

**The Self-Perceived Professional Identity of EFL
(English as a Foreign Language) Israeli Teachers**

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Ph.D. Thesis

Submitted to the Senate of Bar-Ilan University

Ramat-Gan, Israel

October 2015

This work has been carried out under the supervision of Prof. Yaacov Katz

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Abstract

Prior studies concerning teachers' professional identity can be divided into three different categories (Beijaard, 2004). The first category focuses on the formation of teachers' professional identity. The second focuses on the identification of characteristics of teachers' professional identity. The third category discusses teachers' professional identity through their own oral and written stories. The present study aims to explore characteristics that influence the professional identity of teachers who teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Israel. Examining teachers' professional identity is important since it influences the teachers' sense of efficacy, professional development and ability to cope with educational change. In addition, there is the nativeness characteristic. Unlike teachers of other subjects, language teachers are divided into two types: those who have a native speaking background and those who do not. Some studies show that a non-native speaking background may lead to a feeling of inferiority on the part of the teacher and so can cause them to question their identity as legitimate TESOL professionals (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Thus, this research also examines whether nativeness has a role in the PI (Professional Identity) of the EFL teacher.

The model used in this study is based on Beijaard's professional identity model (2000) and includes several types of measures: specific background measures, teaching proficiency measures and teaching appraisal measures. The teaching proficiency measures are subject matter expertise, didactical expertise and communication with students; the teaching appraisal measures are self-efficacy, threat and challenge. The study examines which of these measures best predict professional identity as perceived by EFL teachers and determines whether there are differences between native-English speaking teachers (with English as a dominant language) and non-native English speaking teachers (with Hebrew as a dominant language).

The study includes 150 EFL teachers (5 male and 145 female). The participants were divided into two groups: native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs). In order to examine the research hypotheses, quantitative tools were applied. The research hypotheses were partially supported by the results. It was found that NESTs have higher levels of didactical expertise, challenge and PI than NNESTs, which means that they perceive themselves as having superiority to the NNESTs. Still, fewer differences between the groups were found than expected. In addition, when examining what measures best predict PI, it was found that most of the measures included in the study do so: prior teaching experience, group type, subject matter expertise, didactical expertise, communication with students and threat and challenge. However, the measures of threat and challenge were found to be the main contributors to the explanation of PI. The less the teachers perceive teaching English as threatening and the more they perceive it as challenging the higher their PI. Finally, the SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) technique was applied, in which the relationships among the constructs are more accurately represented. In this model, teaching appraisal measures mediate the relationship between teaching proficiency and PI, and group type has a direct relationship to PI.

The present study provides a theoretical contribution to the understanding of PI in the EFL context. It broadens the comprehension of the measures that are major contributors. Consequent to these findings, several recommendations can be made to appropriate forums regarding teacher preparation programs, "in service" teacher programs and school administrations. For instance, teacher preparation programs should include in their curriculum components that deal with the psychological processes teachers undergo. Preparing English teachers is not only about training individuals to be experts in the subject matter, building lessons and assessing students, it entails facilitating their ability to deal with stressful situations that language teachers may encounter. Similarly, "in service" teachers

should have the possibility to consult and get advice when needed in order to make it possible for them to contend with problems as they occur. Finally, the sensitivities of English teachers require serious consideration. Cooperation between EFL teachers should be encouraged to provide support and to relieve stress.