

## **Institutional identity of teachers: A determinant of teacher efficacy**

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### **Abstract**

Teacher identity has recently been under extensive investigations to understand its impacts on and relationships with classroom variables. Considering the effect identity has on individuals, an immediate relationship is that between teacher identity and an index of an effective teaching, i.e. teacher efficacy. The present study tries to understand the possibility of a direct relationship between the two concepts. 37 English teachers were given an efficacy scale to gauge and rank their efficacy indices. The top 5 participants in teacher efficacy list were then regularly observed during an academic semester and interviewed to study their institutional identity. Meanwhile, similar procedure was conducted for 5 teachers with the least teacher efficacy scores, too. Detailed

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qualitative analysis of interview transcriptions and observation notes revealed the two groups were distinct regarding their institutional identity. In other words, it was shown that institutional identity and teacher efficacy were positively associated with each other.

**Keywords:** English teachers, high school teachers, institutional identity, teacher efficacy

## 1. Introduction and Theoretical Bases

During the past decades, especially after publication of Kumaravadivelu's paper (1994), the significance of teachers' characteristics and personal accounts has attracted many researchers in education (Kelchtermans, 2005).

Moreover, investigating identity has become a rich and promising area of research, as well (Hogg, 2006). Identity, as a generic term, is defined as the type of persons people perceive themselves or are perceived in a certain context (Joseph, 2004), a self-constructed process which is modified by a number of factors (Gohier, Chevrier, & Anadón, 2007).

Teacher identity, likewise, tries to capture teachers' definition of themselves with relation to their profession (Morita, 2004). With its impacts on a wide range of educational aspects, like teacher commitment (Day & Gu, 2007), analyses of teacher identity lead to better understandings of educational theories and practice.

Meanwhile, several theories have been introduced to help educationalists. Social Identity Theory (SIT), for instance, states that individuals, who happen to belong to a certain group, tend to display favoritism toward in-group mottoes and practices (Brown, 2000; Hogg, 2006; Jaspal, 2010). The three contributing factors of SIT are effective in developing such favoritism namely in-group identification, context, and relationship with other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Influencing factors are also viewed in terms of four major concepts which make up cornerstones for group identity in a context: *categorization* is the

tendency toward labeling oneself and others as belonging to in-group or out-groups. This tendency comes from constant *comparison* of group variables with those of other groups. Comparing in-group and out-group leads to increase of interest in some related/neighborhood groups which boost in-group ties, *identification*, and accordingly, distancing from others who are dissimilar, i.e. *distinctiveness* (Hogg, 2006; Jaspal, 2010).

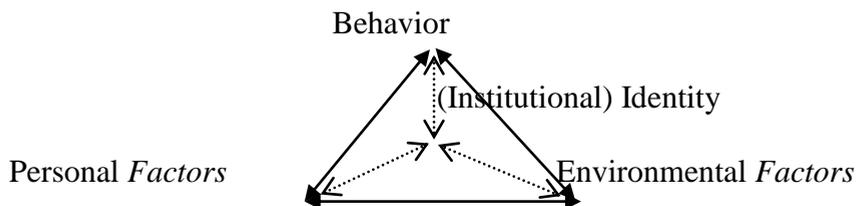
Back to the discussion of identity, SIT can well be traced in teacher identity. Teachers, in the course of their practice in educational institutions, grow a sense of attachment to their affiliated institutions. This sense of belonging is the result of several manipulating variables many of which are informed by SIT, for instance teachers' categorization of themselves and others as in-groups and out-groups as well as their tendency towards in-group connections (Brewer, 1991). A relevant juncture of the concepts of SIT and teacher identity results in the concept of institutional identity, which can generally be described as a teacher's state of identification with the institution wherein he/she teaches (Hogg, 2006). Institutional identity is actually the realization of major SIT notions in teacher identity. SIT, however, is not alone in feeding the idea of institutional identity.

A variety of contextual variables are believed to affect individuals. According to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), there are interactive relationships of effects among environmental, personal, and behavioral factors, which can further influence institutional identity. SCT was essentially developed to understand, foresee, and modify human behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Kanekar & Sharma, 2009). With its roots in Bandura's and his colleagues' studies in 1977, 1986 and 1997, SCT initially takes personal factors as well as behavior and environment, as its independent variables, as affecting learning and change in behavior. It primarily explains how people learn and maintain behavioral patterns (Bandura, 1997).

According to the assumptions of SCT, learning cannot simply be explained in terms of direct reinforcement. What comes in between is a social side existing in the environment which, beside individual's personality variables, influences learning. In other words, learning as accounted by SCT is conceptually an interaction of individual's

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characteristics, environmental factors, and behavior (Bandura, 1989; Pajares, 2002). If we add teachers' identity vis-à-vis their institution, i.e. institutional identity, the conceptual model of learning in SCT can be presented in a novel way (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Modified conceptual model of learning in SCT

In this framework, environment is used to refer to both physical and social variables, i.e. objects, and family members, friends and colleagues, as affecting individual's behavior (Bandura, 2001). Personal factors can range from idiosyncratic characteristics to group or institutional factors. Behavior is thus a by-product of the individuals' personal factors and environment; however, the influence is not monodirectional. That is, behavior also affects how's of environment. As individuals discern and imitate others' actions, based on observational/vicarious learning (Bandura, 1997). They can, in turn, bring about change and modification in the environment. All these three factors affect and are also affected by (institutional) identity of individuals.

Both theories of SIT and SCT can be implemented in understanding teacher identity and, specifically, institutional identity. As discussed earlier, to SIT, individuals tend to feel and act in favor of their group-mates, which means closer contacts and higher attitudinal congruity among group members. If we add SCT notions to the argument, in-group members start observing and modeling attitudes and actions of other members as well as receiving effects from institutional factors, as specified by Bandura's Modeling Process (1997), which by itself enhances yet further agreement among in-group members. Each of the elements of the two theories plus their meeting

point sound to be identical to and support the conditions institutional identity establishes in an institute.

### **1.1 The Locus of Institutional Identity with Regard to Teacher Efficacy**

According to SCT, individuals are influenced by their mutual imitation and manipulation of the people in the setting (Bandura, 1997; Luhr, 2005). Understanding these reciprocal influences helps explain a teacher's behavior and its possible similarity with that of other colleagues around. Teachers' efficacy is one of these factors which can influence teachers' behaviors and thus environment and, accordingly, institutional identity and in return be influenced by it.

A classic definition of teacher efficacy reads, "the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977, p. 137). More recent definitions, also, spin around similar variables. Guskey and Passaro (1994), for example, defined teacher efficacy as "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated" (p. 4). The latter characterization puts an emphasis on the practical dimension of teacher efficacy; that teacher efficacy has directly to do with students' achievement. In fact, teacher efficacy has widely been appreciated as an effective variable in student's achievement, motivation, and sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Both teachers' institutional identity and teacher efficacy seem to influence teachers' practice and theory of their career. A teacher's practice is affected by several variables related to the person (e.g. personality characteristics) and institution (e.g. facilities). These variables, according to SCT, can be influenced by the teacher, as well. On the other hand, institutional identity is the consequence of a series of associations among various teacher-institution attributes. As a result, teacher characteristics and institutional variables are both informing teacher efficacy and institutional identity.

People are inclined towards favoring those belonging to a similar group compared with outsiders or 'others' (Tajfel et al., 1978). Also,

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SCT maintains that motivated members of a certain group may 'learn' from each other (Bandura, 1977). These two theories share a locus where institutional identity and teacher efficacy meet. That is the juncture which leads us to the theoretical backbone of this study.

According to Hansen (2008), identity is shaped and reshaped relative to those around us. The procedure is not holistic though in that the acquisition of identity is by no means all-inclusive, accurate, and permanent. Others influence us regarding those elements we share, particularly in a communal context (Ellemers, Spear, & Doosje, 2002). Yet, this process is reciprocal: when it comes to identity formation, individuals influence and are at the same time influenced by others (Nascimento-Schulze, 1993). This is also true from SCT perspective, as well. To be brief, identity is projected in the practices of group members. Shared context provides the setting for group members' 'observing' and then taking up each other's' practices. If we tend to combine the two theories, having in mind the question of identity formation within groups, we can claim that group members adopt from each other identity-related practices, i.e. contextual (institutional) practices of identity are observed, learned, and employed by colleagues.

But, there has been no study reported in literature as to how these two concepts, institutional identity and teacher efficacy, are correlated. Thus, an investigation of likely relationship existing between the two variables is fruitful. More precisely, it is hypothesized that teachers with the highest scores on teacher efficacy scale, which shows their high motivation and confidence (Stets, 2006), tend to strengthen institutional identity of the group. To put it differently, it is claimed that teachers with higher institutional identity are more efficacious than those with lower institutional identity and vice versa, i.e., vicarious learning (or Modeling Process) of teachers with high teacher efficacy indices helps them boost their institutional identity. Teacher efficacy is therefore claimed to be in direct relationship with teachers' institutional identity.

## 1.2 Institutional Identity Factors

Literature on collective identity of members of a social system is mainly investigated under the title of organizational identity, especially in organizational management studies. However, in the present study, due to higher congruence of the term with educational settings, 'institutional identity' is preferred. Institutional identity, here, is addressed by the primary question of who we are in an institution. It is a flexible phenomenon what emerges through institutional interactions among members to establish a common sense of belonging to the institution different from that of other neighboring institutions. In other words, it is the collective identity we share with others, our group roles the way we define. At the group level, as Puusa (2006) further discusses, institutional identity is based on SIT. In an overview of the notion, Puusa (2006) states that, institutional identity intends to mean the essence of an institution; that institutional identity offers a circle of meanings for realizing actions and attitudes to the institution members.

Professional identity factors reported in literature pertaining to institutions are diverse and extensive due to its multidisciplinary facets ranging from elements of professional identity to commitment and social context. To gauge final participants' indices of institutional identity, a rubric of institutional identity factors was developed based on several studies on teacher identity (e.g. Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; Forde, McMahon, McPhee, & Patrick, 2006, among others).

Factors selected were decided to be all-inclusive and to include the most frequent elements of institutional identity. (*Self-organization* is the institution members' desire to view and categorize one as a member of a certain groups. This factor strengthens members' in-group ties (Hogg, 2006; Stets, 1998). The significance of *context*, also, makes it a determining variable in changing members' attitudes and behaviors. Context is referred to both human and contextual factors (Lovitt, 2007). Seeing the self [or others] as an embodiment of the in-group prototype, what is named as *de-personalization*, makes each single member identify with the institution and thus support his/her institutional identity (Stets & Harrod, 2004). Also, institutional identity cannot be complete without members' sense of *commitment* to the institution. It further fortifies in-group ties and loyalty to the institution

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(Crosswell, 2006). According to literature, members' voluntary choosing to become involved in an institution is an indispensable factor of institutional identity, too (Goldberg, 2003). Members' free *choice* helps them get motivated and interested in achieving institutional objectives. *Subject matter* is yet another factor involved in shaping teachers' institutional identity. It goes without saying that interest in subject matter and the support an institution may provide for teachers to promote the subject matter affect teachers' love of identifying with the institution (Socket, 2008). The last factor has to do with the *people* in the institution (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Preference and/or tendency to work with the people in an institution, including colleagues, manager(s), and staff is regarded as an important factor of institutional identity. Based on literature and after discussing them with scholars, it was decided that these seven factors were comprehensive enough to capture institutional identity of teachers.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

All participants were English teachers invited from a total number of 22 high schools in one of educational sectors of Tehran, as part of a major research project. High schools, and therefore teachers, were selected based on sociolinguistic 'snowball technique' of participant sampling (Milroy & Gordon, 2003, p. 32) due to practicalities. Since access to one of the two genders was more applicable, only male teachers were included. Participants ranged from 22 to 41 years old; given that required number of teachers within a limited age limit was not accessible in the sector under the study, age was not controlled. Experience was considered among the controlled variables. Final participants' teaching experience was set to range between 3 to 5 years. Based on a series of research (e.g. Mackey, Polio, & McDonough, 2004; Scherff, 2008), a borderline of 3 to 5 years between experienced and novice teachers was decided to be participants' required experience to avoid possible negative intervention of teaching burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2005) and the claim that novice teachers lack required skills

and knowledge of their profession (Tsui, 2003). Additionally, participating teachers' degrees were controlled to include only BA holders of English-related majors.

Final sample for data collection was selected by taking into account the above-mentioned variables, which resulted in 37 high school teachers of English courses. From among these 37 teachers, 12 were employed by Iranian Ministry of Education and 25 worked as hourly-paid teachers.

## **2.2 Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedure**

Three types of instrumentations suitable to the purpose of the study were implemented. To rank participant teachers based on their teacher efficacy indices, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's Efficacy Scale (OSTES) (1998) was distributed among primary participants. The reliability of the questionnaire was primarily verified by a pilot study with a sample of parallel participants to be .84, which is a sound index. The questionnaire was then distributed among the 37 participants during a 5-day period. Data collected was later inserted into SPSS to select final 10 participants based on their efficacy indices. Accordingly, after ranking efficacy scores, 5 teachers with the highest scores and 5 teachers with the lowest scores were specified. Only then came turn for the second data collection instrument.

Final participants were then invited to a series of open-ended semi-structured interviews to explore participants' institutional identity. Interview sessions were scheduled and distributed during a whole academic semester. Most of the interviews were conducted and recorded in participants' classes in high schools. Open-ended questions prepared prior to interviews were designed primarily based on the constructs derived from experts interviews and social identity literature and then were reviewed by experts in education, identity issues, and English language to check the primary validity of the questions (Appendix A). The constructs are the same institutional identity factors mentioned in section 1.2.

Overall, each participant was interviewed for an average of 5 sessions. Notes and transcriptions were immediately merged and

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analyzed to shape comparable patterns. For analyzing participants' institutional identity, data gathered from both groups were compared. The unit of analysis varied based on the participants' explicit or implicit responses; in explicit responses, which included relevant constructs, sentences was the analyzed unit, while participants' implicit responses had to be analyzed in a paragraph. To put it differently, making use of content analysis, interview transcriptions and observations were reviewed carefully for participants' explicit and/or implicit references to each of the seven constructs. Positive references to the constructs were construed as affirming existence of institutional identity construct. Negative or lack of references could mean low institutional identity or lack of it.

At the same time, as a complementary means for data collection, participants' classes were observed for a minimum of 2 sessions for each participant, as well. Observations were based on a modified version of Standards for Excellence in Teaching Observation Checklist (Brown, 1995) to include institutional identity constructs derived from literature. Notes taken during observations were also drawn on to enrich data analysis.

## 3. Results

In-depth analysis of data resulted in understanding participants' dissimilar states of institutional identity which helped us answer the main hypothesis of the study. Based on the findings, the two groups of teachers, who were categorized as High Efficacy Indices (HEI) and Low Efficacy Indices (LEI), revealed distinct attitudes and practices about their institutional identity. The diversity of the two groups vis-à-vis institutional identity is discussed with reference to the seven institutional identity factors, as discussed below.

### 3.1 Self-categorization

Self-categorization is defined as the process of categorizing or classifying oneself in one or a number of certain ways regarding other

social categories or classifications (e.g. Hogg, 2006; Stets, 1998). It is the quality of having or not having a sense of belonging to a group. Participants revealed diverse attitudes about this key aspect of institutional identity. Participants in HEI group were highly in favor of seeing themselves as members of the community, i.e. their high schools. These teachers, in most of the relevant data, referred to themselves as ‘us’ even if there was no one else around. In fact, based on the demographic differences (Goldberg, 2003) and collective interests (Jaspal, 2009; Stets, 1998) noticed among them, teachers in HEI group preferred to make a common category and include themselves within the in-group. As in words of participants 2, “We prefer and it is very important to talk about what is going on here...”, using the first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ was highly frequent, which shows their tendency toward a collective identity comprising those in the institution. Besides the collective-referent vocabularies, also including ‘we teachers’ or ‘our high school’, participants in HEI demonstrated their inclination to categorizing themselves implicitly. They tended to include their colleagues in answering questions about their institution and in most cases each of them perceived themselves and answered questions as they were the selected representatives of the group and could strongly state their ideas for the group. This quality is perceptible in one of the participant’s answer to the question, “Are you interested in teaching? Why?”:

*Sure! What would I do here if I were not!? Basically, you can’t take ‘interest’ from teaching and still remain a ‘teacher’. We are all normal human beings and we can’t ignore our likes and dislikes. So, if we are still teaching, in spite of all the difficulties we face, that’s because we are in love with it... (Extract continues) (Participant 4)*

In this extract, he answers an ostensibly personal question in a collective way. Frequent and continuous mentions of the qualities of “their” thoughts and actions he made have rare, if not imperceptible, commonalities with individualism. This way of seeing themselves as group becomes even more apparent in their appreciation of in-group similarities (Chatzisarantis, Hagger, Wang, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009).

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Perception of self-categorization in LEI group, however, was not considerable. Participants' statements in this group were mainly individualistic and personal. When it came to answering interview questions, in several occasions, their responses included personal reasons other than or irrelevant to group norms. In fact, their major self-categorizations were only related to some of their professional concerns, such as employment and salary (all five participants in LEI group were unemployed). As in response to the same question above, one of the participants in LEI group said, "I like my job, yeah, but it's not exactly what I wanted. Sometimes I may feel totally disappointed, but I try to ignore it." To put it in a nutshell, self-categorization was revealed to be a vivid bold line to differentiate the two groups.

### 3.2 Context

Both institutions and contextual factors are referred to as context here. The institutions (high schools) in which a great deal of participants' teaching was taking place as well as contextual factors relevant to that institution were inquired from participants of both groups. Participants in HEI group were all in love with their institutions in different ways. In all interviews they talked enthusiastically about their high schools. Participant 2, for instance, confirmed that his high school and almost everything about it made him become a better teacher, "I'm not exaggerating: my teaching depends on *this* high school. It provides us with facilities I don't think we could have elsewhere." (Participant 2) Clearly, contextual factors have made participants of this group (four of whom came from one high school) find this institution the most suitable helping them increase their institutional identity (Ellemers, et al., 2002). Some of them referred to more accurate reasons such as the proximity of the high school to their houses, proper classrooms, and some limited but decent facilities as other reasons for their approval of the institution. In other words, It seems that contextual factors seem to mean a lot and thus influence institutional identity (Ellemers, et. al., 2002).

Similar conceptions were perceived in LEI group, as well, but from a negative perspective. Out of 25 interviews with participants of this

group, disapproval of the relevant high schools was mentioned 22 times (five participants of this group came from 3 different high schools). Opposite to HEI group, contextual factors led LEI teachers dislike their high schools. Participants 6, 7, and 10 had strong objections to the biased principal, weak management, and teachers' lack of autonomy there. Likewise, participants 9 nagged about the distance he had to commute. Social identity, according to Lovitt (2007) and McCarthy (2001), is essentially context dependant. So, contentment with the context has the positive consequence of heightening one's social identity and, thus, institutional identity. Moreover, having in mind the relationship between contextual factors and teachers' disagreement with many of the environmental factors, according to SCT (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2002), these teachers' attitude and behavior in refusing formation of relevant institutional identity can be understood. Hence, disparity between the groups in terms of both social and physical context adds to the difference between the two groups' institutional identity.

### **3.3 De-personalization**

As another social identity factor, de-personalization is defined as individual's views of the self or others as a genuine representative of the in-group prototype (Brewer, 1991; Hogg, 2006; Stets, 1998). In fact, personal characteristics give way to higher impersonal and collective features.

Over 25 interviews, participants in HEI group, mainly indirectly, referred to the significance of group-based against their personal features for a minimum of 16 times. These participants stated that they had strict conditions for accepting one as their colleagues, mainly because only in-group members with similar characteristics could heighten their reputation, strengthen their professional and inner ties, and accelerate group identification. So, acting in the best interest of the group was believed to be an important requirement for group members, since de-personalization means seeing, measuring, and assessing attributes of prototypes in other in-group members (Hogg, 2006). De-personalization is also affected by some teachers who are known as

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“high-status” actors (Stets & Harrod, 2004). To prove and support their statements, many of participants in both groups referred to a couple of teachers in their own high schools or in the same educational sector. It was then revealed that these teachers were either prominent for their successful record as well as motivated personalities (for HEI group teachers) or their being rebellious (for LEI teachers). To put it differently, much of participants’ institutional identity quality depended on their following these prototypical members.

Contrary to the first group’s ‘eliminating’ verdict due to degradation of collective norms, teachers in LEI group preferred individualistic liberty of thought and behavior. Only a couple of times did LEI teachers acknowledge collective norms. During most of the interview time, they referred to their personal characteristics and their preference to keep distance from other imposed norms:

*If I teach here, I have my personal reasons. I have several problems and whenever I encounter a problem here in high school, well, that’s beyond me. I know I am a teacher and I should try to do my duty, but I can’t go beyond it... No one should judge me! I don’t want anyone else judge me and my job... (Extract continues) (Participant 7)*

This extract clearly explains its narrator’s non-collective viewpoints. Seeing teaching a ‘personal job’, detaching from ‘others’, and refuting any sense of ‘collective feelings’ disclose that this participant has strong sense of personalizing his job, thus moving one step back from institutional identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). LEI participants’ disapproval of compliance with de-personalization, then, shows that there is a direct relationship between teachers’ efficacy and institutional identity in the group. That is to say, low efficacy has to do with low institutional identity.

### 3.4 Commitment

Commitment is generally defined as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization.” (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) It involves an individual’s feeling and behaviors according to specific set of values, standards, reflection willingness, and intellectual and emotional

engagement (Day, et al., 2005). Theoretically, thus, when it comes to commitment, there is a general consensus among researchers as it is directly related to professional identity (Homburg, Wieseke, & Hoyer, 2009; Mowday, et al., 1982). This assumption was verified in our data, too. Participants in HEI group demonstrated their commitment in both interviews and classroom practices. These teachers were highly interested in their high schools and declared their senses of belonging in various ways. Participant 5, for instance, stated that he would never leave that high school. Participant 4 told us he preferred to spend all his working hours in his affiliated high school than elsewhere. Almost in all occasions, HEI group teachers stated that they were willing to (and that they actually did) spend hours in their high schools, which shows their high commitment (Crosswell, 2006). To participant 4, “there is something about my career that makes me leave my family and friends to spend more hours in the high school and still feel happy.”

In LEI group, however, apart from their personal lack of interest in their high schools, the two aspects of commitment were low. To Stryker and Serpe (1994), commitment has two aspects: 1) *quantitative*, which is the number of bonds and ties with which an individual is tied through an identity and 2) *qualitative*, the strength of the ties between an individual and others. During the interview sessions, participants in LEI group asserted that they preferred not to spend time with their colleagues in *that* particular high school and actually most of them (4 out of 5) declared that they had the least professional relationships with each other and their other colleagues. Based on Riketta and van Dick (2005), identification and commitment are proved to be highly correlated. Consequently, a teacher’s lack of or frail commitment can help us predict his/her low professional identity.

This finding was also supported during observations made in the classes. In 7 (out of 10) observation sessions, HEI group attended the classes with prepared lesson plans, while in LEI group, only 4 classes employed proper lesson plans. During 8 sessions, HEI teachers were directly involved in leading the class, employed the materials adequately, and applied the basic phases of teaching (including Presentation, Practice, and Production) (Freeman & Richards, 1996); however, in LEI group teachers were almost passive during 5 out of 10

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observed sessions. Lesson plan, also, was generally ignored, and no systematic teaching procedure was seemingly employed in at least 4 sessions. If we accept commitment constituents proposed by Dey, et al. (2005) (mentioned above), we can claim that participants in LEI group failed to develop strong sense of commitment, which automatically brings about negative consequences on their institutional identity. However, to make the claim safer, the Organizational Commitment Scale, based on Cook & Wall (1980), as cited in Stride, Wall, & Catley (2007), a 9- item 5-point response scale, was distributed among all 10 teachers to check their agreement or disagreement with the items. Nonparametric Mann-Whitney test shows nearly significant difference (sig. value: 0.08) between the two groups' commitment measures (Tables 1 and 2). Thus, the main assumption of the study is further supported.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics of the two groups' commitment measures

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HEI	5	35	42	39.80	2.864
LEI	5	14	21	17.60	2.608
Valid N (listwise)	5				

**Table 2:** Test statistics for Mann-Whitney U: The two groups' commitment measures

Test Statistics <sup>b</sup>	
	Commitment
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	15.000
	-2.635
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.008 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Not corrected for ties.

<sup>b</sup> Grouping Variable: Grouping

### 3.5 Choice

Participants' frequent mentions of their voluntary choosing the institutions in HEI group highlighted the importance of this factor in their appreciating institutional identity. Burke (2004) touches on the influence of 'choice' on role and social identities. Likewise, teachers in HEI group stated that part of the reason they were attached to their institutions was because they had a chance to *choose* them. The choice is, as Goldberg (2003) confirmed, due to the correspondence between teachers' personality patterns and the image the institution had shown. Hence, voluntary choice and similar personality patterns bring about stronger sense of attachment to collective settings and objectives. Participant 3 from HEI group, for instance, stated that, "... [another] reason why I like this high school is because I had heard about its helping atmosphere and some of its famous teachers. I wanted to improve my career, so I tried to be a member of it... ." Interestingly, all the other 4 teachers of the group, directly or indirectly, pointed out this reason. In other words, they came to the institutions with roughly identical packs of personalities and expectations. Voluntary choice has, then, played significant role in their collective institutional identity at the time.

Being a member of their high schools, yet, was not a point of interest for 80 percent of the teachers in LEI group. Participants 6, 7, 9, and 10 confirmed that their being members of their high schools was not based on their personal decision making. These four teachers, who were in their early teaching years, were not famous enough to attract top high schools' principals nor could they gain adequate scores to be able to choose high schools for their service, as two major methods of allocating high schools to teachers (Regulation for Organizing Teachers in Guilan, Iran, 2010). LEI group teachers' statements can be summarized in the words of participant 6,

*I couldn't choose to be in high school X and this school is very far from my home and also I don't know many people here. My previous colleagues and my close friends are in different high schools... I wish all teachers could choose their high schools. Now, I try to finish my classes and get out as soon as I can... (Extract continues) (Participant 6)*

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Participants also discussed ‘choice’ which referred to the autonomy given to or refrained from them regarding teaching content and methods/means of assessment. Mostly, teachers in HEI group stated that they were ‘content with’ or ‘couldn’t complain about’ the choices they had; however, choices were more ‘limited’ as teachers in LEI group clarified. To Forde, et al. (2006), wide range of teachers’ circle of educational choices can help them improve their professional development. Nonetheless, we should be careful about considering this sense of the word, because the Ministry of Education is the main authority for educational choices and only limited options of the kind are provided for almost all high schools.

### 3.6 Subject Matter and People

Two factors of subject matter and people were referred to more or less together by most of the participants. In fact, subject matter and people in the context were seen as inseparable constructs of institutional identity in both groups.

To many researchers, the significance of the people in educational context on teachers’ professional identity and, as a rational consequence, on their institutional identity, is taken for granted. Forde, et al. (2006) and Weber and Mitchell (1995) confirmed the influence of individuals in educational settings. Gohier et al. (2007) believe that “students, colleagues, and all other actors of the school system as a social institution” have impact on teachers’ institutional identity. The concept was seen clearly in all 10 teachers’ words. Participants in HEI group were well satisfied with the human factors in their high schools. They said that their relationships with most of the *colleagues* were ‘very good’ and they liked their *students* ‘a lot’. Also, they mostly named their *principals* and other administrative people as ‘good’ individuals to work with. In addition, love of their subject matter was vivid in interviews and observations. Out of 10 observation sessions, in most class hours of 9 sessions, teachers’ practices were satisfactory or above average. In one of the interview sessions, participant 4 asserted that, “I don’t think I could continue teaching if I didn’t study English”.

Talks on people in the institutions and subject matter were also frequent in LEI group, though with a different direction. These participants, like their counterparts in HEI group, approved the importance of people in their high schools and their subject matter; nevertheless, they were not, generally speaking, in favor of these two factors. Participant 8, for instance, was irritated by some of his colleagues for their lack of support and sadly retold a story of discrimination he had experienced a few months before. He was also discomforted about his students, "I don't know why but they never seem to like English. That makes me unhappy, because sometimes I think whatever I am doing is useless" (Participant 8).

Teachers need to develop a 'sense of purpose' in their profession, which is affected by all involved in education, including students and teachers (Hansen, 2008), and subject matter, a high-ranked priorities why teachers enter the profession (Atkinson, 2002, cited in Socket, 2008). Thus, failure to build successful relationships with them makes teachers hopeless and their profession frail. People in high school and subject matter seem to have, by and large, created such effects on LEI group teachers.

#### **4. Discussion**

This study was carried out to investigate potential relationship between English teachers' institutional identity and their efficacy. Participants divided into high and low efficacy group were observed and interviewed for an academic semester to analyze their institutional identity. Seven factors constituting institutional identity were taken as benchmarks.

Results obtained through qualitative and non-parametric means showed that beliefs and behaviors of participants in the group with higher efficacy (HEI) were highly consistent with institutional identity factors, while those of low efficacy teachers (LEI) were mostly incompatible with institutional identity criteria. In other words, it was known that teacher efficacy was directly related to the teachers' institutional identity. It may also be claimed that teacher efficacy can predict teachers' level of institutional identity and the other way

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around. It should however be warned that our claim pertains to the present study and its participants; no claim of generalizability is intended nor has been sought for.

The findings can be viewed from some different perspectives. Participating teachers' performances, in terms of teaching practice, were mostly in accordance with other in-group members in both groups, with the difference that teachers in HEI group performed better than their LEI group counterparts. This is while contextual factors were almost identical for members of the two groups. This reminds us of Bandura's SCT which maintains that behavior and environment together with personal features affect learning and change in behavior. Based on the vicarious learning (Bandura, 1997; Luhr, 2005), individuals tend to develop attitudes and behaviors akin to those who are around them. Likewise, both groups' frequent mentions of their colleagues (attention) and the similarities among them as well as appreciation of their in-group colleagues (motivation) explains similarities, behavior, and practices in each group. In addition, according to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is specific to situation. So, teachers who have close efficacy indices, i.e. high and low, and are teaching in different contexts, based on the findings, are likely to develop fairly analogous practices, leading to congruence of their institutional identity. As participant 3 stated, "When I see my colleagues are like me in their attitudes and practice, I feel more comfortable. I feel this is where I should be teaching."

Environment was also an imperative affecting variable to confirm diverse states of institutional identity among participants. Different contexts with undesirable features, according to Pajaras (2002), affect behavior and attitude of individuals. Further, distinction of individuals' attitudes, can guarantee discrepancies of behavior, like LEI group teachers. Thus, as for the two groups in this study, distinction of context and efficacy indices have resulted in different institutional identity states.

Findings can also be analyzed from Social Identity Theory viewpoint. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Tajfel, et al. (1971), the two group participants' harmonious reference to the contextual factors, for instance, as well as their in-group identification

indicates their high/low level of institutional identity. Teachers in HEI group preferred to work with in-group members (emphasized similarities) and to ignore (if not reject) members whose characteristics are different or opposed to those of in-group (in-group discrimination). This phenomenon, known as “minimal group paradigm” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), asserts existence of in-group favoritism and thus collective in-group identity. Participants’ tendency to constant comparing and categorizing themselves and others as in-group and out-group, too, as teachers in HEI group strongly did, witness positive institutional identity in the group. In LEI group, by the same token, frequent comparisons with the out-group were made. Nevertheless, interestingly enough, in LEI group, focus was mainly on ‘others’, enhancing ‘othering’ (Gillespie, 2007) and only rarely did they shift focus on in-group similarities. This phenomenon may be explained by their weak in-group ties which had made them get together mainly by the objective of viewing others as the out-group. More precisely, LEI group participants failed to develop strong institutional identity dispositions, partly because their in-group ties were weak and also partly because what made them form a group was merely accentuation of *differences* between self and out-group (Chatzisarantis, et al., 2009). As for the latter reason, accentuation of *similarities* between self and in-group was also required to meet a significant social identity requirement. It can therefore be concluded that participants in HEI group could develop institutional identity due to strong in-group ties among members as well as robust differences with the out-group concerning characteristics, expectations, and environmental similarities, whereas institutional identity among LEI group teachers was frail, if not totally absent, since they managed to only meet part of institutional identity prerequisites.

Both teacher efficacy and institutional identity depend on context and subject matter, too (Brilhart, 2007). According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), contextual factors and subject matter bring about effect on teachers’ beliefs in their ability and judgment to influence students’ outcomes. Likewise, both institutional identity and teacher efficacy depend on teachers’ commitment (Day, et al., 2005; Lovitt, 2006) and professional development variables, such as planning

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and organization (Allinder, 1994), willingness to experiment new methods (Guskey, 1988), and teaching enthusiasm (Allinder, 1994). These factors were found in both groups of HEI and LEI, demonstrating respectively strong and weak connections between efficacy and institutional identity factors. Consequently, it is safe to claim that there is a direct relationship between teacher efficacy and institutional identity of teachers. Findings can help curriculum developers and teacher educators grasp a better picture of teachers' characteristics and its relationship with educational efficacy. Also, teacher evaluation programs can develop more valid means to check the efficacy of teachers based on the findings of this study.

Research on identity has taken several branches due to its multidisciplinary nature. That is why researchers from various branches of knowledge have made attempts to investigate identity in their field such as Math (Murray, 2000). Humanities, too, has still many areas which are in their infancies in terms of exploration of identity. This study, as an interdisciplinary attempt to connect teacher education to social psychology, has focused on one aspect of teachers' characteristics, i.e. efficacy. Further research can address other professional features of teachers and their relationships with their institutional identity.

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## **Appendix A**

### “Interview Questions”

#### *I. Bio*

Gender? Age? Academic degree? Major? Experience of teaching in years? Which level(s)? Which high school(s)?

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#### *II. On Teaching*

1. Why did you decided to be a teacher?
2. If you are (not) interested in teaching, where does this (lack of) interest come from? Any influencing factor?
3. If you are (not) interested in teaching, how long do you intend to stay in this job? Why?
4. What factors are influential to become a ‘good’ teacher? Explain each.
5. Do you think you are a ‘good’ teacher? Why do you think so?

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#### *III. On Institutional Identity*

1. Why are you teaching in ‘this’ high school? Do you have any feeling of belonging to ‘here’? Please explain.
2. How long are you inclined to teach in ‘this’ high school? Which factors are influential? Explain each.
3. Have you ever liked to teach in (an)other high school(s)? Where? Why?
4. To what extent are you ready to cooperate with ‘this’ high school?

5. Please elaborate on the effect(s) each of the following variables may have on the way you feel about your job: 1. High school neighborhood, 2. Students, 3. Administrative staff, 4. Management, 5. Parents, 6. Class level, 7. English major, 8. Income, and 9. Facilities provided by the high school.