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## **Development of EFL Teachers' Engagement and Professional Identity: The Effect of Discussing Teacher Competences via E- Collaborative Discussion Forum**

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### **Abstract**

This study is a mixed method research that investigated the effect of electronic collaborative discussion forum on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement and professional identity and their development in terms of teachers' competences as they were engaged in collaborative teacher inquiry. For this purpose, 5 EFL teachers participated in 11 online forum discussion sessions. Before participating in discussions, their level of engagement and professional identity were examined through administering two questionnaires. In order to investigate the effect of e-collaborative discussions, multidimensional scale of teacher engagement and questionnaire for investigating teacher's professional identity were administered twice in pretest and posttest. The results of Wilcoxon signed rank tests revealed significant difference from pretest towards posttest in teachers' engagement and professional identity. The content of the participants' discussion on an online forum was analyzed using Nvivo software through which categories and subcategories that indicate teacher competences emerged deductively. The major categories are technical competence, critical competence, personal competence and clinical competence. These four major categories include subcategories that represent teacher professional development. In the light of the results, important implications are suggested for teaching practitioners.

**Keywords:** E-collaborative discussion; Teacher competences; Teacher development; Teacher engagement; Teacher professional identity

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Teachers have critical role on students' learning and the desired learning outcomes can be achieved by qualified teachers. Therefore, they need to develop themselves professionally. According to Little (1987), professional development is considered as activities which attempt to

enhance teachers' performance in their present and future role as teachers. Professional development is considered as a major source of enhancing their teaching practice, introducing new teaching methods and finally promoting learners' learning (González & Skultety, 2018 ; Prenger, Poortman, & Handelzalts, , 2017). Through engaging in professional developments, teachers can enhance their knowledge and skills by sharing them with their colleagues and experts and

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boost their capabilities to answer their learners' needs (El-Hani & Greca, 2013). Scaffolding is an effective strategy that enables teachers to develop themselves professionally. Through scaffolding, individuals with different levels of ability interact with each other to develop themselves (Engin, 2014).

One factor that may affect teachers' success in achieving their desired outcome is their engagement. Efficient teachers are those who represent engagement in practice and active participation (Borup, Graham, & Drysdale, 2014). Engaged teachers are usually extremely associated with their mission and are more competent and accountable (Picard, & Kutsyuruba, 2017).

Another factor that influences teachers' professional development is their professional identity. Teacher identity not only help us to understand their professional lives (Gee, 2000), but also they provides a framework for them to interpret, develop and reflect on their professional practice (Yuan & Lee, 2015). Teachers' identity, like other aspects of their identity resulted from their interactions with others in society and understandings of their experiences (Geijssel & Meijers, 2005). As Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop (2004) stated, in shaping the individuals' identity, the interaction between individuals and the context plays a crucial role. Persons' identity comes from their personal knowledge and the knowledge that they gain and refine through negotiation within a special community (Wenger, 1998). To Reeves (2018), language teacher identity is considered as fluid construct that cannot be simply conceived.

It is important to note that teachers' professional development can be done through a blended mode which is currently replaced with face-to-face mode (Jonker, März, & Voogt, 2018). This mode of professional development can further teachers' collaboration and interaction with their colleagues and experts (Lee, & Brett, 2015; Prenger et al., 2017). Online professional activities and online discussion forum provide them with context to share their beliefs, insights and perspectives that they bring to the theoretical is-

ues talked about at universities and their experiences in their classroom in order to find the relationship between theory and practice (Prenger et al., 2017; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010).

A body of research attempted to investigate teachers' level of engagement in their act of teaching. For example, Zhang, & Liu (2019) tried to find the relationships among teachers' engagement and their motivation through online communities; Perera, Granziera, & McIlveen (2018) found the relationship between teachers' engagement, their self-efficacy and work satisfaction; Kangas, Siklander, Randolph, & Ruokamo (2017) examined teachers' engagement and learners' satisfaction in a playful learning context) and several researchers examined teachers' professional identity for instance, Prabjandee (2020) evaluated different teacher education aspects that contribute to the teachers' identity improvement;

Karimi & Mofidi (2019) investigated the development of second language teachers' identity from the view point of activity theory; Yuan, & Mak (2018) examined reflective learning and identity construction; Trent (2018) probed pre-service teachers' professional identity construction during teaching internship; Brindley (2015) explored the relationship between research, teacher professionalism, knowledge and identity; Abednia (2012) investigated the effect of a critical teacher education course on the professional identity of EFL teachers; Sutherland et al. (2010) examined teachers' professional identity creation.

As the results of the previous studies revealed, teacher engagement and professional identity are very important constructs that affect teachers' teaching practice. In this regard, the researcher of the current study tried to highlight how teachers can improve them through collaboration and scaffolding and be accountable for their own professional development. It is also worth noting that the online educational programs are restricted to learner education in the context of Iran. However, this mode of learning is a

worthwhile means for enhancing teacher education. Online education provides teachers with a platform to share their own experiences and ideas with their colleagues and work collaboratively to find solution for the problems they may encounter in their classes. Among the various tools currently available, online forum discussion offers a new avenue for professional development by providing pre-service and in-service teachers with novel forms of learning opportunities.

In addition, no research has been found exploring the effect of e- collaborative discussion on EFL teachers' level of engagement and professional identity. The novelty of the current study not only relies on its investigation of the potential impact of e-collaborative discussion on EFL teachers' engagement and professional identity, but also it examined the development of teachers' engagement and professional identity due to discussing teacher competences in an online forum discussion.

### ***Social Constructivist Theory***

Constructivism is an epistemology, a learning theory, that explains the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn. According to this theory, individuals can construct their own knowledge and understanding through interaction of their ideas, belief, activities and experiences. In this setting learning takes place through active engagement, inquiry and collaboration with others. Social constructivism reflects that individual's development occurs within a sociocultural context where people interact with each other to construct their own knowledge (Richardson, 1997).

Social constructivist theory is proposed by Lev Vygotsky who emphasized the critical role of social interaction in the development of individuals' cognition. He stated that community has a crucial role in constructing meaning (Palmer, 2005). Von Glasersfeld (1998) believed that individual's knowledge consists of their personal experience and their interaction with others. Therefore, learning is considered as individually constructed behavior that is supported socially.

Based on this perspective, other people participate actively in the learning process. According to Dunphy & Dunphy (2003), since social constructivism emphasis both cultural and social context of cognition, collaboration with others and group work are main factors affecting individuals' learning.

In this perspective, individuals construct the knowledge and learning through scaffolding. Scaffolding, as it relates to learning and learner development, was first introduced by Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976). According to Wood et al. (1976), scaffolding is a strategy or tool for describing and organizing such experiences that refers to interaction between members of a group with various levels of abilities as they involve in a specific task. It also suggests transformation from external control to self-control, adoption of strategies, and collaboration. The other construct that is related to individuals' development is Zone of Proximal Development ( ZPD) coined by Vygotsky (1978) which is defined as The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable "(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85).

In second language learning context, ZPD can be considered as the distance between the real developmental level as determined by learner's linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined by language produced collaboratively with a teacher or peer (Ohta, 2005).

Later, some scholars such as Warford (2011) used ZPD in teacher education field. He defined Zone of Proximal Teacher Development (ZPTD) as "the distance between what teaching candidates can do on their own without assistance and a proximal level they might attain through strategically mediated assistance from more capable others (i.e. methods instructor or supervisor)" (p.253). Therefore, teachers can construct their own knowledge and understanding and develop themselves professionally through interaction of

their ideas, beliefs, activities and experiences.

### ***Teacher Engagement***

One of the constructs which is investigated in this study is teacher engagement that is defined by Schaufeli, & Bakker (2004) as a constructive, satisfying, professional state of mind that is described as vigor, dedication and absorption. Rather than a temporary and particular state, engagement refers to a more continual and persistent affective-cognitive state that is not concentrated on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior. Energy and involvement are the two concepts that underlie work engagement (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011). Klassen, Yerdelen, & Durksen (2013) believed that teacher engagement is a multidimensional concept including social, emotional and cognitive-physical dimensions. Social engagement, considers both student and colleague and it refers to teachers' awareness of their connection to, and interest for, students and colleagues, correspondingly. Emotional engagement deals with teachers' emotional reactions to their work. Finally, cognitive-physical engagement is the degree to which teachers focus on and devote effort in teaching tasks.

While workers in many situations should connect socially with their co-workers, teaching exclusively focuses on the energy which is spent on the setting permanent, meaningful relationship with students that describes the work of teaching. Indeed, scholars suggest that the relationships between teachers and learners is an important factor in promoting learners' engagement and their learning outcomes (Davis, 2003 ; Klassen et al., 2012; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012; Wang, 2009 ). Teacher professional identity is the other construct which is investigated in the current study.

### ***Teacher Professional Identity***

We have to understand teachers in order to understand learning and teaching , and for understanding them we should have obvious sense of who they are and know about their individual,

social, cultural and political identities which are attached to them (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Teacher professional identity refers to the way that they define their role in teaching profession (Lasky , 2005). To Nguyen (2008), professional identity construction is learning to teach rather than acquiring knowledge. The identities that teachers bring to their classes affect the positive changes resulted from teacher education (Singh & Richards, 2006).

Nguyen (2016) believed that teachers' identity is shaped based on the interaction of several changing and inconsistent historical, cultural, personal and professional factors. Therefore, identity cannot be regarded as an in-born characteristic of them , but it is an continuing process of understanding experiences and linking individual and contextual features resulting in a versatile knowing of self (Tao & Gao, 2018) .

Teachers can promote their identity when they are involved in a community and social practice that leads to evaluation and improvement of teaching practice and refining their understanding their responsibilities as teachers (Farrell, 2013).

Teachers' identity formation and refinement do not occur in vacuum, actually it happens in society through interaction with their colleagues, experts and stakeholders (Yuan et al., 2018).

### ***Teacher Competences***

Teachers' work has great influence on the development of knowledge in society and it demands professional competences and constant development of professional knowledge and social competencies (Blašková, Blaško, & Kucharčíková, 2014). An efficient language teacher has been defined by means of an extended range of features referring to their professional competences and their personal characteristics which are desirable for them (Drakulić ,2013). Avalos (2011) considered teacher development as teachers' creation of teaching competences.

Competence is defined by a number of researchers such as, Gibb (2011) who defined it as 'the capabilities of superior performers' (p.56).

Competence is also defined as the established ability to apply knowledge and skills autonomously (Quendler et al., 2013). Similarly, Duță, Pânișoară, & Pânișoară (2014) described competence as the coherent and dynamic use of skills and knowledge in order to solve problems. Consequently, competence includes three aspects: 1. cognitive (knowledge), 2. functional (skills), and 3. attitudes and value (teacher autonomy and responsibility) (Mohamadi & Malekshahi, 2018). Niculescu (2014) stated that foreign language teachers need to possess different competences to be efficient teachers. Some of these competences are shaped according to their characteristics and personality whereas, the other competences are archived by participating in teacher preparation programs. According to Zimpher, & Howey (1987), there are four teacher competences: '(1) clinical competence, (2) personal competence, (3) critical competence, and (4) technical competence'.(p. 103).

With respect to the importance of teacher engagement and professional identity, the review of the literature and previous studies revealed a gap which is mentioned earlier. This study is an attempt to fill this research gap and shed light on how teachers' engagement and their professional

identity are changed as a result of participating in an online collaborative forum discussion about teacher competences.

The main questions addressed in this study are:

1. Does e- collaborative discussion forum have any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement?
2. Does e- collaborative discussion forum have any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity?
3. Which teacher competences (as indicators) do have the most effect on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement and professional identity?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Five female Iranian EFL teachers participated in the study with the age range between 30 and 35 who were Ph.D. candidates in teaching EFL in Islamic Azad University, Karaj branch, with 10 years of teaching experience on average. In order to provide the richest information for this study, they were selected based on non-probability purposeful sampling (Best & Kuhn, 2006). The following table represents information of participants of the present study.

**Table 1.**

*Characteristics of Participants*

Participants	Age	Degree	Teaching Experience
Participant 1	35	PhD candidate in TEFL	11 years
Participant 2	35	PhD candidate in TEFL	9 years
Participant 3	30	PhD candidate in TEFL	7 years
Participant 4	32	PhD candidate in TEFL	15 years
Participant 5	35	PhD candidate in TEFL	6 years

### *Instruments*

In order to collect the required data and answer the research questions, the following instruments were used:

#### *Multidimensional Scale of Teacher Engagement*

In order to investigate participants' level of engagement, researcher adopted a questionnaire—

the Engaged Teacher Scale (ETS) which is developed by Klassen et al. (2013) including 16 items reflecting the specific features of teachers' practice in classrooms. The questionnaire examines four lines of argument about teacher engagement including cognitive, emotional, social (students) and social (colleagues) engagement. The questionnaire was revised to include more

issues with respect to teacher engagement which was elicited in the light of researchers' related literature review. The questionnaire includes 30 items examining teachers' level of engagement on a Lickert scale of 1 (never) to 7 (always). Consolidation and examination on the content and face validities and reliability were done by the panel of three experts in the field. The exploratory factor analysis resulted in four factors accounting for 71.31% of the variance in respondents' score and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the EE, SEC, CE and SES factors were .89, .85, .85, and .84, respectively, indicating the designed questionnaire enjoys psychometric properties.

#### *A Questionnaire for Investigating Teacher's Professional Identity*

For investigating teachers' professional identity a questionnaire was implemented which was adapted from Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt (2000). This questionnaire includes four sections; the first section asks about teachers' gender, age, and years of experience. The second section encompasses the subject matter field (4 items) exploring the degree to which teachers teach according to the subject matter knowledge and skills. The third section covers didactical field (6 items), that asks them how much they teach based on knowledge and skills considering the planning, performance, and assessment of teaching and learning processes. And the last section is pragmatic expert (4 items), in which teachers describe the degree to which they support learners' social, emotional, and moral improvement by teaching based on their skill and knowledge. After consulting with some professors in this field, the researcher of the current study added two more fields to this questionnaire including self-evaluation field (16 items), that requires teacher to evaluate their knowledge and skills in their teaching profession and the other added field is cultural and political field (6 items) that explores cultural and political factors that affect teachers' professional identity. Total item numbers were 36 in 6 sections examining teacher identity development on a Lickert scale of

1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Consolidation and examination on the content and face validities and reliability were done by the panel of three expert in the field. The results of factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha for subject matter experts, dedicated experts, and pedagogical experts were 0.62, 0.58, and 0.68 respectively, indicating the designed questionnaire enjoys psychometric properties.

#### *E-collaborative discussion forum (ECDF)*

For developing teachers' professional identity and engagement an online forum (e-writingforum.ir) was utilized. All the participants were asked to have an account in this forum. By participating in e-collaborative discussion forum the participants of the study shared and collaboratively constructed knowledge, reflected collaboratively, and identified teaching problems they had and suggested solutions. The researcher observed the group discussion on ECDF without taking any participation in discussions. The researcher selected the topics of ECDF which were mainly focused on teacher competences (technical, clinical, personal, and critical) that affect teachers' identity and engagement development.

This website possesses some characteristics that fitted into the purpose of the current study. For instance, it provides a good platform for discussion through which participants could easily share their experiences and ideas. It had options for sending post, responding to the posts, commenting, uploading files which helped the participants move their collaborative discussions forward.

#### *Procedure*

In the first phase of this study, multidimensional scale for teacher engagement which was developed by Klassen et al. (2013) and adapted by the researcher of the current study was administered including 30 items, which has been designed in Likert's scale of 1 (never) to 7 (always).

Then, the participants were required to answer the questionnaire for investigating teacher's professional identity which was developed by Beijaard et al. (2000) and adopted by the re-

searcher. It includes 36 items with 6 sections which was discussed in instrumentation part. This questionnaire was designed in Likert's scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

In order to improve the participants' professional identity and engagement they were required to have an account in an online forum (e-writing forum) and participated in 11 online discussion sessions in this forum. Every session the researcher posted four questions dealing with the four teacher competences (technical, clinical, personal and critical) on the site and participants were asked to discuss the topics related to those question. That is, in this study teacher competences were applied as the indicator of the participants' discussion. The researcher didn't take part in the discussions and just observed the discussion sessions. The sample episode of teachers' discussion is available in Appendix 1.

In the last phase of this study, the multidimensional scale of teacher engagement (the Engaged Teachers Scale) by Klassen et al. (2013) and Teachers' Professional Identity Questionnaire were administered again to investigate the effect of e-collaborative discussion forum on teachers' engagement and their profession identity.

### **Design of the Study**

The current attempted to inspect the effect of e-collaborative discussion forum on teachers' engagement, professional identity and competences. To develop the purpose of the study, an explanatory sequential mixed method design (Creswell, 2014) was employed since the researcher collected and analyzed the quantitative data in the first phase of the study through administering and analysis of two questionnaires. In the second phase, the qualitative data was collected through online discussion forum and the content of the discussions was analyzed qualitatively via Nvivo software.

## **RESULTS**

To answer the first and second research questions and due to the small number of the participants,

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was run which is the non-parametric equivalent of paired sample t test.

**Table 2.**  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest and Posttest of the Participants' Engagement*

	Pretest	Posttest
N	5	5
Mean	163.80	188.80
Median	163.00	191.00
Std. Deviation	6.64	11.05
Minimum	158	172
Maximum	174	201

Checking the mean scores of the participants' level of engagement from pretest to posttest shows that the online discussions had a good amount of effect on the learners' performance since their mean score changed from 163.80 to 188.80 which could be considered as a good amount of improvement.

However, to show the significance of this improvement a Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used.

**Table 3.**  
*Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test of Pretest and Posttest of the Participants' Engagement*

Total N	5
Test Statistic	15.00
Standard Error	3.70
Standardized Test Statistic	2.02
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.04*

Table 3 compares the improvement observed in the performance of the participants in terms of engagement level from pretest to posttest. As it can be seen here, the significance value is .04 which is smaller than the standard .05 level ( $p = .04$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ;  $p < \alpha$ ). That is, there was a significant difference between the performance of the participants from pretest to posttest.

**Table 4.**  
*Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test of the Pretest and Posttest of the Participants' Engagement*

Null hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1E-collaborative discussion forum does not have any significant effect on EFL teachers' engagement	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.04*	Reject the null hypothesis.

As it is shown in Table 4, the significance value obtained from Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was .00 which was a value smaller than the standard .05 level of significance ( $p = .04$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ;  $p < \alpha$ ). Therefore, there was a significance difference in the performance of the participants' level of engagement from pretest to posttest which in turns led to the rejection of the first null hypothesis.

**Table 5.**  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest and Posttest of the Participant' Professional Identity*

	Pretest	Posttest
N	5	5
Mean	137.60	162.80
Median	136.00	158.00
Std. Deviation	3.78	7.56
Minimum	134	156
Maximum	143	172

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the participants' professional identity. The mean scores of the pretest and posttest of participants changed from 137.60 to 162.80. To make sure about the significance of this improvement, the researcher has provided the results of another Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on the pretest and posttest of the participants' professional identity in the following two tables.

**Table 6.**  
*Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test of the Pretest and Posttest of the Participants' Professional Identity*

Total N	5
Test Statistic	15.00
Standard Error	3.70

Standardized Test Statistic	2.02
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	.04*

Table 6 investigated the amount of the difference in the performance of the participants in terms of their professional identity from pretest to posttest. The significance value shown here is also .04 which is smaller than the standard .05 level of significance, means the amount of the difference was significant ( $p = .04$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ;  $p < \alpha$ ). That is, the participants had a significant development in the posttest.

**Table 7.**  
*Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test of the Pretest and Posttest of the Participants' Professional Identity*

Null hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
2 E -Collaborative discussion forum does not have any significant effect on EFL teachers' professional identity	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.04*	Reject the null hypothesis.

Table 7 above is presented to clearly provide the answer to the second null hypothesis of the study. As it can be seen here, the second null hypothesis was rejected as well since the significance value of the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for the pretest and posttest of the participants' professional identity was .04 which was smaller than .05 ( $p = .04$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ;  $p < \alpha$ ) means there was a significant difference in their performances from pretest to posttest. That is, they improved significantly in the posttest.

To answer the third research question, probing the indicators that have most effect on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement and professional identity, the content of the participants discussions on an online forum was imported in Nvivo software for analysis. The researcher read the text line by line and reflected on the content for their meanings. through analysis some categories and subcategories emerged deductively. The major categories which are the indicators of the discussions are, technical competence, critical competence,

personal competence and clinical competence. Each category consists of some subcategories

which are shown in the following tables.

**Table 8.**  
**Subcategories of Technical Competence**

N ( Percent)	
Using Technology in Teaching	20 (22.47%)
Encouraging Students Participation	17 (19.10%)
Organizing Activities that Encourage Students' Active Participation	12 (13.48%)
Informing Students of their Competencies	6 (6.74%)
Providing the Contents Following a Clear and Logical Framework	6 (6.74%)
Applying the Established Curriculum with a Certain Amount of Flexibility	6 (6.74%)
Undertaking Planning to Support Students' Learning	6 (6.74%)
Selecting and Using Instructional Resources and Information and Communication Technology	6 (6.74%)
Applying a Professional Knowledge Base to the Design of Learning Experiences	5 (5.61%)
Providing Students with Scientific Information	3 (3.37%)
Using Pedagogical Journal Articles when Teaching	2 (2.24%)

As it is shown in Table 8, the participants of the present study discussed more on using technology in teaching (22.47%). The following extracts of the e-collaborative forum discussion exemplify the theme:

*I am here to confess that I will die without technology in my classes. Better to say I cannot make myself ready for any topic since I use tech to teach everything from listening to writing and from vocabulary to pronunciation.*

The second most frequently discussed topic related to technical competence is, encouraging students' participation which was reported by 19.10 % of the participants. For instance, the participants argued:

*As it is a critical point to try to enhance students' participation in the classes as much as possible, I myself try to always assign them some responsibilities such as being the reporter of their groups in group works, or the one who is going to start the next session's discussion, etc.*

The third subcategory that is reported by about 13.48% of the teachers is organizing activities that encourage students' active participation. One of the teachers stated that:

*Activation has got a necessary prerequisite in my idea & that is not to sit down. From the time you stand up & start to move, activities start. The very first point of enhancing active participation of the students is to make them move in the class using different strategies. E.g. assign them into different groups twice a session, provide their tasks in the form of interesting puzzles, give those passive students responsibilities, appreciate their participation, etc.*

6.74% of participants talked about informing students of their competencies. Similarly, providing the contents following a clear and logical framework was discussed by 6.74% of participants. The other three subcategories, applying the established curriculum with a certain amount of flexibility, undertaking planning to support students' learning, and selecting and using instructional resources information and communication technology were also discussed by 6.74% of participants. As for applying a professional knowledge base to the design of learning experiences, 5.61% of participants discussed this subcategory of technical competence.

The least discussed topics related to this category, were providing students with scientific information, and using pedagogical journal articles

when teaching which were discussed by 3.37% and 2.24% of the teachers respectively.

**Table 9.**  
*Subcategories of Critical Competence*

	N(Percent)
Participating in Teacher Developing Conferences and Workshops	9 (15.25%)
Monitoring & Assessing students' Learning Outcomes for Ongoing Planning	7 (11.86%)
Developing and Applying the Curriculum Policy and Program Teamwork	6 (10.16%)
Observing Colleagues' Classes	6 (10.16%)
Participating in Tasks to Support the Work of Curriculum Policy	6 (10.16%)
Innovative Pedagogy	5 (8.47%)
Reporting Students' Progress to Parents and Others Responsible for	5 (8.47%)
Teaching Courses Out of Routine and Teaching Cycle	5 (8.47%)
Promoting Ongoing Professional Growth	4 (6.77%)
Contributing to Curriculum Policy	3 (5.08%)
Expanding Their Developing Approach to Teaching and Learning	3 (5.08%)

As it can be seen in Table 9, 15.25% of the participants stated that they participate in teacher developing conferences and workshops. The following quotations exemplify the themes:

*I have participated in these types of conferences and workshops, and I have learnt some interesting points. It depends on the teachers who arrange such workshops. I had the opportunity to participate in of the best teaching workshops some years ago.*

The second most frequently topic relates to teachers' critical competence is, monitoring and assessing students' learning outcomes for ongoing planning which was discussed by 11.86% of participants. The following extract from the discussion illustrates the theme:

*There is a kind of assessment called diagnostic assessment which enables teachers to diagnose the students' weaknesses as well as their strengths to be used as a basis for further appropriate feedback.*

Another extracted subcategory related to critical competence of teachers is, developing and applying the curriculum policy and program

teamwork talked by 10.16% of teachers. Similarly, 10.16% of participants of this study discussed observing colleague classes and they shared their experiences. For example, one of the participants argued that:

*To be honest, peer observation is a strategy in my workplace. However, if it was not one of our obligations, I would have suggested it myself as I have learned a lot from my colleagues.*

Participating in tasks to support the work of curriculum policy, is another critical competence subcategory discussed by 10.16% of teachers.

The other themes emerged from participants' discussions are, innovative pedagogy, reporting students' progress to parents and others responsible for, and teaching courses out of routine and teaching cycle, which are discussed with the same level of frequency (8.47%).

Promoting ongoing professional growth is also considered by 6.77% of teachers. The two least discussed topics related to critical competence are contributing to curriculum policy and expanding their developing approach to teaching and learning argued with the same level of frequency (5.08%).

**Table 10.**  
*Subcategories of Personal Competence*

	N( Percent)
Engaging in Informal Dialogue with Colleagues to Improve Teaching	9 (21.42%)
Feeling Sense of Community and Collegueship with Other Teachers	5 (11.90%)
Facilitating Student-Student and Student-Teacher Interactions	5 (11.90%)
Building and Maintaining Learning Partnership with Students	4 (9.52%)
Participating in a Network of Teachers for Professional Development	4 (9.52%)
Maintaining Learning Partnership with Students	3 (7.14%)
Working Cooperatively with Colleagues	3 (7.14%)
Interacting Satisfactorily with Students	3 (7.14%)
Resolving Issues of Power, Authority, Responsibility in Teaching	3 (7.14%)
Responding and attending questions asked in the class	3 (7.14%)

As shown in Table 10, engaging in informal dialogue with colleagues to improve teaching is the most frequent topic related to personal competence that is discussed by 21.42% of teachers. One of the teachers argued:

*One of the great ways for teaching improvement is consultation with friends who are knowledgeable enough. I believe every educated person has a lot of experiences, and it is very useful to take advantage of those experiences. Whenever, I consult with my friends I learn new things which can affect the way I teach and the way I think about teaching. In my opinion, having consultation with a group of friends who are from similar background and similar experiences leads to improvement.*

The other topics discussed by teachers with the same level of frequency (11.90%) are, feeling sense of community and collegueship with other teachers, and facilitating student-student and student-teacher interactions. One of the participants stated:

*Teamwork is great, cooperation and collaboration are beneficial, but I should confess that it really depends on my interlocutor and my colleague. I mean whenever a person is not generous in sharing his/her knowledge then I do not*

*insist on communicating and cooperating with him/ her. On the contrary, I have some colleagues or in fact some besties who are very generous and kind-hearted. I enjoy each and every moment I spend with them, they have many things to teach me both in my personal life and in my profession.*

9.52 % of participants discussed participating in a network of teachers for professional development. Likewise, building and maintaining learning partnership with students was considered by 9.52% of teachers. The following extracts of the discussions exemplify the theme:

*Partnership is a salient factor in promoting learning process. Although it demands to consider the pace of learning, giving enough autonomy to learners can establish a good feeling toward each other's.*

Participants discussed these themes (Maintaining Learning Partnership with Students, Working Cooperatively with Colleagues, Interacting Satisfactorily with Students, Resolving Issues of Power, Authority, Responsibility in Teaching, and Responding and attending questions asked in the class) with the same level of frequency (7.14%).

**Table 11.**  
*Subcategories of Clinical competence*

	N( Percent)
Promoting Teamwork in Your Classes	11 (17.46%)
Teachers' Reaction to the Questions Asked by Students (when teachers don't know the answers)	7 (11.11%)
Catering for Individual Learning Styles and Needs	7 (11.11%)
Recording Students' learning Outcomes	6 (9.52%)
Encouraging Students' Interest and their Motivation to Learn	6 (9.52%)
Updating Teaching Materials	6 (9.52%)
Examining What One is Doing in The Classroom And Making Needed Changes to Apply Them in Class	6 (9.52%)
Fostering Research and Critical Spirit in Students	5 (7.93%)
Managing Teaching and Learning Processes	4 (6.44%)
Reflecting on Professional Experiences	3 (4.76%)
Relating the Teaching to the Professional Environment	2 (3.17%)

As it is seen in Table 11, promoting teamwork in classes was discussed by 17.46% of the participants. The following scripts from the discussion illustrate the theme:

*Team work has always been my priority when designing any syllabi or class activity as I do really believe in the magic of team work. Assigning them projects which have to be done in groups are very useful under the condition they are so mature to share responsibilities.*

Teachers' reaction to the questions asked by learners was discussed by 11.11% of teachers. Similarly, 11.11% participants focused on catering for individual learning styles and needs in their discussions. The following quotations exemplify the themes:

*In classes where the number of students is limited, as a teacher, you can consider each and every individual's learning styles and meet their needs by conducting need analysis and matching your teaching procedures on the basis of your learners, but in big classes, due to an increase in individual differences, cultural diversity, different needs, learning styles and so forth, you should consider the whole group and provide learners with some guidelines and more practice*

*out of their class so that they can meet their needs...*

Recording students' learning outcomes, encouraging students' interest and their motivation to learn, updating teaching materials, examining what one is doing in the classroom and making needed changes to apply them in class are the themes that were discussed with the same level of frequency (9.52%).

As for fostering research and critical spirit in students, 7.93% of participants focused on this topic in their discussions. Managing teaching and learning processes was discussed by 6.44% of participants. The least two discussed topics are reflecting on professional experiences and relating teaching to the professional environment that were discussed by the participants with the frequency of 4.76% and 3.17% respectively.

In order to establish dependability, the researcher applied external audit technique (Creswell, 2014) in which a researcher outside of the data collection and data analysis, examined the analysis of collected data and the interpretation. For examining the credibility of the study, the member checking technique (Creswell, 2014) was employed through which the data interpretation and conclusion are shared with the participants and they provide more information by clarifying what their intentions were.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed at investigating the effect of e-collaborative discussion forum on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement and professional identity. According to the results, significant differences were found in teachers' engagement and professional identity from pretest towards posttest due to significant effect of e-collaborative online forum discussion.

To answer the first research question, the effect of e-collaborative discussion forum on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement was investigated. The results indicated that teachers' engagement was developed from pre-test to post-test as a result of teachers' participation in online forum discussions.

The outcomes of the first research question of the current study corroborate a number of other studies. For instance, Zhao, Yang, Long, & Zhao (2019) investigated the effects of teachers' beliefs and engagement on their professional development in a multi-regional community of practice. They found that teachers' beliefs about teaching and their engagement in practice and learning, were significant predictors to their professional development.

The results of the current study also concord those of the study by Perera et al.(2018) indicated that the engagement, satisfaction, and positive efficacy findings reported by teachers may be the result of their positive affective experiences while teaching, higher achievement orientation, dutifulness, and perseverance in performing work-related tasks, greater intellectual curiosity and preference for variety in the generation of instructional materials and delivery of content, and dispositional warmth, tender-mindedness, and altruism in dealing with colleagues and students.

A study conducted by Kangas et al.(2017) also supported the findings of the present study. They explored the relationship between students' fulfilment and teacher engagement in a playful teaching context. Results revealed that highly satisfied teachers were more motivated and engaged in the playful learning. Second, pedagogical and emotional factors affect teachers' en-

gagement. Third, the study revealed that engagement enhanced gradually that is, engagement development was most noticeable in both cases at the end of the period which is in line with the results of the present study indicating that, teachers' engagement developed from pretest towards posttest as a result of participating in online discussion forum.

In the second research question, the effect of e-collaborative discussion forum on Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity was examined. The results revealed that teachers' professional identity was improved since they took part in e-collaborative discussions actively.

The upshots of the present study are also in agreement with those of other studies as far as teachers' professional identity was concerned. For instance, Villegas, Varona, & Gutiérrez, (2020) examined how in a socially constructed narratives in teacher education program, teacher's identity is constructed and developed through constant social interactions and teaching experiences. Karimi & Mofidi (2019) also investigated the changing aspects of identity development in L2 teachers. They found that teachers' identity is influenced and changed by the teachers' past personal experiences, engagement in teaching practice, the contextual and the social future-oriented ideals, conflicts involved in the negotiation of multiple identities the teachers experienced, and the power relations involved in parallel or alternate systems of activity they were engaged in.

The findings of this study is also supported by a study done by Yuan et al. (2018) who found that teachers can construct and change their identities through their reflective practice, their emerging identities as "reflective practitioners" and "adaptive experts".

Abednia (2012) investigated the effect of critical teacher education course on the reconstruction of Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity. The researcher analyzed data collected through pre and post -course interviews with participants, their reflective journals, class discussions, and the teacher educator's reflective jour-

nals. According to the results, three key shifts were viewed in their professional identities.

The results of this study are also in agreement with the results of Sutherland et al. (2010) who highlighted the degree to which an online discussion forum can support pre-service teacher professional identity construction. The results indicated that teachers' levels of engagement were developed and showed that the majority of preservice teachers moved towards a more professional stance in their contributions in the first semester of preservice teacher education. In line with the outcomes of the present study, a study conducted by Chong & Low (2009) found that identity is not a fixed concept and it can be negotiated, changed and developed through participating in community of practice. Some programs can guide teachers in developing a positive teacher identity which result in more efficient teachers.

Considering the use of e-collaborative discussion forum, the current research indicated results congruent with some other studies. For example, Zenouzagh (2019) investigated teachers' competences using e-collaborative discussion forum and she reported that teachers' competences were affected by participating in ECFD. Similarly, Lee et al. (2015) found that online dialogic discussion can result in teacher transformative learning.

To answer the third question, probing indicators that have the most effect on Iranian EFL teachers' engagement and professional identity, the participants' discussions were analyzed. The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that teachers focused more on some topics such as, using technology in teaching (technical competence), participants stated that they participate in teacher developing conferences and workshops (critical competence), in informal dialogue with colleagues to improve teaching (personal competence), and promoting teamwork in classes (clinical competence) in their discussions. Teachers failed to pay enough attention to topics such as, using pedagogical journal articles when teaching (technical competence), contributing to curriculum policy and expanding their developing ap-

proach to teaching and learning (critical competence), contributing to curriculum policy and expanding their developing approach to teaching and learning (personal competence), and reflecting on professional experiences and relating teaching to the professional environment (clinical competence). It seems that teachers need to be trained in the aforementioned competences in order to develop themselves more professionally.

The present study has important implications related to teacher education. The main implication signifies the role of online collaborative discussion that provides teachers with an environment through which they can share their experiences and discuss different topics related to their profession. These discussions lead the teachers to reflect on their teaching practice for professional development. As indicated by the research findings, participating in online discussion forum leads to improvement of teachers' engagement and their professional identity. Since teacher education is considered as a developmental journey that provide them with different experiences, knowledge and skills to help their learners achieve the desired outcome.

The other implication of this study confirms the view that identity is not a fixed construct and teachers' professional identity is constructed and developed gradually as a result of taking part in an online community that supplies them a platform for socializing and collaborating with other teachers in order to foster their professional growth.

This study also has an implication for teacher educators who are involved in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. They can identify teachers' weaknesses and strengths from their own point of view in terms of engagement level and teachers' professional identity through applying e-collaborative discussion forum in order to develop some courses and programs for them. Teacher educators should give priority to the programs that support teachers' engagement and professional identity development through inquiry processes including discussion and reflection.

Although this study achieved interesting outcomes, but the researcher and participants encountered some problems in the use of technology. As Zenouzagh (2018 , &2019) indicated the main problem was the interrupted internet connection. Low internet speed and quality led to such troubles. The other limitation of the study deals with the small number of participants. Since it was limited to 5 teachers' it might not be possible to generalize the outcomes.

In this study teacher competences were implemented as indicators, future studies can focus

on cognitive, metacognitive, and emotive teacher awareness as indicators of teachers' discussion. In addition, teachers' effectiveness and teachers' literacy can be evaluated through online forum discussions. Although the current study was done with just five participants, the results revealed significant effect of e-collaborative discussion forum on EFL teachers' engagement, professional identity and competences. Future studies can be performed with larger number of participants to show how teacher competences can contribute to teacher education.

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## Appendix 1

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**Fateme replied the topic: Session 3 (Subject 3)**

Talking about the scientific information, due to the point that they are almost always difficult for the learners to go through, especially for those lower level students. I try not to use them in their original forms. I mean, whenever I want to provide students with such information, the very beginning thing I do is to check its difficulty level and then I will do some adaptations such as simplifying the materials through using simpler synonyms for the difficult vocabularies, attaching some photos to set a kind of context for the students, etc. In addition, as dear Shima mentioned, consulting with experts has always proved to be a very good idea.

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Hi Roya Khaki,  
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**Fateme replied the topic: Session 3 (Subject 3)**

Mary Rahmatollahi wrote: 1- First, I introduce the topic and then I ask them to provide me with some relevant information for the next session. I prefer to give them time to surf the net, be well-equipped, and then discuss the topic with me and with their peers in the class.

seems to be a very practical way. I have to give it a try. 😊

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**Mary Rahr**

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**Mary Rahmatollahi replied the topic: Session 3 (Subject 3)**

2- I agree with Shima. We do not have any access to curriculum designers and material developers. I think in Iran, administering such meetings and taking such policies are things that the manager of the institute usually deal with.

Last Edit: 2 weeks 4 days ago by Mary Rahmatollahi .

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**Mary Rahmatollahi**



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**Mary Rahmatollahi replied the topic: Session 3 (Subject 3)**

3- Actually it really depends on the personality of my colleagues. Sometimes I do not prefer to have any extra contact with some colleagues. However, some others are more that just colleagues. You can talk to them as much as you want, hang out with them and discuss academic issues, share books and papers, or even conduct research

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