

Exploring the Professional Identity Construction of ELT Researchers in Higher Education

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Abstract

As part of a large-scale project on English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers' research practice in higher education, this study explored how a Masters student, a doctoral student, and a university instructor in applied linguistics in higher education setting constructed and reconstructed their professional identities as ELT researchers and how they coped with the contextual challenges in this regard. The required data were collected through a narrative enquiry approach in the forms of interviews, diaries, and field visits over nine academic months (i.e., one academic year) in the ELT higher education. The findings, guided by Grounded Theory, indicated a number of themes addressing the participants' professional identities, which were subject to change. The participants formed and reformed their professional identities as ELT researchers with regard to the passage of time, their personal values, their social interactions with other researchers, and the institutional and sociocultural setting. The findings are further elaborated and discussed in the light of the literature and the uncovered themes. The study suggests implications for newly accepted or recruited Masters and doctoral students and university instructors in applied linguistics as researchers in higher education.

Keywords: Professional Identity Construction, Applied Linguistics, ELT Researchers, ELT Higher Education

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1. Introduction

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The concept of professional identity can be thought of as an on-going process of one's professional self-concept that is based on one's attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences and is shaped by contextual factors (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Clegg, 2008; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kogan, 2000; Norton, 2013). Academics' professional identities in higher education setting generally relate to their teaching and/or research activities (Henkel, 2000). As a number of studies have addressed academics' professional identities in higher education context addressing their teaching practice (Gu & Benson, 2014) and research practice (Xu, 2014), the processes in which academics who are newcomers (Archer, 2008) to the higher education context construct their professional identities with regard to their research activities have not been examined extensively and deeply, especially in English language teaching (ELT) higher education setting.

To fully understand ELT researchers' professional identities, it is crucial to explore the way they construct "a sense of themselves – identities – in relation to ways of inhabiting roles, positions, and cultural imaginaries that matter to them" (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 103). On the other hand, younger academics are more willing to accept that "their identities will always be under construction in contexts that are characterised by indeterminacy, partiality and complexity" (Taylor, 2008, p. 35).

In this study, therefore, we extensively and deeply explore how new academics construct their professional identities as ELT researchers in the context of higher education by drawing on the approach of narrative enquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To this aim, we examine the professional identity construction of a university instructor in applied linguistics who has just started his profession in higher education in order to find how he becomes a researcher in the realm of applied linguistics. In addition, we examine the way a Masters student and a doctoral student in applied

linguistics construct their professional identities as researchers in higher education. Moreover, as there is a dearth of studies examining the challenges that these academics might encounter in their research activities, such as research manipulation and publish-or-perish culture (Hasrati, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2014) in which academics' research performance is judged in terms of publications (Sikes, 2006), and the way they may cope with the challenges to develop their research performance, we explore the immediate contextual factors which impact the participants' professional identity construction. We conduct praxis-oriented research, which deals with the "activities that combat dominance and move toward self-organization and that push toward thoroughgoing change in the practices of the social formation" (Benson, 1983, p. 338).

This study can shed light on how Masters and doctoral students and university instructors in applied linguistics in higher education construct their professional identities as researchers and how they cope with the contextual challenges (e.g., the publish-or-perish culture) in this regard. This study might additionally generate practical implications for policymakers, university managers, and other experienced faculty members on how to help newly accepted or recruited Masters and doctoral students and university instructors foster strong and positive ELT researcher identities in higher education setting.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the Communities of Practice (CoP) theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to explore the professional identity construction of a Masters student, a doctoral student, and a university instructor (i.e., academics) in applied linguistics in different state universities who participate in and negotiate meanings around a shared academic research

practice. Academics in higher education are either the peripheral or core members of the given CoP. Wenger (1998) suggests that both peripheral and core members of the given CoP are engaged in a joint enterprise; nevertheless, they might not have equal access to the "repertoire of negotiable resources" which are assembled by the community (p. 76). That is, the core members have unrestricted access to the repertoire of negotiable resources (e.g., experienced university instructors) and the peripheral members have restricted access to these resources (e.g., Masters and doctoral students and new university instructors). Lave and Wenger (1991) maintain that enhanced participation in CoP leads to better learning outcomes.

As the researchers are regarded as members of a CoP, they attempt to develop research knowledge of some of the peripheral members of the community. Such purposeful action which develops the professional knowledge of some members is often linked with the Aristotelian concept of praxis (Grundy, 1995). Grundy (1998) proposes that "professional knowledge is knowledge that is intrinsically connected with practice. This is not knowledge that informs practice, or that has practical intent, but knowledge which is embedded in praxis" (p. 40). Benson (1983) proposes that praxis-oriented research questions the dominance in order to make changes in the current practices. Therefore, in this study, the researchers do not take a dominant position towards the participants, but attempt to empower the participants to come to reflect and understand more about research activities in applied linguistics in higher education.

2.2 Professional Identity

Over the past years, there have been dramatic shifts in the conceptualization of researchers' professional identities in line with the philosophical underpinnings of human learning in education. That is, the concept of identity has been developed from behaviourist, to cognitive, then to

sociocultural conceptualisation of human learning in education (Beijaard et al., 2004; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011). With regard to the sociocultural perspective of identity, individuals construct situated, multidimensional, and unstable identities at the crossroads of their personal agency and social structures (Block, 2006; Hökkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012). In this perspective, agency refers to "a socially situated, culturally bound process that is paradoxically made available by the discursive parameters within which we all exist" (Giroir, 2014, p. 37), and social structures relate to the social relations, such as negotiations between individuals and socio-cultural contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Similarly, Wenger (1998) argues that we (re)form our identities through the "tension between our investment in the various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (p. 188). These identity formations are identified through three modes of belonging, namely engagement, imagination, and alignment. Wenger suggests that in the engagement mode, we participate in practices and interactions with other members of the community and/or labels, tools, and languages to develop our identities in relation to the community. He maintains that the engagement mode considers the status quo of the practice and restricts our access to other communities, and hence identities. However, as Wenger proposes, the imagination mode expands our experiences beyond the boundaries of present time and space, so as to develop other images of our self and the community through other meanings, possibilities, and perspectives. Xu (2012) also claims that imagination "allows people to create unlimited images of the world and themselves based on limited experiences" (p. 569). Wenger further argues that in the alignment mode we coordinate our identities with broader social practices, expectations, demands, and directives in which we position ourselves in the historical, social, and cultural contexts.

It is argued that identity lies at the heart of academics' professional practice and continuous development (Murray & Male 2005). On the other hand, the way in which academics construct their professional identities in academic settings results in effective or ineffective performances in their career or profession (Hall, Zhu & Yan, 2002). There have been a number of studies addressing the academics' professional identities in applied linguistics in higher education settings (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Norton & Early, 2011; Xu, 2014; Yuan, 2017). Xu (2014), for instance, examined Chinese university teachers' professional identity formation as ELT researchers. It was indicated that the university teachers' research practice is limited by "publishing, teaching overload, a shortage of resources, and a lack of support from mentors, as well as self-efficacy beliefs" (p. 248). In addition, the university teachers' professional identities as researchers are formed based on their "research interests, publications, micro-academic environments, and professional life phases" (p. 254).

Yuan (2017), on the other hand, explored the construction and reconstruction of a novice language teacher educator's professional identities through research practice in a higher education setting. Adopting a narrative enquiry approach in the form of multiple interviews and extended field visits to collect the required data, Yuan revealed that the language teacher educator's professional identities were formed and reformed as a language teacher educator-researcher against different contextual obstacles, such as the institutional policy and the publish-or-perish culture.

3. The Aim of the Study

As the review of the literature indicated, academics form their professional identities in higher education through various internal (e.g., their research experience) and external factors (e.g., institutional factors) (Dinkelman, 2011; Wood & Borg, 2010; Xu, 2014; Yuan, 2017). However, to the best of

our knowledge, no published research has explored the professional identity construction of Masters and doctoral students and university instructors as researchers in applied linguistics in higher education context, and the immediate contextual factors involved in their professional identity construction. In this study, adopting a narrative enquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), we address this research gap by exploring these three groups' professional identity construction as ELT researchers during their first year of work; a period which is believed to be demanding for academics to establish their professional identities (Murray & Male, 2005). The study attempts to address these goals by raising the following questions:

1. How do Masters and doctoral students and university instructors construct their professional identities through the implementation of research practices in ELT higher education setting?
2. What factors impact on the Masters students', doctoral students', and university instructors' professional identity construction as ELT researchers in higher education?

4. Method

In order to investigate the participants' patterns of participation in the CoP, the impact of this participation on their professional development, and to track their professional identity construction, a case study approach (Merriam, 1988) was conducted.

4.1 Narrative enquiry as research methodology

In this study, we used narrative enquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), which is a way of thinking about life experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), to collect in-depth data about how the participants' research engagement impacted their professional development and how they constructed their professional identities in this way. "Through narratives, people tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are"

(Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 3), which subsequently divulge details of their identities and socialisation (Kinging, 2009). Therefore, narrative enquiry could be applied as an effective research tool to shed light on different personal and professional identities derived from people's social and professional practices (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013).

In this study, we followed Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of the narrative enquiry space to track the participants' professional identity construction. To this aim, incorporating the dimension of time, the participants' past experiences, present engagement, and future plans as researchers in the ELT higher education context were investigated. Considering the personal and social dimensions, their professional identities with regard to their inward (i.e., their perceptions, values, and emotions) and outward (i.e., their social interactions) enquiry in research were explored. Finally, regarding the institutional and sociocultural dimensions, the contextual factors involved in their professional identity construction were examined.

4.2 Context and Participants

Research invitations were sent to some Masters and doctoral students and university instructors working and/or studying applied linguistics in higher education context at different state universities in Iran. Due to the long-term commitment of the research project, only three participants (one Masters student, one doctoral student, and one university instructor) agreed to participate in the study. Following Creswell's (2007) recommendation, researchers adopting narrative enquiry approach should "focus on a single individual (or two or three individuals)" (p. 214).

The Masters student (henceforth, Masters researcher) and doctoral student (henceforth, doctoral researcher) had just started their dissertation (done to

get a master's degree)/thesis (done to get a doctorate) and the university instructor (henceforth, instructor researcher) had just started his professional teaching and research practice in the ELT higher education. These participants were assumed not to shape their professional identities as researchers yet, since they were at the outset of their research practice in the ELT higher education.

The Masters researcher was a Masters student in applied linguistics at R University. He had not done any research studies before starting his Master of Arts (MA) course. He had been studying there for one academic year and had just started working on his dissertation.

The doctoral researcher was a doctoral student in applied linguistics at R University. He was studying there for one academic year and accomplished some research studies as course requirements, while working on his thesis simultaneously. The study was carried out at the outset of his doctoral thesis project. He did his MA in applied linguistics at B University and had done and published a number of research studies there. He had the experience of publishing in accredited journals (e.g., ISI- and SCOPUS-indexed journals) before participating in the present study.

Masters and doctoral students in applied linguistics in higher education need to cover ELT courses (e.g., Teaching Language Skills, Language Testing, Teacher Education, etc.), do research studies for the partial fulfilment of the requirements of each course, conduct and write their dissertation/thesis, and extract and publish research papers related to their dissertation/thesis, especially the doctoral students. The Masters and doctoral students, as the university instructors' manpower and ghost writers, are required to read and do research for graduate education, enriching their curriculum vitae (CV), being accepted to a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

course/as a university instructor after their graduation, and helping the university instructors get their promotion.

After doing his MA in applied linguistics, the instructor researcher became a lecturer in K University and taught Bachelor of Arts (BA) university students there for four years. He did his PhD in applied linguistics at R University and became appointed as an assistant professor at K University. He did some research studies for the course requirements and his dissertation/thesis during the MA and PhD courses; however, he had not published in accredited journals, because, as he claimed, he had not done the research studies appropriately due to some research setbacks in the present ELT higher education context. He had just started his professional teaching and research practices at K University.

Being regulated at the ministerial level and required by the university, the university instructors should publish research studies and deliver them to the university each academic year in order to pursue their career, and receive the required marks (research-based points) from the university and be promoted to a higher education rank. They can get their promotion and financial benefits based on the credibility of the journal in which they publish their research studies. Being the corresponding and/or first author of the published articles can also help them get their promotion sooner. The university instructors might be dismissed from their post if they do not receive the required marks for several years.

This study focused on the way the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers shaped their professional identities as ELT researchers during the first nine months (a whole academic year) of their professional research practice in the higher education. Before embarking upon the study, ethic approval was obtained from the participants.

It should be noted that this study does not aim at generalizing its findings to the wider population but to provide thick description and in-depth analysis of the participants' professional identities (see Tsui, 2007; Liu & Xu, 2011) in order to develop a substantive theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998) on how they construct their professional identities as ELT researchers in the higher education context.

4.3 Procedure

Following Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of the narrative enquiry space, the first author/researcher explored the participants' narrative experiences of research through interviews, diaries, and field visits over nine academic months in the ELT higher education context. As narrative approach focuses on personal meanings (Clandinin et al., 2006), the first author/researcher conducted the interviews with the participants each month individually during the academic period to tell stories about their personal experience in research, the professional knowledge they gained through their research engagement, the impact of the contexts on their research engagement, and how they took on identities as ELT researcher. In the interview sessions, the first author/researcher was also engaged in meaning construction with the participants by asking questions, providing answers, expressing understanding, etc.

In addition, the participants kept written diaries about their experience, the issues that they had come across, and the suggestions they had to deal with the issues. The interval-contingent design of diary (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003) was used in which the participants reported on their experiences at predetermined intervals. The participants delivered each diary every other week.

Furthermore, the first author/researcher regularly visited and monitored the participants in their academic setting (twice or thrice a month) to engage

in personal communication with them, write down notes about their personal thoughts, and find more about the way they dealt with their research activities, a move to triangulate the interviews and diaries data.

Moreover, while conducting the narrative enquiry, the first author/researcher encouraged the participants to contemplate on their diaries and the interviews in order to empower them to reflect more on their research activities in order to learn about the viable alternatives in reading and doing research in applied linguistics. That is, as the narrative enquiry helped infuse the participants' understandings of research activity with their interpretations, it acted as a socially mediated instrument of their experiences.

The interviews, diaries, and field notes were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for subsequent analyses. Member checking technique (Creswell, 2007) was carried out to check the credibility of the transcribed data. To this end, the transcribed data were returned to the participants to check for their authenticity and make any alterations and/or modifications, if needed.

4.4 Data Analysis

Grounded Theory was adopted to analyze the data of the case study. Hence, based on the open thematic coding, the transcribed data of the interviews and diaries, and field notes were coded to uncover the important themes about the participants' research impact, their professional identity construction, and the factors involved in the process of their professional identity construction. Following the interrelationships among the core variables and guided by the three dimensions of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), categories with identical themes emerged. Each category received a label covering the shared themes within that category. The identification of the core variables and their subsequent segmenting, categorizing, and labelling followed a reiterative, bottom-up approach.

Inter-rater reliability was carried out to reduce the subjectivity and bias in the codification, categorisation, and labelling of the data (Gass & Mackey, 2000). To this aim, an expert and experienced grounded theorist was asked to check the processes of codification, categorisation, and labelling of the transcribed data. The results showed acceptable degree of convergence between the two raters' analyses, with the areas of dispute being resolved through discussion.

5. Results

5.1 Masters Researcher

The Masters researcher did not know much about research before entering higher education, although he had studied some research articles before. He thought that during the MA course, the university instructors in the CoP taught and trained him the principles of doing research studies in applied linguistics, so he considered himself as a novice researcher in the first term. When he started doing research as term projects for different courses, he did not want to do the research projects to receive a good mark, but to try to work hard on the research projects in order to publish them in accredited journals, so as to become famous, enrich his CV, and become accepted to a top university as a doctoral student in the future.

Although my best motivation for doing and reading research is to be accepted as a doctoral student, I want to publish good articles, develop new ideas, and become more famous in my fields of interest. I do not do research for the sake of receiving a good mark. (Interview)

The Masters researcher's enthusiasm in doing research led to a good relationship with his classmates and other researchers in the academic CoP. He stated that his classmates would always ask him questions about doing research, and he would contact other experienced ELT researchers in case he faced a problem in his research projects. Nevertheless, none of his classmates

cooperated with him in conducting research projects. His classmates would ask questions in order to develop their own research projects.

Although I think I am not so knowledgeable, my classmates would always ask me questions about doing research. So, doing research helped me make good relationships with other classmates and researchers. (Interview)

Moreover, there were little cooperation among the university instructors for doing research in the academic CoP, and that they just wanted to be better than the other university instructors and students. That is, there was an intense competition among the university instructors in doing and publishing papers in the academic CoP, which might have negatively affected the Masters researcher's research projects and his professional identities as an ELT researcher. On the other hand, the Masters researcher was not supported by the university to accomplish his research projects properly and the participants would not cooperate with him; therefore, he thought that this lack of support and cooperation might behave the researchers not to do their research studies appropriately. As a result, he encountered some difficulties in reading research articles in order to prepare himself for his own research projects, specifically his dissertation. For instance, he did not know whether the author(s) of the published articles has/have done the research studies or whether the findings are accurate or not in the present context.

It is really difficult to collect data, and I think this difficulty might lead to cheating in doing research. For instance, a researcher might fill out all his questionnaires himself, which lowers the reliability and validity of his research. There are many published articles in some journals with Iranian authors; however, it is too difficult to know whether the data and findings are trustworthy (Interview). It is really treacherous to trust the articles and read them. I think in this

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context the biggest challenge of the researchers is to find realistic and valid data (Diary)

The more research studies published in the present academic CoP that he read, the more he became demotivated of the published research articles, which as he thought was related to the negative influence of the immediate context. As he claimed, in the present academic CoP context, the university instructors and students do research about unimportant matters just for the sake of publication, and they do not consider solving the issues in the education system through research: there is an improper understanding of doing research in this academic CoP context. The topic of research is not important for the researchers in ELT higher education, they just want to publish their papers in good journals to promote to a higher rank, be accepted in a university, or go abroad. However, this influenced the Masters researcher's professional identities as an ELT researcher in academic context on the one hand, and his idea in choosing his dissertation topic on the other hand. Following the other Masters researchers in the academic CoP, he started investigating the relationship among some variables in applied linguistics.

Starting his dissertation, the Masters researcher faced some issues that he needed advice. He addressed the issues by asking his supervisor and reading relevant articles. He claimed that he had learned a lot about different sections of doing and writing research studies through the aforementioned ways. Although, as he claimed, the other university instructors in the CoP did not help him much in conducting the other research projects, his supervisor guided and helped him in this regard.

I really appreciate my supervisor. He has helped me in doing my research. For example, whenever I have a question, I email him and he will reply, and it gives me energy to do the rest of my work properly. (Diary)

Regarding the statistical part of his research study, he encountered some problems, since as he stated he did not know much about the statistical part of research. Reading relevant articles, asking his supervisor, and asking some statisticians in the academic CoP helped him accomplish this demanding part of his research study.

Similar to his research projects during the course, his dissertation project positively influenced his professional development. Through reading the relevant research articles published in accredited journals, he could keep himself up-to-date, develop his academic writing skills, collaborate with other researchers online and in person, and accomplish his dissertation accordingly.

However, like his research projects, he experienced some difficulties in his dissertation project. He was not supported financially and emotionally by the immediate context in the academic CoP, he was short of time and under stress in some cases, especially in data collection, and some of the participants were uncooperative, and his dissertation presentation and mark were capped and procrastinated by the university instructors until he extracted and published a paper from his dissertation. Although sometimes he would lose his enthusiasm, he dealt with the difficulties and accomplished his dissertation.

5.2 Doctoral Researcher

Before starting the PhD programme, the doctoral researcher had genuinely done some research projects under the supervision of his university instructors. Prior to the PhD programme, the doctoral researcher's research experiences mainly revolved around what he had done in the MA programme as course requirements. He had developed some of the research projects under his supervisor's supervision and published them in accredited journals. Although he had carried out other research projects in the academic CoP, he

did not like them as much as those which he did with his supervisor, because, as he argued, he did those research projects just for instrumental purposes, such as receiving the required mark and suiting the university instructors' preferences while receiving little or no contributions from them.

My MA supervisor encouraged and helped me to present, do, and publish my research projects in accredited journals and conferences inside and outside the country. However, as the other university instructors had no contribution to the research projects which I did for their course requirement, I published them in some journals which were not so good. (Interview)

His best research project during the MA programme had been extracted from his dissertation which was in his area of interest. Although he did not accomplish good research projects with the other university instructors due to the university instructors' lack of motivation, encouragement, and contribution, he did, published, and presented a number of good papers extensively in both international and national journals and conferences.

Although I collected the required data, analysed them by myself, wrote the papers, and published and/or presented them in good journals and conferences, my supervisor's contribution and encouragement were worthwhile in this regard. (Interview)

After defending his MA dissertation and receiving the full marks and finishing his MA as a top student, he was accepted at R University as a talented student (i.e. as a top student). In addition to his doctoral thesis, he did some research projects as course requirements for each university instructor and published them in accredited journals. He also presented in an international conference. As he claimed, one of the university instructors helped him with his research project, especially in writing the paper (university instructor 1), another university instructor just encouraged him

and had little contribution (university instructor 2), and the other two university instructors had no contributions in his research projects (university instructors 3 & 4) in the academic CoP.

Some of the university instructors do not contribute to the research projects, while they want to include their name as the first and corresponding author on the published article. They think it is the student's responsibilities to do and publish the research papers for each course (Interview). Or maybe they do not have enough time, since they are involved in other part time jobs (Diary).

However, he argued that he did all the data collection for the research projects by himself appropriately, wrote and submitted the papers, and published and presented them in accredited journals and conferences. university instructor 1 contributed significantly in generating ideas and writing the paper for the term project, university instructor 2 exerted authorities over the doctoral researcher to do, write, and publish papers in accredited journals, while encouraged him and contributed a bit, and university instructors 3 and 4 just wanted him to do research projects in his areas of interest and publish them.

Developing many ideas for his doctoral thesis with university instructor 1, he selected the university instructor 1 as the supervisor of his thesis. In comparison to the other members of the community, university instructor 1 had valuable contributions to his term project, motivated him, and helped him find and work on his area of interest for his thesis.

I selected him as my supervisor, since I know he helps me accomplish my thesis in an appropriate way and publish good research papers in that regard. (Interview)

During his research activities, he experienced a lot of pressures from the immediate context, such as the intense competition among the students,

competition among the university instructors, lack of financial and emotional support; however, he motivated and encouraged himself to do his research projects appropriately in the academic CoP. He considered himself as a real and competent researcher, because, as he contended, he did and published his research studies by himself appropriately. Reading many relevant articles and conducting consequentially valid and locally and internationally appropriate research, he could grow intellectually and personally in the field of applied linguistics. In addition, the research that he read and did led to reflection and reflexivity, which he believed was the necessary condition for professional development in the academic CoP.

I try to do effective and useful research projects.
So, I first read many relevant articles deeply, then
I start the research project, so that I do not come
across many difficulties and I can do the research
study in an appropriate and valid way. (Interview)

In the present context, some of the researchers exercised manipulation and cheating in their research studies; however, as he argued, these unfavourable processes of research accomplishment and research publication by the aforementioned researchers in the CoP had made him not to do so and not to be like them. That is, the considerable pressures from the immediate context and the adverse research accomplishment and research publication by some members of the community stimulated the doctoral researcher to become a real and competent researcher, as he believed. Moreover, his supervisors during the MA and PhD programmes taught and trained him in this regard.

In this context, the education system wants the university instructors to publish research. The university instructors, in turn, want the students to do and publish research for them, and some of the students are not able to deal with all the tasks, so they do useless research studies (Diary).

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However, as my supervisors during both the MA and PhD programmes were not like that, I do not do such a thing to my future students. That is, I do not put them under pressure to do and publish research. I have learned a lot of good lessons from my supervisors, but not from the other university instructors, who put the students under pressure just to get their own promotion (Interview).

For his thesis project, the doctoral researcher read many relevant research papers, contacted some experts and his supervisor for giving advice in different cases, collected the required data from the participants, and wrote his thesis accordingly. He also extracted a number of papers from his thesis and submitted them to different international and accredited journals, hence fulfilling the requirements for defending his thesis, although such publications delayed his defence session to some extent (he skilfully did his PhD along with his doctoral thesis in two and a half years). During the research processes, he could enhance his professional development, such as developing his knowledge, developing his academic writing skills and research skills to a greater extent, increasing a closer cooperation with other experienced researchers in the academic CoP, connecting the research findings and contributing to the classroom context, and enriching his own CV for becoming a university instructor in the future. This could subsequently enhance the authenticity and the genuineness of his research studies.

5.3 Instructor Researcher

Prior to his career at university, the instructor researcher had not carried out any serious research projects except his MA and PhD dissertation and thesis. He stated that his first research project was at the last term of his BA in which he did a simple research project cooperatively with his classmates. During the MA programme, he did some research projects for different courses. However, he did them because he was required to do so in order to

receive the required mark and pass the courses. As he claimed, these term projects were not good enough, since he did them in a short and limited time, and he was not interested in them. Nevertheless, he was relatively satisfied with his MA dissertation, as he was interested in the topic of his research.

My best research project was the one that I did for my dissertation, since it was about critical discourse, which was my field of interest, and I think critical discourse deals with some factors that we frequently encounter in our teaching process and everyday life. (Interview)

When he finished his MA, he was recruited as a university instructor at K University and started teaching ELT BA students. At the same time, he was accepted as a doctoral student at R University. During the PhD programme, he did projects that were in alignment with his research interest. The major problems that he faced while doing the projects in the CoP were related to data collection (i.e. the participants either did not cooperate or were reluctant to do so) and the insignificant contribution of the university instructors and supervisors.

The university instructors do not adequately help their students in doing the research projects, even the supervisors, and it is something that everybody knows (Diary). The students should do the research projects for course requirements and publish them alone; however, they should write the university instructors' name as the corresponding and/or the first author in the published articles, so as to get their promotion (Interview).

After the PhD programme, he started teaching ELT MA courses at K University and started doing some research projects with his Masters students and other colleagues. He argued that during the MA and PhD programmes, his university instructors were busy due to their teaching overload and he would do the research projects and publish them, so that the university

instructors could get promotion and he could pass the courses. However, during his career as a university instructor, the students did not do research due to lack of the required abilities to do and publish research and lack of motivation in this regard. As a result, he himself did and published research to get his promotion. The issue he faced was that it was difficult to collect the data and the students were not willing enough to do research because either they were demotivated or they did not have sufficient abilities and skills to do research. As he argued:

The university accepts many students and quality is not a priority in this acceptance process. In addition, the top students are accepted in top universities and the other students go to other universities like this one, so there is not such an opportunity to do research with the students.
(Interview)

He argued that the university instructors and students as members of the community could mutually affect each other's professional development. When the students are not knowledgeable enough, this negatively influences the university instructors' professional development. Additionally, establishing an excessive number of universities and accepting a large number of students, who are not academically well-prepared to do and write research studies in applied linguistics, dramatically affect the quantity and quality of research studies done in higher education (i.e., they sacrifice the quality of research for the sake of quantity), diminish the quality of MA and PhD programmes in applied linguistics, lead to the mass production of MA and PhD holders, and hence undermine the English language teaching and learning in other academic and nonacademic settings.

Moreover, the lack of motivation and the stress in the higher education context had exacerbated this negative condition as well. The university wanted the instructor researcher to publish at least a paper in an accredited

journal each year and/or present in some conferences in order to prove to the university that he is active and he is making progress. This has behaved him to do research projects with students; however, he did not want to compel the students to do research projects. He claimed that the students should be willing and motivated enough to do research projects. He thought that if he compels the students to do research projects, they either plagiarise or pay to have their paper accomplished by somebody else. As a result, as his Masters students were not able to do research projects, he first wanted to familiarise them with different sections of a research paper.

I told the students to read and summarise some published research articles and deliver them for the course. The students chose relevant articles in their areas of interest, wrote the summary, presented them in the class, and delivered the written summary at the end of the course (Interview). As the topics were in line with their dissertation, the articles helped them prepare for their dissertation as well (Diary).

As the instructor researcher claimed, this process of research reading and summarising in the class had positive impact on his professional development. It was fruitful for him because he learned a lot of things. For instance, he did not know much about the statistical part of research, but as he was involved in this process, he learned much from the research studies.

He supervised none of the students in the first term, since he had been recruited recently and was not allowed to do so. However, a number of students were interested in doing research and he started doing research with them cooperatively, although he said he did not rely on the students, because they were not capable enough in this regard. He stated that he did not trust most of his students in collecting the data and writing the paper due to the prevalent plagiarism and cheating in research in the present context.

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The students are writing the literature review; however, I do not think they can collect all the required data. The students should collect interview data and distribute questionnaire among faculty members. I may help them collect the required data. (Interview)

The instructor researcher did not want to force his students to do and publish research; that is, compelling the students to do something which is beyond their capabilities. Because that was something that he experienced during the MA and PhD programmes, he did not want to do the same to his students and would help them instead. The negative experience that he had as a student behaved him not to do the same on his students. He wanted to prepare students who do research honestly and appropriately and do not manipulate and abuse their future students, so that the students do not do and publish research for the sake of the university instructors' promotion, but for their own research skills and knowledge.

Starting the supervision of some students' dissertation based on the students' and his field of interests, the instructor researcher wanted to publish some papers. On the other hand, the students were not skilful enough in doing and publishing research papers. Therefore, although there was limited cooperation among the university instructor members of the community, he suggested the other university instructors cooperate and do research projects together with him, so, they started working on some research projects. As he argued, the university did not pay attention to the knowledge and skills of the university instructors in teaching. The university only considered each university instructor's number of publications. As a result, this had provided a condition for the instructor researcher to publish useless and impractical papers in the academic CoP. On the other hand, the instructor researcher should have taught a lot of courses due to the economic hardship and earn

money; therefore, he did not have enough time to do research projects adequately. In addition, there was a lot of stress in his job.

We deal with many students, we should prepare the materials, and become ready for the class each day. At the same time, we should publish research papers, no matter the quality, to prove to the university that we are active, although doing and publishing papers in this field (i.e., applied linguistics) is much more difficult in comparison with other fields. Sometimes, I regret choosing this career due to the aforementioned reasons.

(Interview)

Therefore, on the one hand, the context behaved the instructor researcher to become a struggling researcher in the academic CoP. That is, he was struggling to publish research for the university one way or the other. On the other hand, he did not want to manipulate the students into doing and publishing research studies in which they did not have the required abilities and skills.

6. Discussion

The findings of the narrative enquiry indicated that the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers constructed a range of professional identities during the first nine months of their professional research practice and research publications in the academic CoP in ELT higher education setting. It was revealed that the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers' professional identities were dynamic, and formed, shifted, and reformed in ELT higher education, which echoed the findings of Beijaard et al. (2004). Moreover, following Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the various professional identities that the participants of the present study constructed and reconstructed were shaped and reshaped

in relation to the immediate context and other members of the community in ELT higher education and their personal values, beliefs and feelings.

The Masters researcher's enthusiasm in research activities in applied linguistics made him learn the research skills at the outset of his entrance into the academic CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in higher education. However, consistent with the findings of Xu (2014) and Yuan (2017), the influence of the immediate context and the other members of the community would sometimes reconstruct his professional identities from an encouraged novice ELT researcher to a discouraged researcher. The Masters researcher's professional identity construction and reconstruction was somewhat the same as the doctoral and instructor researchers. Constructing his professional identities as a competent ELT researcher during the MA course, the doctoral researcher sometimes encountered difficulties for his research activities in the immediate context in the CoP, which shaped and reshaped his professional identities as a competent researcher and a discouraged researcher. The instructor researcher, on the other hand, shaped his professional identities as a must-be and discouraged researcher before starting his career as a university instructor in the academic CoP. Although the instructor researcher wanted to help foster skilful ELT researchers and develop his own research skills and knowledge in that regard, he lost his enthusiasm through the considerable pressures of the immediate context and some members of the academic community.

Not only the instructor researcher, but also the Masters and doctoral researchers felt a strong force and pressure to be and remain an ELT researcher in the CoP in higher education, which was in line with the findings of Yuan and Lee (2014). In addition, in line with Hasrati's (2013) findings, the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers were all involved in competitive research processes with other members of the

community, which negatively and/or positively affected their professional identities. The education system involved the instructor researcher in a great competition with other university instructors in the academic CoP. That is, there was no cooperation among the university instructors and they just wanted to publish more articles and be better than the other core and/or peripheral members of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This competition among the university instructors also negatively impacted the Masters and doctoral students to overwhelmingly do and write research, if they do and write it themselves, as the university instructors' manpower and ghost writers, and publish it themselves. The Masters researcher received no cooperation from his classmates, and the doctoral researcher was involved in a great competition with other ELT researchers in the academic CoP. On the other hand, the Masters and doctoral researchers passed three or four semesters; in each semester there were three or four courses to pass; and for each course the university instructors forced the students to do and publish research articles. As a result, such herculean tasks adversely influenced the Masters and doctoral researchers' professional identities as ELT researchers in higher education. They were more willing to both form and reform their professional identities as competitive ELT researchers and must-be researchers in the academic CoP in higher education.

Echoing the findings of Xu (2014), in the present ELT higher education context, around eighty per cent of the points to become an associate professor is related to the university instructors' publication and Masters dissertation and Doctoral thesis supervisions. Even being the first or second author and the corresponding author in the published articles affect the university instructors' promotion. The university instructors can achieve this aim in an honest or a dishonest way. They can do and publish research articles with their students cooperatively in joint-projects, or they can manipulate their

students into doing and publishing research articles but write the university instructors' name as the first and corresponding author to receive their promotion sooner or pay and buy ready-made articles and deliver them to the university to get their promotion, as was evident in Hasrati's (2013) findings. The former way contributes to the professional development of both the students and university instructors, given they are both engaged in reading and doing research cooperatively in the academic CoP. However, in the latter way, the professional development of the university instructors remains intact and they do not learn anything, because they have not taken part in the research projects, while due to the direct involvement of the students in the research projects, the Masters and doctoral students can enhance their professional development. In the present study, although the instructor researcher started his career by practising the former way and forming his professional identity as an established and competent researcher for a while, the immediate context and the other members adversely influenced such professional identities. The Masters and doctoral researchers, on the other hand, either did not have any alternative or did not have enthusiasm to practise the former way, and form and retain their professional identities as competent and somewhat independent ELT researchers in the higher education.

Moreover, consistent with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) claim, and Hökkä's et al.'s. (2012) findings, the personal values, beliefs, and feelings of the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers help them construct and reconstruct their professional identities as ELT researchers in the academic CoP in higher education. Despite the contextual barriers, the Masters researcher wanted to become a skilful and famous researcher in the ELT context; hence, he formed and reformed his professional identity as a would-be researcher. The doctoral researcher had

and retained a high motivation in reading, doing, and publishing research studies in applied linguistics; thus, he constructed and reconstructed his professional identities as an encouraged and competent researcher in higher education in spite of the contextual obstacles and the negative impact of some members of the community. Finally, the instructor researcher desired to become a competent researcher through research reading and doing processes with his students; therefore, he constructed and reconstructed his professional identity as a would-be researcher. However, the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers attempted to make a balance between their personal beliefs and values and the contextual norms, rules, and obstacles for their research practice and publication (Wood & Borg, 2010).

Due to the aforementioned contextual impediments in the CoP, the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers' professional identities as researchers in ELT higher education might conflict with their agency and wane by the passage of time. That is, they might gradually become producers of published research articles, due to the impact of the immediate context, rather than real ELT researchers in the academic CoP in higher education. However, the strong motivation of the participants, especially the doctoral researcher, helped them remain as real and competent ELT researchers in the academic CoP to some extent.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on the narrative enquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and CoP theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this study shed light on how a Masters student, a doctoral student, and a university instructor in applied linguistics in higher education formed and reformed their professional identities as researchers and how they coped with the contextual obstacles in the academic CoP. The findings of the study might benefit the newly recruited university instructors, and newly accepted Masters and doctoral

students to the academic context. They might read the findings of the study and come to understand and interpret how Masters and doctoral students and university instructors are mediated through the diaries and interviews to become future ELT researchers in the academic CoP. In addition, the core members of the community (e.g., experienced university instructors) in higher education might contribute to the peripheral members' (e.g., newly recruited university instructors) professional identity construction, based on the findings of the study. The core members of the community have already firmly shaped their professional identities as researchers in applied linguistics; therefore, they might apply the findings of the study and use the guiding principles in shaping and/or helping to shape the professional identities of the peripheral members of the community as future researchers. Moreover, policymakers might apply the findings of the study and help the academics construct strong identities as real, encouraged, and competent ELT researchers in the academic CoP in higher education.

However, this study only tracked the Masters and doctoral students and university instructor researchers' professional identity construction for nine months. Future longitudinal research may address the Masters students', doctoral students', and university instructors' professional identity construction in longer term and across different stages of their research practice in the academic CoP.

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