Narrative Frames of EFL Teachers' Professional Identity Enrolled in Didactics Master's Degree

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Abstract

The educational sphere has relied on EFL teachers' motivation; however, little attention has been given to teachers' narratives and how different factors can reshape their professional identities. This study examined English school teachers pursuing a Master's degree to enhance their professional identity development. Data were collected from eight teachers of English using narrative frames, which they completed at the end of their semester. Narrative frames represented a space for teachers to reflect on and interpret on their experiences during the Master's program after a long learning interruption. A thematic approach was used to qualitatively analyse the narrative frames and interviews. Results unfolded perplexity in negotiating teachers' identities. Teachers' professional identities were influenced by personal motivation, such as empowerment and self-accomplishment through the Master's program. Another factor which influenced teachers' reconstruction of new identities was institutional pressure. The findings showed that teachers' integration into academic life reinforced their agency through collaboration, self-enterprising and new self-images, which contributed to enhancing teachers' professional identities. This agency enabled teachers to overcome institutional pressure. This study brought a snapshot of teachers' agency during a professional identity development program.

Keywords: EFL; collaboration; teacher professional identity; narrative frames

1. Introduction

Teacher identity development has been the focus of many researchers over the last three decades due to educational reforms and changing language policies. In Algeria, professional development is limited to continuous professional development (CPD). Pre-tertiary teachers receive first-in-service teaching training that emphasises pedagogical learning, including classroom management, educational psychology, didactics, pedagogical assessment, the Algerian educational system and curriculum, pedagogy and training design, and school legislation (Boukhalkhal et al., 2025). However, recent research has focused on Language Teacher Identity (LTI) with a greater focus to EFL teachers' identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Sadeghi & Ghaderi, 2022). This study investigates the development of Algerian EFL Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) through the Didactics Master's program.

There is scarce research on TPI in the Algerian literature. Researchers have focused on the CPD programs administered by the Ministry of Education. The current study explored EFL pre-tertiary teachers' personal and contextual/institutional factors that could reconstruct their professional identities during their journey of learning both pedagogy practices and academic research through a Master's program. A Master's degree is a form of personal professional training. It also examined how these factors tended to influence future imagined identities, which the researcher unravelled through narrative frames and interviews. This study raised one research question: How did the professional development program, under 'Master's Degree' learning, enhance teachers' professional development identities?

1. 2. Background of the Study

Algeria has witnessed changes in educational reforms since independence; among many shifts was the switch between Arabic and French in teaching school subjects. Algerian educational policy in Algeria is relatively strict with the language policy. In Higher Education, these reforms are not an exception. The classical system was implemented for decades; until the nuances of globalisation influenced the economic and social decisions. The Bologna system introduced one of its core educational systems previously implemented in Western Europe contexts (Miliani, 2012). The LMD came as an emblematic hope under Bouteflika's office to align Algerian HE with international standards (Bouherar and Salem, 2025).

In Algeria, Master's Degree is one of the three elements in the structured system, L.M.D. 'L' refers to License, translated into English as Bachelor's Degree; 'M' refers to Master's Degree, and 'D' refers to Doctorate Degree. 80% of students who enrol in Master's programs are systematically shifted from their Bachelor's degree. The remaining 20% are employed teachers pursuing a Master's degree related to their teaching specialism. The Master's program is a form of personal professional development, as mentioned in the annual measure of school teachers' mobility (The Official Bulletin of the Ministry of National Education, 2006).

Teachers at middle schools employed or promoted with a Master's Degree have different privileges; they gain two extra points added to their Cvc, which will enable them to make a workplace transfer. These two points also allow them to sit for the 'secondary school' contest. Changing workplaces is instrumentally motivating in increasing teachers' income and reducing their teaching workload (Boukhalkhal et al., 2025). These employed teachers are conditioned to justify an authorised absence certificate to their stakeholders (school directors) once their enrolment acceptance is issued. Teachers are allowed to attend (4 hours) per week, and to attend exams and tests (Journal of the Official Gazette, 2006, Chap. 2, Art. 208).

Eight English school teachers (from private and public schools) returned to university after a considerable learning interruption. The researcher addressed the gap in the literature related to teachers' professional identities in the Algerian context, mainly tracking their reflections on their identities (Melouka and Saadia, 2020) based on their experiences, which enabled them to bridge the gap between their performed identity as teachers and their aspired identity through personal learning (Richards, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1 TPI and Agency

TPI has been studied in research about Language teacher identity (LTI). Nguyen (2018) investigated two young English-Vietnamese language teachers in their early career stages. The results showed that they encountered challenges related to the socio-educational context in Vietnam, as teaching young learners was not highly regarded. Among these challenges, pedagogy (Hofstadler et al., 2021), institution (private Vs public) (Pennington & Richard, 2016), and institutional recognition (Derakhshan and Nazari, 2023), which can affect teachers' emotions. They also found that teaching in private schools is different from teaching in public schools; teachers feel less equity and less recognised at public schools (Richards, 2016). The research line of novice teachers showed that teachers' identity construction is deeply influenced and reconstructed by tension-based institutions (Tsui, 2007).

Identity through language is perceived as a means of self-improvement and material gain (Duchêne and Heller, 2012). LTI is a manifestation of socio-historical and personal factors (Yazan, 2018). Teachers' emotions can be affected by the opportunities provided by their institutions. Therefore, teachers' critical perspectives through these institutional opportunities boost their agency to change in their careers, which then leads to their further quest for professional practices (Edwards & Burns, 2016).

A large body of research calls for examining the myriad contextual factors that influence teachers' identities (Prior, 2019; Benesch, 2017), as ETI levels differ among teacher groups remain under-explored (Zekri et al., 2024). Other conceptualisations of identity include agency and power (Douglas Fir Group, 2016); they are key factors in studying language learners' and teachers' identities in multilingual contexts. Language

teacher identity is a dialectical construct which links teachers' thoughts, performances, and community memberships (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019) with their desired identities.

Agency is a crucial concept in learner identity, as it suggests that learners should be agents of change during the learning process. The poststructuralist view perceives agency as fragmented, temporary, and discursive. Agency refers to teachers' gained positions through facilitated or inhibitive contexts of their work. Teaching, learning or research brings embedded emotions of struggle, fragmentation, joy and instability (Benesch, 2017). Agency can be activated not only through individuals' desires to participate in a social world, but also to improve economic gain (Sahan and Sahan, 2023).

In the context of this study, the researcher did not limit the meaning of 'agency' to a self-conscious 'choice' to make change, rather the researcher is committed to the context-bound circumstances (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019), temporal emerging from an iterative process consisting of the teacher's history, professional biography, evaluative self (evaluating beliefs, values, and ideas), and a projective self (aspirations of short or long term actions and achievements) (Priestley et al., 2015).

The current study explores the narrative frames of young learners' English language teachers and their desire to invest in their professional development. The current study underscores the institutional hindrances that could prohibit/facilitate access to new identities. This study examines factors such as family roles (social) and young teachers' research and learning expectations. The narrative frames engage young learners in developing their agency by merging the self in three predominant teachers' identities as 1. Teachers; 2. Didactics course learners, and 3. Career and research participants (Van Lier, 2010), in relation to three narrative times: the past, the present, and the future.

3. TPI in Narratives

Research on TPI through narratives has not been novel; rather, it has always been conducted through qualitative approaches, mainly teachers' journals (Tsui, 2007), diaries of professional development (Barkhuizen, 2008a), to discuss identity in the face of pedagogical reforms and changes (Liu and Xu, 2011). Narratives are presented in different forms, and in the context of teaching and learning, they can be presented in a written form. Using written narratives includes narrative frames; it has been employed by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) to find out about teachers' learning and research experiences through their professional development programs in China. They investigated teachers' teaching backgrounds, research engagement, experience with the curriculum, and assessment practices. Wette and Barkhuizen (2009) also used narrative frames to look into three main periods: the past (training), the present (current practice), and the future (imagining). Xu (2025) noted the need for further research on the development of language teacher identity through exploratory creative pedagogical practices (Xu, 2025). In this vein, this study integrated a narrative frame as a methodological and pedagogic tool to engage teachers in the reflection, self-interpretation and evaluation of their personal training.

4. Methodology

4.1 Narrative Frames

Narrative inquiry enables researchers to reflect on the sociopolitical world in which the individual's institutional impact on identity shifts (Van Lier, 2010). The line of research using narratives to investigate identity and emotions received scant attention in second language learning (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Ahn and West, 2018). A narrative frame is a tool that enables researchers to access teachers' previous experiences, present cognitions and performances (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021). Narratives are designed based on frames (See Below) that paint a complete picture of teachers as EFL learners, and as early career teachers (1 to 5 years of teaching experience), responding to prompting questions that engage them in telling about the social, contextual and personal experiences; how they felt about them; and how the professional development program helped them shape their current choices and perceptions (identities). Narrative frames are highly implemented to unpack TPI (Karimpour et al., 2024).

Name …….

The most useful encouragement/discouragement to pursue my MA was from.(person)..... I decided to pursue my MA because..... MA program helped develop (describe your relationship with peers, collaboration, power)..... During my MA, I feel…….....I work hard (how, what do you do) ..... After my MA, I look to (what do you want to change).....

4.2 Data Collection and Procedures

The didactics class was instructed with a course entitled techniques of personal research (TPR). The TPR course is a facet of internationalisation of higher education (De Costa Green et al., 2022), to improve research and university rankings, to increase research quality of Master's dissertations, and to prepare candidates for an autonomous and individual research world. This course aimed to assist teachers in conducting their Master's dissertations in any field of Applied Linguistics.

The researcher used purposive sampling to purposefully select the participants. First, the eight participants enrolled in the Master's program as a personal development training to develop their teaching and research skills. Second, the participants had at least 2years and more of teaching experience at private or public schools. Third, the participants were motivated to volunteer in the study and in the follow-up interviews.

The narrative frames were inspired by a test used in a previous academic year. In this test, students read a narrative of a Master's student and they were asked to analyse it using thematic analysis. In the following activity, students were assisted with questions to write their own narratives as teacher-students, reflecting on their social and personal challenges, social relations, desires and hopes. The test was successful and motivating for students, which inspired the researcher in the next academic year to

design statements of the narrative frame and developed it as a research method. Exploring the narrative frames across two years and with different group of students enabled the researcher to validate this method. The use of eight participants' narratives as data was corroborated, and no additional themes emerged.

4.3Research Ethics and Researcher's Positionality

To meet research integrity, the researcher explained that this study respected participants' confidentiality and anonymity. For example, teachers were identified by codes such as Teacher D, E, and F, which represented initials of teachers' names. Participants were introduced to the aim of the study, and how their narrative frames will be analysed and used for publication purposes only. The eight participants voluntarily contributed to this study. The researcher carefully safeguarded the participants' well-being mainly during interviews, and reported findings honestly.

All interviews and narrative frames were conducted in English since the participants were students of English and they had a good level in speaking and writing in English. Concerning the researcher's positionality, as a teacher-researcher, I could understand how teachers are shaped and reshaped by place, time, policies, and language. The motivation to conduct this study stemmed from the socio-emotional factors that influence young language teachers' identities in Algeria. The TPR course offered me access to data collection and positioned me as an aware researcher of my participants' experiences. Along the two years of teaching the sae course, I used fieldnotes to track teachers' challenges in their institutional contexts which opened door for my interpretations of their needs and hopes to develop their professional identities.

4.4Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a method that treats each account as a whole; the data were categorised into codes to locate meaning in sequence. The researcher familiarised themselves with the data collected from the narrative frames and interviews. The researcher tracked expressions that elucidate meanings of belonging to social, contextual and professional communities (family, school, university) to picture the factors influencing teachers' professional identities. Codes presented a general overview of teachers' feelings and experiences as learners of a Master's program, which were categorised into final themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data were analysed inductively to address the research questions of the current study.

4.5Follow-up Interview Questions

The researcher collected more responses, using follow-up interviews to methodically triangulate the findings focusing on teachers' challenges and changes. The researcher used the following question: What challenges have you faced during your MA, and how doing the MA changed you?

Table 1: Teachers' Profile

(8) Teachers	Private vs Public Schools	Teaching Experience
Teacher B	Private school teacher	4Ys
Teacher C	Public school teacher (primary school)	3Ys
Teacher D	Public school teacher (high school)	4Ys
Teacher E	Public school teacher (Middle school)	3Ys
Teacher F	Public school teacher	2Ys
Teacher M	Private school teacher	2Ys
Teacher K	Private school teacher	2Ys
Teacher L	Private school teacher	2Ys

5. Data Analysis: Narrative Frames

Teacher will be used to refer to Master's students in the analysis.

Theme 1: Empowerment

Codes: Disatisfaction, routine, challenge, pride of decision, want, advance, develop, strengthen, reflect, improvement, growing, and professionalism.

Empowerment refers to teachers' feelings during their immersion in the professional learning program. Teachers developed a sense of pride after experiencing doubt and dissatisfaction during a long, interruptive period of learning. Teachers mentioned that teaching that is not pursued with learning limits reflection on self-progress, as it becomes be a routine activity. Teachers hoped for a change in their careers, reinforced by the Ministry of HE decision, calling for 20% to join the second year of a Master's program. Teachers draw on new self-images as teacher-learners with new aspirations to improve their teaching.

Teacher B: I decided to pursue an MA because I was not satisfied with my job and my English.

Teacher L: I decided to pursue my MA because of the challenging part and the pleasure of studying. I feel the ultimate need to be the best…

Teacher K: My desire to improve myself as a teacher. I wanted to advance professionally, strengthen my pedagogical knowledge and reflect on my teaching practices.

Teacher C: I decided to study Masters after 20 years of non-official studies. It was a great decision, and a golden opportunity.

Teacher D: I felt routine in teaching, though I am a creative teacher, but my learning is limited to the same content delivered to pupils

Teacher E: …because I did not have the best teachers of English, but this did not stop me from being the top in my English classes.

Teacher M: I wanted to improve my academic knowledge, develop my teaching skills, and grow professionally.

Theme 2: Self-enterprising

Codes: worked on the self/personal development/hard, develop, realise, the other, understanding the self, the needs, work on personal skills, and learning skills, seeking fluency, collaboration, professional development, balance. Skills (hard and soft): writing, reading, research, presentation, and time management.

Self-enterprising is an economic concept that it captures efforts and willingness to experience change. Teachers' investment in their learning through the Master's program aimed to achieve the desired new self-images as teacher-learners. Teachers employed their Master's learning of research skills to develop other soft skills such as writing and reading, time management, collaboration and presentation skills.

Teacher B: I did not know what to fail or to give up! I worked on myself by watching English-language videos and reading short stories. I worked a lot on my personal development.

Teacher C: I worked hard to develop many skills, such as presentation skills, analysing, and collaborating with younger peers, and integrating into new events.

Teacher D: I write my learning and teaching of English in diaries. This helped me to be fluent in English. I'm looking for personal development

Teacher K: I felt challenged. I worked hard by balancing teaching, coursework, research tasks, and presentations, often managing time pressure and academic responsibilities.

Teacher M: I work hard by organising my time, reading academic sources, attending classes regularly, and trying to balance my studies with my teaching job.

Teacher L: I always search for more resources and literature to review and read, more vocabulary to use in my essays and especially academic words.

Teacher F: I do not depend on what the teachers deliver since I am a kinesthetic learner I only perceive what I get myself so I always do my own research to get in-depth understanding of the subject matters

Theme 3: Accomplished Professional Self

Codes: Pursue a phd, PhD perceived as a professional development opportunity, gain and offer value due to the MA program, improve teaching/practices, and be useful to students.

Teachers expressed how the Master's program shaped their future identities; they moved beyond the teacher's mindset. They deepened into a researcher mindset. Most of them said that they will enrol for a PhD, which explains their influence by the course content, which focused on research skills and theories, educational psychology, teaching approaches and methods and teacher educational development. The program content was also perceived positively, as they noted that they aimed to improve their

teaching practices. The Master's program was a good fit for teachers to cultivate new identities and to envision themselves as good teachers and future researchers.

Teacher C: I want to fulfil my dream after Masters and enrol in a PhD program to become a university teacher.
Teacher D: My aim for now is to carry on with my PhD. I don't think it is too late, as said, " nothing ventured, nothing gained." I'm sure doing a PhD will add value to my career.
Teacher L: After my MA, I look to pursue my PhD
Teacher F: The MA opens the gate to postgraduate studies, I will take the PhD contest and pursue the postgraduate studies.
Teacher M: I look to improve my teaching practices, continue my academic studies, and contribute positively to my students' learning and educational environment.
Teacher K: I look to improve my teaching practices and apply research-based methods in my classroom.
Teacher B: I'm willing to be useful to primary school students, and why not!

Theme 4: Community-based learning

Codes: Relationship, collaboration, social life, networking, friends, communication

Sharing a sense of community with peers highlighted teachers' increased confidence and critical thinking skills. Communication through collaborative work fostered a strong sense of belonging to the Master's program. A community of learning was crucial, as learners shared knowledge and developed skills.

Teacher K: Develop my relationship with peers through collaboration, group work, and academic discussions.
Teacher M: stronger sense of collaboration with peers, improved academic confidence, and a more critical and reflective approach to teaching and learning
Teacher L: The MA program helped develop critical thinking, my social life and self-confidence, as well as networking and cultural expansion with my international friends
Teacher F: I developed strong collaboration as well as communication skills.

6. Follow-up Interview Analyses

The results generated four main themes that build on the results from the narrative frames. These themes highlighted key areas that reinforced teachers' professional identity development.

Theme 1: Insecurities and Institutional Pressure

Teachers' data revealed how they navigated conflicts in their identities as learners, teachers and aspiring researchers. The main factors that influenced the negotiation of their teacher-learner identity were mainly social and institutional pressures. Doubt was a highlighted emotional aspect that created teachers' resilience. Fear of financial insecurity, doubt of eligibility to study (meeting institutional requirements), and achievement of professionalism (time management and skills development)

contributed to the teachers' negotiation of their identities. Teachers had to strike a balance between teaching, learning and institutional requirements.

Teacher B

I was studying and pregnant at the same time, it was difficult to manage all tasks. At the same time, I felt that teaching at a private school is not secure, and even doing a PhD does not guarantee that I can secure a job if I leave my current job.

Teacher C

The head of school does not accept absences, even though he knows I am doing my MA. It is officially legal to pursue an MA if you are a teacher. However, the institution's policy makes it hard.

Teacher E

The Ministry warrants a policy that enables high school teachers to further their studies; however, once you begin your program, the head of school is not happy with your absences.

Teacher K

The main challenges I faced during my MA were institutional pressure, time management and balancing professional teaching responsibilities with academic requirements.

Teacher M

There were some institutional pressures, such as limited time, administrative requirements, and the need to adapt to the program's academic expectations. I feel motivated, but sometimes stressed due to the workload and responsibilities.

Teacher F

The sense of working under pressure since I worked and studied at the same time in different cities.

Teacher E

I feel overwhelmed with tasks. I teach and study at the same time, and this is difficult.

Theme 2: Evaluating the Professional Development Program

Teachers provided their impressions of the course content. Some found it reiterated, and knowledge was ubiquitous. Knowledge was not sufficiently practice-laden. The MA program was perceived as redundant in terms of course content. In addition, teachers noted that traditional teaching methods influenced how they had been assessed; they explained that they were expected to give back what they learnt in their essays for them to pass their exams.

Teacher D

The MA program doesn't fit the teacher's needs.

Teacher F

Since the modules shared similar content, I felt like I was just revising and reinforcing the input. Sometimes in the test, I write the same essay for different modules because they tackle the same aspects. It was mainly theoretical with an inherent deficiency in the practice. Even though CBA calls for scaffolding and building knowledge into genuine experiences, there were no real-life simulations, which are critical for would-be teachers.

Teacher E

It is challenging to choose and to conduct the research that I suggested.
Teacher D
Through the MA program, I thought I would have additional knowledge, but unfortunately, it didn't happen. There are many subjects, and I find that I produce the same essays to discuss exam essays.
Teacher M
The course content was demanding, requiring strong critical thinking and constant engagement.

Theme 3: Accomplished Self

Teachers' mindset about research and learning was reconstructed through their immersion in the MA program. This personal professional development program empowered teachers to reflect on their own needs and track their milestones. The MA program created a change in teachers' perceptions of English as a language to improve and its intercultural learning, which reinforced their understanding of the self and the other. Furthermore, it widened teachers' perspectives towards teaching practices and increased their self-confidence in their own teaching performances.
Teacher B
The Master's made me realise that research is not just for self-development, but it can also be about understanding the other and knowing how to help them.
Teacher C
Through the Master's program, I learnt that English is not only a language, but it is also a culture, a lifestyle, a way of thinking. I learnt many things during this year, which I currently use in my daily life.
Teacher D
As a teacher, I will not be the same as before.
Teacher K
Doing my MA changed me by making me more reflective, organized, disciplined, confident, and critical as a teacher.
Teacher L
Growing stronger by expanding my intellectual mindset and raising my desire to learn and to keep my curiosity.
Teacher F
I was practising what I learn and learn what I practised (in my teaching experience), which provided me with much assistance and invaluable insights. There is a motto that I came up with myself: "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I might remember. Involve me and I will remember".
Teacher M
The course made me more confident in my abilities as a researcher and as a teacher. Overall, the MA experience motivated me to grow personally, enhance my teaching methods, and contribute more effectively to my students' learning environment.

7. Discussion of the Main Findings

How did the professional development program, under 'Master's Degree' learning, enhance teachers' professional development identities?

The professional development program brought a sense of 'empowerment' into the teachers' identities. They revealed that the program was an opportunity for them to meet their needs and desires. They felt empowered to self-invest in progressing their skills. Two main reasons motivated teachers' decisions to pursue their learning: First, the policy that offered learners in 20% category an opportunity to return to their learning seats. Second, teachers' personal motivation was driven by a need for self-satisfaction, development, worth, and power. For example, Teacher K said: My desire to improve myself as a teacher. I wanted to advance professionally, strengthen my pedagogical knowledge and reflect on my teaching practices.

The Master's program gave teachers access to professional development identity, which was solicited by new identities beyond their teaching classrooms. They envisioned themselves as researchers through an imaginary community of learners. Collaboration with peers and academics (their teachers) played a pivotal role in engaging teachers in the desired hope, as revealed in the narrative frames. Collaboration highlighted transformations in teachers' identities, as this result aligned with Karimi and Mofidi (2019).

Teachers were also able to develop critical thinking during their learning; they evaluated the Master's course content, describing it as theoretical rather than practical. This finding aligned with Edwards and Burns (2016) that teachers' evaluation of these institutional opportunities enhances their agency to act upon change into their careers, which then drive teachers to endeavour their professional practices.

Beyond the personal, the contextual had also acted to reconstruct teachers' identities from teachers to learners, to future researchers. The institutional factor connected the divergence of the legacy of learning and institutional attitudes. Although teachers were allowed to pursue their learning, they felt emotionally insecure, doubtful and pressured about their right to study. Tensional emotions contributed to shaping teachers' identities. They endeavoured to find alternatives or new approaches to balance the personal and the institutional intricacies. For example, Teacher K said: I felt challenged. I worked hard by balancing teaching, coursework, research tasks, and presentations, often managing time pressure and academic responsibilities. Teachers had to experience tension to reach an equitable sense of belonging to the academic community, and finding 'balance' was their way to achieve their professional development identities.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study was conducted with eight teachers which represented the number of 20% of teachers accepted in the Master's program in the same academic year this study was done. The researcher is aware that the number is limited and recommends that future research can be conducted at different institutions to investigate teachers' professional development identities in relation to different institutional and personal factors. This

study also recommends that future research can be conducted not only with a larger sample, but also in a quantitative approach considering other factors such as demographic diversity which is deduced as a research gap in Zekri et al (2024).

9. Conclusion

Although previous research highlighted that teachers' identity is highly influenced by their undergraduate studies and their CPD, this study demonstrated that EFL teachers can have a continuous identity reconstruction through a professional development program. The main findings contribute to understanding how policies influence teachers' choices, structures, and hopes. However, teachers' identities in this study were empowered by personal enduring choices that expand in their teacher professional identity.

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