

Exploring Professional Identity among Refugee EFL Teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan

Khaldoon Mohammad Taisir Khamaiseh*

Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia
Corresponding Author Email: hkhamaisa@yahoo.com

Radzuwan Ab. Rashid

Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i4/28118>

Published Date: 21 April 2026

Abstract

This study explores how refugee English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan construct their professional identities within a context shaped by displacement, institutional expectations, and sociocultural challenges. Adopting a qualitative case study design, data were generated through reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews with ten refugee EFL teachers working in the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts (FESA). Reflexive thematic analysis, informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, was employed with the support of MAXQDA-2024 for data management. The findings reveal that teacher identity is dynamic, negotiated, and continuously reshaped through the interaction of personal agency and socially mediated practices. Identity construction was influenced by emotional investment, prior learning experiences, institutional culture, collegial collaboration, mentorship, and refugee-related realities. The study contributes to teacher identity literature by offering context-specific insights from a refugee higher education setting and highlights the need for structured professional development, mentorship, and collaborative learning communities.

Keywords: Teacher Identity, Refugee Teachers, Efl, Unrwa, Sociocultural Theory, Professional Development

Introduction

Identity is a complex and multidimensional term. Identity is widely recognized as a complex and multidimensional construct that has attracted substantial scholarly attention across disciplines such as sociology, psychology, education, and cultural studies. Contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes identity as dynamic, fluid, and socially constructed rather than as a stable or fixed attribute (Ismail et al., 2025; Nguyen & Dao, 2023). Earlier theoretical perspectives often framed identity as a relatively static personal characteristic shaped by individual traits or social categorization. However, recent research emphasizes

that identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through interaction with social, cultural, political, and institutional environments (Kayi- Aydar, 2019; Trent, 2020). This reconceptualization reflects broader theoretical shifts toward post-structural and sociocultural interpretations, which highlight identity as evolving across contexts, relationships, and lived experiences.

Recent systematic studies further reinforce the view that identity is inherently multifaceted and contextually situated. For instance, Ismail et al. (2025) demonstrate that contemporary identity research consistently portrays identity as shaped by multiple intersecting domains, including social relationships, cultural expectations, institutional frameworks, and individual agency. Similarly, Nguyen and Dao (2023) argue that identity should be understood as negotiated within sociocultural contexts rather than determined solely by internal personal characteristics. These perspectives indicate that identity development requires an integrative analytical framework that acknowledges the interaction between personal experiences and broader sociocultural structures.

The multidimensional nature of identity is particularly evident in the understanding that individuals simultaneously hold multiple identities that interact and intersect in complex ways. Individuals construct identities that encompass professional, linguistic, cultural, social, and personal dimensions, each contributing to how they perceive themselves and how they are positioned within social environments (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). Identity development therefore involves ongoing negotiation as individuals attempt to reconcile potentially competing identity components across diverse contexts. As Akkerman and Meijer (2011) explain, identity construction involves balancing continuity and change, as individuals seek stability while adapting to evolving personal and professional demands. This process highlights the inherently dialogical and negotiated nature of identity formation.

Moreover, contemporary identity scholarship emphasizes the central role of social interaction and participation in shaping identity development. From sociocultural and social constructivist perspectives, identity emerges through engagement in social practices, professional communities, and institutional settings (Wenger, 1998; Trent, 2020). Individuals construct identity through participation in communities of practice, where shared experiences, professional discourse, and collaborative activities influence their sense of belonging and self-concept. Kayi-Aydar (2019) further argues that identity is co- constructed through discourse, interaction, and power relations within social and institutional contexts. Thus, identity is not merely an internal cognitive or psychological phenomenon but a relational construct shaped through engagement with others and participation in sociocultural practices.

Another important dimension of identity complexity lies in its temporal and developmental nature. Identity is not formed at a single moment but evolves continuously across individuals' life trajectories (Trent, 2020). Educational experiences, career transitions, professional interactions, and sociocultural changes contribute to ongoing identity reconstruction.

Individuals frequently experience periods of uncertainty, tension, and transformation as they encounter new roles or environments, requiring them to renegotiate their self-concept and professional positioning (Nguyen & Dao, 2023). Such processes demonstrate that identity

should be understood as a lifelong developmental process rather than a fixed or completed outcome.

Despite growing interest in teacher identity, limited research has examined refugee EFL teachers working in higher education in the Arab region. This study addresses this gap by investigating how refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University construct their professional identities and what factors shape this process.

Identity construction, especially for educators, is the process by which people interact with their surroundings, experiences, and connections to create and develop their social and personal identities (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), a teacher's identity is dynamic and constantly influenced by their experiences and professional development, encompassing both personal and professional facets. Study, (e.g., Coldron and Smith 1999) highlight the difficulties in creating an identity, stressing how complex and ever-changing it is. This study demonstrates how identity building is an ongoing process that is impacted by both external and internal elements, including social and cultural surroundings, beliefs, and experiences.

Because teacher identity plays a crucial role in determining professional development, scholars have been studying it increasingly over the years. Palmer (2017) argues that teaching is grounded in the inner self of the teacher, meaning that identity directly influences teachers' motivation, confidence, and pedagogical choices. Similarly, Sammons (2006) highlights that teachers' beliefs, values, and self-understandings form the basis of their effectiveness and long-term professional growth, reinforcing the idea that professional development cannot be understood without examining identity. Zembylas (2003) further demonstrates that teacher identity evolves through emotional experiences and contextual interactions, showing how identity shifts over time and affects teachers' resilience and daily practice. Collectively, these studies illustrate that teacher identity is deeply connected to professional learning and development, explaining why it has become an increasingly central theme within contemporary educational research. The process of teacher identity construction is influenced by some of elements, such as social interactions, educational background, cultural and historical settings, principles, beliefs, values, traditions, and life experiences. Teacher identity construction is also greatly impacted by external factors such as gender, personal biography, policy frameworks, and professional training (Miller et al., 2009; Richards, 2009). Globalization's influence is on the rise, and technology is advancing at a rapid pace. Education and development are interconnected, which has significantly heightened the need for professionally skilled and technologically proficient teachers who can foster quality education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Buchanan, 2015; Shukla & Dosaya, 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate refugee EFL teachers' identity construction phenomenon by contextualizing the refugee EFL teachers' perceptions of their past learning experiences, present teacher education experiences, and future expectations at UNRWA university. Understanding the significance of this research is crucial due to several reasons. Firstly, exploring the teachers' identity construction phenomenon in a refugee context is of vital importance due to the refugee EFL teachers' distinct emotional states, cultural adaptations and the self-perceptions. Secondly, the investigation of the

factors that shape their identity can provide deep insights into their professional growth at FESA, UNRWA university. Thirdly, an emotionally, culturally, and demographically contextualised institutional environment is likely to play a significant role in refugee EFL teachers' self-perceptions over the time. Whereas, elements such as mentorship, training programs, professional expectations, and community norms can decisively contribute to how they perceive their roles to enhance EFL teaching-learning process.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do refugee EFL teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan perceive their professional identity?
- 2) What factors and how these factors contribute to the construction of professional identity among EFL refugee teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan?
- 3) How do EFL refugee teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan attempt to construct their professional identities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since identity is an active and dynamic phenomenon that emerges in social life and education, my thesis draws on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Wenger's social learning theory, both of which emphasise the importance of social context in identity formation, to understand how refugee EFL teachers construct their professional selves. People join communities of practice to develop and learn, as Wenger's notion highlights. This indicates that rather than being formed by their interactions with mentors, students, and other educators, EFL instructors' professional identities are shaped by these relationships. According to Wenger (1998), involvement in a Community of Practice CoP always involves a process of negotiation that occurs when two processes, participation and reification converge. Reification entails creating the artifacts (tools, words, symbols, rules, papers, concepts, theories, and so forth) that serve as the framework for the meaning negotiation, whereas participation is doing and interacting. Reification and participation are complementary processes because each can compensate for the shortcomings of the other. For example, when reading about a concept does not help someone understand it, peers who understand it better can help the person understand it through discussion, which is a sort of participation. Similarly, giving a concept structure through writing (a process known as reification) might improve meaning-making in ways that talking about it with others cannot. 'Learning in a CoP requires both participation and reification to be present and in interplay' (Wenger, White & Smith, 2009 p. 57).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory similarly describes the ways in which social networks and cultural resources help us learn and develop. This means that refugee EFL teachers construct their professional identities as they collaborate with older teachers, decide on instructional materials, and negotiate their workplaces. By integrating these two perspectives, we can gain a deeper understanding of how identity is formed over time. Here, the qualitative method is particularly useful because it enables a deeper examination of individual teachers' experiences, difficulties, and developments rather than focusing only on apparent trends.

Teacher Professional Identity

Teacher professional identity refers to how teachers understand themselves as professionals and how they are recognized by others within educational communities. Scholars emphasize that identity is shaped through experience, reflection, and social participation (Beijaard,

Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). It involves beliefs about teaching, subject knowledge, pedagogical roles, and moral purposes.

Beijaard et al. (2004) conceptualize teacher identity through three interrelated domains: subject-matter expertise, pedagogical competence, and didactical practice. Similarly, Sachs (2001) distinguishes between managerial and activist identities, reflecting how teachers position themselves within institutional reforms.

Day et al. (2006) further highlight emotional, moral, and cognitive dimensions, arguing that teachers' values and emotions play a decisive role in shaping professional commitment and resilience.

Identity from a Sociocultural Perspective

Sociocultural theory views identity as constructed through participation in social practices. Vygotsky's (1978) theory emphasizes mediated learning, while Wenger's (1998) social learning theory highlights communities of practice, where identity develops through participation, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

Within this perspective, teachers learn not only through formal training but also through interaction with colleagues, mentorship, institutional routines, and reflective dialogue. Identity is therefore shaped through both personal agency and socially mediated interaction.

Refugee Teachers and Identity Construction

Refugee teachers experience additional layers of identity negotiation. Studies indicate that displacement, emotional vulnerability, and marginalization significantly influence professional self-understanding (Zembylas, 2003; Badawi, 2021). Refugee educators often draw on resilience, commitment, and community responsibility to sustain their professional roles.

However, research focusing specifically on refugee EFL teachers in higher education remains scarce, particularly in Arab contexts. This study contributes by addressing this underexplored area.

Methodology

The present chapter provides details on the research design and methodology for this study. The design matches well with the main objective of this research, which was to examine the formation of English language teacher identities among refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan. To do this, the study focuses on three specific aims: first, it aims to explore EFL teacher initiators' conceptualisations of factors influencing their professional identity in UNRWA; second, it seeks to identify key variables contributing to identity construction; and, third, it looks into the construction and navigation of professional identity development during their training and initial teaching experiences. In this chapter, the researcher describes the study setting (at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan) in detail with regard to the population and sample size. The target population comprises the refugee EFL teachers in teacher training programs at FESA, UNRWA University. Data gathered from the university registry for the 2021 academic year validated the population size of teachers enrolled in the program. Using a purposive sampling technique, a sample of 10 individuals was finally selected for this study so as to intentionally yield a good representation of unbiased opinions that could shed light on the purpose of the study.

The chapter also discusses ethical issues that arose during the research process and describes the methods and procedures of data generation. Two qualitative methods were utilised: reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews. These methods were chosen to provide a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding their professional identity construction. The chapter concludes with some issues encountered during the study and ways to solve them.

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach, suitable for exploring complex social phenomena within real-life contexts. The case was UNRWA University in Jordan, with a specific focus on the EFL department at FESA.

Participants

Ten refugee EFL teachers were selected through purposive sampling. All participants were Palestinian refugees teaching English at the university level and had varied teaching experiences.

Case Study Approach

To address the research questions, this study utilised a case study design, which seeks to capture individuals and phenomena in their natural settings without attempting to alter them (Zainal, 2007). The case study approach was chosen for its ability to provide context-rich, in-depth data. Yin (2002) points out that a case study looks at a current situation in its real-life setting, especially when it's hard to tell the difference between the situation and its surroundings, and I have little control over them. This makes it an ideal methodology for exploring EFL teacher identity construction, a dynamic and context-dependent process.

A case study allows researchers to conduct a holistic investigation of data within a specific context (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991). It is especially effective when the research focuses on how and why questions, where the investigator seeks to understand the processes behind a phenomenon within its real-life environment. Yin (2014) categorises case studies into three types: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Descriptive case studies aim to document a phenomenon, explanatory case studies examine how and why certain conditions arise, and exploration studies seek to address issues that are not yet well understood.

This study employed a case study approach, which Yin (2014) defines as an investigation into issues that are not yet fully comprehended. Moreover, the study aimed to explore the professional identity construction of refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan, a phenomenon that has received limited attention in the literature. The exploratory approach was extremely helpful for studying the social and cultural factors that shaped these teachers' identities and their interactions in groups.

The case study approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how teachers navigate their professional journeys, including the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the social dynamics that shape their identities. This approach looked closely at a specific group in a unique learning environment, helping the research gain detailed insights. These insights help us better understand how teachers develop their identities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

Data Collection

Two data-generation tools were employed:

Reflective diaries (journaling): Teachers documented their teaching experiences, emotions, challenges, and reflections.

Semi-structured interviews: Conducted to explore perceptions, experiences, and identity negotiations in depth.

Using multiple data sources ensured data triangulation, enhancing credibility and trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing, defining, and reporting. MAXQDA-2024 software was used to organize, code, and manage the qualitative data.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study could be applicable to other settings or populations. Unlike generalization in quantitative research, transferability in qualitative research depends on the richness and depth of the descriptions provided, enabling readers to determine whether the findings resonate with their contexts (Polit & Beck, 2010). Amankwaa (2016) emphasises that researchers must provide detailed descriptions of the research setting, context, and participants to help readers make these determinations.

In this study, transferability was inherently limited as the research focused on the specific context of refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan. The findings are confined to this population and setting. As is often the case in qualitative research, generalization is not the primary goal. Instead, the study sought to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of the experiences of refugee EFL teachers, offering insights that might resonate with similar contexts.

Findings and Discussion

This exploratory case study aimed to investigate the construction of English language teacher identity among refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan. This chapter embarks on the constructed model based on reviewed recent literature on socio-cultural learning theory and the community of practice (CoP) in CHAPTER TWO for the development of emerged themes from the employed data that comes from participants' semi-structured interviews and reflective teacher diaries. In line with the developed theoretical model, this chapter further explores the participants' perceptions of their professional identity and the phenomenon of their socio-cultural learning and their engagement in CoP which subsume social, cultural and emotional factors that can contribute to the construction of refugee EFL teachers' professional identity. The theoretical conceptualisations also guide the analysis of the potential strategies that the refugee EFL teachers engage in to construct their professional identity.

Three major themes emerged from the analysis.

EFL Teachers' Perceived Professional Identity More by Uncertainty and Ambivalence Than Confidence and Affirmation

This section presents the analysis of reflective diaries and interview data of the refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University, Jordan to answer the Research Question 1 which is "how do refugee EFL teachers at UNRWA University perceive their professional identity?". The first main theme "EFL teachers' perceived professional identity more by uncertainty and ambivalence than confidence and affirmation" and its constituent sub- themes collectively provide answer to the first research question. The research findings indicate that the identity of the participants is not static nor consistently positive, but fluid, developing, and the result of classroom experiences, institutional demands, as well as the sociocultural context which echoed recent finding in several studies (e.g., Mehta & Fine, 2019; Yelbay & Balbay, 2021; Alkhatnai, 2023; Saleem, 2021; Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Neander Christensson, 2024; Mansouri, 2021; Muchnik-Rozanov & Tsybulsky, 2019; Henderson, 2023; Schellings at al., 2024). On the other hand, the distinct refugee context of refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA emerged as hindering the positive perceptions of professional identity in terms of socio-cultural influences. These socio-cultural influences in a distinct refugee context which rejects the stance of more positivesocio-cultural influences on professional identity construction in studies (e.g., Eslamdoost, King & Tajeddin, 2019; Widodo, Fang & Elyas, 2020; Nazari et al., 2024; Ebadijalal & Moradkhani, 2022; Nilsson & Cederqvist, 2025)

Overall, the accounts suggest an identity characterised more by uncertainty and ambivalence than confidence and affirmation. More than one teacher defined their professional identity as fragile, questioning their right to call themselves educators. Alongside these instances of pride and determination, however, were the occasions when, looking inward at the sense of what it meant to teach English to students in their surrounding communities, pride and determination were expressed. This split implies that professional identity here is best conceptualised as negotiation between internal notions of self and external evaluation.

The refugee setting of UNRWA emerged as an important backdrop for these identity perceptions. Teachers reported that societal attitudes toward English instruction, coupled with the challenges of limited resources and heightened expectations, shaped how they viewed themselves in the profession. Rather than simply adopting the institutional label of "teacher," many participants described a process of struggling to align personal aspirations with the roles ascribed to them within the university and their community.

Factors that Contribute to the Construction of Professional Identity among Refugee EFL Teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan

This theme addresses the second research question which is "what factors and how these factors contribute to the construction of professional identity among refugee EFL teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan?" by identifying the positive factors that contributed to the professional identity construction of EFL teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan. These factors emerged from participants' accounts as enabling conditions that supported their integration into the professional community. Each factor reflects constructive experiences rather than the challenges and uncertainties discussed in the previous theme. The analysis embarks on Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural

Theory, wherein the theoretical concepts such as mutual engagement, scaffolding, and shared repertoire etc. are explored as contributing to the refugee EFL teachers' identity construction at

FESA, UNRWA, Jordan. Research found certain factors that contribute to the construction of EFL teachers' identity, such as collaborative participation, guided mentorship, situated practice, reflective engagement, resource adoption, and recognition, which helped foster teachers' sense of competence and belonging which aligned with most recent findings (e.g., Alkhatnai, 2023; Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Nazari et al., 2024; Nilsson & Cederqvist, 2025; Arvaja et al., 2022; Mehta & Fine, 2019). The following subsections analyse and elaborate these factors through the lens of Wenger's (1998) and Vygotsky's (1978) perspectives.

Participation in Collaborative Learning Communities

The findings indicated that early membership in learning communities was a critical factor influencing participants' emerging professional identities. Teachers defined these learning communities as forums where they shared lesson ideas, explored classroom problems, and accessed practical tips from colleagues. Such sharing allowed them a chance to be validated for their ideas and to observe other strategies in use. The regular availability of such collegial interaction is indicative of the value placed on mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) in the construction of identity, where participants hold shared responsibility for the development of shared and individual competence.

Guidance from Mentors and More Experienced Teachers

Mentoring from qualified colleagues was a significant contributor to the development of professional identity for EFL teachers. Respondents emphasised that formally guided learning, demonstration of classroom practice, and scaffolding of feedback gave them pedagogic capability as well as the confidence to assume responsibility for their professional roles. In most instances, these encounters fulfilled a bridge function between pedagogical knowledge from the-training-school and the ground-level realities of the classroom, revealing the function of legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998), where EFL teachers were gradually socialised towards membership of the professional community. Such support is also indicative of scaffolding and the aid of others who are more knowledgeable (Vygotsky, 1978), where qualified teachers facilitate newcomers' learning through focused, timely support. This is congruent with findings (e.g., Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Nilsson & Cederqvist, 2025; Rinne et al., 2023) where mentorship serves the double function of skill- transmission and socialisation-into-professional-norm.

Situated Practice through Classroom Interaction

Several participants pointed out that some of their most important learning happened while they were in the classroom itself. Being with students, trying out ideas, and sometimes adjusting plans on the spot gave them a better understanding of what actually worked. For many, it was not just about delivering a lesson but about noticing the reactions of learners and working with that. In Wenger's (1998) view, this is part of learning in practice, and Vygotsky (1978) would see it as growth through social interaction. Similar observations have been made in recent studies (e.g., Mansouri, 2021; Yelbay & Balbay, 2021; Eslamdoost, King & Tajeddin, 2019), which found that regular classroom engagement helps teachers develop both confidence and professional identity.

Mediated Learning and Reflective Practice

Several participants described how their professional thinking evolved through deliberate reflection, both in the moment and after teaching. For many, reflective activity became a way of connecting classroom events with their own professional goals. In mediation through language (Vygotsky, 1978), teachers use speech and writing to process experience, while Wenger (1998) emphasises identity through discursive practice as a way to make sense of professional roles. Recent studies show that reflective engagement, whether through self-questioning, journaling, or collaborative dialogue, supports the internalisation of teaching strategies and strengthens professional identity (see Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Nilsson & Cederqvist, 2025; Mansouri, 2021).

EFL Teachers' Strategic Engagement in Identity Construction

This section presents the third theme " EFL teachers' strategic engagement in identity construction" which responds to the Research Question 3 " how do refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan attempt to construct their professional identities?". This theme explores the specific strategies that refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University in Jordan adopted to actively construct their professional identities during the early stages of their careers. Drawing on data from reflective diaries and semi-structured interviews, three interrelated strategies emerged as the most significant in participants' accounts: reflective practice, collaborative peer engagement, and active feedback integration. Each strategy contributed in distinct ways to the development of competence, confidence, and belonging, and together they formed a dynamic cycle of self-directed and socially mediated growth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings confirm that refugee EFL teachers' identity construction is an ongoing process of negotiation between personal agency and socially mediated interaction. This aligns with Wenger's (1998) notion that identity develops through participation in communities of practice.

Reflective practice functioned as a key mechanism for sense-making, supporting previous research (Marlina, 2017). Emotional investment emerged as central, supporting Day et al.'s (2006) emphasis on emotional dimensions of teaching.

Findings of the Themes

Findings in Relation to EFL Teachers' Perceive Professional Identity

The analysis indicated that the professional identity of refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University was experienced as fluid, developing through an ongoing struggle between self-perception, institutional expectations, and the distinctive realities of teaching in a refugee context. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) view of identity as a negotiated experience within a community of practice and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of development through socially mediated interaction, participants' accounts reflected identity as a process rather than a settled state. Their narratives revealed an often-fragile perception of professional identity, shaped by personal histories, classroom encounters, and sociocultural influences that, in this context, were sometimes experienced as limiting rather than supportive (Mehta & Fine, 2019; Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Eslamdoost, King & Tajeddin, 2019; Widodo, Fang & Elyas, 2020; Nazari et al., 2024). Within this dynamic, teachers' general perceptions revealed that

many felt suspended between the role of learner and that of a recognised professional. Wenger's (1998) idea of legitimate peripheral participation was evident in how they described working to earn acceptance in the teaching community while simultaneously relying on more experienced colleagues for guidance. Even as they appreciated providing for students' futures and considered teaching as socially valuable work, trivial classroom moments, like a linguistic error or pause in response to a query, were prone to break their feeling of legitimacy. From a Vygotskian frame, such instances broke the process of internalising professional practice, reasserting early-career teachers' susceptibility to socially evaluative settings (Alkhatnai, 2023; Nazari et al., 2024; Cojorn & Sonsupap, 2024).

Perceptions of competence and confidence emerged as decisive in shaping identity. Positive classroom experiences, where students engaged enthusiastically or a planned activity worked as intended, acted as moments of affirmation and supported the internalisation of effective strategies through mediated experience (Vygotsky, 1978). Such experiences reinforced Wenger's (1998) argument that identity is maintained by active contribution and recognition within the group. However, experiences that tested their preparedness, particularly in terms of linguistic accuracy or accommodating diverse learner needs, readily undermined their confidence. In the refugee learning context, variations in confidence held special personal significance due to the social and economic implications of knowledge and proficiency in English (Muchnik-Rozanov & Tsybulsky, 2019; Mansouri, 2021).

The refugee context intensified identity tensions but also strengthened commitment and moral purpose. Teachers' professional identities were not merely shaped by pedagogy but by lived experiences of displacement and collective responsibility.

Factors that Contribute to the Construction of Professional Identity among Refugee EFL Teachers at UNRWA University in Jordan

The analysis showed that the construction of professional identity among refugee EFL teachers at FESA, UNRWA University was supported by a constellation of interrelated factors, each of which worked to anchor teachers more firmly within the profession while shaping their confidence and practice. In Wenger's (1998) terms, these factors functioned as pathways into fuller participation in the community of practice, and in Vygotsky's (1978) framework, they acted as mediating experiences enabling teachers to develop new capabilities within supportive social contexts. Participants' accounts revealed that professional growth was rarely the product of a single influence but emerged through the combined effects of collaborative engagement, mentorship, authentic teaching practice, reflective activity, access to shared tools, and affirming feedback.

Joint work with colleagues was one of the most commonly mentioned sources of development. Teachers recounted how informal conversation and collaborative planning helped them to compare experiences, problem-solve difficulties, and gain corroboration of their ideas. These interactions provided an example of Wenger's (1998) concept of mutual engagement, as the teachers were not merely sharing information but instead constructing one another's future career paths. The process also exemplified Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on learning as socially mediated since the conversation aided the formation of higher-order pedagogical thought. By sharing their experiences, colleagues also became one another's sounding board as well as source of inspiration, an effect repeated in research that

associates collegial collaboration with early career resilience and greater agency (Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Nazari et al., 2024; Rinne et al., 2023).

Mentorship provided a more structured alternative of this social support, with experienced colleagues delivering scaffolding that extended beyond lesson planning into classroom management strategies and emotional support. Wenger's (1998) idea of legitimate peripheral participation seemed especially central here, as teachers entered on the periphery, observing and imitating more experienced practitioners and then gradually taking on more responsibility. Mentors in Vygotskian terms worked within the teachers' zones of proximal development, furnishing tasks and challenges that pulled but were within reach. Such support did more than convey skill as it ratified teachers' senses of belonging and legitimacy and supplemented research that finds mentorship confirms and develops competence and commitment in the first years of teaching (Nilsson & Cederqvist, 2025; Mansouri, 2021; Henderson, 2023).

Findings in Relation to Refugee EFL Teachers' Strategic Engagement in Identity Construction

The discussion showed that the refugee EFL instructors of FESA, UNRWA University viewed identity building not as an involuntary result of experience but as an active and dynamic process where they participated in selective strategies for solidifying their identity as professionals. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) perspective of identity formation through engagement within a community of practice and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of socially constructed development, it became evident that the participants voluntarily accepted reflective practice, peer collaborative action, and proactive adoption of feedback as resources for navigating the experiences of their fledgling years of teaching. These strategies, though unique in their implementation, interwove in affirming competence, constructing confidence, and cultivating belonging within the community of teaching (Mehta & Fine, 2019; Henderson, 2023; Rinne et al., 2023).

Reflective practice emerged as a deliberate means for participants to analyse, adapt, and refine their teaching approaches in light of classroom realities. Teachers described reviewing their lesson outcomes, identifying patterns in student responses, and modifying their techniques accordingly. This process is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) idea of self-regulation through mediated action, where teachers used their past experiences to guide their current work. It is also in line with Wenger's (1998) idea of discursive practice, where talking about one's actions helps solidify one's identity. By adjusting instructional pacing, experimenting with varied explanations, and documenting changes, participants demonstrated a commitment to self-improvement that reinforced their professional standing. Such reflective adaptation is echoed in studies emphasising the role of critical self-review in shaping adaptive teacher identities (Nilsson & Cederqvist, 2025; Yelbay & Balbay, 2021; Johnson & Golombek, 2020).

Collaboration with peers was another central feature of identity construction, functioning both as a source of pedagogical innovation and as a pathway to mutual recognition within the community of practice. By watching peers, exchanging resources, and co-planning of lessons, the participants broadened their repertoire of strategies and became confident in their professional strengths. Mutual participation as advanced by Wenger (1998) also characterized these messages where users took on the dual role of learners and contributors.

Vygotsky's (1978) definition of peers as "more knowledgeable others" also found an echo, as teachers reflected on how seeing other approaches motivated them to make direct changes in their own classrooms.

The reciprocal nature of these relationships meant that feedback and encouragement flowed in both directions, supporting findings in the literature that collegial exchange can sustain motivation and accelerate the internalisation of effective practice (Mansouri, 2021; Rinne et al., 2023).

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. The findings are based on a small sample size, which may limit their generalizability. Additionally, the study focused on EFL refugee teachers at UNRWA University, and the findings may not fully capture the experiences of teachers in other contexts. Finally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases and inaccuracies. Future research could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples, incorporating additional data collection methods (e.g., classroom observations), and exploring teacher identity construction in diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

Implications

Practical Implications

- Establish structured mentorship programs
- Promote collaborative professional learning communities
- Integrate reflective practice into institutional PD
- Provide emotional and psychosocial support

Theoretical Implications

This study extends teacher identity theory by highlighting contextual identity construction within refugee higher education settings and reinforcing sociocultural perspectives.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, several areas for future research are recommended. This study explored the construction of English language teacher identity among refugee teachers at FESA, UNRWA University. However, further research could investigate the identity construction process in diverse cultural and institutional contexts to provide a broader perspective on the phenomenon.

Future studies could also examine the role of mentorship programs in shaping teacher identity, focusing on how interactions with experienced educators influence novice teachers' sense of professional self. Additionally, researchers could explore the impact of socio-cultural factors, such as gender and societal perceptions of teachers, on the identity construction process.

Another area for future research is the longitudinal investigation of teacher identity development. Studies that track teachers' identity construction over an extended period could provide valuable insights into how professional identities evolve throughout their careers. Moreover, researchers could explore the use of digital tools, such as e-portfolios or

online reflective journals, as alternative methods for documenting and analyzing teacher identity construction.

Finally, further research could investigate the integration of reflective practices into teacher training programs, evaluating their impact on teachers' professional development and classroom performance. Future studies could also explore the relationship between teachers' identity construction and their teaching effectiveness, focusing on how a keen sense of professional identity translates into improved teaching practices and student outcomes.

By addressing these recommendations, universities, teacher training programs, and researchers can contribute to the development of effective strategies for fostering the professional identities of refugee EFL teachers. These initiatives will not only enhance teachers' professional growth but also positively impact the quality of English language education.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that refugee EFL teachers' professional identity at UNRWA University is dynamic, negotiated, and deeply embedded in sociocultural realities. Identity develops through the interplay of personal agency and social participation. Recognizing these processes is essential for designing responsive professional development and supportive institutional policies in refugee education contexts.

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