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Iranian EAP Teachers' Emotional Trajectories and Professional Identity Re-Construction: A Qualitative Study on EAP Teachers through Positioning Theory Lens

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ABSTRACT

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Through the lens of positioning theory, this study probed into Iranian EAP teachers' professional identity development regarding their emotional trajectories. Participants included 12 EAP teachers teaching English to students of Islamic History, who were studied using Gadamerian hermeneutics. Data collected through hermeneutic interviews and reflective journals were analysed using hybrid thematic analysis. Three main themes were identified, reflecting teachers' movement from their pre-positioning or willingness towards their negotiated teacher identity: a) the third space of hybridity between the global and local, b) re-imagining religious identity, and c) de-familiarisation: shifting from technical terms and specialised grammar towards real-life topics. These themes showed a need for translanguaging turn, post-secular orientation, and life capital acknowledgement in EAP practices to humanise EAP, help EAP teachers practice their agentive teacher identity, and shift the aim of teaching EAP from improving intra-lingual language competence towards cultivating trans-lingual competence.

Keywords:

EAP teachers

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Positioning theory

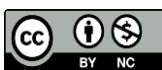
Professional identity

Religious identity

1. Introduction

Language teacher professional identity is one of the thought-provoking topics in language education. However, the professional identity of ESP teachers has been regarded a new topic of enquiry in ESP education (Meihami & Werbinska; 2022, Trent, 2024). The existing literature on teaching ESP has largely focused on learners' needs and linguistic factors involved in the process

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of learning, whereas teachers are “relatively neglected in literature in this field” (Basturkmen, 2019, p. 12). But, as Tao and Gao (2018) have asserted, overlooking ESP teacher professional development leads to the identity crisis because such teachers have to acquire many skills beyond their language teaching expertise and encounter the knowledge gap in the subject matter they teach as ESP teachers. That is, ESP teachers’ professional identity development involves a great level of emotional challenges (Zhao et al., 2022), while their emotions have not received adequate attention in the process of their professional identity formation. The relevant studies on ESP teacher professional identity have so far examined the relationship between their identity construction and action research (Meihami & Werbińska, 2022) or the effect of globalised English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programme on the identity construction of EAP teachers (Huang et al., 2024).

In addition, the existing studies on EAP teachers’ emotions have examined the relationship between their emotion and pedagogical decision-making (Zhao & Zhong, 2022) or has specifically explored ESP teachers’ emotional geographies, focusing on the relationships with oneself, others, and the surrounding world. But generally speaking, teachers’ emotions dramatically shape their professional identity since their profession involves interactions with learners and environment, which require emotional exchange. Teaching is a profession through which the teacher “is not evaluated, but his reaction to an emotional act is analysed” (Cheng, 2021, p. 4).

Although the literature on the relationship between language teachers’ identity and emotional trajectories (Cheng, 2021; Wolf & De Costa, 2017) has generally spoken of teachers of General English or EFL teachers, a few exceptions specially examined the relationship between ESP teachers’ identity formation and emotional experiences. To mention a few examples, Atai et al. (2022) have probed into the professional identity development of a novice EAP teacher teaching English to students of sport sciences through the examination of his emotional conflicts and perceptions about EAP instruction in Iran. Trent (2024) has explored tension and triumph in the professional identity construction of an EAP teacher in Hong Kong, who taught English to students of engineering.

Accordingly, to complement the findings of the aforementioned studies about the identity development of EAP teachers in terms of their emotional experiences that have addressed EAP teachers teaching English to students of hard disciplines such as Sport Sciences, Medical

Sciences, and Engineering, we sought to delve into Iranian EAP teachers' professional development through the examination of their emotional trajectories. The study probed into EAP teachers who taught the soft discipline of Islamic History, focusing on the religious aspect of Iranian history, at Iranian universities. According to Trowler (2009), hard disciplines are composed of well-established theories, causal propositions, and global laws leading to the generalisable findings and statements, whereas soft disciplines “have unclear boundaries, relatively unspecified theoretical structure, are subject to fashions and have loosely defined problems” (p. 182). As Canagarajah (2018) explicates, “[it] is high time religion came out of the closet in language teaching and education” (p. xviii). This argument reflects a dire need that was underscored by Han (2018), arguing that “there is surprising little research on this topic in the field of applied linguistics in general and in language teaching and learning in particular” (p. 433). It should be added that teachers' professional identity was examined through the lens of positioning theory, which form the way teachers position others and are positioned themselves. The present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the claimed identity or pre-positioning of EAP teachers teaching English to Islamic History students before starting their EAP class?
2. How do they negotiate their claimed identity through their emotional trajectories in the reality of the class?
3. How is their professional identity re-formed through their negotiated positioning?

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

2.1.Literature review

The first study to be reviewed in this section was carried out by Atai et al. (2022) in the context of Iran. The study focused on the emotional experiences of an EAP teacher, Alborz, who was a Ph.D. student in Sport Sciences and was invited to work as an adjunct EAP teacher at a university due to his linguistic knowledge. Data was collected using various qualitative methods of data collection. The analysis of the data led to the identification of three main themes: tensions between claimed and constructed EAP identities, content-related emotional conflicts, and EAP teacher as an undervalued professional. With regard to the tensions between EAP teachers' claimed and constructed identities, Alborz suggested that his students' inadequate knowledge of

their field of study prevented him from exercising his extensive agency. After resolving tensions and realising the contextual needs, he was successful to exercise multifaceted balancing agency, that is, to create a fit between his professional ideals and his students' needs. The theme content-related emotional conflicts showed the tensions Alborz experienced since he had to go beyond his professional ideals as an English teacher, who mainly tried to use English as the medium of instruction. To elaborate on the contents of the texts on Sport Sciences, he had to use Persian, which was in conflict with his teacher identity. After gathering more information about his students' proficiency level, he developed a contextually-sensitive EAP practice. For Alborz who worked as an adjunct EAP teacher, such a part-time job seemed to be undervalued. He believed that he was not treated with the respect he deserved, which showed another tension he experienced.

Derakhshan et al. (2023) analysed the emotions of 12 EAP teachers working at Iranian universities and teaching English to students of Medicine, Nursing, and Dentistry. The researchers used written questionnaires and narrative frames to collect data, which were then thematically analysed through the lens of the conceptual framework proposed by Zembylas (2000) addressing emotions at three levels: intra-personal, interpersonal, and inter-group. At the intra-personal level, the findings of the study involved both positive and negative emotional experiences of learners' appreciation and moments of knowledge inadequacy. Learners' acknowledgement of their EAP teachers' performance in the class resulted in the experience of positive emotions in their teachers. However, when students asked their EAP teachers questions about the content of the course that EAP teachers are generally unfamiliar with rather than the linguistic aspects of the course, such questions when could not be answered adequately resulted in the negative emotions in teachers, indicating their inadequate mastery of the subject matter. At the inter-personal level, the main themes included practitioners as agents of criticality and institutional pressures. The EAP teachers sought to help their learners move beyond the academic obligations of their class and learn how to think critically about the social issues. In this way, these teachers tried to claim agentive teacher identity, which was formed based on their process of self-reflection and could positively lead to the educational effectiveness.

Inter-group factors consisted of socio-economic impediments, hollow prestige, and religious predicaments. Teachers were low-paid but over-worked. They criticised the quality of acceptance of students at Iranian universities and believed that the door of universities got open

to everyone. They maintained that the governmental policies deteriorated the social status associated with being a university teacher in Iran. Talking about religious predicament, they pointed out that some strict rules determined at the macro-level, made them lose their agency and control over simple events such as choosing their dress codes.

Considering language teachers' professional identity as a fluid social construct formed, developed, and negotiated dialogically through interactions with others and the environment, Trent (2024) explored the process of professional identity construction of an EAP teacher, Carol, teaching English to students of engineering through the examination of her experience of tensions and triumph. Carol was a Chinese female teacher who had a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and taught various EAP courses. During the time of the research project carried out by Trent, she taught English for Engineering Purposes at a public university in Hong Kong in which teaching English was, as Trent asserts, "subject to numerous competing pressures" (p. 3). While English was regarded as the medium of instruction at that university, due to many national forces, a significant role was implicitly given to Chinese. Through semi-structured interviews, Carol narrated her stories and reflected upon her own experience as an EAP teacher. Trent referred to three main stories narrated by Carol: floating above the lesson, meeting the faculty, and a visit from the department head. Floating above the lesson was about Carol and her engineering students. Initially, Carol identified herself (her self-positioning) as a regular teacher, who was the main source of knowledge. Students were then given the passive role of receivers of knowledge. But this identity was strongly rejected by her students, who believed that their teacher's knowledge in engineering is limited and she cannot help them. Such a shift in power relations from the teacher to learners caused Carol's tensions, shame, and frustration, since her teacher identity was contested. To resolve the problem, she tried to become a more knowledgeable teacher. While her story was about a class, she talked about an imaginary place where she could become an agent to enhance her teacher identity. And that imaginary place was her own teacher identity. She defined her professional teacher identity through the phrase "to be changed". In so doing, she defined herself as an agentive teacher, a process in which she could experience triumph.

The second story, meeting the faculty, occurred at a room within the Faculty of Engineering, where there was a table keeping the physical distance and distinction between the

engineering faculty members and language teachers invited to the meeting, which ended when engineering faculty members decided to leave the meeting to underscore their dominant roles. In fact, the table highlighted the distinction between them (language teachers) and us (engineering faculty members). At the end of the meeting, engineering faculty members invited the language teachers to do further research studies. Language teachers were marginalised based on their focus on teaching and overlooking the importance of research.

And the third story was a visit from the department head, which, as Trent (2024) explicates, was a chance for Carol to transform the way she was positioned by engineering faculty members by inviting the head of the Engineering Department, Chan, to speak to her EAP students. Chan talked about his linguistic challenges and the way he tried to resolve the problems to become a proficient faculty member. An importance was assigned to language skills, which affected the way Carol was positioned by her students. As Trent (2024) indicates, she was positioned by her students, “as someone who possess and provides valuable linguistic capital” (p. 13). Although the third story occurred at the EAP class, which was initially considered as limited and insignificant from the students’ perspectives, the presence of Chan made that place a space for identity work. Generally, Carol’s self-positioning was challenged and contested by the way others, including her EAP students and engineering faculty members positioned her, which, in turn, helped her reflect on her beliefs and performance and create the chance of change to become an agentive EAP teacher.

To complement the findings of the above-mentioned studies on the way EAP teachers’ emotions could shape their professional identities, the current study probed into the emotional trajectories of EAP teachers working at Iranian universities. However, contrary to the aforementioned studies on the EAP teachers teaching English to the students of hard disciplines, the present study specifically explored EAP teachers teaching English to the students of Islamic History. As Han (2018) argues, due to the dominant discourse of secularisation in the neoliberal world of higher education systems across the world, religion could not receive enough attention in English language education. Researchers in English language education, ignored the importance of social contexts at the expense of their excessive focus on cognitive and linguistic aspects of the process of language learning. But Han (2018) strongly acknowledges that “recent social changes indicate that there is an acute need to understand religion in social life today” (p. 434). Carrying out such research in the context of Iran is highly important because the co-

existence of the three dominant representations of identity in the context of Iran, including national identity, Islamic identity, and modern identity rooted in Western ideals have caused many conflicts resulting in identity crisis (Saboori et al., 2015), because the English language, in Iran, is considered as the language used for spreading the Western culture and way of life. We used positioning theory, addressing the three important themes, including willingness, capability, and power, as our conceptual framework to examine the way EAP teachers teaching English to students of Islamic History position themselves and are positioned by others.

2.2. Conceptual framework

In the present study, the teacher professional identity is conceptualised through the lens of positioning theory. As Huang and Wang (2024) indicate, in positioning theory, teacher professional identity is defined based on willingness, capability, and power. They explain that willingness refers to the extent to which teachers position themselves or position others based on their internal motives and ideals. Capability “describes the extent to which participants are able to take up the positions offered, which is bounded by their temperament and personal experience” (Drageset & Ell, 2024, p. 356). Finally, power is about the extent to which teachers are permitted to position themselves as they wish. Indeed, power shows the situations, through which teachers have to perform positions forced by the external world. Huang and Wang (2024) maintain that "if an individual has sufficient autonomy, she/he can consistently perform the desired positions. Otherwise, the individual is unlikely to actualise the desired positions and will instead have to perform forced positions within a highly controlled environment"(pp. 3-4). Generally, positioning revolves around the three inter-related concepts: positions, speech acts, and storylines. Van Langenhove et al. (2016) state that being positioned in a special way entails particular duties leading to certain practices and rights, such as “the right to intervene or to speak” (p. 18). Positions are formed by duties that make acts meaningful in a given context (Moghaddam et al., 2008). Van Langenhove et al. define speech acts as those actions that are regarded as meaningful in a given context and conceptualise storylines as the context through which people position themselves or others either based on their own ideals or based on the existing norms and expectations. In this regard, teacher professional identity is dynamically constructed through negotiations and interactions with others. Huang and Wang (2024) explain

that, before teaching, teachers have an ideal image, or a claimed image, of being a teacher, which is pre-positioning. After engaging in teaching practices and establishing interactions with texts, learners, colleagues, and institute administrators, their pre-positioning may be refused, challenged, affirmed, or indeed, negotiated. The result of the negotiated positioning will be their performed positioning.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

Thematic analysis, as a method of extracting, examining, and presenting themes within qualitative data set was used as the method of the study. As Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate, thematic analysis is a rigorous approach to analysing qualitative data in order to explicate participants' experiences, realities, and meanings after uncovering the noteworthy patterns in the data generated through qualitative methods of data generation such as interviews.

3.2. Participants

Using purposeful sampling, participants were selected from among those teachers of Islamic History, who taught English for Specific Purposes for more than five years to undergraduate and postgraduate students of Islamic History. Tsui (2005) explains that teachers with more than five years of teaching experience are experienced teachers. That is, our participating teachers were chosen from among experienced ESP teachers teaching English to students of Islamic History. Moreover, they were selected from among teachers, who translated various books in their field of study or participated in developing EAP books for students of theology. To undergraduate learners, based on the headlines identified by Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, they taught the course entitled *Reading Historical Texts in English*, which involved historical treaties and documents, texts about Iranian history, and works of historians, which offered information about the history of Iran and Islam, the history of the West, history of politics, and the Western world's wars. To postgraduate learners, they taught the course entitled *The Foreign Language*, which focused on improving learners' knowledge in reading and translating various historical and Islamic texts. They included 12 teachers, eight males and four females, whose ages ranged from 42 to 59. Their teaching experiences ranged from seven years

to 20 years. An informed consent was obtained from all participants, indicating that their rights are observed. They were permitted to use pseudonyms.

3.3. Method of Generating Data

To generate data, we utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews as well as reflective journals. Content validity of the interview questions and journal prompts was established using expert judgement procedure. Based on their experience in qualitative research and their impartiality, six experts in applied linguistics and four assistant professors in Islamic History analysed the content, wording, and relevance of interview questions and journal prompts.

3.4. Procedure

After choosing the purposeful sample of EAP teachers, we obtained written informed consent from them. They were given information about research and were permitted to discontinue their participation at any phase of research. Then, we contacted them once more to set up the convenient time for carrying out interviews through which the participants were invited to share their view of being ESP teachers before starting their teaching and evaluating their students. That is, in this stage, we invited them to share their pre-positioning. Some of the interview questions are presented below:

- What ideals and expectations about teaching EAP have you had before starting your classes?
- What ideals and expectations about teaching EAP to students of Islamic History have you had before starting your classes?
- What roles have you assigned to teachers and learners?
- What types of materials or activities have you preferred to use in your classes?

After three weeks, all participants were interviewed once more. This time, they were required to share their ideas about the way the emotions they experienced in the reality of the ESP class made them reform and re-evaluate their initial positioning. Each interview lasted for about one-half hour, and was transcribed verbatim. After each interview, each interviewee was analysed. At the end of each interview session, each individual participant was invited to write a reflective journal to reflect on the noteworthy points mentioned in interviews. The interview

transcripts and journals were analysed using hybrid thematic analysis, composed of both deductive and inductive analysis. Initially, we read each interview transcript or journal as a whole story for three times. After immersing into the main story, we read each text once more and highlighted each relevant phrase, line, or section.

4. Findings

Three main themes were identified: a) the dialogue between the global and local, b) re-imagining religious identity, and c) de-familiarisation: shifting from technical terms and specialised grammar towards real-life topics. These themes are further explicated below:

4.1. The Dialogue between the Global and Local

The first theme was named the dialogue between the global and local. This theme, which reflects the way teachers' experiences of emotions of fear and anxiety made them negotiate their initial positioning about being an EAP teacher of students of Islamic History, included three sub-themes: a) developing one's own knowledge in using the global language of English, b) acknowledging the important role of the local language, and c) creating the dynamic space of co-existence of the global and local. Regarding their preferred identity as an EAP teacher, formed based on their willingness, some of the teachers (80%) after the first round of interviews referred to this fact that, at the beginning of their work, they thought an EAP teacher should be highly knowledgeable in using the English language and the only medium of instruction and communication should be English. They made mention of a monolingual English teacher, who was a near-native speaker and expected learners to be imitators of that model. Maryam, in her interview, explained:

I thought an ideal English class is like what we see in movies. Teachers fluently speak like Americans and their learners follow them to become fluent in using English.

However, three teachers spoke of their learners' inadequate knowledge of English, as a factor restricting their capability in actualising their preferred identity and avoiding them from performing their desired professional identity. Ahmad, in his reflective journal, indicated:

My students have many problems in using English. So, I cannot be the ideal teacher of English that I expect. I mean, a teacher, who only speaks English.

He added that:

I am afraid of making my learners anxious. Thus, I use Persian in many cases to clarify my meanings and help my learners learn.

While Ahmad believed that an ideal EAP teacher uses English as the main medium of instruction and communication, he preferred to use Persian most frequently to improve the process of learning of his learners. But, the majority of the teachers talked about this point that, for themselves, as teachers of Islamic History, it is very challenging to have a monolingual class in English and they need to practice and enhance their knowledge of English. Regarding the emotions they experienced in the reality of their classes, this group of teachers talked about the emotions of fear and anxiety of using the English language as the only language of instruction and communication in front of their learners. This made them choose the Persian language as the main medium of instruction. Ali, in his interview explained:

Before coming to the class, I read the text I want to teach. So, I check my pronunciation and knowledge of grammar. But it is impossible for me to have a class where the English language is used to ask and answer questions. I fear that my students ask hard questions, decreasing my confidence.

In his reflective journal, Ali added that:

Being in the class is really different from my ideal image of an EAP teacher, who only uses English like Americans. Here, I try to avoid using English as much as possible. Some students are really strong in using English and this causes emotions of anxiety and fear in me.

Likewise, Sahra, shared her emotions of anxiety and fear of being examined by her students as follows:

I am their teacher in other courses related to the Islamic history, where they respect my knowledge. But, in language classes, everything is different. I wish to be the best English teacher only using the English language. But I can't. It shows my problems.

She added that:

I am imbued with the bitter emotion of fear, that is, fear of making mistakes and perhaps identifying my problems.

However, the participating teachers, addressing the way they negotiated their experiences in the classes, explained that they started doubting, as an important speech act, formed based on their interactions with their learners and colleagues. Ehsan, in his interview, stated:

My learners asked me to move my class towards using English. Some students during the lunch time, explained that such a class is ineffective. I asked myself what I was doing. I re-analysed my expectations and, doubtlessly, what I was doing in my class. I was no longer certain.

To elaborate on his teaching practices, or his performed positioning, after negotiating with his learners, he asserted:

Everything happens in the class, where I have learned to start improving my English. Here, I have learned, while I should use English as the main language, I should consciously use Persian where it can be useful. I should use both languages without being dogmatic. Anyway, I use English even when feeling embarrassed. It is a more useful experience.

In her interview, Somayeh, another participant, explained that improving her knowledge of English and respecting the value of the Persian language in cases where meanings could be clarified and relations could be strengthened helped her create a more effective atmosphere of learning. She referred to the important role of her colleagues' experiences and stated:

I used to be an English teacher who always uses Persian. But, sharing my experience with one of my colleagues made me ask myself questions about the effectiveness of my class. Then, in the class, I kept focused on using English, even if I might make mistakes, while courageously and flexibly used Persian when communication situations required.

Somayeh used a quote by Will Durant, which is presented here:

Tolerance grows only when faith loses certainty; certainty is murderous.

Likewise, Ehsan explicated:

An EAP class, what I have experienced, after learning from my learners and successful colleagues, is a class where English and Persian languages meet each other in a flexible way.

As the above-mentioned examples show, in actualising their ideal EAP teacher, the participating teachers experienced protective vulnerability, because, as Song (2016) maintains, “teachers are likely to experience protective vulnerability when they are anxious and fearful and they tend to avoid or move away from any event that they consider potentially causes a threat” (p. 634). Many teachers avoided using English due to their inadequate knowledge, and some others talked about their learners’ inadequate knowledge. Here, it can be seen that initially they had a conception of a duty-capability mismatch that later, in their interactions with their learners and even some of their experienced colleagues was transformed. Indeed, with regard to negotiation occurring in the storyline created not only in the EAP class through their interactions with their learners, but also outside the class through their interactions with their colleagues, their pre-positioning was refused. They explained that, in the language class, they realised it is possible to be flexible and use the Persian language as a source for helping their learners. They explained that it is high time to improve their knowledge of the English language and use English more courageously in their classes, even if they made mistakes. And, as Song (2016) asserts, they have experienced open vulnerability. Song states that teachers experience open

vulnerability when they feel the sense of security to “risk opening themselves to the possibility of embarrassment and emotional stress for the sake of relationship building and student learning” (p. 634).

4.2. Re-imagining Religious Identity

The second theme, indicating the performed and negotiated positioning of teachers in the reality of the class was re-imagining religious identity, formed by a) moving from neutrality towards awareness of religion, b) gathering knowledge about various religious groups, and c) offering possibility to learners to share their religious identity. In analysing willingness of the participants, it was revealed that the majority of the teachers considered being neutral to religious orientations as the ideal form of becoming an EAP teacher. In his interview, Ehsan pointed out:

Before starting my work as an EAP teacher, I thought my focus should be on the English language and I should, as a good teacher, avoid bothering learners with religious biases.

However, analysing the participating teachers’ emotions in their EAP classes directed our attention to emotions of anger and resentment. In his interview, Ali explained:

But, in the class, everything is different. Here, I really felt different emotions. One of them was anger towards those groups that attacked Iran and Islam throughout history. Sometimes, I cannot hide my anger, while I try to separate teaching English from religion.

Likewise, in her reflective journal, Maryam talked about the emotion of anger as follows: Anyway, we talk about Islam and history. We talk about wars, discrimination, and our enemies. Sometimes, I cannot be indifferent to differences in religion or beliefs that caused wars. I myself become full of the bitter sense of irritation.

Teachers’ personal anger and resentment limited their capability for becoming what they considered as an ideal EAP teacher or a secular teacher. As Lytra (2020) indicates, a secular position revolving around a separation between religion and education is one important debate in

education. However, some teachers (40%) referred to the emotion of anger towards the external power of the educational system and curriculum putting heavy emphasis on national and self-centred identity as a factor limiting their capability. In his interview, Ahmad explained:

Anger is an important emotion I feel, because I have to follow the determined rules by university to focus on only a self-centred conception of religion. It is my English class not their class of ideology.

Nevertheless, analysing the participants' narratives and comments regarding the way they negotiated their emotions revealed that they tried to do their best to get rid of their anger. Here, we named the noteworthy emotion transition-anger because the participating teachers tried to modify their anger by gathering necessary information. According to Nussbaum (2015), "the entire content of one's emotion is, 'How outrageous! Something must be done about this.' I shall call this emotion *Transition-Anger*, since it is anger, or quasi-anger, already heading down the third fork in Angela's road" (p. 53). In his interview, Mohsen explained:

Anyway, anger destroys everything, even an English class. I should manage my anger. I try to move beyond my previous ideal of secularism. I try to ask my learners questions about events caused by religious differences. I try to be flexible in answering their questions. I give them information, outside the textbook to improve their knowledge.

He added:

We should be knowledgeable enough. We should not let such events, only rooted in religious matters and differences, repeat again.

Indeed, Mohsen talked about speech acts of enquiring and asserting as ways for seeking and gathering information to create religious knowledge and awareness in learners and modify his anger. He referred to this fact that, in his class, he needs to go beyond the neutrality of secularism. Similar argument was put forward by Ahmad, indicating that:

We should break all walls similar to the Berlin Wall. We need to study more and more. We should talk with each other, ask questions, and answer questions. I ask my learners to share their religious traditions and important events, based on English texts about religion we read.

In fact, the analysis of the second theme shows that the participating teachers' pre-positioning as English teachers was challenged in their classes after their attempts for modifying their anger and moving towards transition-anger through enquiring and asserting, which led to becoming post-secular EAP teachers. According to Lytra (2020), a post-secular position in language education acknowledges the interrelationship between English education and religion. In other words, the teachers' storyline started by their willingness to reposition themselves through a *personal right-institutionally determined duty negotiation* that activated their capability in creatively shaping a new social structure to empower themselves in managing their emotion and in avoiding burnout.

4.3. De-familiarisation

The third noteworthy theme revealed the way the participating teachers moved from their initial pre-positioning for teaching technical terms and grammatical structures towards relating the religious text content to real-life topics or experiences in their classes for their deeper understanding and for making the course more interesting for the learners. This theme involved three sub-themes: a) an initial focus on jargons and particular grammatical points, b) learners' disengagement with the EAP class excessively focused on grammar and vocabulary, and c) attempts made to engage learners through real-life topics. In elaborating on his willingness, in his interview, Kamran indicated:

English for students of Islamic History is a challenging course. Learners have many difficulties, even in the skill of reading. I wished to be the best teacher of English, who teaches his learners important grammatical points and makes them familiar with important key words.

In a similar vein, Homayoon stated:

I thought, I mean before experiencing the reality of such a class, I should teach special words, like supplication for Dua, life in the hereafter for Akhira, migration for Hijrah, and so on. Based on the headings prepared by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), I teach them how to read and translate such texts.

Both Kamran and Homayoon explicated that their pre-positioning was reflected in teaching grammatical structures and specialised vocabulary items to improve their learners' skills in reading and translating English texts about Islamic history. Homayoon talked about the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) as a powerful social force shaping his pre-positioning. However, in his reflective journal, he acknowledged:

Focusing only on grammar, words, translation, and reading made our classes boring. In my interactions with my learners, I have learned that I should change my goal and method of teaching.

Similar argument was put forward by Maryam in her interview:

When I remove my learners and just teach them words and grammar, they repeatedly check their wrist watch and I realise I should re-check my teaching.

Indeed, both Homayoon and Maryam referred to the emotion of boredom. According to Worsham (2001), boredom reflects disempowerment. Zawodniak et al. (2023) maintain that boredom is a silent emotion, which is largely overlooked in educational contexts. They argue that, in many cases, boredom is rooted in teacher-related factors, such as teachers' inability to engage learners, since learners think the course is of little value. Teachers' inability to create a captivating class to engage learners restricted their capability of becoming a teacher, who makes learners good readers and translators of EAP textbooks. Maryam spoke of the speech act of argumentation, or creating the possibility for her learners to provide reasons to support an idea, reject an idea, or persuade others about a particular idea. Maryam pointed out that her

interactions and dialogues with learners helped her understand that her willingness in teaching grammar and vocabulary items as the only duty of an EAP teacher led to a boring class.

5. Interpretation of Findings

The first theme identified in the present study was the third space of hybridity between the global and local, represented in the translanguaging practices shaping the participating teachers' performed identity. While their initial self-positioning put emphasis on becoming a monolingual English teacher just using English, their emotional trajectories made them believe in incorporating the local and the global in the EAP class, indicating the dynamic use of both English and learners' local language. Indeed, they experienced a conflict between their pre-positioning and their learners' needs. Similar argument was mentioned by Atai et al. (2022), narrating the story of Alborz as an EAP teacher of students of Sport Sciences. Alborz made mention of the emotional conflict he experienced between showing his claimed identity as a near-native EAP teacher and the identity he constructed in the class after the process of need analysis. While Alborz mostly spoke of learners' inadequate knowledge of their field of study and the boring content of materials as factors making him use learners' local language, in our study, the majority of the participating teachers talked about their insufficient knowledge of communicative aspects of English, which led to the experience of emotions of fear and anxiety, whereby they avoid using English as the only medium of instruction. Likewise, in their study on EAP teachers, Derakhshan et al. (2023) reported the negative emotions of their participants, when they could not answer their learners' questions about the EAP book contents.

Initially, our participants experienced protective vulnerability by avoiding using English when they were not prepared. But, after negotiating their identity in the class, they shifted towards open vulnerability to open themselves to the possibility of stress of using English as a medium of communication. Song (2016) maintains that "when teachers experience open vulnerability, they are likely to have positive attitudes and orientations to ongoing professional developments that may lead to pedagogical and self-transformation" (p. 634). Through teachers' open vulnerability, translanguaging was practiced, which offers an alternative to the conventional model of language teaching aiming at developing a monolingual near-native speaker of English by acknowledging learners' various linguistic and cultural repertoires (Semiante & Tian, 2020). More importantly, Wei (2024) regards translanguaging as a process

of trans-positioning transcending the existing pre-determined roles “by releasing one’s self from conventions and fostering a greater sense of possibility, freeing ourselves from habitual thinking, and building empathy for others involved in the process” (p. 212).

The second theme named re-imagining religious identity showed the EAP teachers’ shift from neutrality of secular views of language teaching towards the acknowledgement of the importance of religious awareness, which we defined as post-secular negotiated positioning. This finding was in contrast with the findings of the study by Derakhshan et al. (2023), which considered the inter-group emotional factors like religious predicaments as oppressive discourses reducing EAP teachers’ agency. In the present study, religion was regarded as a factor shaping EAP teachers’ and learners’ subjectivity that should be acknowledged in a more profound way. Souza (2016) explicates that religion is a sociolinguistic marker of identity. However, the dominant discourse of secularisation in language education, restricting the conceptualisation of language education to the global north or Anglo-phone world, led to the anxiety and fear of dealing with religious issues, which in turn caused lack of knowledge of religions across the world (Han, 2018). But, Vaccino-Salvadore (2024) points out that English language teacher professional identity is cultivated through awareness and acknowledgement of local ideologies and religious sensitivity, offering a space of humanising the processes of language education.

The third theme, showed teachers’ movement from specialised grammar and technical words towards real-life issues to attract the attention of the learners, navigate the emotion of boredom, and offer a space for learners to think, argue, and play a more active role. This finding was in line with the findings of the study by Derakhshan et al. (2023), indicating that, at the inter-personal level, the EAP teachers of the hard discipline of Medicine, Nursing, and Dentistry in the context of Iran, went beyond the pre-determined duties of their class to teach their learners how to think about social issues. They believed that, their participants sought to practice their agentic teacher identity by offering a space of thinking about social issues. In our study, the third theme showed the participants’ attempts for performing their agentic teacher identity as EAP teachers of the soft discipline of Islamic History. Generally, such a movement arising from the experience of boredom, is a point of departure from the neoliberal expectations of educational contexts, which reduces education to mastering skills required for becoming successful in market. In our study, in the EAP class, the necessary skills were confined to

knowledge of grammar and vocabulary making learners ready for reading and translating EAP texts and preparing them for the job market as professional readers and translators. Zembylas (2023) points out that “boredom may be experienced as detachment and disaffection from the neoliberal structures of higher education, thus serving as a point of departure for revitalising efforts to reclaim the contemporary university” (p. 1). That is, a shift from specialised grammar and technical words towards real-life issues was a point of departure for reclaiming thinking and agency.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on positioning theory, this study examined Iranian EAP teachers’ professional identity development through emotional experiences. Teachers experienced a shift in their emotional trajectories, which reflects a dynamic process of meaning-making through which teachers mainly seek for possible alternatives to transform their emotions (Song, 2016). The dynamic process of meaning-making was formed through various storylines shaped by EAP teachers’ interaction with their learners, colleagues, and educational curricular through which they were provided with the possibility to change their pre-positioning and perform a new positioning based on the needs of their learners.

Findings underscored the needs for translanguaging turn in teaching EAP. According to Anderson (2024), translanguaging creates a possibility for valuing language learners’ whole languaging resources based on the specific purpose of communications and changes the goal of teaching English from improving learners’ communicative competence to enhancing their performative competence. He maintains that translanguaging is “a paradigm shift from an intralingual view of ‘competence’, or languaging ability, to one that is translingual, validating all our competencies and identities as twenty-first century multilingual” (p. 79). Findings highlighted the importance of religious identity, which should be given more serious attention in the secular field of language education since it is a heterogeneous construct or cultural repertoire comprised of faith beliefs and practices, which indicate the symbolic power of language (Han, 2018). Foregrounding the life-related issues in EAP classes, along with the attention given to religion and emotions, is a space for valuing learners’ life capital or experiences to humanise the process of language learning and move beyond the neoliberal trend of education. Findings of this study were delimited to Muslim EAP teachers, working in Iranian Universities. Further

studies on other educational contexts, especially secular ones, can shed light on the relation between religion and language. This study was conducted on teachers of Islamic History, who taught EAP to students of Islamic History. Others studies on teachers of Applied Linguistics, working as teachers of English for students of Islamic history may be helpful.

Bio-data:

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