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Interconnections of Iranian EFL Teachers' Identity, Ethics, and Self-Actualization

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ABSTRACT

Teachers in the post-method era play a vital role in education systems, where their professional identity and self-actualization influence their commitment to professional ethics. This research examines the interconnections among these variables, presenting a model and comparing gender differences. A model was proposed to explore the interrelationships among Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics. Further, it investigated the difference between male and female teachers' regarding these three variables. A sample of 253 Iranian EFL language teachers participated in the study selected through convenience sampling procedure. To examine the hypotheses, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and independent sample T-tests were employed. The results of SEM revealed that the proposed model had perfect fit with the empirical data. Based on the fitted model, professional identity predicts commitment to professional ethics positively and significantly. While self-actualization is a positive and significant predictor of commitment to professional ethics, professional identity is a predictor of self-actualization. Furthermore, the results of T-test showed that there are significant differences between male and female teachers regarding ethics and self-actualization. However, there is no significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of professional identity. The findings emphasize the importance of professional ethics in education and its critical role in fostering teacher effectiveness.

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1. Introduction

Within the field of teaching and teacher education, many studies have concentrated on instructors' professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004; 2008; Olsen, 2008; Vähäsantanen, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005). The idea of identity is defined in different ways in the more general literature. Renee (2013)

stated that teacher professional identity has an important role in teacher efficiency, maintenance, and their practice in classroom. Kostogriz and Peeler (2007) indicated that instructors' professional identity formation is not a constant process; rather it is instructors' endless negotiation in the situated setting.

According to Smethem (2007), teacher educators have been challenged “to recreate the space for construction of an individual, meaningful, and resilient professional identity underpinned by strong beliefs and values” (p.478). In the Iranian context, Salehnia and Ashraf (2015) claimed that “despite the importance of professional ethics for organizations, this matter has not been investigated much in the field of English language teaching” (p.135). In addition, Hedayati et al. (2019) mentioned that ethics impact the organization activities, outcomes, as well as instructors' productivity. Imanipour (2012) mentioned that the code of ethics is a strong ground for the instruction profession given its positive effect on the overall teaching process. Thus far, little research has been carried out on instructors' professional identity and the way they improve this identity in the Iranian context (e.g., Moslemi & Habibi, 2019; Sheybani & Miri, 2019). While some research efforts are currently underway, they often fail to provide a clear understanding of a teacher's professional identity (Eslamdoost, et al., 2019).

Ethics play important functions in the society generally and in the life of the teacher particularly. This commitment to the Code of Ethics of Profession assists instructors to achieve their purposes successfully and leads to an enhancement in the organization of professional and personal association among instructors and students. The significance of the research lies in its methodological effort to explore the relationship between instructors' commitment to ethics, identity, and their self-actualization.

Furthermore, it is critical that instructors know what factors impact their commitment to ethics. If instructors are to become ethically aware; then, the pre-service teacher education programs are the most important place for the inclusion of ethical content and commitments required in the teaching profession. Professionalism influences teaching approaches, enabling a shift from traditional, teacher-centered methods to dynamic, student-focused learning.

Teachers' professional identity is a developing research field (Beijaard et al., 2004). The improvement of a professional identity is a constant process, in which the teacher self-improves progressively through experience and identifies with the profession of a teacher (Flores & Day, 2006). Hammerness et al. (2005) noted that “developing an identity as a teacher is an important part of securing instructors' commitment to their work and adherence to professional norms of practice” (p. 383). Although professional identity is linked to instructors' views of themselves and their self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2005), teaching context, teaching experience, and instructors' biographies also influence their professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2000).

Maslow (1943) defined self-actualization as intrinsic development of what is already in the living being or more precisely of what is the organism itself. Kaur (2008) defined self-actualization as growth not associated with physical features, but to maturity, social communication skills, and the ability to better understand the self. Ethics means mood, behavior, temper, and such things that are seen as the inner aspect of human being which can be understood by intuition as opposed to “people” which is utilized to human appearance and can be seen by eyes (Ng, & Feldman, 2011). According to Öztürk (2010), ethics has various concepts based on the context. “Sometimes, ethics means moral values;

other times, it means legal limitations on behavior and understood community standards” (Öztürk, 2010, p. 394).

Over the last two decades, the controversy over the ethics of teaching that occurred in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century has attracted renewed global attention (Ashraf, & Hosseinnia, 2016). Teacher commitment is one of the main factors in education and is arguably becoming an increasingly significant factor. The work educators engage in on a daily basis is complex as well as demanding and needs a good level of personal engagement and commitment (Crosswell, 2006). Different researchers have worked on the relationship between instructors' commitment, professional ethics and other variables.

Albishri (2006) conducted a research to explore the degree of commitment to the ethics of the profession by principals as reported by their instructors. The findings indicated that the commitment degree was high in all fields, and that no statistically significant differences were found attributed to the qualification and years of expertise variables. The findings also indicated statistically significant differences attributed to the gender and in favor of male instructors. Ashraf, et al. (2017) explored the association between EFL teachers' commitment to professional ethics and their emotional intelligence. Recently, Al-Hothali (2018) explored the ethics of the teaching profession among secondary school instructors from school leaders' perspectives. This research used the descriptive approach and a scale applied to 426 school leaders. The results revealed that there were no statistically significant difference in the sample responses based on school type, age, years of experience, and qualification. Thoker (2017) measured the level of professional ethics of higher secondary school instructors based on gender. The Professional Ethics Scale, designed and validated by Mattoo and Thoker (2016), was utilized for data collection. The findings indicated that gender has a significant influence on the level of professional ethics of instructors. Male instructors had a higher level of professional ethics than female school instructors.

According to Gee (2000) “identity is an important analytic tool to understand for schools and society” (p. 1), as it is acknowledged by different researchers that identity should not be considered as independent from contexts. Lasky (2005) defined teacher professional identity as “how instructors define themselves to themselves and to others” (p. 901). It can be mentioned that professional teacher identity is the instructors' interpretation of a function that they take on. In various studies, instructors' identity is characterized as a continuous process of negotiating between one's personal self and one's professional self when becoming a teacher (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Recently, the fields of teaching and teacher profession development have seen a number of investigations about the association between teacher professional identity and different factors in the Iranian EFL context. Meihami and Esfandiari (2022) examined EFL instructors' professional identity development in a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) teacher preparation program. The results revealed that CALL teacher preparation programs could have a positive role in improving EFL instructors' professional identity. The results also showed that EFL instructors' readiness to become CALL-oriented instructors increased after participating in CALL teacher preparation programs.

Motallebzadeh and Kazemi (2018) conducted a quantitative research to explore the association between EFL instructors' professional identity and their self-esteem. Structural equation modeling was used to assess the possible relationship between variables. The findings showed that all five sub-constructs of self-esteem are positive significant predictors of professional identity. Arpaci and

Bardakçi (2016) studied the relationship between prospective instructors' identity and their needs for cognition. They found that as the need of cognition increased, so did the instructors' early teacher identity scores.

Martin and Strom (2016), in an empirical review of the teacher professional identity and English learners' literature, investigated how teacher identity has been seen among instructors in an English dominant teaching context. Their findings claimed that three aspects of teacher identity including characteristics of teacher identity, factors given to teacher identity development, and finally contextual influence on teacher identity in the literature have been central aspects in the literature. In another research conducted by Kalali et al. (2021), the relationship between Iranian EFL instructors' professional identity and their goal orientation was studied. The outcomes demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between Iranian EFL instructors' professional identity and goal orientation.

Maslow (1943) declared that the phase self-actualization in the hierarchy can only be achieved when requirements lower down in the hierarchy are satisfied (cited in Vanagas & Raksnys, 1971). His hierarchy starts, at the bottom, with physiological requirements and develops to safety needs; love needs; self-esteem needs, and lastly the need for self-actualization (Vanagas & Rakšnys, 2014). The first researcher who brought self-actualization into discussion was Goldstein (1995). He introduced the term to define what he found in his extensive psychological research, a uniquely human requirement that separates humans from all other animals (Yang, 2003). Goldstein (1934) believed that the human is not a mere animal, to be understood in terms of its biology and behavioral reactions. He mentioned that human nature is special, and should be understood in its own terms (Yang, 2003).

Previous researchers have worked on the concept of instructors' self-actualization and its relationship with other factors. For instance, Rapheal and Paul (2012) supported the relationship between self-actualization and ethics in a research dealing with self-actualization and personal growth initiative among the instructors of adolescents. Živković (2018) supported the relationship between professional identity and self-actualization in the research on the dimensionality of student teacher professional identity. He concluded that instructors' professional identity is linked to the needs of self-realization and self-actualization.

Many contextual elements are involved in the creation of professional identity. As this area of teaching language has been an understudied area in the setting of Iran, studies which try to explore the professional identity of instructors of language institutes in the context of Iran seem essential. Having emphasized the importance of the variables and lack of the related studies concerning the relationship among instructors' professional identity, commitment to ethics, and self-actualization, the following research questions were proposed.

RQ1: Does the proposed model of associations among EFL instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics fit the context of EFL in Iran?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference between EFL male and female instructors in professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants and Setting

This research was carried out in English language institutes in Mashhad. The sample consisted of 253 Iranian EFL language instructors. They were both male (N=147) and female (N=106) instructors in different ages ranging from 26 to 47 (M=36.54, SD=3.41). They were considered as EFL instructors with university degrees (BA, and MA) as well as different teaching experience levels (M=6.77, SD=2.84). Their field of research was English language teaching, English translation, and English literature. The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method.

2.2 Instruments

The main instruments used in this research consisted of three questionnaires: Teachers' professional identity questionnaire (Beijaard et al., 2004), the self-actualization scale (Kaufman, 2018), and EFL instructors' commitment to professional ethics questionnaire (Jeffrey & Weatherholt, 1994).

2.3 Procedure

The research was conducted in English language institutes in Mashhad among 253 Iranian ELT instructors who were selected based on convenience sampling. Then, the questionnaires were spread to the subjects of the research within population. The probable time required for filling out questionnaires was 45-50 minutes. AMOS software and SPSS were used to analyze the results.

2.4 Study Design and Analysis

This research is based on a quantitative method within a correlational design. The three major variables were Iranian EFL instructors' Professional Identity, Self-Actualization, and their Commitment to Ethics. Further, gender was analyzed as a separate variable.

2.5 Proposed Model

The proposed model of associations among instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics can be justified as follows:

Živković (2018) supported the relationship between professional identity, and self-actualization in the research on the dimensionality of student teacher professional identity. He concluded that, instructors' professional identity is connected with the needs of self-realization and self-actualization. Rapheal and Paul (2012), supported the relationship between self-actualization, and ethics on the research on Self-Actualization and Personal Growth Initiative among the Teachers of Adolescents. Gutiérrez and Jaramillo (2016) supported the relationship between professional identity, and ethics on research Professional Identity, Teacher's Ethics and Professional Culture as Context. In order to assess the first research question, "Does the proposed model of associations among EFL instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics fit the context of EFL in Iran?" Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to verify the proposed model (Figure 1 the proposed Model)

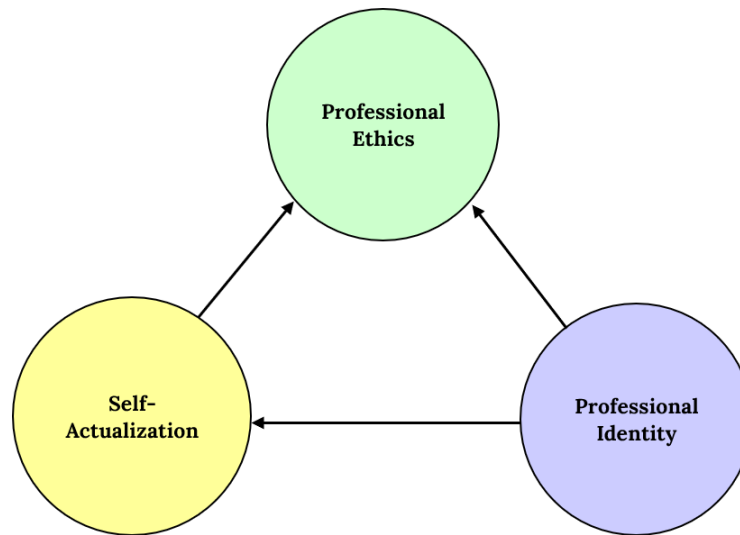


Figure 1 The proposed model

3. Results

To check the normality of the distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to decide if a sample comes from a population with a specific distribution. The results of the normality test indicated that the sig value for all variables was higher than .05. Thus, it can safely be concluded that the data have been normally distributed across all variables.

In the following table (Table 1), the descriptive statistics for each of the scales used in the study are presented. The table includes the number of items, the possible range of scores, as well as the minimum, maximum, and mean scores for each scale based on the sample of 253 teachers. This summary provides an overview of the distribution of the participants' responses across the different dimensions of professional identity, self-actualization, and professional ethics.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Range of Scores	Min Score	Max Score	Mean Score
Professional Identity	14	70-14	39	68	58.05
Self-Actualization	15	75-15	38	67	53.30
Professional Ethics	32	160-32	98	158	127.90

Table 2 summarizes the information obtained from Cronbach alpha analyses for the main variables of the research.

Table 2*Results of Cronbach's Alpha Indexes for Reliability Analysis*

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Professional Identity	14	.83
Self-Actualization	15	.70
Professional Ethics	32	.77

As can be seen, the utilized questionnaires gained acceptable indices of Cronbach alpha for all variables. The reliability of the Professional Identity scale with 14 items was .83, for Self-Actualization with 15 items was .70, and for Professional Ethics scale with 32 items was .77.

In order to answer the first research question, Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among teachers' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics. Table 3 presents the results of this analysis including correlation values (r) and significance levels (p). R represents the correlation value which should be between -1 and $+1$, and if p is lower than .05, it means that the correlation is significant.

Table 3*Professional Identity and Ethical Commitments in Teaching*

		Professional Identity	Professional Ethics	Self-Actualization
Professional Identity	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	253		
Professional Ethics	Pearson Correlation	.415**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	253	253	
Self-Actualization	Pearson Correlation	.242**	.362**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	
	N	253	253	253

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As outlined in Table 3, there is a positive significant relationship between overall professional identity and overall professional ethics ($r=.41$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, there is a positive significant relationship between overall professional identity and overall self-actualization ($r=.24$, $p<.05$). Finally, it was found that self-actualization is positively correlated with professional ethics ($r=.36$, $p<.05$).

To check the strengths of the causal relationships among the components, the standardized estimates were examined. Figure 2 displays the model of associations among EFL instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics.

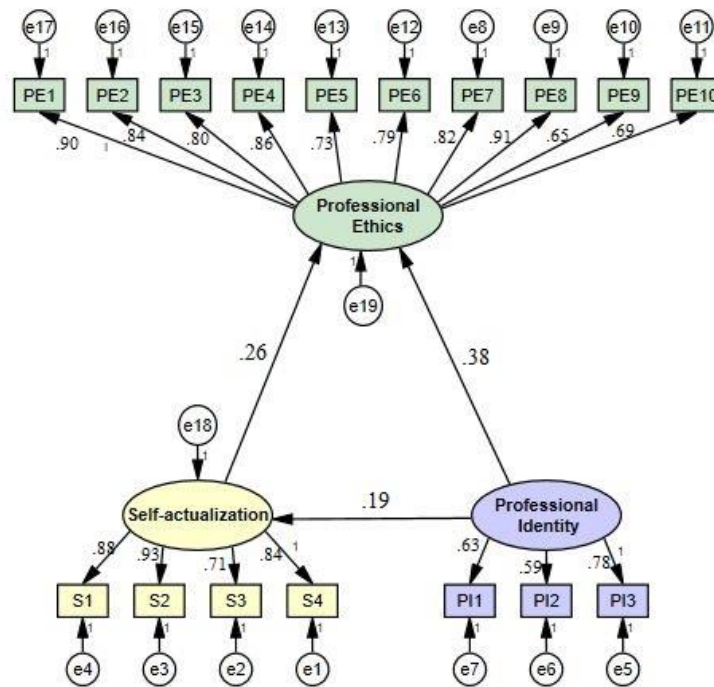


Figure 2 The model of associations among EFL instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics.

As indicated in Figure 2, professional identity predicts commitment to professional ethics positively and significantly ($\beta = .38, p < .05$). In addition, self-actualization is a positive and significant predictor of commitment to professional ethics ($\beta = .26, p < .05$). Finally, the results of SEM showed that self-actualization is predicted positively and significantly by professional identity ($\beta = .19, p < .05$).

Table 4

Results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for Predicting Variables

Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	β	p-value	Significance
Professional Identity	Commitment to Professional Ethics	.38	<.05	Significant
Self-Actualization	Commitment to Professional Ethics	.26	<.05	Significant
Professional Identity	Self-Actualization	.19	<.05	Significant

As indicated by results (Table 4), all fit indices lie within the acceptable fit thresholds: the chi-square/df ratio (2.41), RMSEA (.07), GFI (.93), NFI (.90) and CFI (.91). Thus, it can be concluded that the proposed model had perfect fit with the empirical data.

To answer the next research question, an independent-samples T-test was performed. The assumptions of T-test were checked. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics of male and female instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics. The results of the independent-samples T-test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics of Male and Female Teachers*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Identity	Female	106	58.20	4.07	.39
	Male	147	57.92	4.91	.405
Ethics	Female	106	130.36	7.49	1.02
	Male	147	126.06	8.69	.88
Self-actual	Female	106	55.52	5.24	.51
	Male	147	51.74	4.40	.36

As observed in Table 5, the mean score of female instructors was higher than that of male instructors in all three variables. To find possible significant differences, T-test was run (see Table 6).

Table 6*Results of the Independent Sample T-test for Gender*

	T-test for Equality of Means				
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Identity	.46	251	.64	.27	.58
Ethics	3.16	251	.00	4.29	1.35
Self-actualization	6.19	251	.00	3.77	.60

As indicated in Table 6, there are significant differences between male and female instructors in terms of Ethics ($t = 3.16, p = .00$) and Self-actualization ($t = 6.19, p = .00$). It shows that with confidence interval of difference of 95%, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the two genders. However, there is no significant difference between male and female instructors in terms of professional identity ($t = .46, p = .64$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings emphasize the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive approaches in teacher training programs. Moreover, they underscore the role of self-actualization in enhancing professional ethics, which can directly impact teaching effectiveness. These results align with previous studies but highlight context-specific challenges in Iran.

The results of SEM highlighted significant relationships between identity, ethics, and self-actualization, emphasizing the critical role of teacher training in fostering these attributes. Gender differences observed in the findings suggest the need for differentiated approaches to support male and female instructors effectively. The results of the present research indicated that this collection of norms and standards can be predicted by instructors' professional identity. This finding is in line with a research conducted by Gutiérrez and Jaramillo (2016), which supported the relationship between

professional identity and ethics. The results of their research were consistent with the present research and found a positive relationship between professional identity and commitment to professional ethics. Rapheal and Paul (2012) supported the relationship between self-actualization and ethics on the research on self-actualization and personal growth initiative among the instructors of adolescents.

The findings of the present research also showed that self-actualization is predicted positively and significantly by professional identity. The result is in line with a research done by Živković (2018), which supported the relationship between professional identity, and self-actualization in the research on the dimensionality of student teacher professional identity. He concluded that instructors' professional identity is connected with the needs of self-realization and self-actualization. According to the results, a significant difference was found between male and female instructors in terms of self-actualization, which has been in line with a research carried out by Gilligan (1993).

Besides, this research examines the relationships among Iranian EFL instructors' professional identity, ethics, and self-actualization. Using SEM analysis, a validated model highlights significant gender differences and the implications for teacher training programs. This research provides insights into the practical implementation of ethics in teacher education, addressing the need for a stronger focus on professional identity development. The study also identified key relationships among Iranian EFL instructors' professional identity, ethics, and self-actualization, confirming the proposed model through SEM analysis. Contributions include practical insights for teacher training programs, emphasizing ethics and identity development. Future research could explore these variables across diverse educational contexts and investigate long-term impacts on teacher performance.

Furthermore, to examine the structural relations, the proposed model was tested using AMOS 24 statistical package. Professional identity predicted commitment to professional ethics positively and significantly. In addition, self-actualization was a positive and significant predictor of commitment to professional ethics. Finally, results of SEM showed that self-actualization is predicted positively and significantly by professional identity.

As the objective of the research, the researchers intended to uncover the relationship between instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics among Iranian EFL instructors. Further, gender differences in professional identity, self-actualization, and commitment to professional ethics were explored.

Firstly, addressing the first question "Is there any significant relationship between EFL instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics?", the researchers employed Pearson correlation. The results revealed a positive significant relationship between all three variables.

Secondly, addressing the second research question, "Does the proposed model of associations among EFL instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics fit the context of EFL in Iran?" the researchers presented a new model of interrelationship among instructors' professional identity, self-actualization, and their commitment to professional ethics. The results of SEM indicated that the proposed model had perfect fit with the empirical data.

The results of this research are contributing to instructors to pinpoint the importance of professional identity and for improving commitment to professional ethics and self-actualization. Further, focusing on instructors' professional identity seems very important and necessary, since

instructors especially novice ones are impressionable and try to make some decisions that may influence them during their career life. Thus, the identity they develop is a crucial factor for success in their profession. The findings of this research are also helpful for policy makers in designing teacher training programs or workshops which provide instructors with opportunities to promote different professional ethics, positive identities, and self-actualization, and familiarize them with these important concepts to improve their students' achievements.

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