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## Language Teachers' Professional Identity Related Studies: A Narrative Review

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### KEY TERMS

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Personal elements

### ABSTRACT

Numerous investigations have been carried out on the significance of language teachers' professional identity in recent years. As a crucial construct in educational psychology, professional identity has a critical role as teachers' practices and their educational approaches are formed by their identity. Several underlying constructs may affect language teachers' professional identity. This paper intends to review quantitative studies published in recent years. In the present review paper, the objective is to focus on the related studies that investigated the constructs that affect language teachers' professional identity. The underlying constructs were categorized into two sub-classes of personal elements and work-related and organizational elements. The former elements included autonomy, self-efficacy, critical thinking, and self-esteem, focusing on the involvement of personal factors. The latter class entailed burnout, job satisfaction, and other minor elements related to the work milieu and associated factors. The paper also presents a dearth of research and the gaps associated with professional identity investigation in language teaching and educational contexts.

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## 1. Introduction

Many investigations have been carried out on the language teachers' professional identity (LTPI) significance in language education since teachers have played fundamental roles in educational procedures (Awaje & Amaha, 2022; Dilek & Altas, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2022; Nazari et al., 2021). According to some investigators, the research on the very scope lacks a clear description of the notion of LTPI (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019; Richardson & Watt, 2018). LTPI can be considered a trait formed

within particular social and pedagogical settings and can be promoted in a lengthy, stable, and successive procedure (Kalali Sani et al., 2022). Simply put, LTPI is formed by a series of emotional, personal, social, and contextual aspects that are responsible for the creation of self-perception and the roles they have in the classroom (Kang et al., 2022; Pishghadam et al., 2022). It can be defined as how teachers regard themselves as teachers, depending on having deeper insights into their ongoing relations with their educational environment (Beijaard et al., 2004). Furthermore, identity is conceptualized as how individuals view themselves and how others perceive them (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Teachers who work on their effectiveness, influence, and self-directedness to attain more knowledge and skills are more inclined to develop their professional identity (PI), which is indispensable for their teaching career (Ivanova & Skara-Mincelne, 2016). As for student teachers, Izadinia (2013) believes that the social groups they are engaged in can affect their identity, which is viewed as a social construct and formed in social contexts. As college teachers are involved in the interaction and equilibrium of individual beliefs and norms process, their PI can be constructed and reconstructed, and they can be favorably impacted by their academic learning experience (Caihong, 2011). Recent studies have indicated that LTPI could contribute to their success positively, and the importance of PI should be highlighted by teacher education programs for developing instructors' performance (Derakhshan et al., 2020). Similarly, the ultimate purpose of a teacher education program is to elevate PI based on the Vygotskian outlook (Van Huizen et al., 2005).

Recent research has revealed a strong interrelationship between teachers' decision-making in educational contexts, especially within the classroom, and their identity, which can shape the essence of their profession (Bullough, 2011). Furthermore, EFL teachers' teaching experience influences PI impressively, and also when teacher trainers intend to set up some teacher training courses, they are required to consider the useful features of PI (Parsi & Ashraf, 2020). Ultimately, many contextual and individual factors impact LTPI, such as experience, beliefs, values, motivations, attributes, social interactions, socio-political context, culture, teacher education, school culture, and professional development (Derakhshan et al., 2020; Dilek & Altas, 2022; Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018; Richardson & Watt, 2018).

In many current studies, a great number of significant factors have been identified that can impact LTPI very impressively, including teachers' autonomy (Dilek & Altas, 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2020), critical thinking (Moslemi & Habibi, 2019; Parsi & Ashraf, 2020; Sheybani & Miri, 2019), self-esteem (Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018), burnout (Lu et al., 2019), and job satisfaction (Awaje & Amaha, 2022; Butakor et al., 2021). This review paper collects and reviews studies that scrutinize the relationship between LTPI and several related constructs, including job satisfaction, self-esteem, work engagement, self-efficacy, occupational commitment, critical thinking, autonomy, and burnout.

## 2. Theoretical Frameworks Related to Professional Identity

It is claimed that synthesizing theories related to LTPI is complex and confusing owing to its nature (Awaje & Amaha, 2022), and PI is regarded as a construct with different aspects (Richardson & Watt, 2018). Theories are the grounding aspects of a research study and several theories have been suggested to be associated with the PI as community of practice (CoP), sociocultural theory, activity theory, positioning theory, cultural production theory, practice theory, the dynamic system model of role identity (DSMRI), dialogical-self theory (Ahmad et al., 2019), and social cognitive theory (Marlow,

2009). Three main theories, namely CoP, socio-cultural theory, and activity theory, are primary in the scope of LTPI investigations that provide different visions toward PI.

Professional identity could be considered through social theories such as the Community of Practice. According to Awaje and Amaha (2022), this theory was developed by Wenger, and accordingly, this community refers to groups of individuals sharing common objectives, skills, and work milieu. They maintain that this theory is labeled as a social theory and the pair of learning and identity formation is not separable (Awaje & Amaha, 2022). A community of practice must be differentiated from communities that share the same interests or geographical boundaries due to the lack of a shared practice (Wenger, 1998). This theory is claimed to be the primary alternative to studying LTPI (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Learning and society are not separable as “we are social beings” and “this fact is a central aspect of learning” (Wenger, 2009, p.210). As teachers are one of the main learning agents, LTPI can be inspected through social theories. As Ahmad et al. (2019) mentioned, PI links with social constructivism and posited cognitive advancement would be enhanced with the zone of proximal development (ZPD) involvement with a person with more knowledge. They append that PI would be regarded as a cultural and social element that teachers would advance in their identity development by interaction with individuals under the dominance of ideas related to socio-cultural theory (Ahmad et al., 2019). As Richardson and Watt (2018) mentioned, teacher identity is rooted in social and cultural practices and it would be regarded as unlikely in distinct cultures of different communities. In addition, according to constructivist theories, identity is a dynamic trait formed in social interactions and changes in context (Pishghadam et al., 2022).

Vygotsky established Activity theory which is an extended theory of social constructivism (Ahmad et al., 2019, p.5). As Smit et al. (2010) mentioned, LTPI can be reasoned by activity theory as there are associations and interactions between all aspects of an activity system. It is stated that teachers are active representatives of self-growth and development, and there is mostly no tendency to act fully in their selected settings. It is also added that the class environment cannot be separated from the outside world as all parts of an activity system are related to each other because the environmental effect is evident (Smit et al., 2010). In the view of activity theory, it is worth mentioning that the subject refers to teachers who precede the activity with their standpoints, the object relates to the grounds for providing learners with practices and PI, “teaching approaches, methods, and methodologies” are associated with tools, all involved people in the course of teaching and learning are referred to as community, rules are labeled as yardsticks that systemize activity, and division of labor is related to the process of task distribution in a “hierarchical structure” among teachers (Ahmad et al., 2019, p. 5)

### **3. Elements of Professional Identity in Education**

Professional identity cannot be addressed with rigid constructs, but researchers have proposed several traits to be related to the former (Ahmad et al., 2019). It could be analyzed through several constructs that have direct or indirect relationships with the former and have been investigated through various traits that would be different from study to study. The sub-elements of LTPI that are included in this review are autonomy, burnout, self-efficacy, critical thinking, and self-esteem as major constructs. However, there are minor elements that are tied with the PI or other constructs as experience, work engagement, occupational commitment, perception of the context, job stress, and motivation.

### 3.1 Personal Elements

In the scope of personal elements, the study outlines autonomy, critical thinking, and self-esteem. One or variant definitions of the construct are presented, followed by the studies carried out with a central focus on each construct. The participants, data collection samplings, data analysis methods, and the results are included in a brief presentation.

Autonomy has been characterized by Husband and Short (1994) as having the capability to determine the schedule and procedure of the work freely. Teacher autonomy can be defined as the expertise to form fine “skills, knowledge, and attitudes” (Smith, 2003, p. 9). This construct is addressed as the main factor in the work milieu that affects PI and job satisfaction (Strong & Yoshida, 2014). Autonomy is believed to be an acquired construct rather than intrinsic (Reich, 2002) and is claimed to be complex and contradictory (Pitt, 2010).

Motallebzadeh and Kazemi (2018) conducted a study on the connection between LTPI and self-esteem. This inquiry utilized convenience sampling with 224 EFL teachers and SPSS software for the data analysis. The SEM analysis revealed that sub-constructs of self-esteem were predictors of PI significantly and positively. All constitutions of self-esteem comprise satisfaction, knowledge, commitment, adaptation, and communication. A recent inquiry intended to scrutinize the connection between Iranian EFL LTPI, self-efficacy, and critical thinking skills in teaching procedures. Furthermore, 75 EFL teachers took part in the inquiry with an availability sampling type. For the analysis, SPSS was employed to calculate Pearson correlation and simple linear regression through ANOVA (analysis of variance models). The present inquiry's findings demonstrate a strong positive connection between the EFL LTPI, self-efficacy, and critical thinking adeptness. The ANOVA test revealed that the EFL LTPI is a predictor of self-efficacy and critical thinking adeptness (Moslemi & Habibi, 2019).

Critical thinking, as another factor, has been defined under the two lines of thought: solid defining of the concept and field-dependent defining. Sheybani and Miri (2019) attempted to promote an EFL LTPI relationship understanding with critical thinking. They concluded that LTPI correlates significantly with critical thinking, and also critical thinking positively impacts all three components of PI: subject matter field, didactical field, and pedagogical field (Sheybani & Miri, 2019).

A recent inquiry encompassed 190 EFL teachers. Pearson correlation was employed with SPSS, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized with AMOS. The findings revealed that LTPI and autonomy efficiently predict their success. Additionally, they discovered significant positive relationships between LTPI, autonomy, and success (Derakhshan et al., 2020).

Parsi and Ashraf (2020) carried out an inquiry regarding the connection between EFL teachers' critical thinking and PI. This study subsumed 120 EFL teachers with convenience sampling. The study employed SPSS with Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The findings disclosed a strong positive connection between teachers' critical thinking and PI, which implies that as critical thinking is enhanced, PI is consequently improved. Furthermore, the results of multiple regression analysis indicated that the teaching experience of EFL teachers served as a more effective predictor of their PI.

A recent study was carried out on the connection between LTPI, self-esteem, and job satisfaction. Cluster and availability sampling were applied, and the total number of participants was 94 EFL teachers. In addition, Stata and analysis of moment structures (AMOS) were utilized in the data

analysis phase. The Pearson Correlation Coefficients indicated that self-esteem and job satisfaction are correlated to PI positively and significantly. Moreover, the results of SEM indicated that self-esteem and job satisfaction predicted teachers' PI significantly and positively. They maintained that self-esteem has an indirect mediating role between job satisfaction and LTPI (Awaje & Amaha, 2022).

Previous research aimed to examine how pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and learning engagement influence the connection between professional identities and experiences. A number of 309 pre-service teachers engaged in the study, and questionnaires were used to measure the variables. Structural equation modeling was utilized for the data analysis. A significant connection existed between learning engagement, PI, self-efficacy, and teaching internship. In a parallel fashion, learning engagement and self-efficacy both partially acted as a mediators in the connection between PI and teaching internship. The relationship between PI and teaching internship was also successively mediated by self-efficacy and learning engagement (Cai et al., 2022).

Dilek and Altas' (2022) investigation concerned the Turkish EFL LTPI relationship with their autonomy. The inquiry subsumed 250 with convenience sampling. Data analysis employed Pearson correlation with SPSS. The investigation results demonstrated a significant, positive, and moderate connection between PI and teachers' autonomy. Furthermore, they identified some elements, including sex, academic position, and job experience that could modify the association between LTPI and autonomy.

In recent research, Ding et al. (2022) intended to scrutinize the connection between EFL LTPI and critical thinking in a Chinese context. This study comprised 274 teachers, and their responses were elicited through convenience sampling. For data analysis, hierarchical linear regression was employed for direct hypotheses, and Hayes PROCESS models were used for mediation, moderation, and mediation moderation analysis. Hayes PROCESS model is a tool developed for analyzing complex relationships between variables, particularly in the context of mediation and moderation. The findings revealed that critical thinking mediates the relationship between LTPI and employee success. The findings of the moderated mediation analysis indicated the mediating function of critical thinking in the connection between LTPI and leaders' motivational language on teachers' success. Furthermore, related results denoted a positive connection between LTPI and critical thinking, leading to success impressively. Research measured the effect of critical thinking, grit, resilience, and self-efficacy perceptions on LTPI among Iranian EFL instructors. The study comprised 437 EFL teachers, and data analysis was carried out with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and SEM utilizing LISREL. In conclusion, they figured out that critical thinking and self-efficacy significantly affected LTPI (Namaziandost et al., 2022).

An inquiry is conducted on the connection between LTPI and professional development, with the mediating function of self-esteem, using 2668 special education teachers as participants. A random sampling was applied in the study, and IBM SPSS and the PROCESS macro program were utilized. The result of the connection between self-esteem and PI indicated a significant positive correlation. In addition, the findings revealed the mediating function of self-esteem on the connection between LTPI and professional development (Pi et al., 2024).

### **3.2 Work-related and Organizational Elements**

In the scope of work-related and organizational elements, the paper describes job satisfaction and burnout. Alternative explication of the construct's notion is given, followed by the investigations



conducted with the primary focus on the constructs. The participants, data collection samplings, data analysis methods, and the findings are presented below.

Job satisfaction is another factor under this category that is a pleasant or aversive feeling of evaluating the job status and experience (McAllister et al., 2017; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Furthermore, job satisfaction's effect modulates burnout among teachers, and job satisfaction correlates negatively with burnout (Chen et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2019). Furthermore, several investigations indicated that job satisfaction correlates positively with PI (Lu et al., 2019). Lu et al. (2019) conducted an investigation on the effect of job satisfaction on the relationships between LTPI and burnout. The responses were elicited from 267 student teachers through convenience sampling. Moreover, SPSS and Mplus as software, Pearson correlation, and SEM as data analysis methods were employed in the inquiry. The results of the Pearson correlation revealed a negative connection between LTPI and burnout, as well as job satisfaction and burnout. Inversely, job satisfaction correlated positively with LTPI. SEM results revealed that LTPI and job satisfaction were predictors of burnout, and job satisfaction partially acted as a mediator on the influence of LTPI on burnout.

As Chen et al. (2020) mentioned, job satisfaction mediates the connection between burnout and LTPI. The study comprised 483 Chinese university teachers. Additionally, SPSS and AMOS were utilized to carry out a common method bias test, descriptive statistics, and mediating effect analysis. The study reported that LTPI and job satisfaction significantly and negatively predict burnout. Furthermore, job satisfaction moderated the connection between LTPI and burnout. Burnout could be synthesized as having an opposing role concerning LTPI. Later, Butakor et al. (2021) inspected the relation between job satisfaction, work engagement, and PI. With a total sample size of 260 teachers, responses were elicited through multi-stage sampling. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), SEM, and univariate statistical analyses were utilized to analyze the data. Moreover, SPSS was employed for EFA, and Mplus was utilized for SEM analysis. Related results indicated that job satisfaction acted as a mediator in the connection between the teacher's emotional intelligence and PI. They maintained that emotional intelligence would affect PI positively in a direct manner and through job satisfaction in an indirect manner.

Another recent research (Lin et al., 2022) was carried out to determine the connection between job satisfaction, work engagement, burnout, and PI. It was carried out with 3147 elementary and middle school teachers through random sampling, and SPSS was utilized for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were applied to the main constructs. In addition, the SPSS PROCESS macro was employed for mediation and moderation analysis with 5000 bootstrapped samples. SPSS PROCESS macro is a tool developed for advanced statistical analyses focusing on mediation or moderation. The results indicated the mediating function of work engagement between PI and burnout. The connection between LTPI and burnout was negative, and the same result was found for the connection between burnout and work engagement, while the connection between LTPI and work engagement was a positive one. Furthermore, LTPI was recognized as the predictor of burnout.

Burnout is addressed as a result of sustained tension and stress upon teachers (Chen et al., 2020). It is claimed that teachers' burnout initiates with the student-teaching phase of their careers

(Hamman et al., 2007). There could be some reasons, such as teachers' characteristics in managing the classroom that would be responsible for teachers' burnout (Reichl, 2014) or excessive amounts of stress in the work milieu (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). Burnout and PI correlate negatively according to several investigations.

Burnout is investigated by Li et al. (2023) with the mediating function of work engagement and the moderating function of self-efficacy and perceived organizational support. This study was carried out on 3147 kindergarten, elementary, and middle school teachers. SPSS and ordinary least squares (OLS) were utilized to carry out the analysis. They reported that the connection between LTPI and burnout was partially mediated by work engagement. In addition, LTPI had the largest predictive influence on burnout via work engagement. Another research study was conducted on the connection between LTPI, burnout, work engagement, and psychological capital. A sum of 3147 primary and secondary school teachers attempted to answer the questionnaire, and SPSS was utilized. The findings indicated that teachers' PI, work engagement, and psychological capital correlated with burnout significantly in a negative way. Work engagement and psychological capital partially mediated the connection between LTPI and burnout (Zhang et al., 2024). The studies on LTPI, including constructs, designs, participants, sampling types, and relationships, are presented below in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*A Review of Studies on Professional Identity*

Author	Year	constructs	Design	Participants	Sampling	Relationship
Motallebzadeh & Kazemi	2018	Self-esteem	Quantitative survey	224 EFL Teachers	Convenience	Positive
Lu et al.	2019	Burnout Job satisfaction	Quantitative survey	267 Student Teachers	Convenience	LTPI> Negative Moderate burnout LTPI> Positive
Moslemi & Habibi	2019	Self-efficacy	Quantitative survey	75 EFL Teachers	Availability	Positive
Sheybani & Miri	2019	Critical Thinking	Quantitative survey	259 EFL teachers	Convenience	Positive
Chen et al.	2020	Critical thinking	Quantitative survey	483 Chinese university teachers	-	Positive
Derakhshan	2020	Autonomy	Quantitative survey	190 Iranian EFL teachers	Convenience	Positive
Parsi & Ashraf	2020	Critical Thinking	Quantitative survey	120 EFL teachers	Convenience	Positive
Butakor et al.	2021	Job satisfaction Job satisfaction	Quantitative survey	260 Teachers	Multi-Stage	Moderate Positive
Awaje & Amaha	2022	Job satisfaction Self-esteem	Cross-sectional	94 EFL Teachers	Cluster & Availability	Positive Positive

Cai et al.	2022	Self-efficacy	correlational research design	309 Preservice Teachers	Stratified random	Positive, mediate
Dilek & Altas	2022	Autonomy	Quantitative survey	250 Turkish EFL teachers	Convenience	Positive
Ding et al.	2022	Critical Thinking	Time-lag	274 employees	Convenience	Mediate
Han et al.	2022	Job satisfaction	Quantitative survey	648 Primary and Secondary Teachers	Convenience	LTPI> Positive
Lin et al.	2022	Burnout	Cross-sectional	3147 Primary and Secondary Teachers	Simple random	Negative
Namaziandost et al.	2022	Critical Thinking	Quantitative survey	437 EFL teachers	Random	Positive
Li et al.	2023	Burnout Self-efficacy Work engagement	Quantitative survey	3,147 school teachers	No access	LTPI> Negative Moderate Mediate
Pi et al.	2024	Self-esteem	Cross-sectional	2668 special education teach	Random	Positive, mediate
Zhang et al.	2024	Burnout	Descriptive correlational	3147 primary and secondary school teachers	No access	Negative

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this review was to outline the studies concerning LTPI and related constructs. In Table 1, the studies regarding LTPI are presented. Primarily, PI impacts teachers' performance and learners' learning processes crucially. Based on the conducted review, it was revealed that the designs of studies investigating LTPI were quantitative surveys, cross-sectional, time-lag, and correlational. The types of sampling in such studies were cluster, availability, multistage, convenience, and random sampling.

A strong PI among teachers can likely boost the educational system's effectiveness, and by this means, it is essential to invest on teachers' self (Awaje & Amaha, 2022) as they are agents who can contribute to the success of education (Cheng, 2021). Teachers are endowed with a crucial role in education by providing opportunities for their learners' nurturing (SoodmandAfshar & Hamzavi, 2017). Teacher identity is regarded as a multidimensional construct with an intrinsic association with teachers' learning and cognition (Pishghadam et al., 2022). Teacher identity is posited to be fluid, context-laden, and indiscriminate (Yuan & Zhang, 2020) and is labeled as a blurred and indistinct phenomenon (Namaziandost et al., 2022). Furthermore, LTPI can be characterized by interactions within communities of practice and the advancement of time (Namaziandost et al., 2022).

Conceptualizing LTPI more precisely, its relationship with some particular constructs must be scrutinized. LTPI is characterized by many personal constructs and work-related and organizational elements that interplay to build self-perception. Regarding personal factors, teachers



with a deep commitment to their career are likely to possess a strong personal identity, which is important for elevating their engagement and job satisfaction (Pi et al., 2024). Furthermore, the commitment becomes stronger by observing students' academic progress and improvement, which leads to intrinsic motivation for teachers (Wu et al., 2024). The present review paper focused on the related personal constructs including autonomy, self-efficacy, critical thinking, and self-esteem.

Language Teacher identity also relates to work-related and organizational constructs associated with contextual and social factors. Regarding contextual factors, teachers' perceptions of roles and responsibilities can be affected by changes in the educational system (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021). Educators can take responsibility for their professional identities in contexts that empower autonomy and teachers' practical knowledge (Pishghadam et al., 2022), while resistance and a distinct sense of identity that obstruct their professional growth may become emergent as a result of repeated and inadequately implemented changes (Jiang et al., 2021). Furthermore, social factors such as perceived support from colleagues and the community influence LTPI (Simon, 2024). In addition, supported teachers probably develop a more constant and positive PI, resulting in their commitment to learning (Lai et al., 2024). The underlying constructs of work-related and organizational types reviewed in this study are burnout, job satisfaction, occupational commitment, and work engagement.

According to Derakhshan (2020) and Dilek and Altas (2022), autonomy correlates positively with LTPI. It is reported that burnout correlates negatively with LTPI in a correlational (Chen et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2024). Additionally, LTPI correlates negatively with burnout (Li et al., 2023). The studies on critical thinking and LTPI indicate a positive correlation between both constructs (Ding et al., 2022; Moslemi & Habibi, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2022; Parsi & Ashraf, 2020; Sheybani & Miri, 2019). Related studies on job satisfaction and LTPI are abundant; they indicated a positive relationship between these traits (Awaje & Amaha, 2022; Butakor et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2019). Furthermore, research indicated the moderating role of job satisfaction on LTPI and burnout (Chen et al., 2020). Self-efficacy correlated positively with LTPI in quantitative studies (Butakor et al., 2021; Moslemi & Habibi, 2019); it has a mediating function between LTPI and teaching internship (Cai et al., 2022), and a moderator function between LTPI and burnout (Li et al., 2023). Self-esteem was reported to positively correlate with LTPI (Awaje & Amaha, 2022; Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018) and with a mediating function between LTPI and professional development (Pi et al., 2024). As Butakor et al. (2021) mentioned, work engagement has a positive correlation with LTPI, while in Li and colleagues' (2023) study, work engagement has a mediating function in the connection between LTPI and burnout.

Among various constructs investigated concerning LTPI, some are primarily focused in this review such as job satisfaction, work engagement, burnout, and critical thinking. Other constructs like autonomy, educational background, self-esteem, and self-efficacy could be investigated more to come to a richer conclusion. There are new approaches to PI in other fields of study, such as clinical, nursing, engineering, and studies related to general practitioners. In the aforementioned fields of study, constructs like career support, workforce policies, public image, self-understanding, turnover intention, age, working overtime, and occupational development opportunities are investigated, and one potential gap could be the lack of investigations on these traits in the very scope of LTPI. In addition, there are various theories applied or referred to in LTPI that could be the grounding frameworks for newer approaches to LTPI or newer aspects of the construct to be found. Therefore, future studies concerning LTPI could be focused on investigating other influential elements.

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