

## **EFL teachers' professional identity development through potentially exploitable pedagogical activities**

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Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activities (PEPAs) help teachers problematize teaching and learning puzzles. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of PEPAs in EFL teachers' professional identity development. A PEPA program was run in which two EFL teachers participated. The program took around a year to familiarize the teachers with the theoretical and practical aspects of PEPAs. The teachers tried to do PEPAs to understand puzzles in their classes. During the program, interactionally oriented narratives written by the two EFL teachers were collected. The narratives were analyzed based on the Teachers' Professional Identity Scale developed by Karaolis and Philippou (2019), including five indicators: self-efficacy, professional commitment, task orientation, work motivation, and future perspective. The findings showed the development in the five indicators after the two EFL teachers participated in the PEPA program, indicating that PEPAs had a positive and constructive role in developing EFL teachers' professional identity. It can be concluded that PEPAs help the teachers develop their syllabuses based on practice-as-research. Through using PEPAs, EFL teachers are involved in a never-ending research process to understand and solve their teaching puzzles.

**Keywords:** Exploratory Practice; Interactionally Oriented Narratives; PEPA; Teachers' Professional Identity

### **1. Introduction**

It is now undeniable that language teachers' professional development has become one of the main interests of language teacher educators and researchers (Astuni, 2016; Behin, Esmaeili, & Assadollahi, 2018; Farrell, 2015; Mehrpour & Moghadam, 2018; Werbińska, 2016). Such an interest may be due to the fact that by investigating various aspects of language teachers' professional identity, language educators can develop new approaches to enhance the language teaching profession and performance (Abednia, 2012; Flores & Day, 2006). There have been significant discussions among researchers on proposing, finding, and implementing new ways to develop language teachers' professional identity. Thus, by exploring the new roles that language teachers can play in their classes, such as acting as researchers of

their classroom problems; language teacher educators can prepare the requirements for developing language teachers' professional identity.

Exploratory Practice (EP), defined by Hanks (2017) as a type of practitioner research that helps to integrate research and pedagogy, is an approach to understanding educational processes and performances. Allwright and Hanks (2009) point out that EP helps to avoid burnout in the process of teaching, learning, and researching. Although EP is similar to other practitioner research, such as action research and reflective practice, they have some differences. Firstly, as Allwright (1993) argues, EP tries to unify research and pedagogy while other forms of practitioner research focus on unifying research and practice. Secondly, EP emphasizes understanding rather than providing solutions (Hanks, 2017), meaning that its critical priority is to understand the issue well and prepare solutions. Thirdly, the importance of agency is emphasized in EP in which both teachers and learners are involved in researching, teaching, and learning problems. As a whole, EP can be defined as “a way of getting teaching and learning done so that the teachers and the learners simultaneously develop their understandings of what they are doing as learners and teachers” (Allwright, 2006, p. 15).

Language teachers' professional identity can be developed if teachers involve in different practitioner research types, including EP, action research, and reflective practice (Borg, 2017; Burns, 2009; Salmani Nodoushan, 2006, 2009). However, some critiques are inevitable while implementing action research and reflective practice to develop language teachers' professional identity. The central proposition of action research and reflective practice is the *discourse of improvement* (Hanks, 2017), asking language teachers to conduct teacher-research to improve their situation. This will ask language teachers to be positioned in a context where they will not receive complete and qualified knowledge to conduct research (Breen, 2006). However, EP's main proposition is the *discourse of understanding*, which can help language teachers who have already suffered from time limitation, lack of expertise, lack of resources, and even lack of research to understand the existing puzzles in their classrooms. More importantly, EP tries not to produce a research burden while language teachers collect data in their classrooms without intruding on teaching and learning (Hanks, 2017). It is highly essential to examine EP's effectiveness on language teachers' professional identity development through Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activities (PEPAs) tools.

PEPAs are defined as “in-class activities that use normal pedagogical practices for unpacking and understanding puzzles” (Dikilitaş & Bostancıoğlu, 2019, p. 48). One of the crucial characteristics of PEPAs is the co-constructed understanding of language teaching and learning issues, known as puzzles,

which matter for the language teachers and their learners. This characteristic of PEPAs changes data collection terminology to data generation, because both teachers and learners are involved (Hanks & Dikilitaş, 2018). That said, through applying different PEPAs (e.g., creating questionnaires, conducting interviews, doing observations, etc.), language teachers and learners will recognize how to use the tools for research and pedagogy, but not just for research; this means that PEPAs help them (1) to understand their teaching and learning puzzles, and (2) to solve them. However, the whole story has not been investigated to answer how PEPAs can affect language teacher's professional identity. This is the aim of the current study.

English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Iran. Iranian EFL teachers often have educational backgrounds in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), English literature, and English translation studies. Except for those studying TEFL, the others are not provided with enough instruction on research in EFL classrooms (Rahimi & Askari Bigdeli, 2016; Zand-Moghadam & Meihami, 2016). Moreover, in most EFL teacher education programs, the focus is on language teaching approaches and methods rather than on different types of practitioner research, including EP. There have been many investigations on action research and reflective practice on EFL teachers' professional identity in Iran (e.g., Salmani Nodoushan, 2010; Sarani & Najjar, 2012; Zolghadri & Tajeddin, 2013). However, there is a paucity of research on the effects of EP on EFL teachers' professional identity development, not only in Iran but also globally. As such, it is remarkably essential to investigate the effect of involving EFL teachers in EP on their professional identity development. The current study attempted to qualitatively analyze the effects of involving two Iranian EFL teachers in PEPAs on their professional identity development.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1. EFL teachers' professional identity**

Since identity development is a mutable and dynamic process (Sherry, 2008), it is not easy to define it. This is also true about the definition of teachers' professional identity in that there is almost no clear-cut and comprehensive description of identity to be used in defining professional identity (Richardson & Watt, 2018). Researchers need to consider a broad definition such as "professional identity is associated with the interactions that occur in a professional context" (Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019, p. 3). They can then make it more specific for their studies by definitions like the one proposed by Oslen and Buchanan (2017, p. 14), in which professional identity was defined as "an active process of phenomenological self-construction within the flow of daily activities, past and present." Consequently, it can be stated that teachers'

professional identity is a procedural concept contributing to the development of the teaching profession (Flores & Day, 2006). Hence, it can be stated that if teacher education programs put teachers in a professional arena in which teachers can negotiate their professional identities with different communities of practice, the result can be teachers' professional identity development.

EFL teachers' professional identity development has been discussed concerning different factors such as action research, reflection, preparation for practices in the classrooms, EFL teacher experiences, and contextual influences (Martin & Strom, 2016). Some of the investigations (e.g., Goodnough, 2010; Yuan & Burns, 2016) showed that doing action research can develop EFL teachers' professional identity; however, this would not be without complexities for the teachers to do action research. Studies (e.g., Galindo, 2007; Pennington & Brock, 2012) showed that teachers' reflection on their classroom performances could develop teachers' identity, including their professional identity. Moreover, some investigations (e.g., Haworth, 2008; Varghese, 2006) indicated that EFL teachers prepare themselves for classroom practices, and their practices can be influential in their professional identity development. Other studies (e.g., Johnson, 2006) investigated the role of sociocultural experiences and background of the EFL teachers in their professional identity development. The results showed that there is a direct relationship between EFL teacher experiences and their professional identity development. Finally, studies (e.g., Assaf, 2008; Haworth, 2008) showed that contextual factors such as language-related education policy and the school policy could impact EFL teachers' professional identity development.

Other concepts, such as teacher motivation and teacher emotion, are related to EFL teachers' professional identity development (Meihami, 2019a). It is believed that EFL teachers' rationale for choosing to teach as their career is directly related to their professional identity development (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Hence, it can be stated that EFL teachers who are motivated by their profession will probably engage more in professional activities which will lead to their professional identity development. Moreover, emotion is considered psychic energy that teachers, including EFL teachers, invest in their classrooms' practices and performances which are important for them (Harding & Pribram, 2004). The connection between EFL teachers' professional identity development and their emotion is positive (Day, 2018) in that EFL teachers attempt to address the emotional issues of their classrooms through using professional practices, including teaching methods. EFL teachers' understanding of their classrooms' emotional messages requires them to continue teaching in different contexts; if EFL teachers learn how to address emotional issues in their classrooms, they can develop their professional identities.

## 2.2. Exploratory practice in EFL teaching and learning

It is crucial to distinguish EP from other forms of practitioner research—such as action research, teacher research, and reflective practice—so that it will be possible to arrange the EFL teacher education program according to EP's principles. To begin with, EP is a form of practitioner research that, unlike action research, teacher research, and reflective practice, encompasses learners, teachers, teacher educators, curriculum designers, and anybody else who is involved in language teaching and learning (Hanks, 2017). However, other forms of practitioner research focus, more often than not, on teachers; while many of the investigations that follow action research are questing to identify the problems, the foremost priority of EP is to understand problems and then attempt to solve them thoroughly.

Nevertheless, as Hanks (2017) asserted, it is not a critique but a difference between EP and action research. Consequently, it can be said that the point of departure between EP and other forms of practitioner research is changing the positions, meaning that, for instance, EFL teachers will be in the positions of learners, teacher trainers, curriculum designers, and so forth. Finally, Hanks (2017, p. 29) nicely stated that all forms of practitioner research “are family members—carrying similar DNA, but decidedly individuals with distinct identities. EP shares much with both AR [action research] and RP [reflective practice], but each has its history, its own life, its future.”

In a series of case studies conducted by Dikilitaş and Hanks (2018) on teaching EP principles to English language teachers, the researchers reached critical results. They stated that the epistemological challenge was the teachers' challenges in distinguishing among different practitioner research forms. Moreover, the teachers had problems with how to produce PEPAs. In a series of case studies, Trotman (2018) found out that the teachers started with EP principles, yet they continued with action research principles. In another study, Ergünay (2018) sought to investigate EFL students' reading comprehension puzzles through EP in which Ergünay understood that the EFL students reading comprehension puzzles could be categorized into four main themes: (1) student-related, (2) text-related, (3) exam procedure-related, and (4) the other puzzles; the conclusion was that these lead to EFL students' inability to read for comprehension.

The literature on EP is somewhat limited because the concept is new in applied linguistics. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, there has been no study investigating the effects of EP principles and PEPAs on EFL teachers' professional identity development until now. Thus, it can be so important to focus on different aspects of EP to see whether it can potentially be used in EFL teacher education programs. As such, the results of the current study and the follow-ups will help to answer whether EP can be introduced to develop

EFL teachers' professional identity when addressed in EFL teacher education programs.

### **3. Method**

This study was a qualitative one in which narratives were collected and analyzed as the data for the study. Narrative inquiry is regarded as the primary vehicle to investigate teacher identity development (De Fina, 2015). It is so because teachers are “great” storytellers of their teaching profession. Since their teaching professions manifest their teaching activities, decisions, and performances, researchers can track down their identity development by analyzing their narratives (Meihami, 2019b). An interactionally oriented approach (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012) to narrative collection and analysis was used in the current study. The researcher used this approach since, different interactions were made between the teachers and the researcher during the PEPAs program. By so doing, the researcher tended to closely observe the process of professional identity construction.

#### **3.1. Participants and setting**

The participants of the current study were two EFL teachers who had MA degrees in TEFL. Ramila (pseudonym), who has taught as an EFL teacher for six years, is 28 years old. Amir Hafez (pseudonym) is 35 years old and has taught as an EFL teacher for 11 years. Both of the teachers taught English in different EFL institutes. The two teachers were informed about the purpose of this study. Moreover, the researcher let them know that they need to participate in a program called understanding PEPAs the aim of which was to develop their professional identity. Both of the teachers accepted the conditions to participate in the program.

A program called understanding PEPAs was established for the two teachers in which the researcher taught the fundamentals of PEPAs to the participants. The researcher used the adopted contents used by Dikilitaş and Hanks (2018) to help the two teachers become familiar with how to go through PEPAs in their classes. The program included five sessions each of which took about three hours of discussing different issues related to EP. Table 1 (below) shows the contents of the discussions during the five sessions.

As shown in Table 1, the researcher tried to design a program in which the two teachers were introduced to the EP's theoretical and practical issues. Thus the teachers could develop their PEPAs in their classrooms. By so doing, the two participants would be able to practice EP based on its theoretical conceptions. In the first session, the researcher let the teachers know about the purpose of the study, and he ensured them that their identity would be kept confidential. In this session, the theoretical and operational definitions of

EP were explained to the teachers. In the second session, the researcher discussed practitioner research types so that the two teachers could differentiate among them. The researcher attempted to show different examples of various types of practitioner research to the teachers. It was done through research papers, teacher notes, lectures, and classroom videos. In the third session, the two teachers developed their understandings of the concept of EP. From this session onwards, the two EFL teachers were asked to start their EP practices. They asserted that they had already had different puzzles to work on.

Table 1

*Contents Discussed During the PEPA Program*

Title of the workshops	Discussed contents	Date
Lets' start knowing EP (Session 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The aim of the current study</li> <li>• An introduction to EP.</li> <li>• Definitions and descriptions of EP</li> </ul>	• January 2019
The point of departure (Session 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explanation of different types of practitioner research, including action research, teacher research, reflective practice, and EP.</li> </ul>	• March 2019
* Understanding of <i>understanding</i> in EP (Session 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of understanding in EP.</li> <li>• Puzzle, Puzzling, Puzzlement</li> </ul>	• May 2019
How to develop PEPAs (1) (Session 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EP research design</li> <li>• Research questions</li> <li>• PEPAs activities</li> </ul>	• August 2019
How to develop PEPAs (2) (Session 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EP data collection</li> <li>• EP data analysis</li> <li>• Reporting and using the findings</li> </ul>	• November 2019

\* From this session, the two teachers started to address puzzles in their classes

Given that, Ramila stated that her puzzle was about her students' reading comprehension skills. Amir Hafez pointed out that the puzzle he wanted to address was EAP students' ability to use English for domain-specific communication. In the fourth session of the program, the two teachers learned how to design their EPs to address their puzzles appropriately. From

this session until the end of the study, the two teachers interacted with the researcher. In the fifth (or the final) session, the researcher created a teaching space where the two teachers learned different things about EP data collection and analysis and learned how to report EP and use its findings. It should be noted that the two teachers were in touch with the researcher via different types of social media to discuss their problems. That said, they could ask their questions and discuss their issues with the researcher whenever they wanted.

### **3.2. Data collection**

Teachers' narratives were used as the primary source of data collection. To that end, the two EFL teachers were asked to write their narratives from the first session that they participated in the PEPAs program. Ramila wrote and delivered seven narratives with a minimum length of 500 words and a maximum length of 1500 words. Amir Hafez, the other EFL teacher, wrote and delivered five narratives with a minimum length of 300 words and a maximum of 900 words. Such interactionally oriented narratives (De Fina, 2015) helped the researcher to track down the EFL teachers' professional identity development during the PEPA program. In the first session of the program, the researcher provided instruction for the teachers based on which they could write their narratives more appropriately. The coaching included how to develop the narratives in such a way as to have semantic coherence.

### **3.3. Data analysis and rigor of the study**

To analyze the narratives written by the two EFL teachers, the researcher used *a priori* codes adopted from the *Teachers' Professional Identity Scale* developed by Karaolis and Philippou (2019). This analytical framework contains five components: (a) self-efficacy, (b) professional commitment, (c) future perspective, (d) task orientation, and (e) work motivation.

- Self-efficacy refers to how teachers see their ability to do the teaching profession.
- Professional commitment refers to teachers' psychological ties with their teaching profession.
- Task orientation refers to the tasks which we expect from good teachers.
- Work motivation refers to the energy a teacher devotes to his/her teaching profession.
- Future perspective refers to how teachers see their teaching profession in the future.



To analyze the data, the researcher selected the parts of the narratives that were semantically revealing the five codes, meaning that the parts whose meaning could be associated with the mentioned codes. To do so, *MAXQDA 20* was used. The following example shows the whole process.

### Example 1

. . . . *EP is beneficial to understand doing research is not just for the university professors, but we can do research to understand the problems, what we call puzzles, of our classes . . . we can do it for ourselves, regardless of what others think . . . I hope I can use EP in my future classes in a way that my students can be involved in the process of EP . . .*

- Research is not just for the university professors . . . : this part of the narrative reveals *task orientation* in that the teacher thinks of EP as a way to be a good teacher.
- We can do it for ourselves: this part refers to *work motivation* in that it is related to the teacher's intrinsic motivation in doing EP.
- My future classes: this part, to some extent, refers to *future perspectives* since the teacher plans for the future of his classes.

The rigor of the qualitative research study is a crucial issue (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014). The dependability of the data analysis was addressed by asking another coder who had an MA degree in applied linguistics and studied teacher identity to codify the narratives based on *a priori* codes. To that end, 50% of the narratives were codified by another coder. The results showed high agreement between the two coders, which can be due to their practices on the framework. The credibility of the study was addressed through member checking. That said, the researcher discussed the confusing parts of the narratives with the participants and asked them to provide more explanations.

## 4. Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings based on the five indicators (i.e., self-efficacy, professional commitment, task orientation, work motivation, and future perspective) through which the EFL professional identity development was examined. Then, the related discussion will be made.

### 4.1. Self-efficacy: PEPAs develop teacher agency

The analysis of the narratives written by the two EFL teachers showed that their self-efficacy as a manifestation of their professional identity developed

after they participated in the program and conducted PEPAs in their classrooms to understand the already mentioned puzzles. The analysis of their narratives showed that they believed that they had become more efficacious after the program and when they designed and delivered their PEPAs. Extracts 1 and 2 are parts of Ramila's and Amir Hafez's narratives, respectively.

### **Extract 1**

. . . After the program and when I start to do PEPAs in my reading comprehension classes, I see myself more capable of understanding the reading comprehension puzzle and do something to solve them . . . after a while, two of my students told me, "do you change your method of teaching reading? Since we enjoy more."

### **Extract 2**

. . . I tried to be better every day . . . I wanted to understand the problems [puzzles] of my EAP students in EAP communication . . . The quest for understanding provided me with a good feeling of being a good teacher . . .

Extracts 1 and 2 show the development of the two EFL teachers' self-efficacy during the program and while they were busy conducting PEPAs. The participants' beliefs about the development of their capability in addressing the puzzles are in line with the self-efficacy definition proposed by Bandura (1997, p. 3) in that self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." One reason that can be mentioned about the development of self-efficacy after doing PEPAs is the concept of understanding that led the teachers to delve into the teaching profession to figure out the puzzles and try to solve them. This is because teachers obtain an arena to focus on the teaching conditions rather than the sole contents (Clarke & Fournillier, 2012).

Since EP and PEPAs helped the teachers to find their agency in their classes and to manage their puzzles, they could develop their self-efficacy. The development of their self-efficacy was due to the control they gained over their teaching (cf., Cabaroglu, 2014). When teachers find a place to exercise their agency, they will need to make choices that cultivate their (a) competencies, (b) self-efficacy and, (c) their professional identity (Bandura, 1993). Hence, it can be stated that by going through the PEPAs in their classes, the two EFL teachers needed to make choices to solve the puzzles, which required their problem-solving skills and their reflections. The whole process, then, develops their self-efficacy and, over all, their professional identity.

#### **4.2. Professional commitment: PEPAs develop ideal self**

Professional commitment is another indicator of teachers' professional identity development found in the EFL teachers' narratives. The findings indicated that their professional commitment had developed when they did their PEPAs in their classrooms. Given that, it can be claimed that PEPAs can lead to the EFL teachers' professional commitment development and, sequentially, their professional identity development.

##### **Extract 3**

. . . I think my participation in the PEPAs program helped me allocate much of my time to my teaching . . . .

##### **Extract 4**

. . . when I engaged in PEPAs in my classrooms to understand EAP students' puzzles in communication, I saw myself more as a full-time teacher who paid more attention to students' problems compared with the past time . . . .

Through narrative analysis, it was revealed that PEPAs helped the teachers to create their "ideal selves" (Higgins, 1987). The ideal self is what an individual, such as a teacher, wants to be in his/her domain. PEPAs can develop teachers' competencies in different respects so that they can be more in line with their ideal selves as teachers. Extracts 3 and 4 show that the teachers associated working in PEPA contexts with their perfect selves, meaning that their professional commitment, as they had in their ideal selves, developed during addressing PEPAs in their classrooms. Given that, such associations can build their professional satisfaction and identity (Gao & Xu, 2014).

In a similar vein, PEPAs helped the teachers to reach their teaching goals. This leads to teacher motivation, which, in turn, develops teachers' professional commitment. The PEPAs can develop teachers' approaches to fulfill different goals such as relational goals (i.e., to create a close rapport with students), mastery goals (i.e., to develop their professional knowledge about teaching), and ability-approach goals (i.e., to illustrate their abilities in teaching) (Bulter, 2007). Accomplishing these goals will help the teachers to develop their professional commitment.

According to Day (2002), professional commitment can be influenced by students' behavior. The narratives written by the two EFL teachers showed that after they addressed PEPAs in their classes to understand the puzzles and solve them, they understood the changes in how the teachers presented the course. For instance, as Ramila stated (extract 1), "after a while, two of my

students told me, “*do you change your method of teaching reading? Since we enjoy more;*” the students liked the way Ramila addressed the issue. Receiving such reactions from the students can develop teachers' professional commitment. As such, the development of professional commitment can boost EFL teachers' professional identity.

#### **4.3. Task orientation: PEPAs as a bridge for purposeful task orientation**

Task orientation has a relationship with teachers' professional identity in that the development in teachers' task orientation for teaching can develop teachers' professional identities (Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). The analysis of the teachers' narratives showed that participating in the program of PEPAs and going through PEPAs to solve the puzzles in their classrooms helped the two EFL teachers to develop their task orientation beliefs. Thus, it can be stated that PEPAs can develop teachers' professional identity through developing task orientation beliefs.

##### **Extract 5**

. . . PEPAs helped me consider other methods to address reading comprehension in my classes . . . [PEPAs] helped me understand the new methods of teaching reading comprehension and solves the puzzles by them . . . .

##### **Extract 6**

. . . I think after I used PEPAs in my classes, I found better ways to address the EAP students' communication skills . . . these ways, I think, let me be a better teacher in this regard . . . .

PEPAs establish a space where the teachers will act in different roles, including decision-makers and syllabus designers (Hanks, 2017). When teachers obtain such roles, they will need to orient their tasks to be conducive to removing the puzzles in their classrooms. Thus, the task orientation process can be associated with professional activities and behaviors (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), leading to teachers' professional identity development. Hence, PEPAs can be thought of as a bridge connecting task orientation to teachers' professional development.

The researcher believed that the two EFL teachers participating in this study understood the fundamentals of their puzzles in their classes to provide correct and sound reactions toward those puzzles, which led to their professional identity development. This is because PEPAs helped the two EFL teachers act purposefully based on understanding their classes' puzzles. This characteristic brought to the teachers helped them to orient their tasks

purposefully. As such, a purposeful task orientation can lead to teachers' professional identity development.

#### **4.4. Work motivation: PEPAs motivate teachers by developing their understanding**

The analysis of the narratives written by the teachers also showed that their internal and external motivation developed by participating in the program and when addressing their classroom puzzles by PEPAs. Thus, by knowing the relationship between teacher motivation and teacher professional identity (Richardson & Watt, 2006), it can be stated that PEPAs developed the EFL teachers' professional identity through developing their work motivation.

##### **Extract 7**

. . . when at the end of the program, I solved the puzzle of reading comprehension skills of my students, and when I saw they understood the changes, I became more energetic about my teaching profession . . .

##### **Extract 8**

. . . the more I understood my EAP students' problems; the more I was motivated to do something to remove the problems . . .

The main principle of EP, which can be found in PEPAs, is to emphasize understanding (Hanks & Dikilitaş, 2018). Understanding is motivating, and when teachers understand the puzzles in their classes, they can use their knowledge or search for new methods to solve their puzzles. Consequently, teachers' motivation will be developed which, in turn, develops teachers' professional identity.

On top of this, since EP is integrating research and pedagogy based on teachers' puzzles, it motivates the teachers to delve into the critical puzzles. To put it another way, the teachers' curiosity about the puzzles they faced led them to do their best to understand every aspect of the puzzles. Later on, their ability to solve the puzzles made them more motivated to continue the process. On the whole, it should be stated that PEPAs developed teachers' understanding of puzzles, their understanding developed their motivation, and their motivation developed their professional identity. It is so since teachers do professional activities and negotiations to solve their puzzles when they are motivated. Overall, they will be more motivated to work as teachers.

#### **4.5. Future perspectives: A future with PEPAs**

The findings regarding how EFL teachers saw their future teaching showed

that EP was considered a part of their teaching profession. The analysis of the EFL teachers' narratives showed that they would try to be more professional in addressing their classrooms' puzzles by EP and PEPAs.

#### **Extract 9**

. . . I will try to study more about EP and use PEPAs to understand, recognize, and solve puzzles . . .

#### **Extract 10**

. . . in the future, I involve students in the process of PEPAs. It will not be easy; but I continue my studies about EP and PEPAs . . .

It is believed that teachers' future perspectives about different issues are created based on significant experiences that they had in the past (Keltchermans, 2009). Based on the findings obtained from the analysis of the two EFL teachers' narratives, it can be stated that the EFL teachers had positive experiences with EP and PEPAs. Consequently, they would be motivated to create the future of their teaching based on these concepts, namely EP and PEPAs. Since considering EP and PEPAs in the future is not achievable without professional negotiation, performances, and activities, EFL teachers need to develop their professionalism regarding EP and PEPAs, which will lead to their professional identity development.

### **5. Conclusion**

In sum, this study aimed to investigate the role of PEPAs in EFL teachers' professional identity development. The findings showed that the five indexes associated with teachers' professional identity (including self-efficacy, professional commitment, task orientation, work motivation, and future perspective) had been developed after EFL teachers participated in the PEPAs program and addressed their classrooms' puzzles through PEPAs. Thus, it can be stated that PEPAs have a constructive role in developing EFL teachers' professional identity.

It can be concluded through the findings of the current study that EP, in general, and PEPAs, in particular, helped the EFL teachers to problematize their puzzles rather than the mere problem-solving issues (Hanks, 2017). The distinguishing feature between the two concepts is *understanding*. To problematize their classes' puzzles, EFL teachers need to meta-understand the puzzles (i.e., to understanding the understanding of puzzles), and this requires them to engage in professional activities that could ultimately develop their professional identity.

PEPAs are practice-as-research rather than research-as-practice (Hanks,

2017), meaning that PEPAs can be thought of as an inseparable part of any classroom syllabus. Given that, teachers, including EFL teachers, are in a constant and never-ending process of researching in which the whole teaching is the practice of researching. In such a condition, teachers construct and reconstruct their professional identities based on the dynamicity and phenomena of their classes.

As the descendant of EP, PEPAs have characteristics that allow them to create positive rapport between EFL teachers and their students and to create a space in which teachers understand the puzzles of their teaching and learning and prepare solutions for them (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Thus, if EFL teacher education programs help EFL teachers to learn and practice PEPAs in their classes, teachers can then benefit from the established rapport to precede teaching in different situations. Here, the trust between teachers and learners achieved through practicing PEPAs in classrooms will make teaching and learning environments more professional, leading to professional identity development of both teachers and learners.

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