, and cause me to deviate from the perspective I had about myself."

By the end of the induction year, Maryam's identity evolved from that of a complete novice to a more self-assured teacher who had developed basic pedagogical skills. However, she still felt constrained by contextual limitations, such as institutional expectations and large class sizes.

For Mohammad, an Article 28 teacher with prior experience in private institutes, the transition was more of an adaptation than a reinvention. While he initially felt confident in his teaching abilities, he soon realized that the expectations of public schools differed significantly from his previous work experience. He struggled to balance student engagement and Ministry of Education guidelines, leading to a gradual shift in his teaching identity. He exemplified in his interview:

"Large classes, irrelevant material, lack of motivation in students, caused the material not to be conveyed well; chaos would arise in the class, and learning would not be practical. Given my prior teaching experience, I divided the class into groups of 5, and in addition to the material in the book, I added material related to the students' interests, such as various sports although I had to follow the syllabus of the Ministry of Education."

While his prior experience provided classroom management strategies, his identity shifted toward a more adaptable and context-sensitive approach. Unlike Maryam, he had a stronger initial sense of professional identity, which allowed him to modify rather than reconstruct his teaching philosophy.

On the other hand, Ali, the Farhangian University-trained teacher, experienced a more structured and theoretically grounded transition into the profession. His university education had provided a strong foundation in pedagogy, but the realities of the classroom required practical adaptations. Ali mentioned this point in his narrative:

“Farhangian University has a big effect on shaping the identity of teachers. Since starting there as a freshman, the students’ concern is about teaching: What should I do as a teacher? How should I behave? What is a teacher? Who is a good teacher? There are bunches of PCK (pedagogical content knowledge) courses about teaching with various professors.”

This strong theoretical foundation enabled him to adapt his teaching methods to the practical realities of the classroom. Furthermore, the program’s emphasis on educational theory resulted in a graduate demonstrating a deeper theoretical understanding and a stronger professional identity.

Findings also suggest that unlike the Farhangian University graduate, the Article 28 teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the pre-service training they received. They felt it focused too much on general educational psychology and general pedagogical theories, and not enough on practical methods for teaching English. Both teachers felt unprepared for real classrooms, struggling with implementing lesson plans due to resource limitations and administrative constraints. The teacher with some prior teaching experience adapted more readily, whereas the novice teacher experienced significant frustration due to the disconnect between theoretical training and practical classroom demands.

Factors Influencing Identity Shift

While the previous section focused on how professional identities changed during the induction year, this section addresses the second research question by highlighting key factors that contributed to these identity transformations.

Theoretical vs. Practical Training Mismatch

One of the most critical factors shaping teacher identity was the gap between theoretical training and practical classroom experience. While the Farhangian University teacher expressed disappointment over the lack of practical training due to Covid-19, he credited PCK courses and peer collaboration for his ability to adapt. Ali mentioned in his interview:

“One of the biggest academic shocks was the pandemic. We lost the practicums that bridged theory and practice. During practicums, we observed and taught at schools, then discussed our experiences at university with classmates and professors. Besides, we had 19 lessons, including 27 PCK units. These were the most influential courses for our teaching skills.”

In contrast, Article 28 teachers felt unprepared due to an overemphasis on psychology and sociology instead of practical ELT strategies, leading to difficulties in classroom implementation. Mohammad explained in his narrative:

“The training I received through Article 28 didn’t prepare me because it emphasized psychology over teaching methodologies. It shifted our focus from teaching students’ educational needs to prioritizing emotional and psychological concerns.”

Institutional Barriers and Administrative Constraints

Teachers in both groups faced institutional barriers that affected their professional growth, including large class sizes, lack of resources, and rigid administrative expectations. In her narrative, Maryam shared:

“Looking back, there was a moment when I realized that the approach that I had in mind wasn’t applicable in a large class. Chaos ensued, and I had to modify my approach based on student feedback, even though my initial method wasn’t necessarily bad.”

Additionally, limited school resources impacted teachers’ motivation and self-efficacy. Maryam further explained in her interview:

“I wanted to give worksheets to my students every session, but the school’s photocopier was broken, and printing outside was expensive. These limitations made me question my effectiveness as a teacher.”

In addition, Article 28 teachers reported having little autonomy in lesson planning due to rigid Ministry of Education guidelines. They struggled to balance standardized curricula with innovative teaching methods, leading to a conflict between institutional expectations and their evolving teaching philosophies. Mohammad advised new Article 28 teachers in his narrative:

“Expect the strict syllabus of the Ministry of Education and be prepared to teach based on that. I now see myself as a teacher who must follow government guidelines rather than being flexible in my teaching.”

The Role of Peer Support and Self-Learning

Despite these challenges, peer collaboration played a crucial role in teacher identity shift. Teachers from both pathways relied on their colleagues for support, motivation, and professional adaptation. Maryam reflected in her narrative:

"The coursework I went through in Article 28 training impacted my identity. When interacting with other teachers, I realized I wasn't the only one facing these challenges. This collaboration changed my perspective on teaching, classroom management, and feedback strategies."

Similarly, Ali from Farhangian University highlighted the significance of peer discussions in his narrative:

"As I continued teaching, my hopes diminished. My only source of motivation was my university classes and discussions with colleagues who shared similar experiences and getting help from university professors some of whom were also school teachers."

Discussion

This study investigates how EFL teachers trained through different programs (Farhangian University and Article 28) experience shifts in their professional identities during their first year of teaching. Employing activity theory (Engeström, 1987), the study examined the fluctuations teachers experienced in their identity during the induction year of their teaching. Initially, all teachers saw themselves as authoritative figures and knowledge transmitters, a view often associated with traditional and teacher-centered roles (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Varghese et al., 2016). However, classroom realities such as student disengagement, large class sizes, and limited resources challenged these perceptions, prompting participants to reevaluate their identities. These findings support the view that teacher identity is fluid, context-bound, and constantly under construction (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). In line with this, Varghese et al. (2016) argue that teacher identity is negotiated at the intersection of the individual, institutional, and sociocultural. In this study, participants' reflections and teaching practices evolved in response to institutional expectations, classroom dynamics, and their own prior beliefs, confirming identity as a dynamic and ongoing process.

Activity theory also provides a valuable framework for analyzing the challenges and struggles individuals face by examining the interplay between the various components of an activity system, such as subjects, objects, tools, rules, community, and division of labor. The teachers (subjects) in this study function within activity systems where their goal is to become an effective and competent EFL teacher within the constraints of the institutional and educational system (object). Their identity fluctuates through pedagogical knowledge and teaching strategies (tools), institutional policies and expectations (rules), colleagues, students, and administrators (community), and the hierarchical structure within schools, where teachers have some responsibilities while navigating institutional expectations, mentorship structures, and peer collaboration (division of labor). Among the three participating teachers, Ali and Mohammad primarily engaged with their own roles, tools, and goals, developing their identities based on internal adjustments rather than external influences. In other words, Ali approached identity shift through structured pedagogical tools such as PCK courses and, despite initial frustration due to the lack of practicum during COVID-19, he relied on internal motivation and theoretical knowledge to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Mohammad began his career with a knowledge-transmission approach but later adjusted his identity based on classroom realities. He used his prior teaching experience as a tool to refine his methods, focusing on student needs rather than external institutional demands.

However, Maryam struggled with external pressures, institutional policies, and administrative constraints and felt overwhelmed. She experienced a drastic identity shift, realizing that her pre-service training had not prepared her for real classrooms. Institutional constraints such as large class sizes, limited resources, and rigid curricula further restricted her ability from implementing ideal teaching methods, requiring her to seek peer support for adaptation. This means that the focus is now on the second dimension of activity theory which she required social interactions, mentorship, and external validation to navigate identity tensions. These findings also support Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) perspective that teacher identity is multifaceted and shaped by the specific contexts in which teachers work. For example, Mohammad, an experienced Article 28 teacher, initially saw himself as the primary authority in the classroom. However, through his teaching experiences, he recognized the importance of addressing students' emotional needs and fostering student engagement. In activity theory terms, these shifts represent contradictions between the subjects (teachers) and the rules (institutional constraints), forcing teachers to adapt their pedagogical beliefs and transition toward more student-centered, emotionally responsive approaches.

Another significant finding of this study is the impact of prior teaching experience on identity formation. Experienced teachers including Mohammad and Ali, indicated greater flexibility in adjusting to institutional constraints, while Maryam, the teacher with no prior experience, struggled with the abrupt transition into the profession. Therefore, prior experience functions as a mediating tool, enabling teachers to resolve contradictions more effectively. Novice teachers lacked this tool, making their identity shifts more intense and challenging. This finding supports the research by Faez and Valeo (2012), who demonstrated that pre-service teachers with extensive practical training experiences are better equipped to successfully transition into the teaching profession.

The findings of the study also emphasize a misalignment between theoretical and practical aspect of the teacher recruitment pathways and how it could affect teachers, particularly Article 28 teachers who reported the overemphasis of the program on the educational psychology rather than practical strategies to use in the classrooms which leads to difficulties in employing effective teaching strategies. This represents a **contradiction between the tools (teacher training) and the object (effective classroom teaching)**. The absence of **practical strategies** in the Article 28 program **left teachers unprepared**, requiring them to **develop their identities through experience rather than training**. This finding aligns with Nguyen and Yang (2018), who mentioned that pre-service TEPs should integrate real world teaching situations to ensure better professional shift.

Institutional expectations and administrative constraints are other important factors in shaping teachers' identities especially for Article 28 teachers who struggled with the rigid syllabus of the Ministry of Education which restricts their ability

to implement innovative, student-based approaches in their classrooms. This finding represents a contradiction between the object (becoming an effective teacher) and the rules (institutional policies that restrict teachers' autonomy). The finding in this regard is consistent with Nghia and Tai (2017), who found that novice teachers experience identity tensions when their personal teaching beliefs clash with institutional policies.

Despite these challenges, teachers actively engaged in peer collaboration to navigate identity struggles. Both Maryam and Ali, found motivation through discussions with colleagues, which helped them refine their teaching identity. Within the framework of activity theory, prior experience functioned as a mediating tool, and peer collaboration served as another mediating artifact, enabling teachers to resolve contradictions and adapt to their professional roles. This echoes Wenger's (1998) emphasis on the concept of "communities of practice," where teachers construct their identities through interactions with peers and shared experiences. These identity shifts are visually mapped in Figures 2, 3, and 4, which represent the activity systems of Ali, Maryam, and Mohammad. Figure 2 shows how Ali drew on theoretical tools and internal motivation to manage classroom challenges. Figure 3 highlights Maryam's struggles with institutional constraints and her reliance on peer support due to lack of practical training. Figure 4 illustrates how Mohammad used prior teaching experience to balance institutional expectations with student needs. These visualizations help the reader see how different mediating components shaped each teacher's identity trajectory within their recruitment pathway.

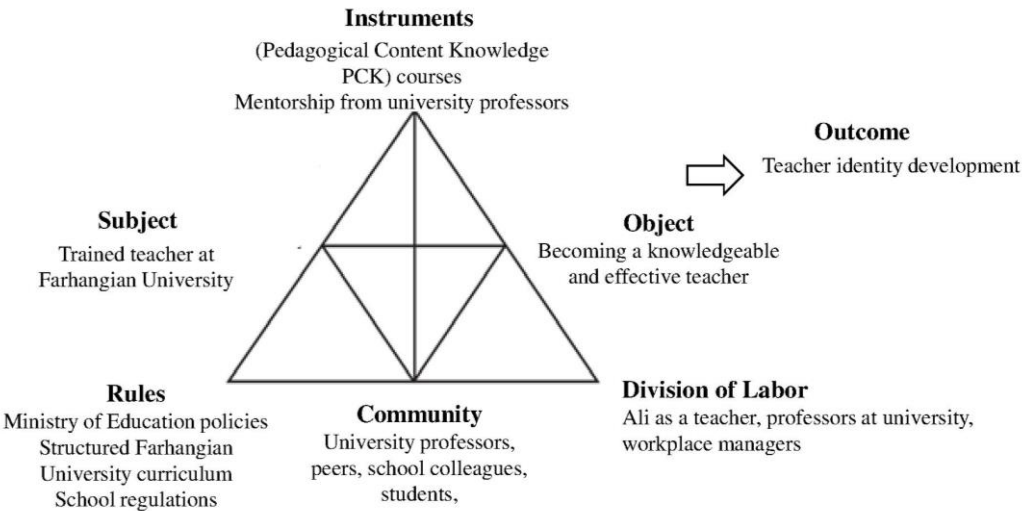


Figure 2. Representation of an activity theoretic perspective on Ali, the teacher trained in Farhangian University

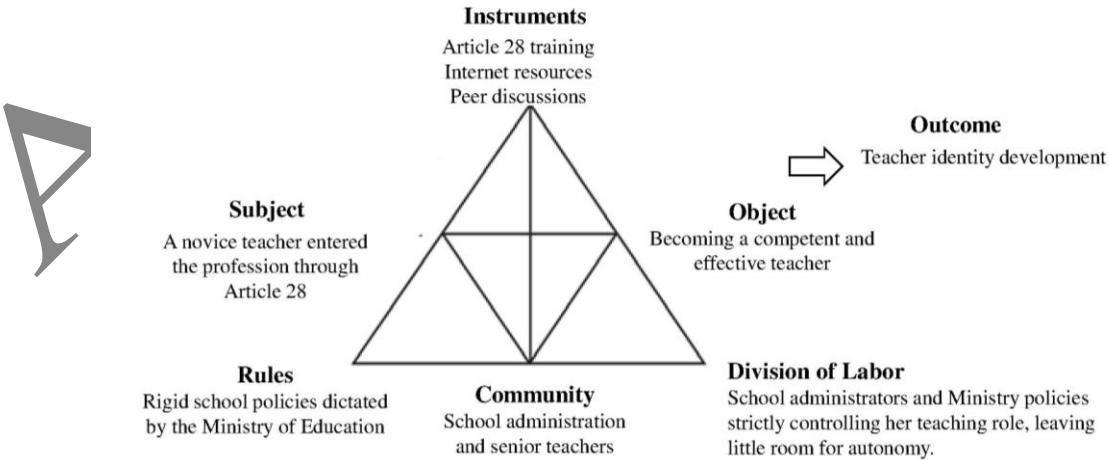


Figure 3. Representation of an activity theoretic perspective on Maryam, the teacher trained in Article 28 with no prior experience

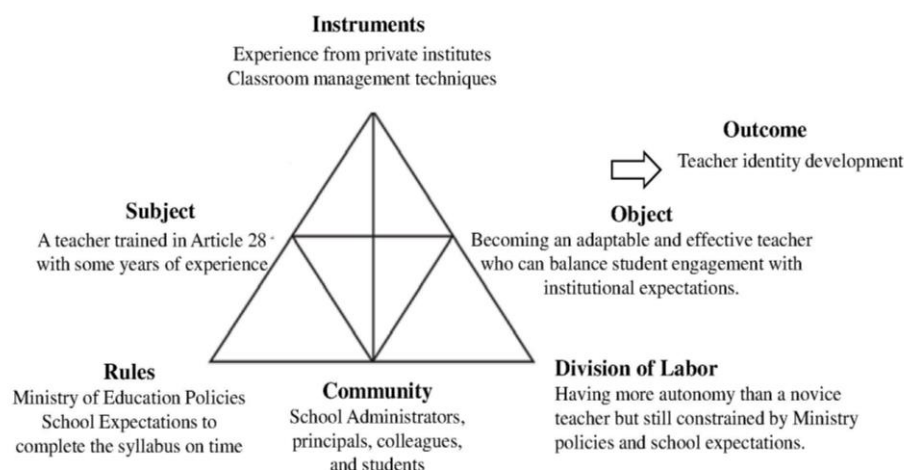


Figure 4. Representation of an activity theoretic perspective on Mohammad, the teacher trained in Article 28 with prior experience

Conclusion

Framing these findings through activity theory highlights the complex, dynamic nature of teacher identity shift. The results emphasize that teacher identity is fluid and shaped by a range of factors, such as prior teaching experiences, the gap between theoretical and practical training, institutional limitations, and collaborative interactions with peers.

While the Farhangian University graduate experienced a smoother transition due to their structured pedagogical training, Article 28 teachers faced significant challenges bridging the gap between theory and practice. Their struggles were largely shaped by institutional constraints and limited classroom autonomy, leading to tensions in their professional identity shift. Therefore, it can be concluded that Farhangian University teacher exhibited greater reliance on individual agency, pedagogical tools, and theoretical frameworks which highlights the individualist dimension of activity theory (i.e., subject-object-instrument). In contrast, Article 28 teachers, especially the novice, mostly struggled with external structures, such as institutional regulations, peer collaboration, and curriculum constraints emphasizing the social dimension of activity theory (i.e., rules-community-division of labor).

Although all teachers were in their first year of teaching in the public school system, one of the Article 28 teachers (Mohammad) had several years of experience teaching in private language institutes. This prior experience appeared to function as a mediating tool, allowing him to navigate the induction year with greater adaptability. In contrast, the teacher without any prior experience (Maryam) struggled more significantly, relying heavily on peer support to manage institutional pressures. The findings indicate that inadequate pre-service training, lack of institutional support, and high contextual demands can contribute to teacher attrition, as novice teachers struggle to develop a stable professional identity. Without sufficient preparation and ongoing support, teachers may become demotivated or leave the profession altogether, exacerbating existing teacher shortages.

Given these findings, several implications for teacher education and policy emerge. First, bridging the theory-practice gap is essential, particularly in Article 28 programs, by incorporating extended practicums and hands-on training to enhance teachers' preparedness. Second, mentorship and peer collaboration should be prioritized to support novice teachers in navigating institutional barriers and refining their teaching philosophies. Third, a structured TEP with a defined syllabus, as mandated by the Ministry of Education provides a valuable framework for teacher training but it is crucial to incorporate flexibility that allows teachers to adapt teaching materials to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Although this study provides significant insights into the identity shift of EFL teachers recruited through Farhangian University and Article 28, there are several limitations. The number of participants was limited to three; however, this is consistent with narrative inquiry conventions in which depth, contextual richness, and the uniqueness of lived experience are prioritized over numerical representation. Therefore, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable but to provide meaningful insights that can be applied in similar settings. Moreover, the data was gathered through narratives and interviews which were self-report data and may be subject to the teachers' bias. Thus, future studies should combine observations with self-report data to provide a more balanced view of teachers' identities. To gain a deeper understanding of how teacher identity evolves, it is crucial to examine longitudinal shift beyond the induction year. This necessitates investigating how teachers' identities might transform over multiple years of teaching experience across different recruitment pathways. Furthermore, as identity is a concept that is intertwined with the environmental factors, future studies could explore teacher identity shift in other regions to assess whether the findings are the same in different contexts.

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Appendix A.

Narrative Frame Prompts for Exploring EFL Teachers Identity During the Induction Year of Their Teaching

Dear colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This narrative frame will help us understand your journey as an EFL teacher during the first year of your teaching. Please take your time with each section, as your reflection and experience are highly valued.

Background Information

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Educational Background:
 - Highest degree obtained: _____
4. Major:
 - TEFL ☐
 - English Literature ☐
 - English Translation ☐
 - Others ☐
5. Years of English Language Teaching Experience:
6. Recruitment Path:
 - Farhangian University ☐
 - Article 28 ☐
7. Experience of participating in other Teacher Training Courses (TTCs)

(Other training programs except those offered by Farhangian University and Article 28)

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

Please provide details, if the answer is positive:

City/region where you currently teach:

- Before I started teaching, I thought of myself as a teacher who.....

(Describe any beliefs that you had about yourself as a teacher, your skills, and your professional identity)

- What inspired me to pursue a career as an EFL teacher was.....
- As I started my teaching, I believed that my role as an EFL teacher was to.....
- An aspect of teaching that surprised me during my first year of teaching was.....
- Looking back, there was a moment or experience that made me think differently about

my teaching approach or sense of identity when.....

(Reflect on any interactions, feedback from mentors, experiences with students, classroom management challenges, or institutional expectations that might have influenced you to see your role in a new way.)

- The coursework I went through at Farhangian University/Article 28 training impacted my
- identity by.....
- The training I received through Farhangian University/Article 28 prepared me for.... but did not prepare me for....
- One specific part of my training at Farhangian University/Article 28 that has influenced my teaching style the most is.....

- If I want to advise a new teacher coming from Farhangian University/Article 28, I would tell them to expect....
- The transition from the training program to my actual teaching role made me feel... because....
- If I could reshape part of my training experience, I would focus on....
- Reflecting on my teaching journey, I now think of myself as a teacher who....

Appendix B.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Farhangian University Teacher

1. Before you started teaching, you saw yourself as an information transmitter in the classroom. Could you elaborate more on this concept and what this role means to you?
2. Prestige and interactions with your students were among the factors that motivated you to become a teacher. How have these factors shaped your current teaching practices?
3. What led you to view your role as a teacher who aims to create hope, complete the curriculum, fill class time, and transmit knowledge to students after you started teaching? Has this view changed over time?
4. You described a situation where there was a lack of supervision, and you had the freedom in teaching. How did the freedom to teach without supervision impact your teaching practices and confidence?
5. Could you explain the reasons for losing your hope during your first year of teaching and how did your interactions with colleagues helped you cope the situation? How did this experience shape your teaching identity?
6. How did the courses, the professors and the curriculum at Farhangian University shape your identity?
7. How did the training you received at Farhangian University prepare you for real classrooms? In what ways did the program fail to prepare you?
8. How have the PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) units at Farhangian University influenced your teaching style? What aspects of these units are you currently applying in your classroom?
9. How did you overcome challenges like school deficiencies, feelings of isolation, and the need for self-motivation?
10. How did the lack of sufficient training caused by the COVID-19 pandemic influence your readiness for your first year of teaching?
11. How can a combination of practical and theoretical courses best prepare teachers for real-world classrooms?
12. How have the school environment and lack of collaborative opportunities shaped your teaching identity and approach compared to your initial expectations? Were there additional factors that contributed to these challenges?

Appendix C.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Article 28 Teacher with No Years of Experience

1. Before you started teaching, you saw yourself as a teacher who could effectively manage the class and handle challenges confidently. How has your perception of yourself as a teacher evolved since then?
2. How have your initial motivations-such as interest in the field, the influence of inspiring teachers, and job security-shaped your current teaching perspective?
3. How did the gap between your initial expectations and the realities of teaching shape your teaching practices and your identity? How have you adapted over time?
4. How did the disconnect between theory and practice impact your teaching methods, your student expectations, and your confidence during your first year?
5. Can you describe a specific moment when you realized your initial teaching approach wasn't working in a large class setting or due to student feedback? How did this experience shape your teaching and your identity?
6. Can you elaborate on how the Article 28 program and the opportunity for peer interactions influenced your teaching practices and your identity?

7. How did challenges, such as the lack of practical application of theories in classrooms due to limited school resources and diverse student needs, shape your perception of the Article 28 training program?
8. How did Article 28's emphasis on collaboration among teachers and the introduction of various learning styles influence your current teaching practices and interactions with students?
9. How do you think novice Article 28 teachers should prepare themselves for the realities of teaching? Can you share any strategies that helped you navigate these challenges?
10. What specific challenges stressed you out after the Article 28 program? How did you gain confidence and adapt to your role?
11. How do you think integrating internships in real classrooms before starting your teaching career would have better prepared you?
12. How have challenges, such as inadequate school facilities, administrative expectations, and other contextual factors, shaped your teaching identity and approach compared to your initial expectations? Were there additional factors that contributed to these challenges?

Appendix D.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Article 28 Teacher with Some Years of Experience

1. You have previously described yourself as a helper who passes on English language knowledge to your students. Have you ever felt the need to go beyond knowledge transmission? If so, what motivated this shift?
2. Your interest in English was a motivating factor for starting your teaching career. How has this passion influenced your current teaching practices?
3. You were the authority of your class in the beginning of your teaching. Has this view changed over time? If yes, what experiences or factors contributed to this change?
4. How did the lack of student motivation, mismatched materials, and large class sizes impact your teaching strategies and how did you adapt?
5. How did changing your teaching approach due to your students' lack of motivation alter your sense of identity as a teacher?
6. Before entering the Article 28 program, you viewed yourself as a guide. However, during the program, you adopted a teacher-centered approach. How did this transformation affect your teaching identity?
7. The emphasis on authority in your Article 28 training led to a rigid, teacher-centered approach. How did this shape your perception of the Article 28 program?
8. The educational psychology courses were a significant part of your training. How have they impacted your interactions with students and your current teaching approach?
9. Why is it crucial for new Article 28 teachers to be aware of challenges like large classes, unmotivated students, and balancing emotional and educational needs within the ministry of education syllabus? How did you overcome these obstacles?
10. How did you adapt to the differences between theoretical knowledge and the realities of the classroom after the transition from Article 28?
11. How do you think focusing on educational courses and having instructors with expertise in English teaching would better prepare Article 28 teachers for real-world classroom challenges?
12. How have challenges like conveying specialized content, managing large classes, and working with limited resources shaped your teaching identity and approach compared to your initial expectations? Were there additional factors that contributed to these challenges?