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The Role of Iranian High School EFL Teacher's Emotional Experiences in Their Professional Identity: A Qualitative Enquiry

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' emotional experiences that could affect their professional identity. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, seven high school teachers of Mashhad and Zabol were selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Qualitative analysis of teachers' interviews through open, axial and selective stages of coding resulted in the four components of 1) teachers' sense of appreciation for teaching; 2) teachers' sense of connectedness to other colleagues; 3) teachers' sense of competence in teaching; and 4) teachers' sense of commitment, which were found to influence their professional identity. The study's findings contributed to acknowledge the significance of teachers' emotions as determining factor in their professional identity. On the practical side, teacher educators can gain insight into the importance of teachers' emotions in shaping their identities in EFL classrooms. The study demonstrated that teachers' emotional experiences can greatly influence the formation of their identities. Findings have significant implications for both teachers and students. When teachers are aware of their emotions and their effects on their professional identity, it can lead to better outcomes for learners. A teacher who is emotionally stable, confident, and motivated is more likely to inspire and engage students, resulting in increased student achievement, motivation, and engagement in the classroom. By equipping teachers with the necessary skills to navigate their emotions, teacher education programs can contribute to the overall improvement of teaching practices and ultimately enhance student learning outcomes.

Keywords: emotions, teachers' emotional experiences, teachers' professional identity

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1. Introduction

In studies on teacher development and language teacher education, language teacher identity is a topic of interest for both researchers and practitioners (Pavlenko, 2003). The necessity for studying teacher identity is due to the fact that applying the right methodology to teach as well as to lead learners to learn the target language are, to a large extent, related to notion of identity (Abu-Alruz & Khasawneh, 2013). According to Johnson (1992), early research on teacher attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs revealed that these qualities cannot be viewed in isolation, but rather, the teacher's overall identity plays a vital role in the classroom. This perspective highlights the importance of teacher identity in shaping language teaching and its impact on teacher education.

Teachers' self-perception and the recognition of their teaching and personal characteristics by others are influenced by their political, cultural, professional, and individual identities (Varghese et al., 2005). The concept of identity has evolved to encompass multiple, shifting, and conflicting aspects, rather than being fixed and internally consistent (Norton Peirce, 1995). Furthermore, identity formation is now understood as a process that is influenced by social, cultural, and political contexts, emphasizing the role of individuals as intentional beings (Duff & Uchida, 1997). Language and discourse play a significant role in constructing, maintaining, and negotiating identity (Gee, 1996; MacLure, 1993). This perspective on identity is particularly relevant for studying language teachers, as it acknowledges the impact of external factors on the language learning process.

Teachers' professional identity can be influenced by their emotions, which has been overlooked in studies on English Language Teaching (ELT) (Karlsson, 2013). Nias (1996) highlighted this lack of attention to the role of teachers' emotions over two decades ago, noting that the emotional aspect of teaching and teachers was rarely considered in teacher education. Teacher emotions were seen as unworthy of serious academic or professional consideration. However, teacher emotions play a significant role in the teaching and learning process (Hargreaves, 1998). Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of teacher emotions and how teachers can effectively manage them within the classroom context (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2014). According to Hargreaves (1998), teachers who experience joy and passion in the classroom are more likely to establish a strong connection with their students. These positive emotions can lead to the use of student-centered teaching strategies (Trigwell, 2012), which have been shown to enhance student motivation and achievement (Frenzel et al., 2009). Conversely, teachers who display negative emotions are more likely to rely on lecture-based strategies and may struggle to implement their lesson plans effectively (Frenzel, 2014; Ghasemi & Khany, 2019). The negative emotions of teachers have been linked to negative emotions in students (Ghafournia, 2023; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002), lower levels of well-being (Day & Gu, 2011) and intrinsic motivation (Schutz & Lee, 2014), and burnout (Chang, 2009).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The following issues deserve attention:

First, there has been a limited body of research examining the emotional experiences of teachers in Iran, with a particular emphasis on exploring the connections between emotions and variables such as teaching styles, reflective thinking, and critical thinking (Heydarnejad et al., 2017; Heydarnejad et al., 2018). These studies have primarily highlighted the crucial role that emotions play in the educational context, emphasizing the need for teachers to acknowledge and address their emotional experiences in order to promote effective and high-quality learning outcomes.

Second, there might exist shortages of research on teachers' professional identity in the context of Iran. In other words, very few recent studies done by Eslamdoost et al. (2019) and Moslemi and Habibi (2021) revealed that more attention has to be paid by EFL scholars regarding teachers' professional identity – as a taken for granted issue for EFL teachers – as they might confront conflicts across their personal beliefs and external expectations, which needs to be taken into account in further studies.

Last but not least, there might have been few studies to explore Iranian EL teachers' perceptions regarding the role of emotional experiences in their professional identity. It is, however, worth noting that there might have been only one study in the Chinese context that concentrated on the relationship between teacher's emotions and professional identity

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through a case study (Jiang et al., 2021), which highlighted that there are three processes (i.e., the process of education changes, the process of creating new or multiple professional identities, and the generation process of teacher emotions) that could be intertwined and developed together concerning professional identity of a teacher.

Hence, the current research thought to qualitatively explore the emotional experiences that could affect Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Teachers' Emotions

Teachers' emotions have been attended by researchers as a significant contributor of teachers' success in their profession. González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal (2017) conducted a study to explore the structure of teachers' emotional labor in the classroom among 1,086 practicing teachers from six areas in Canada from two educational contexts (primary and secondary). They were given questions which were sent to their e-mails and questionnaires concern the collected data were analyzed through missing data analysis. The results showed that teacher hides their negative feeling and express positive emotions in a classroom setting, also emotional labor strategy shows the complexity of negative emotions as a behavior control strategy.

In another study by Whu and Chen (2017), the researchers examined the teacher emotions in Hong Kong; they used 28 primary school teachers, by semi-structured interviews, also employed content analysis for data analysis. The findings of the study were categorized into three main areas: teacher emotions, student and learning, and teacher and teaching. The teachers in the study reported experiencing a total of 78 emotions, with approximately 40 being positive and 38 being negative. Interestingly, the results showed that teachers often experienced both positive and negative emotions simultaneously. The teachers also revealed that they used self-restraint to manage their emotions, which was influenced by their demographic background. The study suggests that both initial teacher education and professional development play a role in shaping teachers' emotional experiences.

Wang et al. (2020) tried to investigate the role of personal emotional effect on the teacher's performance who took part in Primary and Secondary Education. Also, he was asked to write an autobiography of himself a long-term diary to explore the professional experiences in a primary and secondary school as a methodology tool because stimulates their critical, reflective processes and helps them broaden their outlook about classroom events. Data analyzed in content and categorical for dairies, the writer used both inductive and deductive procedures for data analysis. The result showed that three factors can affect teachers' professional development a) using student proper name sensitivity; b) a sense of humor; and c) knowing students.

Uzuntiryaki-Kondakci et al. (2021) conducted a study to explore the emotions experienced by science teachers during instruction, their objectives and methods for managing these emotions, and how factors such as teaching experience, teacher efficacy beliefs, and teacher goal orientations impact their emotions and regulation of emotions. The study utilized the control-value theory of emotions and the process model of emotion regulation. The research design employed a comprehensive multiple-case approach and included three science teachers currently working in the field. The researchers collected data through various methods, including teacher diaries, video recordings, field notes from observations, and interviews. They analyzed the data using deductive reasoning, content analysis, and the constant comparative method. The results revealed that the teachers experienced enjoyment and contentment as positive emotions during instruction, while worry and anger were the most common negative emotions. The teachers primarily used antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies for hedonic reasons, with situation selection being the most frequently employed strategy to address classroom management issues. Additionally, the findings showed that teachers' emotions, emotion regulation goals, and strategies varied based on their years of teaching experience, self-efficacy beliefs, goal orientations, and educational content knowledge. These results highlight the importance of considering teachers' emotions in science education to enhance teaching practices and improve science education overall.

2.2 Teachers' Professional Identity

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Research on teachers' identity has pervasively occupied the literature. In fact, the purpose was to uncover the factors affecting teachers' identity. In a study by Chong et al. (2011), the researchers aimed to investigate pre-service teachers' identity as it emerges from the exploration of their attitudes about teaching profession on the one hand, and their understanding and feeling of teaching when they graduate in Bachelor of Art/Science (BA & BS) by engaging in the pre-service program, on the other. In doing so, 105 graduating pre-service teachers took part in the study, being enrolled in the BA and BS programs approved by the educational system in Singapore. The programs aimed to prepare pre-service teacher to adopt the required skills for primary and secondary education. Open-ended questionnaire and a survey questionnaire were used for data collection. Regarding the teachers' perceptions of teaching profession, 39% were more realistic concerning what teaching entails after graduation and starting their teaching in practice. The analysis of the survey questionnaire also revealed that the factor of 'the role of teaching and learning' had the highest mean value among the participants' responses. The researchers informed pre-service teacher educators to carry out their educational duties more responsibly as their expertise in teaching shapes their professional identity.

Fletcher et al. (2013) used identity and self-efficacy scales to as the pre- and post-tests to investigate the extent to which pre-service teacher education program could significantly change teachers' identity as the teachers' of Physical Education and improve their self-efficacy in conquering the barriers they might encounter in teaching Physical Education (PE). Descriptive and inferential measures indicated the significant and positive changes in elementary pre-service teachers' identity because, as their interviews showed, they "felt that the pre-service PE course and practice teaching placements provided them with useful examples of how to promote inclusive practice and collaborative opportunities for learning" (p. 169). However, the teachers' self-efficacy to overcome the barriers in teaching Physical Education was not significantly changed. Findings contributed to the efficacy of directing the pre-service teachers' attention to their coursework, leading to their identity development and realizing their role as the teachers of Physical Education.

Chang (2017) conducted a qualitative study in Taiwan to explore a teacher's development of identity. The study focused on the multiple and shifting aspects of the teacher's identities, as they had led to significant positive changes in her development as an educator. The qualitative findings revealed that the teacher experienced growth in her professional identity as an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher. She was able to recognize and negotiate this identity, preparing herself for potential challenges in an ESP classroom. It is important to note that teachers' self-developed identities can impact their success in teaching and students' learning outcomes. The study emphasized the need for further qualitative research to examine the role of identities within specific contexts.

Atai et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the beliefs and perceptions of nine teachers regarding their roles as language teachers. The study took place at a state university in Iran and included six English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers and three content teachers. These participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling method. Eight role identities were emerged from qualitative data analysis including "teachers as creators and users of learning opportunities; teachers as selectors and users of teaching/learning materials; teachers as assessors and evaluators; teachers as researchers; teachers as realizers and facilitators of the development of learners' (full) potentials; teachers as observers of ethicality; teachers as learners; and, teachers as teacher educators" (p. 97). Findings of the study contributed to conducting further research on role identities of a larger group of teachers in both ESP and EAP contexts and looking into other possible components of their role identities by benefiting from doing qualitative and quantitative research.

2.3 Teachers' Emotions and Teachers' Identity

Research on the emotional experiences of teachers that impact their professional identity has been largely overlooked. There has only been one study conducted by Jiang et al. (2021) that explored how a STEM teacher emotionally developed their professional identity during STEM education reform. This study used a longitudinal case study approach over a period of three years, focusing on one STEM teacher in China. The research employed various instruments including in-depth interviews, conversations, personal emotional diaries, and correspondence records. Data analysis was conducted in four steps. The findings revealed three major themes related to the teacher's emotional professional identity: "an interested but confused learner," "an enthusiastic but nervous explorer," and "an excited but

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unsatisfied mentor." Throughout the teacher's experiences as a learner, explorer, and mentor, positive and negative emotions were intertwined. The findings highlighted the influence of personal, social, cultural, and contextual factors on teachers' emotional experiences and the development of their professional identities.

In sum, the literature reveals that teachers' emotions have attracted researchers' attention. Besides, teachers' professional identity have been adequately addressed in the literature. However, up to the present, there might have been no studies conducted in an EFL context, such as Iran, to investigate teachers' emotional experiences that affect their professional identities. Hence, the main research question of the study was as follows:

RQ. What are the emotional experiences that affect Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

By benefiting from a qualitative and interpretive research design, this study addressed EFL teachers' emotional experiences that might be effective on their professional identity. In other words, by conducting semi-structured interviews, this study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between emotions and professional identity formation among EFL teachers.

3.2 Participants

As to the purpose of this study, seven Iranian EFL teachers were selected from high school teachers of Mashhad and Zabol. They were two female and five male teachers. The method of sampling adopted in the present study was purposive sampling. Hence, purposive sampling was used to go for the high school teachers in the present study. Moreover, ethical procedures were met and all the participants gave their informed consent. Concerning the teachers' degree and field of study, they were all M.A graduates of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). It is worth noting that they have been teaching in the high school for at least 5 to the maximum 15 years. They were invited to take part in online semi-structured interview sessions.

3.3 Instrument

The only instrument used in this study was semi-structured interview explained as follows:

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

To investigate the emotional experiences of EFL teachers that impact their professional identity, the study invited chosen participants to participate in online semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, as suggested by Mackey and Gass (2015), involve a predetermined set of open questions that encourage discussion, while also allowing the interviewer to delve deeper into specific themes or responses. Ary et al. (2014) highlighted the key aspects of semi-structured interviews, establishing it as a significant research methodology in qualitative studies. Firstly, the interviewer and participants engage in a formal interview setting. It is important to note that the interviewer prepares and utilizes an interview guide, which consists of open-ended questions and topics that need to be addressed during the interview. The open-ended nature of the questions allows for both the interviewer and interviewee to delve deeper into certain topics. The guide often includes prompts to assist the interviewee in providing answers, and the interviewer follows the guide while also exploring relevant lines of inquiry that may deviate from the guide when appropriate.

Dornyei (2007) further supports the use of semi-structured interviews by emphasizing the researcher's ability to prompt or motivate the interviewee for additional information or when their responses are intriguing. This approach grants the researcher the flexibility to inquire further or explore new areas of interest based on the interviewee's input. Semi-structured interviews also provide participants with the liberty to express their perspectives using their own language.

Hence, the EFL teachers in the current study were invited to take part in only sessions of semi-structured interviews. The interview sessions took approximately 30 minutes, and the time for conducting interviews were not obligatory and based on the teachers' convenience. Teachers' interview questions were adapted from Wu and Chen (2018) and

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Jiang et al. (2021). Interview sessions were conducted in Persian for better elicitation of teachers' responses to the questions. Interview questions were as follows:

1. Could you please provide a description of the emotions you have encountered most frequently as a teacher, whether in or outside of school?

2. Can you elaborate on why you believe these particular emotions have had the greatest impact on you?

3. How much influence do your emotional experiences have on your professional life?

4. In what ways do you think your emotional experiences can shape your professional identity?

5. Could you share two emotional situations that have left a lasting impression on you as a teacher?

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected for three weeks using semi-structured interviews. Prior to the initiation of the interview procedures, the related studies on teachers' emotional experiences and teachers' professional identity were scrutinized to reach to a well-organized sets of questions, which were then validated by the experts and academicians of TEFL. Initially, after obtaining the legal permissions from the target high schools of Mashhad and Zabol, seven EFL teachers were selected. The researcher held a general online session for the individual teachers to explain the objectives of the study, and their informed consent form was also filled out and signed online. Then, each teacher was interviewed by the researcher through Skype. It is worth mentioning that each interview session almost lasted for 30 minutes. The interview sessions were audio-recorded for further qualitative analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Dornyei (2007) suggests that researchers should use partial transcription of data, specifically transcribing the significant parts related to the study's purpose. In this study, the researchers categorized extracts from teachers' interviews using grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to explore their perceptions of their emotional experiences. Grounded theory is significant in qualitative research as it allows for an in-depth analysis of the studied item. The analysis involves coding the texts based on three stages identified by Dornyei (2007): open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding involves breaking the textual data into chunks and assigning each part a category. Axial coding establishes meaningful connections between the categories found in the first step. Selective coding creates a unified category and explores teachers' perspectives on the factors that influence their emotional experiences and professional identity.

4. **Results**

Regarding the research question aiming to probe the teachers' perceptions toward their emotional experiences that could affect their professional identity, grounded theory was applied. To do so, teachers' viewpoints were coded according to the principles of grounded theory. Table 1 shows the results of coding stages as follows:

Table 1. Open, axial, and selective coding categories

Axial Coding	Selective Coding

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- Sense of Accomplishment in Educating - Value in Building Relationships with Students - Affirmation of Teaching Skills - Affection for the Teaching Community - Respect for the Teaching Profession	- Teachers' Sense of Appreciation for Teaching
- Admiration for Students' Efforts - Reverence for the Learning Process - Recognition of the Importance of Education - Esteem for the Teaching Role - Gratefulness for the Ability to Educate	- Teachers' Sense of Connectedness to Other Colleagues
- Pride in Making a Difference - Joy in Seeing Students Succeed - Gratitude for the Teaching Profession - Satisfaction in Fostering Learning - Contentment in Inspiring Students	- Teachers' sense of competence in teaching
- Fulfillment in Nurturing Growth - Happiness in Creating a Positive Impact - Appreciation for Student Progress - Delight in Witnessing Learning Moments - Thankfulness for the Opportunity to Teach	- Teachers' sense of commitment

4.1 Teachers' Sense of Appreciation for Teaching

Witnessing students thrive and succeed is often the most gratifying aspect of a teacher's job, as it validates their impact. When teachers feel understood and acknowledged by others, it boosts their self-esteem. While it is important to appreciate teachers in the present, it is also crucial to acknowledge the lasting difference they make. Even years after graduation, teachers cherish hearing from former students. Their passion for teaching stems from the joy of witnessing students learn and develop, which serves as its own reward. Nevertheless, heartfelt appreciation from others is always welcomed and can serve as a powerful source of inspiration for teachers. It is important for teachers to recognize the profound impact even a small gesture of gratitude can have on their morale.

As to the teachers' interviews, almost all (n = 6) acknowledged the role of being appreciated by the school, learners, and parents. In other words, they believed in the effective role appreciation could play in shaping their professional identity. Participant teachers also believed that it is sometimes demanding for them to value their job as a precious profession although appreciation from learners had been found to be the most valuable one since learners are directly involved with teachers. The following extracts indicate teachers' points of view concerning the role of appreciation that can influence teachers' professional identity. It is notable that the English version of teachers' interview transcripts are provided.

Extract 1.

Let me tell you about the time I was selected as one of the best teachers at school. I have been employed for only two years, and it was a very positive sense that happened to me. It makes you be proud of your profession and continue to

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be more successful in the future. So, school plays an important role in cherishing the teachers who are more hard-working and feel that their attempts are attended by the school authorities.

Extract 2.

I really feel proud when I am talking to the parents and they start complementing my performance in the classroom. It makes a sense of being important in my profession as a teacher. It is really hopeful to see that both learners and their parents pay attention to you and your practice in the classroom.

4.2 Teachers' Sense of Connectedness to Other Colleagues

When teachers collaborate, they establish valuable professional and personal connections. They rely on each other for support and can assign tasks that allow each teacher to feel effective. Teacher collaboration contributes to school improvement and student achievement. Sharing experiences with colleagues who have similar backgrounds fosters a sense of mutual trust and boosts confidence. Building meaningful relationships with peers outside of one's department through social and professional networks or during staff development activities can also be beneficial. Teachers who have positive connections with their colleagues genuinely care about them. They believe in the respect and trust shared among their coworkers. They view their colleagues as accepting, encouraging, collaborative, and supportive of each other's success. Lastly, they feel comfortable communicating openly with their colleagues and know they can seek help when needed.

All interviewed teachers (n = 7) concurred that having or attempting to create an intimate collaboration with their coworkers could assist them in their development of professional identity. In other words, they pointed out that their colleagues could act as the catalyst to improve their professional dimension of their life as well as personal aspects. Therefore, a knowledgeable and trustable coworker can be sufficient for any teacher to recognize himself-herself as the teacher and make his/her attempt to develop identity. These relationships create a mutually beneficial system, in which increasing your network also increases your effectiveness and helpfulness in professional settings. The extracts below reveal their perceptions accordingly:

Extract 3.

One of the best times that I usually have is the time when my colleagues and I share our classroom experiences. You know, sometimes, you face some unexpected challenges in the classroom that it is impossible for you to control it. It makes a good sense when you understand that there are some teachers who have the same or similar experiences.

Extract 4.

I can say that I try to share my classroom events with my coworkers and it is very helpful when we use our colleagues' experiences. You feel that you are not alone and you are part of the great community of teachers.

4.3 Teachers' Sense of Competence in Teaching

Competencies refer to the skills and knowledge necessary for a teacher to achieve success. In order to enhance student learning, teachers must possess expertise in their field. These competencies impact their values, behaviors, communication, goals, and practices within the school environment. Additionally, they contribute to professional growth and the study of curriculum. Thus, the discussion on teachers' competencies to improve the teaching-learning process in school is of great importance. When teachers feel that they are competent in their profession and they are always willing to develop their competence in teaching, such perception can lead to development in teachers' identity both personally and professionally. The role of teacher education in making teachers' competent appears to be undeniable as teachers are strongly recommended to keep their knowledge up-to-date to fulfill the educational needs. Therefore, when a teacher feels that he/she is competent and this sense is approved by teacher educators in the educational system, it can result in positive outcomes for a teacher to develop his/her professional identity.

More than half of the interviewees (n = 5) stated that they had to enhance their competence in teaching to increase their professional identity. It was honorable for a teacher when he/she is understood as a competent teacher by his/her colleagues and other teacher assessors or educators. Participant teachers strongly recommended the need for taking part in teacher education programs to raise their awareness of modern issues related to their profession to increase

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their expertise in the field, leading to developing their professional identities. The extracts below show participants' agreement on the sense of competence for a teacher to be successful in the profession.

Extract 5.

I enjoy taking part in teacher education programs. It was two years ago that the school has scheduled a 2-day workshop for teaching grammar by concentrating on the focus-on-form approach. I really did not know about it consciously. It was a really productive workshop to help me be more conscious in teaching grammar.

Extract 6.

I really care about my own knowledge of teaching methodology. I sometimes feel that I do extremely need to be more professional in teaching language skills. So, there is a strong need for participation teacher education programs. I had one experience and that was great, but, it should be continuous to help us be always up-to-date.

4.4 Teachers' Sense of Commitment

The commitment of teachers is crucial for providing a high-quality education. This commitment encompasses the passion, dedication, and enthusiasm that teachers bring to their profession, which in turn enhances their performance. Committed teachers are known to have higher job satisfaction and consistently strive to excel in their work. Teacher commitment is characterized by an emotional connection to their profession, and it has been identified as a key factor in effective teaching. Therefore, teachers who demonstrate a high level of commitment can significantly impact the learning and success of their students. The commitment of teachers is essential in establishing a strong connection with their school and dedicating their time and effort to its growth. Teacher commitment is linked to the creation of a productive learning environment where students can improve their skills and succeed. Committed teachers enjoy working with their students and prioritize their growth. These teachers actively strive for effectiveness in teaching and learning by utilizing various methods.

As to the EFL teachers' interviews, all (n = 7) confessed that being attentive and caring about their students' success as well as their own progress can be effective factors to develop their professional identities. They added that being an accountable teacher could make them a trustable teacher who is always ready to take necessary measure to bring about positive changes for effective learning to take place. Such a change is in alignment with teachers' sense of commitment that can play a significant role in recognizing their professional identity. Extracts below show teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of being a committed teacher:

Extract 7.

I always try to be attentive to my students' progress and their learning. It give me a sense of being loyal to my profession and my learners, school, and parents. And it will be beautiful when this sense becomes mutual and you see that the others expect you to act in this way.

Extract 8.

The important point I can add is my sense of responsibility to the profession I have chosen as a teacher. It is important for me to keep track of my learners' progress and identify the strong and weak points in their performance, which reflects my practice as well.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' emotional experiences that could have an impact on their professional identity. Through qualitative analysis of teachers' interviews, four components were identified. Firstly, teachers expressed a sense of appreciation for teaching, highlighting the importance and value they attach to their profession. Secondly, teachers emphasized a sense of connectedness to their colleagues, recognizing the significance of collaboration and support within the teaching community. Thirdly, teachers highlighted a sense of competence in teaching, indicating their confidence and proficiency in their instructional abilities. Lastly, teachers expressed a strong sense of commitment to their profession, demonstrating their dedication and loyalty to their role as educators.

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The study's findings highlighted the significance of teachers' emotions in shaping their professional identity. These results align with previous research conducted by Whu and Chen (2017) and Wang et al. (2020), which emphasize that success in learning a second or foreign language is more influenced by interpersonal dynamics (teacher-student and student-student relationships) and emotions, rather than solely relying on materials, techniques, and language analysis. Uzuntiryaki-Kondakci et al. (2021) further argue that teachers' emotions have a widespread impact on their behavior, teaching methods, professional identity, personal life, educational changes, as well as students' behavior and learning outcomes. It has been suggested that teachers' emotions influence their behavior and teaching methods. Emotions can affect how teachers interact with their students, how they deliver instruction, and how they manage classroom dynamics. For example, a teacher who is feeling stressed or overwhelmed may be more likely to use strict discipline methods or struggle to effectively communicate with students. On the other hand, a teacher who is feeling positive and enthusiastic may be more engaging and inspiring in their teaching approach. Teachers who are emotionally positive and supportive create a conducive learning environment that fosters student engagement, motivation, and ultimately, language learning outcomes. Conversely, teachers who struggle with managing their emotions may inadvertently create a negative emotional climate that hinders student progress (Uzuntiryaki-Kondakci et al., 2021).

Teachers' professional identity was found to be affected by teachers' emotional experiences. The results of the current study recognized the role of teachers' professional identity as an important factor influenced by their emotional experiences, leading to teachers' success. Hence, the results were consistent with the study conducted by Fletcher et al. (2013), which highlighted that teachers' self-perceptions greatly impact their teaching methods, professional growth, and attitudes towards educational reforms. As noted by Chang (2017), placing importance on cultivating a strong professional identity early in their careers can assist educators in navigating the multifaceted nature of the teaching profession, enabling them to contribute to their own success as well as their students' achievements in language learning settings.

In conclusion, the study's findings supported the notion that teachers' emotional experiences are closely tied to their professional identity. This aligns with the findings of Jiang et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of teachers being knowledgeable about emotional aspects in addition to the technical aspects of teaching. Understanding these emotional experiences can offer valuable insights into the development of teachers' identities. Significantly, Jiang et al. (2021) demonstrated a clear connection between emotional experiences and professional identity, which is consistent with the present study's findings. By recognizing the connection between emotional experiences and professional identity, educators and policymakers can develop strategies and interventions that support teachers' emotional well-being and promote positive professional identities. This can lead to improved job satisfaction, teacher retention, and ultimately enhance the overall quality of education.

6. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine the emotional experiences of Iranian EFL teachers that may influence their professional identity. By analyzing interviews with teachers, four key aspects were identified. Firstly, teachers expressed a deep appreciation for teaching, emphasizing the importance and value they place on their profession. Secondly, teachers highlighted a strong sense of connection with their colleagues, acknowledging the significance of collaboration and support within the teaching community. Thirdly, teachers emphasized their competence in teaching, indicating their confidence and proficiency in their instructional abilities. Lastly, teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to their profession, showcasing their dedication and loyalty to their role as educators.

The findings of this study have important practical implications for the classroom. Firstly, it is crucial for teachers to be aware of their emotional experiences and how they can impact their performance in the classroom. By understanding and managing their emotions, teachers can effectively teach language skills and create a positive learning environment for students. Additionally, teachers' emotions and professional identity have a direct influence on students' performance. Therefore, when teachers are aware of their emotions and their effects on their professional identity, it can lead to better outcomes for learners. Lastly, in order to enhance teachers' understanding of the role their emotional experiences play in shaping their professional identity, teacher education programs and workshops should

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be conducted. This will not only benefit teachers but also contribute to students' achievement, motivation, and engagement in the classroom.

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