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A Bourdieusian analysis of the educational field and professional identity of EFL teachers

Educational
field and
professional
identity

A hermeneutic phenomenological analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – Informed by the Bourdieusian construct of the social field, the purpose of this paper is to explore how different aspects of the educational field and the sub-field of English language teaching in Iran influence diverse components of the professional identity of high school EFL teachers. To this aim, the impact of the power hierarchization structure, distribution of capitals and field autonomy, as important aspects of the social field theory, is investigated in relation to Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity construction.

Design/methodology/approach – Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research method was adopted to analyze the data obtained through the semi-structured interviews and reflexive journals from 15 Iranian EFL teachers at high schools.

Findings – The hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of the data yielded to the extraction of one global, three organizing and six basic themes. The global theme was the educational field and professional identity. The resulting organizing themes were: first, autonomous field and teachers' commitment; second, asymmetric power relation and teachers' autonomy; and, finally, cultural capital and teachers' motivation. This study revealed how the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the power relations between the field of education and power influenced the professional identity of EFL teachers.

Research limitations/implications – This dynamic representation of the inherent complexities of the educational context contributes to a more profound understanding of the role of the micro and macro contextual factors in formulating teachers' professional identity. The implications of this study are further explained.

Originality/value – Hereby, the authors declare that all the procedures of data collection and analysis have been just done by the researchers.

Keywords Professional identity, Autonomous field, Bourdieusian, Social field theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The paradigm shift from the structural and cognitive orientations to the socio-cultural frameworks in teacher education has enriched the discourse on teachers' professional identity, which is a practical construct for analyzing their pedagogical practices in diverse contexts. In the realm of human science, professional identity is defined with reference to the dominant discourses of essentialism and constructivism as two competing perspectives with distinct epistemological and ontological assumptions regarding human essence (Kerby, 1991; Gayton, 2016; Shim, 2014). Informed by the platonic notion of the ideal types, the Cartesian concept of universal rationality and a plethora of theories from other scholars, essentialists maintain that an individual's identity has a coherent core, despite the constant changes in her physical, psychological and social states. Essentialists' realization of teachers' professional identity is based on the principal that the pre-defined characteristics, called substances, constitute the core of their professional identity irrespective of time and space. Conversely, in social constructivists' (Vygotsky, 1978; Norton, 2014) account, identity is defined as the coherent narrative of one's life which is constructed and reconstructed in relation to a wide range of external and internal factors across time and space.



According to constructivists (Norton, 2014; Sachs, 2005), teachers' professional identity defined as their understanding of their roles and commitments toward different aspects of their teaching practice can be transformed as the result of the psychological and socio-cultural factors. In line with the principals of social constructivism, this study considers professional identity as a dynamic and multifaceted construct including different aspects such as autonomy, commitment, authenticity, reflectivity, self-efficacy, etc., and investigates it in relation to the Bourdieusian construct of the social field, encompassing the sub-field of the education in Iran. In practice, Bourdieusian field analysis makes a key contribution to both the theory and methodology of cultural sociology. The adoption of sociological constructs for analyzing different aspects of identity in the English language teaching context has been the focus of scholars in the field of education. In this respect, the social identity theory was used by Varghese *et al.* (2005) to theorize teachers' professional identity in regard to the in-group and out-group dichotomy among English teachers. Likewise, the dialogical identity was employed by Akkerman and Meijer (2011) to reveal how teachers' professional identity construction is formulated as the dialogical relations among different components of their professional identity. Regarding the application of the field theory, Hardy (2012) explored the ways that the field of power influenced the field of education by indicating how teachers' choice and implementation of curriculum were related to the expectation of policy which was generated by the central government. Furthermore, Park *et al.* (2016) investigated the influence of teaching context on the formulation of their teaching habitus. Nonetheless, to the best of our knowledge, no study investigated the professional identity construction of teachers in relation to the field of education based on Bourdieusian theory of social field.

Bourdieu (1990) defines social field as the structured system of social positions in which agents compete for access to and control over specific types of resources. In this respect, the field of education in Iran and the sub-field of EFL include teachers, students, employees and administrators as the stakeholders competing for economic capital, prestige (symbolic capital), network of mutual relationships (social capital) and scientific achievements (cultural capital). Bourdieu (1990) illustrates social contexts as the dynamic entities with dialectic interrelationships among agent's habitus, rules of the field and the volume of the available capital. Informed by the principals of the social field theory, we analyzed how the different aspects of the educational field and the sub-field of English language teaching in Iran influenced diverse components of the professional identity of EFL teachers at high schools. In this regard, the impact of the distribution of capitals, the power hierarchization structure and field autonomy, as important aspects of the social field theory, was investigated in relation to Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity construction. In contrast to the prior studies that investigated specific aspects of educational context in isolation and in relation to teachers' professional identity, in this research, a multiplicity of interrelated contextual variables is taken into account to provide a dynamic representation of the EFL teachers' experiences in the educational field. Considering these points, the present study seeks to address the following research question:

RQ1. From the Bourdieusian perspective how does the field of education in Iran influence the professional identity construction of EFL teachers?

Teachers' professional identity

Professional identity is a dynamic and multi-dimensional construct that has been explored from diverse standpoints. According to Gayton (2016), professional identity involves the intricate interrelations among personal, professional and situational aspects of teachers' lives. Based on this conceptualization, a teacher with extensive subject matter knowledge but lack of commitment to the students' needs or destabilized emotional state is not treated

as a professional teacher. Furthermore, Beijjaard *et al.* (2000) define professional identity as a dynamic construct including the combination of teachers' subject matter knowledge, didactical knowledge and pedagogical expertise. Based on post-structuralists' approaches to identity, Kerby (1991) illustrates this construct as an ongoing process with three dimensions of the perceived present (who am I as a professional); anticipated future (who would I desire to be?); and reconstructed past (how did I become a professional teacher). Generally, in discussing this concept, some relevant questions are as follows: How do they see themselves as EFL teachers? How do they (teachers) perceive their professional roles? And to what extent, are teachers committed to their assigned roles? (Nixon, 1996; Sachs, 2005). The present study informed by constructivists' and post-structuralists' line of thought considers identity as a dynamic and multi-dimensional construct that is constructed and reconstructed in relation to a wide range of psychological and socio-cultural variables.

Bourdieu's theory of the social field

To understand the intricacies of the social field theory, it is imperative to have a quick overview of the related conceptual tools from Bourdieu's toolbox. Bourdieu (1986) developed the concept of cultural capital and divided it into the three types of objectified (books), institutionalized (academic degrees) and embodied cultural capital (language proficiency). According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus is the embodiment of the rules and norms of the social space inculcated in the individuals' mind, and acts like a schema for perceptions, preferences, feelings and so forth. As another substantial construct, symbolic violence refers to an invisible mode of domination that prevents it from being recognized (Bourdieu, 1984). A social field according to Bourdieu (1986) is a setting that includes the individuals and their social positions. These positions in the field are the outcome of the interaction between the rules of the field, agents' habitus and their capital. Bourdieu adds that social field is a historical and social-spatial arena in which people struggle to accumulate their desirable resources.

To illustrate a field of relations, we refer to the high school as the sub-field of the educational system. Within this sub-field, teachers are among the main stakeholders struggling to accumulate different types of cultural capital, symbolic capital (social recognition), social capital (group membership) and economic capital (higher income). Each of the agents within this field has a habitus that might be congruent to the rules of the field or not. For instance, the teacher raised in a family with high volume of cultural and economic capital may have a habitus that impedes her intimate relationship with the students of the lower classes. Therefore, teachers are not limited by the rules of the educational field, because each of them carries the habitus which is their unconscious inclinations toward things and events, and if this acquired habitus does not conform to the rules of the field, the hysteresis effect happens leading to the innovative actions and gradual changes in the structure of the educational field (Bourdieu, 1990). Additionally, the analysis of the power hierarchization structure reveals which groups of the agents hold the power in their hands and determine the rules of the game as well as the value of the distributed capitals within the field. This hierarchization principal will be external, if the decisions are made by people other than the field members and this condition is indicative of an unstable field in which the norms and values are determined by other fields.

Power relations in the field of education

To understand the dynamism of the power relations within a field, the subsequent questions are relevant. What beliefs do teachers hold regarding the rules of their school as the sub-field of education? And how do such beliefs impact their understanding of their roles? Is there any conflict among teachers with different orientations regarding teaching practice? For instance, how is the form of competition between traditionalists vs post-method proponents, or new comers vs old timers (teachers)? Does the field of power (religious groups, political groups) exert influence on the field of education and how this impacts their functions as teachers?

Such questions provide the basis for relating the macro structures to the individual level of analysis. In this research, after reviewing the literature concerning the field of education and consulting with sociologists, the following aspects of the social field were studied in relation to the EFL teachers' professional identity (Figure 1).

Iranian educational field and Bourdieu's structural constructivism

The modern educational system and the so-called Western sciences in the form of compulsory education were established during Reza Shah Pahlavi, the ex-king of Iran. After the 1979 revolution, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, fundamental changes with diverse scientific and ideological goals happened in different stages in the educational field (Secretariat of the Higher Council of Education, 2006, p. 43). While the educational system in the previous regime was informed by Western ideology, the Islamic Government was inspired by the political Islam. The political parties including reformists, Islamic moderate conservatives, Islamic radical conservatives and secular groups (democrats, nationalists) were among the poles of power in the educational field in Iran, each trying to maximize their influence on this strategic field. It should be remarked that the secular groups in the subsequent years lost their position in the field of power; however, they still enjoy some degree of popularity among the teachers and students in the educational field.

Regarding the sub-field of English language teaching in Iranian schools, many changes took place in relation to the content and form of the text-books, the time devoted to English classes, teachers' needed qualifications, among others. For instance, the text-books were emptied of the Western icons. English was omitted from the first year of guidance school, and the time devoted to teaching English decreased to 2 h per week. The employment of the English native speaking teacher educators in the educational system was banned. In addition, EFL teachers were also required to pass difficult selection tests of Islamic moral codes to be qualified as the prospective EFL teachers (Figure 2).

Figure 1.
A proposed model
of the aspects of
educational field

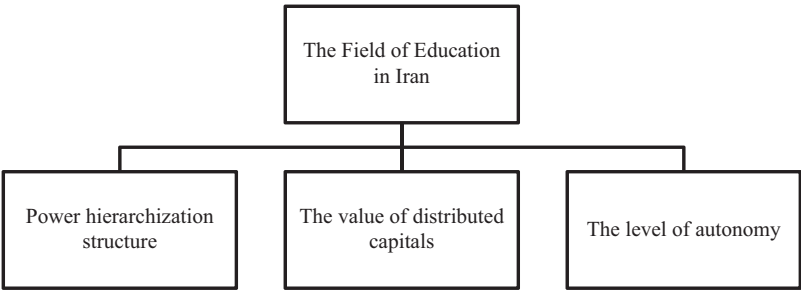
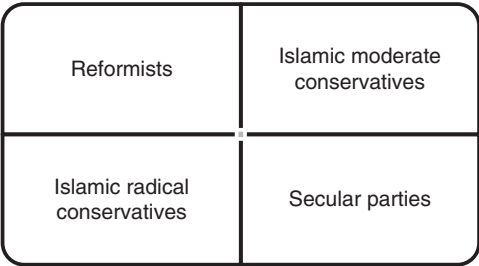


Figure 2.
A proposed model of
the poles of the
political powers
in the field of
education in Iran



Empirical studies

One of the valuable contributions of Bourdieu to sociology was the revealing of the intricate web of the power relations dominating polarized aspects of individuals' life by the help of his social field theory. According to Bourdieu (1984) in the French field of the education, the dominant cultural orientations were reproduced through the medium of the unfair rules in the most subtle ways by the holders of the cultural and economic capitals.

To critically evaluate the autonomy of the educational system, Luke (2008) adopted a constructivist grounded research and used a Bourdieusian interpretation of the pedagogy for literacy. The findings implied that many teachers unconsciously implemented the expectations of the field of power in their pedagogical practices with the students.

In a separate line of research, Hardy (2012), by means of Bourdieu's concepts of social field and habitus, explored the linkage between the fields of education and power; to this aim, she examined how teachers in the field of education were aligned with the expectations of policy for the curriculum prescribed by central government. The results showed that teachers' habitus appeared more likely to be formulated by the local field than by the national field, despite the governments' desire to shape the teaching practices from the top down.

In an effort to shed light on the power relations in the Iranian educational context, Mohammadi *et al.* (2016) studied whether there is congruence between the dominant rules and regulations of the educational field of Iran and the intended purposes defined by the ministry of education. To this aim, they used the Bourdieusian concepts of social field and cultural capital. The analysis of the official documents and interviews revealed that there is an evident mismatch between the designated goals and the existing rules of the field of education in Iran. To analyze the changes of teachers' instructional performances, Park *et al.* (2016) explored the life histories of two West African pre-service teachers pursuing their education in the USA through an ethnographic research. The life histories of these teachers indicated how their habitus noticed in their perception toward methodology and curriculum became contingent on the fields in which they were situated. Considering these empirical studies, and to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is no research concerning the analysis of the role of the field of education in the professional identity of the teachers from the Bourdieusian perspective.

Methodology

This study sought to generate a model of the role of the educational field of Iran in the professional identity construction of EFL teachers through the Bourdieusian-inspired theory of social field. As its focus was on the multi-dimensional and dynamic constructs of the educational field and professional identity, Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research method was employed to grasp the essence of the EFL teachers' experiences from the impact of the educational field on their professional identity. Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological analysis includes four main stages, and each of these stages has different sub-components. The first stage is turning to the nature of the lived experience including the sub-components of: first, orienting to the studied phenomena. This stage confirms that researchers should be well interested in the topic of the research. Second, formulating the phenomenological questions as another sub-component refers to the procedure of asking critical and insightful questions that contribute to the more profound understanding of the studied phenomena. Third, explicating assumptions and the pre-understandings. This step focuses on the time before conducting the analysis on the collected data and signals the fact that researchers should identify their biases about the topic of the research by means of different strategies to increase the validity of the obtained results.

The second main stage is pertinent to the existential investigation focusing on exploring the phenomenon by gathering the data through: using the researchers' personal experience as a starting point; tracing etymological sources pointing to the analysis of the roots of the theoretical constructs of the research; searching for the idiomatic phrases, confirming that researchers should find constructive phrases from the related literature to more deeply articulate and understand participants' experiences from the topic of the study. Gaining and locating experiential descriptions from the participants and locating them in the literature, art, etc. is another important step that provides the needed data for the phenomenological analysis. Regarding the third main stage, the emphasis is on the process of phenomenological reflection. This stage includes: the revealing of the thematic aspects in the life-world descriptions of the participants; isolating thematic aspects that deepen the extracted themes; composing linguistic transformations; and gathering thematic descriptions from artistic sources such as novels, poems, articles to better understand the participants within the context; and identifying the essential themes. The last main stage of the analysis is the process of phenomenological writing involving: the attention to the speaking of language generated by the participants; varying the examples confirming the elaboration on the themes; and finally, writing the obtained results. Each of these main stages and the related sub-components are discussed in the procedures of data collection and data analysis.

Participants and settings

In phenomenological studies, understanding the structure of the participants' life-world experiences with the studied phenomenon is possible through holding interviews with a limited number of participants (Patton, 2002). To this aim, participants were selected through the procedure of criterion sampling, involving the selection of the cases that meet the predetermined criteria for selecting the participants of this study which were: their tendency to share their experiences of the research question with the researchers; their interest in the topic of investigation; the years of their teaching experience that should not be under 5. The subjects of the research were 15 participants including 8 male and 7 female EFL teachers. Additionally, the range of the participants' age was between 27 and 55 years old. Their degrees varied from BA to MA and PhD student degrees.

This study was conducted in the city of Sabzevar in Khorasan Razavi province, Iran. To establish rapport with the participants, and to obtain rich data in an intimate context, researchers asked them to propose their desired locations for holding interviews. Respectively, interviews were held in the schools, language institutes and at Hakim Sabzevari University.

Instruments

Interviews and reflexive journals

Achieving a shared understanding of the participants' subjective experiences with the studied phenomenon is the main goal of the phenomenological research, and to this aim, interviews are practical and flexible tools (Creswell, 2002). In this study, the interview questions were devised to extract the essence of teachers' understanding from their experience of their professional identity construction in relation to the educational field. To this aim, questions like "Are the available cultural capitals like certifications of in-service courses in your teaching context considered valuable by you and your colleagues?" and if not, "how this condition has changed your definition from your role as a teacher?" were asked from the participants.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, reflexive journals can be adopted to record and recollect participants' experiences through reflective and critical writing (Creswell, 2002). In order to gain the data with high content and construct validity, the

participants were asked to write freely about their experiences in relation to posed questions. Furthermore, some questions were planned based on the similar studies driven from the literature as well as the expert judgments in the fields of English language teaching, and sociology, e.g., how do you think that the interference of the political and religious fields in your school has influenced your perspective toward teaching? was one sample of these questions.

Procedure

In this study, the main stages of Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological method as well as its sub-components were taken as the guidelines for the collection and analysis of the data from the participants. After the selection of 15 EFL teachers based on the criterion sampling procedure, three 50-min interviews were conducted with each of them. All of the interviews were audio taped and then transcribed. The questions of these interviews were designed to illicit the first-hand experiential data regarding the impact of the micro and macro context of education on their professional identity. In these semi-structured interviews, the questions focusing on the relation between the characteristics of the participants' educational field such as distribution of different types of capitals, power hierarchization system and field autonomy were probed in relation to their professional identity. Then, interviews were listened to while reading the transcript. Information was highlighted on the transcripts during that read through. The main guiding questions asked during the interviews are presented in the following list.

Interview questions:

- (1) To what extent, do you think that the rules and regulations of your school are fair, and how do they impact your definition from your role as an EFL teacher?
- (2) To what extent, has the lack of economic income influenced your performance in the class and your conceptualization of your role as an EFL teacher?
- (3) Based on your experience as an EFL teacher, how much do you think the teachers are valued by the administrators in the ministry of education? How these evaluation systems impress their commitments to their job?
- (4) To what extent, have you experienced prejudice in the office regarding the economic and cultural factors? How has it impacted your relation with colleagues and students?
- (5) As an experienced EFL teacher, can you freely criticize the rules and the norms of your working context? If the answer is negative, has it influenced your commitments toward your job?

Understanding the structure of the participants' life-world experiences is imperative in phenomenological studies. Such experiences according to Van Manen (1990) are related to the lived space (spatiality) signaling the teachers' lived experience from their professional identity in relation to their teaching context, and lived body (corporeality) focusing on the teachers' situated emotions and cognitions of the changes of their professional identity in relation to the educational field, and lived human relation pertaining to their relationship with significant others (administrators, colleagues and students). In summary, the procedures of data collection and analysis were conducted according to Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological analysis based on the following stages.

Orienting to the studied phenomenon was the initial step of Van Manen's research method confirming that researchers should be interested in understanding the topic of the research and loss of orientation to it lowers the validity of the findings. In this regard,

researchers were interested in understanding the role of the educational context in constructing the professional identity of EFL teachers from the Bourdieusian perspective, and two of them had previously conducted similar studies. The second phase was about formulating the phenomenological questions, addressing the questions that may inspire investigators to reveal the essence of the studied phenomenon from their own perspective. In this stage, researchers asked themselves (not participants) insightful and challenging questions to comprehend different aspects of the educational field and professional identity. In the third step, to explicate the assumptions and pre-understandings, the researchers identified their pre-understandings and biases from the concepts of social field, habitus and professional identity and other related concepts through writing reflective journals and consulting with colleagues.

The second main stage of this research method was exploring the phenomenon through gathering data and included four different steps. The first step was using personal experience as the starting point. In this respect, researchers' professional and personal experiences with their own conceptualizations from the educational context gave an elementary understanding of the participants' accounts of professional identity and these experiences inspired them to more profoundly understand the feelings, emotions and cognitions of teachers from the changes in their professional identity resulting from contextual factors. In conformity with the second step which was tracing the etymological sources, the roots of the constructs of the social field, cultural capital and professional identity were studied to enrich the researchers' knowledge. The subsequent stage was about searching the idiomatic sources; to this goal, we searched for the applicative words, phrases and quotes related to the social field including the educational field, cultural capital, symbolic capital, etc., to widen their scope about the research. In the next step of obtaining the experiential descriptions from participants, effort was made to collect participants' first-hand experiences with the role of educational field in their professional identity through interviews and reflective journals. In this respect, Van Manen (1990) implies that we gather the most significant experiences of other people, because they provide us with the opportunity to become more experienced ourselves. The next step was locating experiential descriptions in the literature, art and so forth. To gain a profound understanding from teachers' identity construction, some of the articles and books related to professional identity and educational field were studied and their informative aspects were written for the subsequent use by the researchers.

The third main phase focused on the phenomenological reflection through conducting thematic analysis of the collected data. Phenomenological reflection facilitates the recognition of how a phenomenon is felt in our life-world experiences (Van Manen, 1990). The uncovering of the thematic aspects of life-world descriptions of the participants from phenomenon was the first sub-stage in which the identified themes provided focus, meaning and pointed to the lived experience of the teachers from the impact of educational field on their professional identity. The second step was isolating the thematic statements. The researchers listened to the interviews and read transcripts and searched for statements that were essential in revealing the participants' experience of their professional identity.

In the stage of composing linguistic transformation, creative expressions were developed for articulating themes to better represent their underlying meanings, the themes including, educational field and EFL teachers' professional identity and cultural capital and teachers' self-concept. Based on the fourth stage, the most essential themes were identified. Essential themes according to Van Manen (1990) were those that speak to the shared experience of the phenomenon and without them the phenomenon would be altered. In the stage of determining the essential themes, those talks and writings of the participants related to the themes of cultural capital and motivation and the other extracted themes were

chosen for more analysis. Considering the final stage of the phenomenological writing, as the first step, the interpretation must stay true to the linguistic style of the participants, in this regard, the researchers tried to take into account the linguistic orientation of the participants in their study. The next step was varying the examples. To this aim, researchers used a variety of examples from teachers' understanding of their professional identity changes in relation to the educational field. These examples are presented in the Result and discussion section. In the last stage of phenomenological writing, the participants' experiences were translated into shared themes by thematic network analysis technique. This analysis includes: lowest-order premises noticeable in the text as the basic themes and categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract and analytic principles (organizing themes) and the global theme which is the most inclusive theme. It is worth mentioning that during the different stages of data collection and analysis, the Maxqda version (2015) software was used for the collection and analysis of the data. This software allowed the researcher to manage non-numerical data by coding, labeling categories of text and retrieving the labeled passages across all cases.

Results and discussion

The hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of the collected data resulted in one global, three organizing and six basic themes. The global theme was the educational field and teachers' professional identity. One of the organizing themes emerged from the data was the heteronomous educational field and teachers' commitment, including the two basic themes of: political field and commitment to self-growth; and economic field and commitment to students' needs. The second organizing theme was the asymmetric power relations and autonomy involving the basic themes of: marginalized teachers and critical voice; and curriculum autonomy. Finally, the third organizing theme referred to the cultural capital and motivation, with the basic themes of: available cultural capital and teaching motivation; and accrued cultural capital and negative self-concept (Figure 3).

The emerged global theme indicated that different aspects of the Iranian educational field played a key role in the professional identity construction of EFL teachers. In addition to the global theme, one of the organizing themes was the heteronomous educational field and teachers' commitment, including the two basic themes of: political field and commitment to self-growth, and economic field and commitment to students' needs.

The heteronomous educational field and teachers' commitment

Heteronomy of the field according to Bourdieu (1984) highlights the dependence of one field on other fields within the social space. This study revealed that the field of education in Iran suffered from very low autonomy in determining its rules, norms and values, and this condition negatively influenced teachers' professional identity. The following comment from one of the participants is in relation to the first organizing theme which was related to the intervention of the political field in the education:

The time devoted to English classes is really limited in comparison with Arabic language. Also, most of the contents of English text books are not authentic and you can't find any name from Britain, Australia and other English speaking countries in them. For teaching English, I have some problems too; I am not allowed to play original English songs in my classes, because it is considered as the propagation of Western culture. As far as I know, they do not appoint English teachers as administrators in the central office; because they think we are influenced by Western thought. In this context, I am not encouraged to focus on improving my professional knowledge, taking part in different classes. I feel that most of my personal and professional beliefs are totally ignored.

Such comments were frequently mentioned in the participants' talks and writings, indicating that most of them were disappointed with the interventions of the political

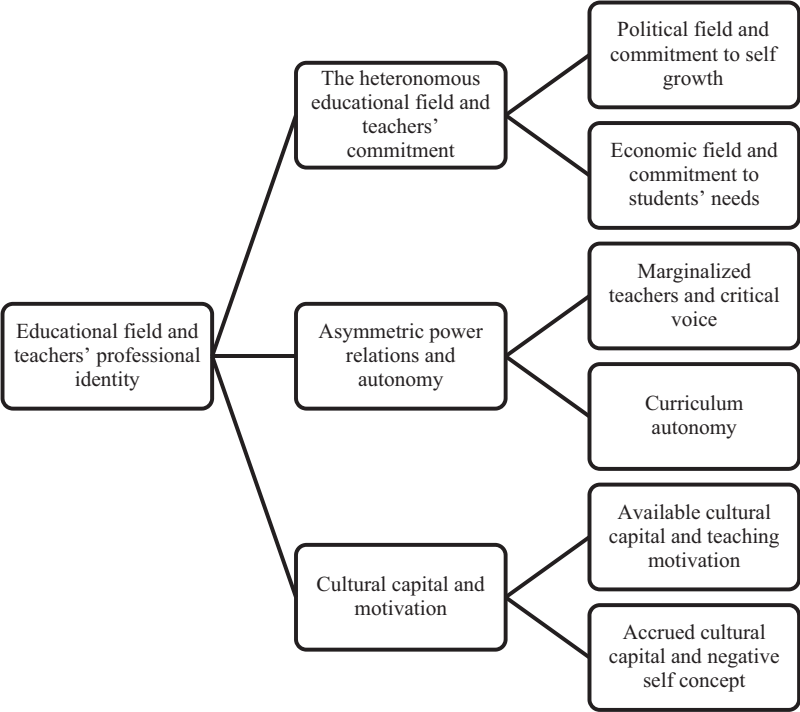


Figure 3.
The extracted global, organizing and basic themes of the educational field and professional identity

(anti-Western) ideology in the educational field and considered the imbalances in the field as the impediments to their professional trajectory. Regarding the first basic theme, another participant remarked:

With every political change, most of the administrators are replaced. Administrators mostly support teachers and employees with personal loyalty to them and prefer them to those with teaching experiences, articles and books. Honestly, I am not feeling valuable and I am not motivated to continue my education, or write a paper, because I feel whatever I do, I will not gain my desired position as I do not belong to any political groups.

Another basic theme was the economic field and teachers' commitment to the needs of the students. The findings showed that the financial pressures from the field of economy had a detrimental impact on the field of education in Iran leading to teachers' burn out and consequently their lack of commitment to their students' needs. The economic crisis resulting from the geopolitical condition of the Middle East and the disturbed relations with the Western powers led to the vulnerable educational field from different aspects. The findings implied that the economic resources generated within the educational field were so scarce that this giant organization was totally dependent on the governmental budget. The following quote from another teacher describes this condition:

If you compare our income with that of the employees from other governmental organizations, you will realize that we get paid less than most of them. Our health insurance does not cover many medications. Administrators do not bear with our objections from low salary. Most of the teachers face financial problems; they cannot dedicate their time and energy to provide the students with their needed support. Some of them try to find the rich students for holding private classes. In many cases, we are asked to be more lenient toward the students whose parents support the school financially.

The above-mentioned points indicated that the educational structure in Iran suffered from lack of autonomy, while according to Bourdieu (1986) a stable field should have some degree of autonomy from other fields to function efficiently. In this respect, the imposition of the political norms on the educational system is so debilitating that May (2012) warned us how the embeddedness of political orientations impacts language policy and distorts it.

The political interventions in the field of education in Iran were so inclusive that most of the administrators were selected based on their political orientations (anti-Western), rather than their professional expertise in educational affairs. To describe this issue, Maton (2005) adopted the concept of low positional autonomy to address the condition in which the administrators of a field were not appointed based on its internal logic; rather, they were selected according to the principals of the field of power. In such circumstances, most of the participants remarked that prior to the start of their teaching practice, they were interested in improving their qualities to promote their position in the school, but with the passage of time, the pressure they felt from the political and economic organizations disappointed them. In this regard, Luke (2008) revealed that the curriculum teachers adopted for teaching indirectly reproduced the political and cultural values of the government. Furthermore, Gerrard and Farrell's (2013) research implied that the intervention of the field of power in the educational field destabilized power relations and had debilitating effect on teachers' performance. Regarding this research, the findings showed that the field of education in Iran suffered anomic condition due to the interventions of the field of power, inequitable power relations and consequently, most of the teachers experienced a dramatic decrease in their commitments toward their self-growth and their students' needs.

Asymmetric power relations and teachers' autonomy

The second organizing theme was the asymmetric power relations and teachers' autonomy covering the basic themes of: marginalized teachers and critical voice, and institutional power and curriculum autonomy. Teachers' autonomy is an important aspect of the professional identity pointing to their capacity to exert control over different aspects of their pedagogical practices (Leander and Osborne, 2008). During the interviews, it was found that teachers' autonomy was threatened by the institutionally imposed discourses on their pedagogical performance. In this respect, the majority of the participants were concerned about issues such as: first, they had no role in determining the school principal and even the assistant principal. Second, the official instructions were mostly approved and implemented without consulting with teachers. Additionally, teachers were indirectly controlled through the yearly assessment only conducted by the principal of the high school not their students, and colleagues. Regarding these problems, one of the participants commented:

If I design a test based on the international standards and students get low grades from it, I am reprimanded by the principal, because he expects me to give higher grades to increase the students' acceptance rate. Also, criticizing the administrators about the way they distributed different positions among teachers and their behavior with them have had consequences to our job. Besides this, our English classes are very crowded and we can't decide about the number of students in them. In such a condition, I really feel powerless.

These sorts of comments accounted for the highly imbalanced power relations between the institutional structure representing the authoritarian structure of the educational field and teachers as its main stake holders. This imbalance led to the condition of heterodoxy in the schools, indicating that most of the teachers were opposed to the legitimate and coercive power that dominated them. Furthermore, most of the teachers were frustrated at the lack of

autonomy regarding the curriculum. The following is the comment from one of the teachers about this issue:

Recently, English text-books have been revised; however, they are not standard yet. Unfortunately, we have to follow the contents of these books step by step. In this condition, I have limited time to work on the authentic books like interchange, top notch, etc. In addition, if one of the students opposes the extra-curricular books that I offer my students, the principal supports him by confirming that I should stick to the text-book. Also, in writing the new versions of high school EFL books, we were not consulted. I sent three emails including my suggestions for modifying text-books, but I received no answer.

According to Foucault (1980), power can be exerted over the social agents in coercive, referent and legitimate form. In this study, the exercising of these forms of power was observed in the inequitable relation between EFL teachers and the educational context. Teachers were not included in most of the educational and administrative decisions. It might be due to the fact that the structure of the power in its most concrete form has a top down morphology in Iran. In the educational context, especially the sub-field of English language teaching, due to the authority of the administrators over the teachers, they (teachers) were frustrated. This condition led to the emergence of the insurgents within the educational field. Insurgents according to Bourdieu (1990) are those who opposed to the dominant rules of the educational field due to their deprivation from the power within that field. Another reason for the perceived lack of autonomy can be attributed to the autocratic institutional habitus instilled in the mind of Iranian teachers and students through the educational context. This habitus encouraged the authoritarian behaviors from the administrative structure and respected the submissiveness of the teachers. In this respect, Pelletier *et al.*'s (2002) experimental study showed that the more teachers perceived pressure from above (they have to comply with a curriculum, administrators and with performance standards) the less they were self-determined toward teaching. This problem was also noticed in relation to the curriculum development and its implementation within the educational field. The subordinate position of teachers in the educational field as well as the inequitable distribution of power signaled the administrators' lack of trust in teachers' capabilities. This condition ushered in the imposed curriculum that had to be followed by EFL teachers. Moreover, Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) narrative research implied that the institutional discourse which also includes the prescribed curriculum differently affected the professional identity of teachers.

Cultural capital and motivation

In any educational context, the competition over accruing higher volume of cultural capital is one of the major incentives in formulating the agents' social actions. In this research, it was observed that the Iranian educational system and the school as its sub-field did not appreciate the value of the possessed cultural capital by the EFL teachers, due to its ideological orientations, administrative inefficiency and hegemonic structure. Moreover, the cultural capital offered (available) and distributed in this field was not perceived valuable by the teachers, due to their low quality and lack of conformity with their expected standards. Such imbalances led to the severe decrease in teachers' motivation to improve their qualities to perform more efficiently in the respective educational field. In this light, based on the interviews and reflexive journals, most of the participants maintained that their teaching expertise, their published articles, TOEFL certificate and even their academic degree were not sufficiently appreciated by the administrative body. Considering the first basic theme, data showed that the offered and accessible capitals by the schools and the whole educational system were not motivating enough. The following quote from one of the teachers pointed to this issue:

I do not believe in the benefits of many in-services courses and workshops held for us. Most of these courses are not related to English language teaching. They are mostly religious and political

courses. Even the certificates of such classes have low impact on our salary. Therefore, we are not motivated to take part in these classes. In this disappointing condition, my passion for teaching and practicing new methods of teaching English has been diminished.

In addition to the low value of the available cultural capital in the educational field which inhibited the sense of competition among teachers, the educational field and its evaluation system were shown to be dysfunctional as it undervalued the possessed cultural capital of English language teachers. The following quote refers to these issues:

When I told the head of the office about my acceptance in the PhD program in another city, to my surprise, he disagreed with my transfer to that city. Later, I realized that getting a PhD has a very limited effect on my income, and doesn't provide considerable chance for me to improve in the organization. I wrote two ISI indexed articles, but, the central office did not consider any difference between ISI articles with other low indexed ones. In such a condition, I feel bad about myself and I know that I have no future in this organization. I intend to find a position in a university to get rid of this stifling condition.

In this regard, Malik and Mohamed (2014) maintained that cultural capital has an instrumental role in motivating teachers to improve their pedagogical performance. The distributed cultural capitals involved the certifications of different workshops, in-service classes, religious courses and so forth. According to the results, the low value of the offered cultural capital caused teachers to show limited inclination toward attaining them. Consequently, we witnessed teachers' sense of passivity toward gaining educational goals in Iranian schools. For these reasons, teachers felt that they were not considered as legitimate agents in the field, and their habitus did not match the ideological expectation of the educational field. As Bourdieu (1986) holds, if the power hierarchization principals in any social field are not in conformity with the goals and habitus of its agents, it will suffer instability. Regarding the concept of the cultural capital, this study is novel in the sense that no prior study has previously analyzed teachers' motivation with respect to the mechanism of the distribution of cultural capital within the educational system.

Conclusion

The goal of this Bourdeusian-inspired study was to generate a model from the dialectic relation between the field of education in Iran and EFL teachers' professional identity construction. More specifically, the focus of this study was on the sub-field of English language teaching at high schools. To this aim, Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research method was employed. The results included one global, three organizing and six basic themes. The global theme was the educational field and professional identity. This theme indicated that different aspects of the field of education widely influenced the professional identity construction of EFL teachers. These aspects included power hierarchization structure, autonomy of the field, distribution of cultural capital, among others. The first resulting organizing theme was heteronomous field and teachers' commitment. This theme revealed that the field of teacher education and language teaching in Iran was highly influenced by the political and economic fields. This dependence negatively influenced the internal logic of the educational system, and changed it to the dysfunctional structure that reproduced the unfair power relations rather than generating qualified cultural capital for students and teachers. This condition was detrimental to teacher' commitment toward their self-growth and students' needs, because of the pressure they experienced from the politically dominated context. Asymmetric power relations and teachers' autonomy was another extracted theme which accounted for the top down and hegemonic structure of the power in the educational field of Iran. In this topography of power, the political administrators supported by the field of the power were at the top of the pyramid and teachers were at the base of it. This inequitable power relation

imposed considerable restrictions on teachers' autonomy in their diverse decisions regarding curriculum development, test design and extra-curricular activities. The cultural capital and teachers' motivation was the last theme representing the fact that the distributed cultural capitals in the educational field were not qualified enough to motivate teachers for more competition with their colleagues. Most of the offered certificates, in-service courses and workshops were not in accordance with the needs and wants of EFL teachers. Therefore, they gradually lost their motivation for improving their teaching performance in the educational context. In a nutshell, this study revealed how the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the power relations between the field of education and power influenced the professional identity of EFL teachers. In this respect, this dynamic representation of the inherent complexities of the educational context contributes to a more profound understanding of the role of the micro and macro contextual factors in formulating teachers' professional identity.

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