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A Long Journey from Language Teaching Classroom to Teacher Education Classroom: Multiple Identities and Shifts of Second Language Teacher Educators

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Abstract

Teacher identity has been a topic of interest in many studies on teacher education. However, expertise and identity of teacher educators has taken less attention. Like any other professional identity, teacher educator identity goes through a process of construction with various aspects of their sub-identities. This paper focuses on the identity shifts of new second language teacher educators coming from language teaching by discussing their personal and professional motives that drove them to be teacher educator, and their sub-identities constructed through their experiences and education. Retrospective narratives and interviews with three new teacher educators were analyzed and discussed with an interpretivist approach with links to the literature. Some key findings suggested that those second language educators had a dominant researcher identity in any context, so their transition did not have a significant effect on their identity, but their practices were affected from their earlier experiences.

Key Words: Second language teacher educator, teacher identity, identity shifts

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Introduction

From the beginning of 21st century, a growing literature on teacher education draws attention to the importance of understanding and facilitating teacher identity development (Korthagen, 2004; Miller Marsh, 2002; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006). Teacher identity has been investigated in many various forms but from a sociolinguistic view, it can be seen both as a “product” of influences from society and an ongoing dynamic “process” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006). Teacher educators, who teach student-teachers, assist them in developing professional identities, design curriculum and contribute to the literature, can be considered as the core external influence on the quality of teacher education (Loughran, 2006). Therefore, research focus of teacher education has shifted on teacher educators over the past 15 years with an increasing attention on teacher educator identity developments, tensions and challenges they face during induction and transition from school teachers and teacher educators (Izadinia, 2014). Teaching and Teacher Education Journal devoted a special issue specific in 2005 to provide a catalyst for “What do teachers educators do and how is their work constructed?”, “What competences are germane to teaching about teaching?”, “What support is necessary in the professional development of teacher educators?”, and “What is the role of teacher educators as both consumers and producers of knowledge?” (Korthagen, Loughran & Lunenberg, 2005).

Although there is still not much known about the notion of teacher educator identity, it is assumed to have similar features of any other definitions of identity, which is a complex ever-changing process affected by personal and professional dimensions, sociocultural relationships and agency. (Dinkelman, 2011). Like student teachers who experience a period of identity change as they move from the protected environment of teacher education programs to initial teaching practice, teacher educators move from a safer area of teaching where they formed an identity in time to a new context where they teach teachers-to-be, during which there has to be some fluctuation. Wood and Borg (2010) used the metaphor “rocky road” to refer to these inner conflicts and tensions faced by teacher educators on their journey from school classroom to teacher education. Limited source of research can be found to address tensions and challenges teacher educators’ face, complexities involved in becoming a teacher educator, identities and sub-identities constructed in teacher educators and influences of various social and personal factors (for reviews of literature, see Izadinia, 2014; Swennen, Jones & Volman, 2010; Williams, Ritter & Bullock, 2012). These studies have demonstrated some common experiences for teacher educators as they move from school contexts to teacher education colleges or university (e.g. Murray, 2005; Smith, 2005; Olsen & Buchanan, 2017). After entering the profession, teacher educators ‘deconstruct’ their previous identities as school teachers and ‘reconstruct’ them in their new context of higher education (Khan, 2011). However, attempts to answer the question of how beginning teacher educators develop their professional identity are not enough to establish a theoretical framework or a common ground for the induction of new teacher educators. Besides, most of the research studying identity shifts of teacher educators involves self-studies of teacher educators transforming from primary-elementary school to teacher education programs carried out in a rare number of countries (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017).

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No research has been found with a specific focus on language teacher educators, who may encounter additional challenges of being a non-native speaker of the language they are specializing and teaching, dealing with multiple identities and previous beliefs of student teachers as learners of language and learners of teaching, and building a quality of knowledge base for students in such a field that there is no consensus about the best way to teach a second language. Therefore, this study explored the identity changes and tensions experienced by new second language teacher educators in the course of transition from being a second language teacher, resulting from individual and contextual factors.

2. Teacher Educator Identity

The notion of teacher educator is drawn from Ducharme (1993:6) as ‘those who hold tenure-line position in teacher preparation in higher education institutions, teach beginning and advanced studies in teacher education, and conduct research or engage in scholarly studies germane to teacher education’. In a broader sense, the European Commission defines teacher educators as “those who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers” (2013, p. 8). Swennen et al (2010) identified, in their literature review article, four available sub-identities teacher educators use as they construct or transit into their new professional identities. These are schoolteacher (or first-order teacher), teacher of teachers (second-order teacher), teacher in higher education setting (university educator), and researcher. The terms of first order and second order teacher were introduced by Murray and Male (2005), discussing that as they take new social roles, teacher educators create a new professional identity which mostly relies on their own first order practices in the early phases of transition (Murray & Male, 2005). Southworth (1995) describes this transition as the process of aligning situational and substantial self to achieve a professional identity. The situational self is constructed in social context and interactions with their community, while the substantial self is about beliefs about self which are concrete and difficult to change

Many various responsibilities are assigned to teacher educators. Koster, Korthagen, Wubbels and Hoornweg (1996) state eight general functions of teacher educators; facilitator of the learning process of the student teacher, encourager of reflective skills, developer of new curricula, gatekeeper, researcher, stimulator of professional development for school teachers, team-member, collaborator (external contacts). When it comes to language teacher educators, these functions increase as role model of good language use, activator of a new language and cultural identity in language teachers-to-be and reshaper of their pessimist language learning beliefs in a non-native context.

3. Being Language Teacher Educator in Turkey

Faculty of Education in Turkish universities consists of instructors, research assistants, assistant professors and with further grades, associate professors and professors. There are no nationally stated standards for teacher educators’ professional knowledge in Turkey, unlike the Netherlands (see Koster & Dengerink, 2001) and in the USA (ATE, 2008). However, one can officially teach in education faculties only after becoming an assistant professor with a PhD degree in the field, and there are two pathways of obtaining this title graduates of education faculties who want to pursue an academic career choose while making a living at the same time.

The first and common way is to assume a research assistant position in a university. Research assistantship is a transition position during which assistants pursue their Master’s and PhD degree, assist faculty members and carry out research and projects with a supervisor. Most of the research assistants in education faculties observe professors in classroom or substitute when necessary, but in general they do not have any autonomous teaching experience before they are assigned as assistant professors, which is also an issue worth investigating but out of the scope of this study.

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Another way of becoming a teacher educator which most language teacher educators follow is teaching at primary or secondary schools or assuming a language instructor position in English preparatory classes of universities and completing the PhD degree at the same time. One advantage of this position is that they come to teacher education profession with at least 5-6 years of teaching experience. Though, the arduous requirements of research and courses during Doctorate education and many hours of teaching concurrently overburden them. This arouse curiosity about what missions, identities and beliefs (based on the identity model in Korthagen, 2004) deep down mediate and encourage them to persist in becoming a teacher educator and how they change during this period, which this study seeks to understand.

4. Research Framework

As there is no research identified particularly on language teacher educators, this research draws mainly from the literature on development of teacher professional identity transited from primary / secondary classroom to teacher education (Murray, 2005; Dinkelman, 2011; Olsen & Buchanan, 2017; Korthagen, Loughran, & Lunenberg, 2005; Wood & Borg, 2010; Zeichner, 2005). The literature is mostly based on self-studies of teacher educators who experienced such transitions. For example, Wood and Borg (2010) explored patterns of experience between themselves and the other participants that helped to explain the transition process for new teacher educators and allowed to see their own experiences in new aspects. Dinkelman, Margolis and Sikkenga (2006), based on self-studies of two beginning teacher educators and semi-structured interviews, concluded that the process was not a simple exchange of their classroom teacher identities for a new teacher educator identity, but they reserved elements of the former in their struggle to construct the latter. With an interest in finding some common features in the development of identity among three language teacher educators who were in their first year in the program after getting a PhD degree and who had worked as a language instructor for a couple of years in a state university before that, this research was intended to investigate the following research questions;

1. What personal or professional reasons have led them to attain the profession of language teacher education?
2. What kind of tensions and challenges have language teacher educators been through during their first year in a teacher education program?
3. How have their earlier language teaching experiences affected their applications in teacher education classrooms and
4. In what aspects has this period of career change affected their perceptions about their selves, students, and communities they belong to?

This study stands within interpretivist approach based on qualitative data from retrospective narratives of the participants and in-depth unstructured interviews in order to gain insights into their motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences of language teacher educators which are time and context bound (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000). Interpretivists argue that we need to see the world through the eyes of the actors doing the acting. Thus, interpretivism research does not try to generalize and predict causes and effects, instead, aims to make sense of human behavior (Neuman, 2000; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The goal of the research is to contribute to the growing literature and be a stone in the building of theoretical framework for teacher educator identity.

5. Method and Data Sources

Interpretivist framework and research questions of the present study calls for a qualitative form of inquiry. A life history approach and narrative inquiry was adapted for the investigation in personal, historic and biographical contexts to deeply understand educators' identities and transitions because to understand a person, we need to know about that person (Cole &

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Knowles, 2000). Also, identity change is not a one night process, it happens in time, so it is important to follow these processes.

Epistemological stance of narrative inquiry is that stories help us make sense of random experience. As Bell (2002) explains, “we select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us”. These approaches have been widely used in the field on teacher education to see into the ways in which teachers’ narratives shape and inform their practice with the recent emphasis on reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Following these views, data was collected through written retrospective narratives and semi-structured in-depth interviews with the language teacher educators to develop an in-depth understanding of the educators’ transition from their previous careers to college and to explore issues of identity formation.

6. Participants

Three English language teacher educators who work as assistant professors in English language teaching (ELT) department at a state university in Turkey supplemented the data for the research. Their deep involvement is highly appreciated since they needed to be reflective and critical in their narratives and interviews. A brief background information is given about the participants before discussing the findings to make sense of the data collected.

Betty’s Story

Betty is a 30-year-old assistant professor at a state university, teaching language acquisition, advanced listening and speaking, scientific research methods, and English language teaching methodology courses at undergraduate level in ELT program. She grew up and studied at an Anatolian teacher high school in a very small town but she completed her bachelor’s degree in ELT from a highly prestigious university in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. After that, she was awarded Fulbright scholarship to do her master’s in Applied Linguistics in the USA. Then she began to work as a language instructor at that university teaching English to beginning level students at vocational schools and preparatory classes. While working as a language teacher, she pursued her PhD degree at the same university in Ankara. She describes this period as the most challenging days of her life because she had to travel from Amasya to Ankara (six hours of journey) every week to take her PhD courses for three years as well as teaching English for about 25-30 hours a week. Finally, after she got her PhD degree in the summer of 2016, she obtained her assistant professor title and took on the position of English language teacher educator in ELT program.

Merry’s Story

Merry also grew up and went to a high school in Amasya, then completed her ELT bachelor’s degree in Istanbul, the biggest city in Turkey. She started as an English language teacher at a primary school in a small town in Amasya. After working there for two years, feeling dissatisfied with the school environment, she began to pursue her master’s degree in Ankara. At the same time, she got an English language instructor position at Amasya University. She taught basic English at some faculties and English skills at preparatory classes for about 8 years. After one-year Fulbright scholarship for doctorate thesis research in the USA and completion of the PhD degree in Linguistics in Ankara by traveling back and forth every week like Betty, she became an assistant professor at the age of 35 in ELT program in the same university and now she is giving English literature, applied linguistics and literature and language teaching courses.

George’s Story

George also spent his childhood in Amasya but he has a different life history. After he graduated from ELT program in İstanbul, he got a master’s degree in business management and PhD degree in Translation Studies. Meanwhile, he worked as a language instructor at a private

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university in Istanbul. He taught English skill classes and some ESP courses. He comments that it was a big decision for him to move back to Amasya to get his assistant professor title after finishing his doctorate studies. After working as a language teacher for nearly 18 years, he became a teacher educator at the age of 43. Now he is teaching student teachers applied linguistics, advanced reading and translation courses in ELT program in Amasya.

7. Findings and Discussions

Since there has not been found any established theoretical framework on teacher educator identity, the findings were discussed based on the patterns of responses identified according to the research questions from an interpretivist approach. After written retrospective narratives were collected and analyzed, in-depth interviews were carried out to clarify and detail key points in their narratives.

Research Question 1: What personal or professional reasons have led them to attain the profession of language teacher education?

Results indicated that for each of these participants, the idea of becoming a teacher educator started from the early years of their university lives. They all enjoyed studying ELT but two important factors were identified as encouraging to become a teacher educator. First one is the impacts of their educators. Interviews also confirmed that they were all inspired by their educators, take them as a role model and try to be like them in the class.

Merry

I fell in love with linguistics in my university years, my courses and educators at the university play a big role in taking my attention, so I wanted to be a lecturer at the university.

Betty

I have always enjoyed studying English but I was very impressed by my educators at the university. They were so different from our language teachers at high school, they were more sharing, more loving and instead of teaching on the board, they were helping us learning to learn.

They supported me most in this process. I never forget, one day, one of my educators saw me with a KPSS (a general exam for the recruitment of teachers for state schools) book and laughed saying “are you kidding me”, she didn’t mean to discredit being a teacher but she knew I would be happier if I stayed at the university.

George

One of my educator, who was giving the translation course, was the person who prompted me to study in translation program. His care, love and deep knowledge... So, I really wanted to study with him more. He was also the one who guided me in my decision to return to Amasya.

Second factor is personal motivation to self-development. Merry and Betty stated that they always enjoyed learning and doing research. So, professional development is not a route for a target but a life-style for them, as they explained, no matter how challenging it might be. George’s motivation to struggle with the problems he faced in adapting the life in İstanbul, brought him many opportunities, unexpected success and satisfaction. He said, “*In time this motivation and satisfaction became a need for me, I wanted to do more for myself and I enjoyed dynamics of being a researcher such as working as a team with your colleagues, going to conferences, socialization, etc.*”.

These findings indicate that their teacher educator identity was firstly shaped as a “researcher” as for their substantial selves (Southworth, 1995) and the first seeds of their situational selves

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were created through “apprenticeship of observation”, a key term in teacher education introduced by Lortie (1975) describing the phenomenon whereby student teachers bring their own perceptions of teaching shaped by hours of observation and evaluation of their teachers to their teacher education classroom. For teacher educators, this means that their actions in teacher education classes develop through observations and evaluations formed during their own training instead of from high school. The next step for them was to align their situational and substantial selves which were in continuous change through their teaching practices and graduate studies (Wood & Borg, 2010).

Research Question 2: What kind of tensions and challenges have language teacher educators been through during their first year in a teacher education program?

As all three participants had decided to become a teacher educator in early years of their career, they were well-prepared for their new position. Still, they mentioned about some tensions and challenges they faced at the very beginning of the semester but they were easily solved or relieved.

Betty

The first day in my teacher education class was the day my dreams had come true. I was very enthusiastic but stressful. Although I have teaching experience for about 8 years, those students were going to be teachers and I had to be a good model for them as my educators were for me. Teaching student teachers means teaching generations for me. At first, I thought “what am I going to do know? they are not typical students, they are future teachers!! How will I make it?” But in a very short time this stress changed into relief and joy because I realized how happy I felt in that class, but I knew I had to be more careful about everything I would do.

George

Although I had teaching experience, I had to give some courses that I did not specialize due to our limited number. But with the support of my colleagues and mentors, it was not difficult to get prepared for these courses. Also, I had some administrative duties which I did not like but these duties helped me know more people from various disciplines and see different aspects in education.

Merry

I had to teach literature classes and it was really difficult for me. I only had some literature courses at university. So, I had to study a lot before the class and I had to make my own schedule and textbook. But in the class, I enjoyed a lot because the class was dynamic and students were active compared to my language classes.

In their interviews, they also stated that although they had some problems, it was such a relief and satisfaction for them that these problems were nothing when compared to problems they had during their language classes. While teaching English, they had to lead a class with unmotivated and silent students. No matter how hard they tried, they could not achieve to teach English to most students and they did not enjoy any hours of their classes. For example, Merry stated “I hate trying to teach English to those who don’t want to. I tend to have big expectations from my students, and this sometimes makes me impatient.” Some implications of “burnout” (“a reality of teaching”, Iwanicki, 1983, p. 27), can be observed in these statements. Their burnout as a language teacher can be manifested among the factors stimulating them for professional development. Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom, and Svensson, (2007) suggest that intention to career change can be related to a person’s positive or negative perception of change, contextual pressures to change and their career self-efficacy.

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Research Question 3: How have their earlier language teaching experiences affected their applications in teacher education classrooms?

Becoming a teacher educator is not a single transition from language teacher for the participants of this research. They had to get a PhD degree and engage in academic studies like articles, conference presentations, projects. As interpreted based on activity theory framework (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999), there are many factors affecting the way they do what they do; their social, historic and personal variables, artifacts, rules, their teaching contexts, students, etc. However, their teaching experiences have the most powerful effect during their swift transfer from language classroom to training courses particularly in their first years until they establish their professional identities.

Merry

I can talk about my own experiences as a language teacher and give examples from my own work life, which makes the lessons intelligible.

George

I had 15 years of teaching experience and I always felt its support during my training courses. I have become more and more comfortable in the class. It is important to look professional and impressive for candidate teachers to be effective and this period helped me to gain these characteristics.

Betty

Sometimes in the middle of the course, I stop and say, “you will need this instead of that” and take their attention to practical issues. I usually discuss with the students about how to use theoretical knowledge in real classroom and my experiences help me a lot to give opinions...

For all three participants, teaching experience was a benefit to make use of in their profession. First of all, they accepted that as the non-native speaker and teacher of English, this teaching period as well as doing research to get more competent and confident in English, which is crucial for their profession. They agreed that sharing their experiences with student teachers helps them provide models and illustrate theory in practice. In fact, being a researcher at the same time changed their practices as a teacher and promoted their professional development. As this is initial stages of transition from first-order to second order practice, the results support the discussion of Murray and Male (2005) that for their disciplinary knowledge, the teacher educator relies on their own knowledge and perception of the classroom at the early phases of teacher education. Their teaching content is mostly based on ‘personal values, beliefs and biographies’ (Murray & Male, 2005, p. 126). However, they will realize that teaching students about teaching requires more than first-order practice and the practices and discourses of both school teaching and teacher education need to be included.

Research Question 4: In what aspects has this period of career change affected their perceptions about their selves, students, and communities they belong to?

The last research question was about their overall interpretation of their experiences, their personal and professional developments and their socialization in this period of change. What is interesting about the findings that all participants identified this process not as a change but as a preparation. When they were asked about how they defined their selves as a language teacher and teacher educator, they all complained that they were demotivated and dissatisfied with their job as a language instructor because teaching English to unwilling students made their classes inefficient and boring. Although they were very enthusiastic and idealist at the beginning of their careers, with the demanding requirements of their graduate studies, they lost their care and enthusiasm. However, they remarked that their idealism and motivation increased as they started to teach student teachers. The problems they faced in language teaching encouraged them to be

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better teacher educators who will guide student teachers in their struggle to deal with these problems.

Merry defined herself as disciplined but tolerant and warm in her language classes while she was more disciplined and more demanding but more sharing and guiding towards student teachers. George saw himself only as a supporter for prep-class students in their future careers, but with ELT students he believed they had a stronger connection which might go on for a lifetime providing them with the support and guidance during their teaching careers. Betty said that she had never had a such a close relationship with her language students as she had with her student teachers.

When specifically focused on being a teacher educator of a foreign language, they were highly positive about that dealing with the language has made them more intercultural, colorful and understanding. Besides, it made it easier for them to find their place in the academic communities of the world. However, as a language instructor, they confirmed again that trying to teach English to students of various departments were not satisfactory for them and they always felt that it was not their actual job.

Talking about the effects and resulting changes of social context they were working on the way of their transition from language instruction to teacher education, they valued the great support of their families, friends, colleagues and administrators who always encouraged and provided emotional and physical support. Betty and Merry were working as a language instructor at the same university before becoming teacher educators. So, the community they work with has not change but their position in that community has changed. Both of them explained this change as they felt like finally they found their place in that society because as a language instructor they did not feel completely fit in the community of faculty members but now they have more common issue to share, they have colleagues who they can do research or projects together and give professional support to each other. They started to have a sense of belonging which they did not have any previously.

The situation is different for George. George left Istanbul to become a teacher educator in Amasya. His social context changed completely but he marked that his colleagues and his family helped him adapt to his new community and position. He enjoyed having new roles, new responsibilities and new friends whom he can collaborate with in research projects from various disciplines. He stated that his social context grew and bloomed up there because when he was an instructor he was only in contact and collaboration with other instructors and his educators in graduate programs. Though he experienced some problems in the period of his orientation, he was very content with his development through his new context.

Conclusion

The present study reported the findings from retrospective narratives and in-depth interviews with three second language teacher educators to understand their identity developments through the process of becoming a teacher educator. Although there is not any theoretical framework to ground the findings on, they were in consistence with the literature.

The process of becoming a teacher educator is described as a rocky road since they try to align their situational and substantial selves (Southworth, 1995; Wood & Borg, 2010). Substantial selves of the participants were constructed as early as in their university years, reshaped in the course of their Master's, PhD and teaching experiences. Their situational selves started from being a language learner, a candidate teacher, non-native teacher of English and a researcher simultaneously and as the ultimate goal teacher of teachers. These previous sub-identities structured their new identity as teacher educators. However, as interpreted from the findings, the most dominant identity they hold was being a researcher which is the closest to their substantial selves as being curious, goal- and development-oriented, innovative and critical. This interpretation show parallelism with the model suggested by Swennen et al (2010). In their

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circle model depicting sub-identities of teacher educators, at the center is first order teacher as the source of their knowledge about teaching and teachers as observed in their statements about their practices in teacher education. The second circle is their second order teacher identity as teacher educators. Murray and Male (2005, p.139) claims that it the transition from teachers to teachers of teachers takes two or three years to achieve a confident professional identity. The next one is teacher educator in higher education which is valid for future sub-identities and finally, the researcher identity is the one which covers the other sub-identities (Swennen et al, 2010). In the context of this study, for second language teacher educator, another sub-identity can be added as language learner which shaped their beliefs about language learning and their substantial identity, made them intercultural and developed in the creation of their professional identity. Also, before first order practice, they took some of their educators as role models and this apprenticeship of observation can be another sub-identity in deeper circles

A distinctive finding of the study was that those teacher educators indicated some symptoms of burnout towards language teaching and this stimulated them to focus on and expedite their professional development. Further studies, especially longitudinal research, are required to understand how this burnout affects their practices in teacher education, and to question if this is specific to language teacher educators.

Although many studies presented tensions and challenges of teacher educators in the transition process (e.g. Murray & Male, 2005; Wood & Borg, 2010; Zeichner, 2005; Khan, 2011), no significant tensions and challenges were identified in the present study. This may be because the participants saw this process as a preparation for their ultimate goal of becoming teacher educator and academician, so they were emotionally prepared for the requirements of their new position. The only common challenge among them was that they had to give some courses they did not specialized.

This paper has briefly examined various aspects of transition from English language instruction to teacher education by making links to the growing literature on teacher educator identity. The purpose of the study was not to question how teacher educators are educated and evaluated or to give any suggestion about how it should be, but the goal was to contribute to the deep understanding of identity formation among language teacher educators. This is crucial because they are the most important model in the construction of student teachers' identity just before they go to their own school context. So, as Zeichner (2005) argued in his self-study, "teacher educators need to think consciously about their role as teacher educators and engage in self-study and critique of their practice as they ask their students to do in their elementary and secondary school classrooms". Besides, considering the global position of English, more supporting literature is needed to describe teacher educator identity in particular to English language teaching profession from the aspects of multiculturalism, bilingualism, and status in the community.

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