

Libyan (EFL) Teachers' Perceptions of their Academic Identity: Teachers'
Academic Identity Beyond Profession

تصور أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية اللبيني للهوية الأكاديمية

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الملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تصورات أعضاء هيئة التدريس لهويتهم الأكاديمية والأنشطة الأكاديمية التي يمارسها معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية من أجل تحقيق المعايير التعليمية التي تضعها مؤسساتهم.

ولتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة، تم اعتماد المنهج النوعي. تمت مقابلات شبه مُنظمة في كلية اللغات مع سبعة أعضاء هيئة تدريس للغة الإنجليزية في جامعة صبراتة حول رؤيتهم الأكاديمية. وبناءً على النتائج النوعية، أشار جميع المشاركين إلى تصورات غير متشابهة لهويتهم، بغض النظر عن اختلاف رتبهم الأكاديمية وتباين خبراتهم التدريسية. وكشفت النتائج أنه لا يوجد خط فاصل واضح بين الهوية الأكاديمية والكفاءة الأكاديمية، وأن الحدود بين متطلبات البحث والتدريس غير واضحة. كما أوضحت النتائج أن أعضاء هيئة التدريس يظهرون مشاركة انتقائية في النشاط الأكاديمي عوضاً عن المشاركة المتوازنة. وتوصي الدراسة بأن يشارك أعضاء هيئة التدريس بشكل أكثر فاعلية في ورش العمل والندوات والمؤتمرات من أجل موازنة هويتهم المهنية مع المعايير الأكاديمية. كما ينبغي على أعضاء هيئة التدريس إيلاء اهتمام أكبر بالبحث والنشر العلمي، وتحديث كفاءاتهم وممارساتهم التدريسية.

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of staff-members regarding their academic identity. It also explores how EFL teachers engage in academic

activities to meet the educational standards established by their institutions. To achieve the objectives of this study, a pure qualitative approach was utilized. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers selected from the faculty of languages to gather the data required. Analyzing the data indicated that all the research participants held varying perceptions of their identity; revealing an ambiguous understanding of their academic identity. The findings also highlighted that the distinction between the demands of research and teaching is not clearly defined. There exists no definitive boundary between academic identity and academic competence, despite the presence of different academic ranks and diverse teaching experiences. Furthermore, it was noted that staff members tend to engage selectively in academic activities instead of participating evenly across all areas.

It is recommended that staff members should focus on research performance and publication, and regularly update their competencies and teaching practices. They have to participate more actively in workshops, seminars, and conferences to adhere to academic standards of professional and academic identity.

Introduction

The academic identity of staff members at higher education institutions plays a crucial role in shaping the educational journey and prospects within the field of English. Recently, there has been an increasing focus on not only on the methods, teaching skills, and techniques employed by EFL teachers but also how teachers' perceptions of their academics affect their performance. This encompasses the knowledge, skills, competence, and understanding of academic culture possessed by university staff-members. In this regard, Quigley (2011, p. 27) stated that "culture should not be ignored when thinking of academic identity in terms of community," as it influences values, norms, and practices. The primary objective of this study is to define academic identity, explore how EFL university teachers perceive themselves, and examine how they build a supportive community for professional growth. Consequently, proficient EFL university teachers provide valuable insights into EFL teaching and learning. Palmer (1997) characterized effective teachers as being honest and passionate towards their students; their teaching

transcends mere techniques and encompasses the identity and integrity of teachers. Academic identity refers to how staff members at higher education institutions perceive themselves in their roles as educators.

It is noteworthy that certain EFL teachers may feel satisfied and make positive contribution to the field of EFL. Those who have high self-esteem and strong confidence tend to be more resilient and creative. In this regard, understanding the perceptions of EFL teachers' can foster an inclusive academic environment and success in their academic pursuits. A strong perception of their academic identity among teachers, along with support from the educational community, valuable appreciation, and the way these are perceived by other teachers, all contribute to the improvement of the academic environment. Furthermore, not all higher education institutions actively promote and develop the skills of staff members for effective academic improvement. According to Othman & Aljuhaish, (2021, p. 534), "a positive teaching environment plays an important role in motivating the EFL teachers to participate in their community of practice and share responsibilities and goals with their peers." Moreover, Cultural background and interpersonal skills influence the formation of academic identity; individuals with a strong perception of their academic identity may communicate differently. By improving academic identity, a sense of belonging to the academic community is fostered, which in turn develops self-confidence, competence, and self-esteem, thereby benefiting the academic society in various ways (Day et al., 2006). Nevertheless, other staff members may encounter some challenges in developing their identity due to language barriers, self-perception issues, academic expectations, and institutional norms. Accordingly, EFL teachers possess varying perceptions of their academic identity, with some experiencing anxiety, feeling of inadequacy, self-doubt, and struggle within their academic institutions. This study sought to address this issue and bridge the gap in the existing literature. These barriers are closely associated with anxiety and affect their sense of belonging and self-esteem, consequently resulting in minimal academic progress, feelings of isolation, and impeding the academic performance of EFL teachers. Subsequently, fostering a sense of alienation can be particularly stressful for staff members and hinder their capacity to participate effectively

scholarly discussions. In this respect, teachers with a limited understanding of their identity often experience misconceptions and inaccurate perception regarding their role as staff members; thus, this scenario may lead to isolation or reduced involvement in the workplace. This research aims to:

1. Examine how faculty members perceive their academic identity within the context of higher education.
2. Explore the activities that EFL teachers engage in to develop their academic identity.
3. Increase awareness of the significance of academic activities to solidify their academic identity over time.
4. Identify the personal and institutional aspects and tensions they encounter in the university context and embark on a lifelong journey of academic growth.

The research questions to be answered:

1. How do Libyan EFL staff members at the language faculty perceive their academic identity?
2. What academic activities do Libyan EFL staff members engage in to enhance their academic identity and meet the educational standards?

Literature Review

Identity refers to “what makes you similar to yourself and different from others” (Deschamps and Devos (1998) as cited in Hashemi et al. (2021, p. 3). Erikson’s theory posits that identity encompasses two dimensions: exploration and commitment. Marcia (1966) proposed a derived identity pattern. Likewise, he identified four distinct identity statuses across various domains: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion (Marcia, 1993). Marcia stated that individuals with a deeper self- awareness tend to be more conscious of their distinctive characteristics, their similarities to others, and their specific areas of expertise (1980). Yet, the Eriksonian-Marcian research highlighted a developmental perspective on identity, which was recognized to include both strengths and weaknesses. According to Marcia (1980, p. 109), identity is defined as “an internal self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, benefits, and individual history.”

Moreover, an individual’s identity has a substantial effect on the efficiency of workplace positioning in the future, as it represents an ongoing process of

reshaping who we are. According to Day et al. (2006, p. 601), “identity impacts on an individual’s sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and inevitably, effectiveness.” They further noted that it is shaped by organizational consideration, culture, and an individual’s values and beliefs. Quigley (2011) asserted that culture is a central component of academic identity, as it signifies a complete belonging within a community. Syversen (2019, p.16) described identity as “a process we go through to define who we are, but not necessarily by adapting an initially desired identity; it can also be characterized by exploration and discovery.” This process involves continuous reflection of experiences, where individuals “Learnt and re-learnt” (Billot, 2010, p. 709).

The fundamental aspects of EFL teachers’ professional identity, along with its peripheral components, evolve in response to personal, contextual, socio-cultural factors and fields of practice. Identity encompasses the beliefs, values, motives, experiences, knowledge, skills, and practices that an individual possesses. It is an ongoing process that transforms and improves over time through discourse. Nevertheless, it exhibits many characteristics within a larger community. Regarding the pedagogical dimension, EFL staff members need to possess certain qualities, including the capability to develop or select EFL materials, proficiency in error correction, management, communication skills, being knowledgeable and updated, demonstrating respectful behaviour, and having the ability to create a safe and stress-free learning environment (Hashemi et al., 2021).

In this sense, the academic identity of teachers is identified by a research-oriented focus. The identity of teachers is influenced by their communications with students during class sessions, while institutional identity is framed by the teachers’ connection to the institution. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that identity forms a self-structure that originates internally and develops over time. For EFL teachers, affinity identity is rooted in the shared values that arise from voluntary engagement in professional communities of practice, whereas discursive identity is shaped by others through the use of language and social interaction. In this respect, a lack of belonging to build affinity for EFL teachers within the community could create an opportunity for having an academic identity moratorium and diffusion.

Professional Identity

The concept of professional identity was initially introduced in academic literature within the past three decades by Beijaard et al. (2004). Various elements reshape identity to align with an individual's professional field at a time when identity is closely linked to experience (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Billot, 2010). Professional identity is defined as one's self-image, as well as how EFL teachers perceive themselves in relation to other teachers and researchers. This identity develops throughout a career as individuals participate in different activities aimed at enhancing their classroom practices, pedagogical knowledge, and skills, or engaging in research. Consequently, it is shaped by the continuous professional development programs (CPD) offered at institutions of higher education.

The concept of teacher identity is broad and intricate, shaped by various influences like affective factors, the work environment, and societal context. Professional identity is typically defined as the way academics perceive themselves in relation to their professional roles, standards, and environment, which is recognized as a critical factor in determining pedagogical practice and classroom atmosphere. Therefore, it plays a significant role in shaping teachers' styles, thereby influencing curriculum reform, classroom instruction, and student achievement. In the field of education, numerous studies have explored teacher professional identity regarding its meaning and characterization; however, there is no clear definition of the concept that has been accepted and agreed upon. The concept of identity encompasses the shared and constitutional rights and obligations associated with speaking and acting, as well as individuals' self-perception and their integration into the surrounding world. Subsequently, identity represents individuals' way of positioning themselves within an unstable world, though it is neither fixed nor imposed. According to Sachs (2005, p. 15), "teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society." Al Jumiah (2024), in his study conducted in Saudi Arabia, found that the professional identity of EFL teachers is influenced by institutional norms, regulations, teaching/ research experiences, qualifications, perspectives, values, and levels of commitment.

Additionally, commitment and exploration are integral components of identity; these components are vital to the conceptualization of identity. The latter is defined as a process of information-seeking and encompassing activities that range from reading to joining educational events. Thus, a strong connection exists between identity and commitment; this relationship has been described by Erikson (1968), Hoelter (1983) and Styker, and Burke (2000).

Based on the previous perspectives, addressing the factors that contribute to success in higher education and beyond is essential. Gaining insights into the impact of identity on the careers of EFL teachers, particularly how it influences their academic progress, will yield valuable information that may help them in achieving success in college and beyond.

Academic Identity

Academic identity refers to the self-perception that individuals possess within an academic context, influenced by numerous factors, including comprehensive knowledge of EFL, strong research skills, a supportive educational environment, receptiveness to experiences, and the adoption of an external viewpoint. Byrne (1984, p. 429) characterized the perception that we have about ourselves as the “attitudes, feelings, and knowledge about our abilities, skills, appearance, and social acceptability.” Thus, Eggen & Kauchak (2010) stated that the academic self-concept represents a cognitive appraisal of an individual’s academic competence. Whannell & Whannell (2015, p. 48) noted that academic self-concept affects “several educational outcomes, including the quality of academic achievement.” Thus, academic identity “becomes intrinsically bound up with the values, beliefs, and practices held in common with others of that affiliation” (Billot 2010, p. 713). It is evident that faculty members may hold opposing perspectives on the essence of being an academic. Jenkins (2004, p. 5) regarded identity as a process of “being and becoming,” shaped within particular environments.

The ranking of teaching practices was positioned at the top of academic activities, followed by the field of societal service, then the field of scientific research, and finally decision-making. It was also observed that significant differences existed concerning academic rank, favoring teacher assistants and professors. Nevertheless, Syversen (2019, p. 66) asserted that the beliefs of

academics are closely linked to “the production of knowledge (research) and less so to the dissemination of knowledge (teaching).” From an academic perspective, the identity of teachers is viewed as a reflection of their expertise. Within universities, the identity of teachers is influenced by many contextual factors that can either promote or hinder its growth. Lankveld et al. (2017, p. 235) stated that “developing a teacher identity in the higher education context is not a smooth process.” A supportive work environment, characterized by interaction with both students and other staff members, is essential and is complemented by abundant career opportunities. Collaborative efforts and group discussion strengthen teacher identity, while sharing experiences fosters a sense of mutual trust and boosts confidence. On the contrary, the environment may be viewed as a constraint when teachers sense inadequacy, competition, hierarchy, and lack of trust. This results in feeling of isolation and inhibition. Staff members tend to favor teaching compared to research, as they are required to manage both duties.

Significantly, the concept of academic teacher identity can be viewed from a wider lens, considering the influence of external factors such as colleagues and workplace demands, or from a more personal standpoint. In this sense, the high academic expectations that EFL teachers are required to fulfill, coupled with a substantial workload, can be particularly overwhelming, resulting in feelings of isolation and a misconception of their academic identity. Consequently, the roles of teaching and research became intertwined. Academic researchers found themselves uncertain about whether to focus on teaching or research at the same time. Nevertheless, neglecting either aspect will lead to a loss of the overall significance. Balancing teaching and research to enhance identity is essential within the faculty (Lankveld et al., 2017).

Academic Autonomy

According to Schmidt & Langberg (2007), academic autonomy is highly valued; it is mainly perceived as one of the foundational principles of the profession. Academics value their freedom and academic autonomy because it is closely tied to the sense of professionalism. Academic autonomy serves as the cornerstone of higher education. It embodies the value in making decisions regarding teaching, for example, designing curricula, selecting research topics, or engaging in scholarly activities, and exercising

professional expertise based on academic judgment rather than external influence. Subsequently, Schmidt & Langberg (2007, p. 87) identified academic autonomy as “one of the primary values of the profession.” There exists a close association between autonomy and the academic profession for EFL teachers in higher education, attributed to the freedom they are afforded (Schmidt & Langberg, 2007; Syversen, 2019). Syversen observed that highly competitive settings make academic work increasingly challenging, and insufficient support from leaders causes a feeling of abandonment among staff members. Furthermore, Syversen (2019) remarked that academic freedom was regarded highly in both teaching and research.

Billot (2010) stated that academics encounter challenges associated with employment and identity issues stemming from heavy workloads. There exists a conflict between the increased demand for research and the responsibilities of teaching. Additionally, collaboration with colleagues was lacking due to the individually tailored system of assessment criteria, particularly concerning scientific promotions. There is also inadequate funding for attending local and national conferences, as well as for publishing in high-ranking scientific journals. According to Othman & Aljuhaish (2021, p. 534), “the supportive members of the community of practice seem to promote their professional identity formation in terms of their pedagogical skills and linguistic competencies.”

In the Libyan context, Taha et al. (2025) conducted a study across two universities located in Aljabel Alakhder, which included 282 participants. The findings revealed that the professional identity of teachers of the English language did not contribute to the development of students' language grit. Consequently, they investigated further and found no significant positive correlation between students' language achievement and the professional identity of the teachers of the English language. Syversen (2019) suggested that there is a feeling of inattention between academics. The academics involved in this study were neglected because of the individual differences among faculty members. Taha et al. (2025, p. 3) remarked that “Teachers who exhibit high confidence in their instructional roles demonstrate a meaningful professional identity that fosters students' belief in their own competencies.”

Nevertheless, there is a wide range of academic activities for EFL staff members to demonstrate and develop their academic identity. These activities illustrate their role as academics and scholars, such as conducting and publishing research in peer-reviewed journals as well as participating in workshops, seminars, and conferences, whether by presenting or attending. Involvement in academic service, which encompasses scientific committees, editing, and peer-reviewed panels, holds equal importance. Furthermore, pursuing continuous professional development is crucial. Similarly, working collaboratively with colleagues on research projects, publishing or reviewing manuscripts, and supervising graduation projects is vital for promoting academic advancement (Boyer, 1990; Wenger, 1998).

Research Methodology

Data Collection

The qualitative phase was utilized to gain a comprehensive understanding of EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their academic identity. This methodology revealed the participants' perceptions concerning their academic identity, as well as the strategies implemented to enhance academic identity within educational institutions. A semi-structured interview format was adopted to investigate teachers' perceptions in depth and gather data on various aspects of academic identity. The interview guide was developed based on an extensive literature review, and the participants were informed about the rationale behind the study. The study included seven faculty members selected through a relatively equal random sampling method. The primary ten open and closed-ended questions were posed, accompanied by several follow-up questions to elicit more detailed responses. Each interview lasted 20 to 30 minutes and addressed the participants' backgrounds, including age, gender, qualifications, work experience, and research experience. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. It is worth noting that no credit was given for gender respect. The faculty members were nonnative speakers of English, yet they exhibited a high level of English proficiency, which is deemed essential for EFL teacher academic identity. They possess varied teaching experiences, ranging from 4 to 20 years within English departments at Libyan universities. The staff members were MA holders in different areas such as translation, literature, applied linguistics,

and TESOL. Four participants completed their education in Libya, whereas the others pursued their education abroad. The number of published research studies conducted by faculty members varied from one to seven. However, the second research question focused on the academic activities undertaken by staff members to gather specific details aimed at developing their academic identity, thereby enhancing the depth of understanding regarding their perceptions of the concept under investigation.

Data Analysis

To answer the two research questions, seven EFL teachers (2 males and 5 females) were interviewed in a semi-structured way. The interviewees were asked about their experiences, work environments, and the activities they engage in to advance their careers. This section explains the findings of data analysis, taking into account the themes that emerged from the participants' contributions. The themes identified from the analysis of the data were categorized into two main sections: understanding the academic identity from the perspective of teachers of English language and the activities adopted by staff members to raise their scholarly identity. These emerging themes were further classified into four main categories: participants' perception of their academic identity, their perceived image by others, the extent of recognition they receive in their workplace, and the academic activities they engage in to foster professional development and comply with the academic standards established by their institutions. Throughout the interview process and the subsequent analysis phase, several logical considerations needed to be addressed, such as intersubjectivity, honesty, depth, validity, and reliability in research, as well as objectivity of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, the researcher acknowledged a certain level of bias throughout the analysis and interpretation of the data. Given that the participants were exclusively from one institution, generalizing the findings poses challenges, as it is confined to individuals holding MA degrees. Moreover, there is a pressing need for future research to be conducted in greater depth across various contexts.

Findings and Discussion

This section outlines first the most significant findings, which are summarized as follows.

1. All participants expressed varying perceptions and agreed that academic identity is a complex process.
2. The developed identity varies for each participant influenced by factors such as age, gender, qualifications, work, and research experience.
3. There is no distinction between academic identity and academic competence.
4. Professional identity includes academic identity, as teaching is considered a profession.
5. Tension between research and teaching has been occurred.
6. A relationship between autonomy and the academic profession has been established.
7. A positive correlation exists between academic identity and student achievement.
8. There is an absence of balanced involvement in academic activities.

Academic Identity and Competence

To explore how EFL staff members perceive their academic identity within the department of English, the interviewees were asked to describe their academic self-concept. The answers obtained reveal a lack of clarity regarding the concept of identity, which has resulted in misinterpretation of its fundamental meaning. The findings imply that there is a noticeable absence of familiarity with the concept among the answers provided. The participants failed to provide a precise definition of what it means to be an EFL faculty member with a comprehensive academic identity that encompasses all its dimensions, including their role in teaching, research, decision-making, and so forth. Furthermore, staff members acknowledged that identity is a complex process that necessitates a significant level of commitment and self-control of behavior, guided by an interconnected set of ethical principles. Considering the participants' comments on the concept of being a staff member, only one respondent effectively captures the full essence of being an EFL academic faculty member. To support this assertion, teacher 1 stated, "*I perceive myself as a staff member, as a linguist, as a teacher, and as a researcher.*"

However, teacher 4 remarked, "*A committed teacher who strives to balance between teaching and professional practices.*" Teacher 3 further commented,

"I see myself as a teacher even though I am not putting too much effort into scientific research." While teacher 7 took a step further by stating, *"As a staff member at college, the matter is to be or not to be."* This finding is consistent with Jenkins (2004), who perceived identity as a process of "being" and "becoming"; identity is shaped under certain circumstances, specific considerations, the pathways for advancement to meet the requirements, and the cultural context of education. According to Quigley (2011), culture plays a vital role in the formation of identity.

Consequently, it has been noted that these comments have obscured the clear representation of academic identity; they revealed a lack of certainty and a limited grasp of the concept. Faculty members appear to lack a definitive understanding of their academic identity, which may stem from inadequate support provided by educational institutions. The constructed identity for the participants varies; thus, each is influenced by factors such as age, gender, qualification, work, and research experience. In this regard, Hol and Aktas (2013) stated that perceptions vary according to academic level; as the academic level rises, the perception of competency also rises. The general self-perception of teachers is high, as it is based on their level. However, Caihong (2011, p. 18) remarked that "English teachers with non-English PhD degrees were questioned about whether their knowledge was exactly what was needed in their English teaching and research." The findings gained also revealed that the participants emphasized the connection between autonomy and the academic profession for EFL teachers in higher education due to the freedom they are afforded. These findings are consistent with Schmidt and Langberg's (2007) research findings.

One significant issue arose when the interviewees were asked about their satisfaction with their professional competence. All the participants expressed confidence in their professional abilities and reported high self-esteem. Teachers' professional identities are not solely influenced by practical and emotional aspects of teaching or their personal lives. Instead, they are shaped by personal involvement and the social, cultural, and educational contexts that significantly contribute to the development of teachers' self-esteem (Day et al., 2006).

Teacher 5 contributed, "I am satisfied with the skills I have." Teacher 1 also mentioned, "I believed that I possess all the essential skills related to pedagogy of teaching." In contrast to the other participants, Teacher 7 noted, "It is not easy to possess all the required skills, but I am fine." Meanwhile, Teacher 6 expressed, "I do not think I possess the necessary skills so far and I am working hard on myself." This finding aligns with Caihong (2011), who stated, "There was no commonly recognized standard for college English teachers' competence" (p. 18).

The comments obtained from the interviewees were almost identical. Teacher 4 remarked, "*I am satisfied as I believe in myself.*" Teacher 2 stated, "*I am completely satisfied.*" Teacher 1 affirmed, "*Yes, certainly.*" Teacher 3 responded, "*Absolutely.*" Teacher 5 contributed, "*I am satisfied with the skills I have.*" Teacher 1 also mentioned, "*I believed that I possessed all the essential skills related to the pedagogy of teaching.*" In contrast to the other participants, Teacher 7 noted, "*It is not easy to possess all the required skills, but I am fine.*" While teacher 6 stated, "*I do not think I possess the necessary skills so far, and I am working hard on myself.*" This finding aligns with Caihong (2011, p. 18), who stated, "There was no commonly recognized standard for college English teachers' competence."

The research findings indicated that a clear distinction between academic identity and academic competence does not exist, as competence is closely associated with identity. Another significant concern is that all teachers perceive themselves as effective teachers; they exhibit a strong motivation to advance their professional development, particularly among novice teachers. However, almost all the participants expressed that developing their academic identity is a challenging endeavor that necessitates participation in various activities, whether undertaken independently or organized by the institution. These findings align with the research conclusions of Lankveld et al. (2017).

Academic Activities

According to the findings obtained, identity significantly influences the academic environment for faculty members. This conclusion aligns with the expectations of the higher education sector. All the research participants reported that they lack the required support from the university to achieve academic integrity. Moreover, the findings showed that identity has an impact

on their behavior; faculty members with a commitment to their academic identity tend to act in accordance with their academic principles and are more inclined to experience academic advancement. The findings also revealed that faculty members exhibit limited engagement in academic activities; all the interviewed teachers focus on certain activities while disregarding others. For instance, some staff members stated that they are actively involved in CPD programs, but they have minimal research output. Subsequently, the overall level of engagement in academic activities, as noted by the interviewees is evidently low, which could hinder individuals' professional development.

The interviewed participants explicitly expressed that:

Teacher 2 stated, *"I tried to engage in academic activities whenever it was possible."*

Teacher 4 said, *"I am supporting myself through attending workshops and language conferences."*

Teacher 1 confirmed, *"Training sessions to support academic integration."*

Teacher 7 confirmed, *"Web is the main source, Google Meet, and online workshops."*

Teacher 5 argued, *"I rely on reviewing academic resources."*

Notably, none of the participants reported engagement in all academic activities. All Staff members focused on certain activities and neglected others. However, each of these activities is equally significant and holds the same value.

Similarly, the findings of the present study indicate a correlation between professional development and teacher identity. They affirm that staff members demonstrate a significant desire to advance their career progression, particularly among novice teachers. In light of these statements, to address the needs of EFL teachers, facilitate their professional growth, and assist their integration into the academic community, various activities should be implemented by staff members to raise their academic identity. This conclusion is supported by the works of Boyer (1990) and Wenger (1998).

Teaching vs. Research

When the research participants were asked which part of their job they consider rewarding or challenging (research, teaching, or counseling students), their answers were almost the same. The participants agreed that

teaching receives more emphasis. Teaching was mainly viewed as essential for faculty members, while research is regarded as an academic requisite. Therefore, participants highlighted that faculty members are expected to conduct academic research, and they unanimously acknowledged its challenging nature. They mentioned that teaching is favored over research, yet the distinctions between the two are ambiguous. Unsurprisingly, almost all participants believe that teaching is the most rewarding, while research is challenging. The result is consistent with a study conducted by Lankveld et al. (2017). The teaching practices within this field were prioritized above academic activities, followed by societal service, scientific research, and finally decision-making. All participants whose comments were explored showed a comparable preference towards teaching rather than research. Subsequently, the participants expressed a deficiency in essential academic writing skills and scientific research capabilities. The roles of faculty members are primarily confined to teaching. This conclusion is consistent with the research findings provided by Lankveld et al. (2017) and Syversen (2019). The participants also associated the negative aspects of research with feelings of isolation, uncertainties, and self-doubt, as highlighted by Syversen (2019).

Faculty Members in the Academic Community

According to the responses provided by research respondents, the presence of valuable appreciation has a positive impact on academic performance. All the interviewees agreed that appreciation and recognition increase motivation and job satisfaction. This finding aligns with Day et al. (2006), who stated that identity influences an individual's sense of self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, and job satisfaction. All participants in this study acknowledged that positive feedback from their leaders and colleagues raises their academic identity and increases their self-esteem. This conclusion is consistent with the research findings of Lankveld et al. (2017). Nevertheless, six participants experience a sense of isolation and lack of belonging, indicating a deficiency in a supportive educational environment within the workplace. These results are corroborated by studies conducted by Lankveld et al. (2017) and Othman & Aljuhaish (2021). To alleviate the feelings of isolation, it is essential to foster a sense of community among EF academics. In this regard, Teacher 1

said, “*Yes, I experience isolation.*” Teacher 7 shared, “*I experience stress from teaching more than five subjects each semester, deadlines, and some administrative duties.*” Teacher 2 stated, “*I felt stressed because of time constraints, especially during exams.*” Teacher 6 remarked, “*I experience stress whenever teaching a new subject.*”

Based on the explanations provided by the participants, it can be inferred that they perceived the teaching environment as both stressful and unwelcoming. This result is similar to a study conducted by Syversen (2019), who noted that academics often feel overlooked and experience a lack of attention regarding their individual differences.

On the other hand, all participants stated that working within higher education institutions poses several challenges. As noted by Syversen (2019), there appears to be a feeling of inattention among academics. The academics involved in this study felt overlooked due to the individual variances among faculty members concerning their scientific and academic status. Each participant reported facing challenges related to heavy workload, deadlines, administrative responsibilities, tension, research demands, and teaching practices. Similar findings were reported by Billot (2010), who asserted that academics encounter difficulties related to employment and identity, ranging from heavy workload to conflict arising from the growing emphasis on research over teaching. Moreover, there is limited cooperation among academics, attributed to the system policy regarding assessment criteria for scientific promotions, insufficient support for attending national conferences, and publication in high-ranking scientific journals. The interviewees shared different anecdotes regarding how they managed academic activities aimed at promoting their professional development, including teaching and research. Moreover, the participants' responses were precise regarding their serious intentions to promote their professional competence through continuous professional development programs. Based on the findings gained, all the participants agree that they are engaging in various activities, such as peer review, collaborative research, and pursuing CPD to effectively maintain their academic involvement. This conclusion was previously reached by Boyer (1990) and Wenger (1998). It indicates that targeted training courses, workshops, and conferences support staff members in shaping their academic

identity. This finding is consistent with Amara (2020), Elabbar (2017), and Elhaj (2022). In this respect, EFL teachers are recommended to be continuously updated to thrive academically.

Recommendations

1. Academics are required to demonstrate flexibility in acknowledging the impact of their identity on career progression, while simultaneously developing their academic identity to meet educational requirement as per institutional guidelines.
2. Creating a sense of community among EFL teachers, ensuring that everyone feels accepted, respected, and understood by encouraging reflective discussion groups, establishing a diverse environment that values differences.
3. Engaging in a balanced range of academic activities, offering academic consultancy to guide EFL teachers who need support.
4. To thrive academically, EFL conferences, workshops, and seminars should be arranged regularly.
5. More emphasis on teamwork in both teaching and research should be advocated.
6. Providing specialized CPD (continuous professional development) to boost EFL teachers' confidence.

Conclusion

Academic identity is crucial in shaping the profession of teaching, particularly in the field of EFL. This study identified how Libyan EFL teachers at higher institutions perceive themselves as staff members of the academic community they belong to.

Based on the findings obtained, EFL teachers misperceive the essence of academic identity and their roles as faculty members and researchers. However, a limited understanding of academic identity restricts their capacity to fulfill their roles as EFL teachers and hinders the progression of their identities. The findings gained underscored the importance of devoting more time to research performance and publications. It can be concluded that EFL teachers' professional competencies were significantly relevant to academic

identity. Therefore, fostering a supportive, and low stress environment is essential for career improvement. In conclusion, it is recommended that EFL teachers improve their positions as staff members through joining training programs, raise their academic competence level, and keep updated to fulfill professionalism.

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