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IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION: THE PHD EXPERIENCE OF TURKISH EFL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT. This autoethnographic qualitative case study examines the impact of PhD programs on the identity of Turkish EFL teachers. Involving six EFL instructors, including the researcher, the study analyses diaries and interviews to explore how doctoral studies influence their professional and personal identities. The findings reveal that the PhD journey enhances their roles as collaborative teachers, critical thinkers, and pedagogical experts in English Language Teaching. Doctoral studies foster self-reflective teaching skills and a deep sense of accomplishment. As teacher-researchers juggling dual roles, they enhance their problem-solving abilities and develop greater empathy towards students. This research has implications for EFL instructors considering PhDs, PhD programs, and the broader research community.

Keywords: Classroom practice, doctoral education, researcher identity, teacher agency, teacher identity.

RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD: LA EXPERIENCIA DOCTORAL DE DOCENTES TURCOS DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

RESUMEN. Este estudio de caso cualitativo autoetnográfico examina el impacto de los programas de doctorado en la identidad de docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) en Turquía. Con la participación de seis docentes de ILE, incluida la investigadora, el estudio analiza diarios y entrevistas para explorar cómo los estudios doctorales influyen en sus identidades profesionales y personales. Los resultados revelan que la experiencia del doctorado fortalece su papel como docentes colaborativos, pensadores críticos y expertos pedagógicos en la enseñanza del inglés. Los estudios doctorales fomentan habilidades de enseñanza autorreflexiva y un profundo sentido de realización. Como docentes-investigadores que asumen roles duales, mejoran su capacidad de resolución de problemas y desarrollan una mayor empatía hacia el alumnado. Esta investigación tiene implicaciones relevantes para docentes de EFL que estén considerando cursar un doctorado, para los programas doctorales y para la comunidad investigadora en general.

Palabras clave: práctica docente, formación doctoral, identidad investigadora, agencia docente, identidad docente.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many academics have grown interest in the idea of language teacher identity, and in recent years the discipline has seen an increase in the number of studies on teachers' professional identities (Weng et al. 567). From a sociocultural perspective, teacher identity is negotiated via experience rather than being fixed or enforced, despite the fact that it can be defined and understood in a variety of ways (Flores and Day; Maclean and White; Sachs) in which an individual makes interpretations about himself or herself in a particular setting (Gee and Clinton). As teachers' identity can be shaped in a professional context, it is considered an inseparable part of teacher education (Beauchamp and Thomas), one of the most important pathways of the teacher identity is shaped by doctoral education. Although a bulk of research has been conducted on teachers' professional identity development through teacher education, it is still unclear what role professional and personal experiences play in influencing the identity of Turkish EFL teachers and their classroom practices throughout their doctoral journey.

Given the significance of teacher identity, several studies have been conducted about the role of social and institutional settings on teachers' identity formation (Akkerman and Meijer; Beijaard et al.; Lim; Mantai; Varghese et al.). One strand of the research on teacher identity has highlighted the importance of the role of doctoral education on teacher identity (Choi et al. 90; Colbeck 9; Hall and Burns 49;

O'Leary 32). For instance, Choi et al. investigated PhD students' identity development and explored that students experience some challenges in managing "multiple identities (e.g., student, professional) and due to the perceived mismatch between students' idealized notion of a scholar and what is attainable for them" (90). Therefore, to improve language instruction, it is crucial to investigate the identities of language teachers (Beauchamp and Thomas 175). In other words, investigating this issue is important for understanding teacher identity's dynamic and evolving nature. However, in the Turkish context, very little research explores the role of PhD education on language teacher identity. Thus, this issue needs further investigation. By filling the gap in previous studies, this autoethnographic qualitative case study aims to comprehensively explore and understand the intricate relationship between Turkish EFL teachers' professional and personal experiences as well as how these factors collectively shape their teacher identity and impact EFL education in Turkey.

The outcomes of this study will provide new insights into the improvement of teaching methodologies and educational philosophies by exploring how EFL teachers attain teacher-researcher roles during their PhD journey. It is important to understand what professional and personal experiences shape EFL teachers' identities throughout this academic journey. Besides, in this study, the data obtained from Turkish EFL teachers through weekly diaries and semi-structured interviews will offer an in-depth analysis of the issue and contribute to the existing body of research on teacher identity.

It is hoped that the current study will provide beneficial implications for EFL teachers and teacher education programs. Investigating the experiences of EFL instructors during their PhD journey provides valuable insights into the challenges faced in the classroom and it offers practical solutions to overcome these problems for EFL instructors currently undertaking or planning to embark on a PhD. In addition, the results of this study will also encourage teacher education programs to highlight the value of pursuing a PhD degree among pre-service teachers for their lifelong learning. Given these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What are the roles of professional and personal experiences on Turkish EFL teachers' identity during their Ph.D. journey?

(2) How do research practices of Turkish EFL teachers during their Ph.D. journey affect their understanding and reflection of their teacher identity?

(3) How does the teacher-researcher role in PhD programs shape Turkish EFL teachers' teaching philosophy and classroom practices?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher identity

From the social cognitive perspective, which is another facet of this study as well, Berzonsky emphasized that "identity is understood as a cognitive structure or self-theory, serving as a personal framework for interpreting self-relevant information, addressing challenges, and making decisions" (55). He further proposed that, according to this perspective, the construction of identity involves a process in which individuals employ social-cognitive strategies to establish a sense of personal identity by reflecting on "the perspectives, aspirations, criteria, values, etc., that constitute the inner self" (64). When individuals articulate their identity, they draw on the social context in which they belong, and this surrounding context undergoes continual reproduction or transformation in alignment with prevailing social patterns (Van Dijk 160-161). In the educational context, the teacher identity that is shaped during the internship undergoes continuous evolution throughout their career path and persists beyond the initial steps in exercising the profession (Long et al.). Previous studies have shown that collaborative experience in social interaction enhances and shapes teachers' identities as researchers while also advancing their general personal growth (Meihami; Dimitrieska 783).

2.2. PhD journey

The idea of identity emerges as a complex, abstract, and somewhat mysterious phenomenon within the challenges of the doctoral experience (Cotterall 362). The doctorate is "as much about identity formation as it is about knowledge production" (Green and Powell 153). Similarly, Holley asserted that doctoral students construct an identity in harmony with their understanding of the community, facilitating both their cognitive and social activities (645). In the literature, doctoral candidates have been regarded as novice researchers (Girard et al.), and their aim has been mentioned as the development of research skills and gaining a researcher identity (Austin; Delamont and Atkinson). In the dynamic landscape of doctoral education, constructing a researcher identity requires engaging in various activities such as designing a proposal, learning new research skills, and publishing (Aitchison; Aitchison and Guerin; Aitchison et al.; Guerin; Kamler; Kamler and Thomson; Lee and Kamler; Mewburn and Thomson). Completing the requirements of dual roles improves their sense of efficacy and enables a positive professional identity (Bandura; Beauchamp and Thomas 175; Day; Day et al.). Doctoral candidates understand what it means to be a researcher in academia, on campus, or elsewhere from the academics they engage with, as previously indicated in the literature (e.g., Çakmak and Çelik; Aladegbaiye; Alves et al.). Such interaction and learning take place in formal and informal areas, including peer learning (Boud and Cohen; Boud and Lee 512).

2.3. Teachers as researchers

According to Zhang, Litson and Feldon, in their early stages as researchers, PhD students contribute hard work and patience to enhance their proficiency in research. The challenging dual roles of being a doctoral candidate and teacher, as highlighted in the literature (Grant et al.; Smith, et al. 601), often leads to difficulties in managing obligations. The teacher role can be frequently neglected (Byers et al.; Greer et al. 714) or teachers may show stronger affiliation with their researcher identity rather than teacher identity (Hillbrink and Jucks 117; Green and Powell 19). Throughout their PhD journey, teachers can acquire new skills and enhance their identity as critical thinkers (Pantić et al. 147). In addition, it enhances their knowledge in the field and improves their ability to think about their feelings, actions, and experiences and reflect on them (Zhang et al. 1254).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This autoethnographic qualitative case study discusses the role of professional and personal experiences of Turkish EFL teacher PhD candidates in their identity development and classroom practices. As highlighted by Cresswell, the qualitative research process involves the development of evolving questions and procedures, inductively analysing data, and progressing from specific to general themes (15). In line with Cresswell's emphasis on the qualitative research process, autoethnography represents a specific approach within qualitative research (118). It involves the researcher examining the group or culture to which they belong, employing methods such as evolving questions, inductive data analysis, and the progression from specific to general themes. The aim of this type of research is to move beyond the personal and to locate the individual experience within a wider context.

3.2. Participants and setting

Six Turkish EFL instructors with at least 3 years of teaching experience and pursuing a PhD in English Language Teaching participated in the study. The participants of the present study were PhD students who were also full-time EFL instructors in another higher education setting. To uphold ethical standards, participants were anonymized and referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5 while the researcher is denoted as R. Table 1 highlights that some participants share similar workplaces and academic experiences. For example, T1 and T2 work at University A and are also pursuing their PhDs at RED University, which suggests shared institutional and PhD requirements. Similarly, T3 and R both work at University B, while T3 and T5 are pursuing their PhDs at BLACK University, indicating overlaps in their academic journeys. All participants were informed about the interviews, and the final segment of the study, which could be conducted in either English or Turkish based on their

preference. A purposeful sampling technique that enables the selection of information-rich cases (Guest and Mitchell 41) was employed to address the research questions.

Table 1. Demographic information about participants.

Participants	Gender	Institution They are Currently Working at	Experience in Teaching	The University They are Pursuing their PhD
T1	Male	University A	3	RED University
T2	Female	University A	9+	RED University
T3	Female	University B	3	BLACK University
T4	Female	University B	5	GREEN University
T5	Female	University C	7	BLACK University
R	Female	University B	4	RED University

3.3. Data collection

The participants were asked to maintain weekly diaries for five weeks, corresponding to each week of their PhD program. The utilization of diaries by teachers is considered a potent resource for exploring emotions related to their teacher identities (Schutz et al.; Li, Jing and Cherly). The researcher provided them with guiding questions to focus on before writing, such as (1) What were the main accomplishments or progress you made in your PhD studies this week? (2) Reflect on the balance between your roles as a student and a teacher/researcher. How did you manage your time and energy this week? (3) Describe any meaningful interactions or collaborations with colleagues or fellow students that influenced your academic or teaching experiences. Furthermore, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same participants in the final phase of the study to gather in-depth information. The interview format chosen for this study was intentionally designed to allow flexibility in questioning, making it suitable for formal settings as well (Xerri 141).

3.4. Data analysis

The data were meticulously examined using thematic analysis, following the model suggested by Braun and Clarke (297), and facilitated through the utilization of MAXQDA. Participants shared their diaries with the researcher through Google Documents. The transcripts were carefully read multiple times to enhance familiarity with the data and obtain an overview of the most prominent themes. In this study, the units of analysis based on themes could encompass a phrase, a sentence, or several sentences. The outcomes were conveyed by highlighting emerging themes, and illustrative responses from the participants were used to offer additional insight into these themes. This study presents the recurring themes identified in all the diaries. The data were subjected to a re-examination by an independent researcher with expertise in data coding to guarantee inter-rater reliability in this phase of the

study. Using examples from the literature, a third of the data was demonstrated to the independent researcher during an online conference on how sample sentences reflect the underlying educational thinking categories. In addition, for ethical considerations, consent forms were obtained from the participants.

4. FINDINGS

Through the exploration of weekly diaries and interviews guided by specific questions, a total of eight themes emerged, collectively addressing the three distinct research questions as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Themes that emerge as a result of qualitative data analysis.

4.1. The roles of professional and personal experiences on Turkish EFL teachers' identity during the PhD journey

The analysis of participants' weekly diaries and interviews revealed three distinct themes highlighting the role of professional and personal experiences on teachers' identities throughout their PhD journey. All participants emphasized the positive role of their PhD experiences on their teacher identities. They mentioned that PhD experience has significantly enriched their evolving teacher identities. Under the first research question, three themes emerged: collaborative teacher, critical thinker, and pedagogical expert.

a. Collaborative teacher

All participants emphasized that, through their PhD journey and interactions with classmates and research experts, they developed a willingness to collaborate on both classroom and research practices. This collaborative mindset, developed during their interactions, continued to shape their journey, allowing them to embrace fresh perspectives throughout the process. This theme is explicitly displayed in the statements of T1 and T3 below:

> Excerpt 1
>
> "The conversations we had between classes were very useful for me this week. My PhD classmates are from different universities and have different backgrounds. The fact that each of them has done different types of research gives us the feeling

that we can get an expert opinion on every subject in environments where we talk collectively or drink coffee. We suggest new classroom activities and tools to each other. Also, sometimes we recommend some research topics." (T1)

Excerpt 2

"I consulted more experienced teachers on how to conduct academic writing classes. One of them recommended using Google Docs for in-class writing, allowing all students to view each other's work. This not only facilitated digital feedback but also eliminated the need for physical papers. It turned out to be a brilliant idea! Additionally, during our Educational Linguistics class, my classmates and I shared our personal experiences. I realized that they struggle with it as much as I do, which was a relief." (T3)

b. Critical thinker

The diaries written by the participants and the researcher herself demonstrate how their doctoral journeys' combination of personal and professional events assisted their growth as critical thinkers. They stated that having conversations with colleagues and teachers is essential to the development of their critical thinking abilities. Participants stated that they look at things critically as stated by R and T2:

Excerpt 3

"I found out that I enjoy looking at things critically. When we analyze a research paper with my classmates, I see that everyone has their style, whether it is supporting or questioning how the research was done. It is like getting into a discussion where you must really explain your ideas, and there is a strong talk about what you are saying and how you are saying it." (R)

Excerpt 4

"My curiosity has increased because of the PhD. Making significant life decisions for myself as well as for my career and studies seemed to benefit from critical thought and questioning. I pondered whether life is ultimate purpose was to be able to ask questions and have the will to seek out better solutions. During the PhD, I had many thought-provoking and inspirational conversations because of my new, more curious mind, and I felt like this was just the beginning." (T2)

c. Pedagogical expert

The results showed that the PhD students' courses helped them to acquire new ideas and trends in the field of ELT. Besides, they indicated that their field knowledge grew because of the lessons in the first semester of their PhD programs. According to the participants, the ability to identify theories behind observed phenomena in class served as a valuable resource for enhancing their teaching roles. They believed that

they mastered the field more theoretically, and it made them more aware of what they do in class. This was clearly stated in the diaries of T1 and R:

> Excerpt 5
>
> "Initially, I believed that there was little innovation happening in our department during my bachelor's and master's years. English language teaching seemed to be in a repetitive cycle. However, over time, I realized the value of revisiting and exploring the basics in greater depth. Gradually, I began to see myself developing expertise in the field."

> Excerpt 6
>
> "Reflecting on my journey, I found that revisiting foundational topics in second language acquisition during the first semester was beneficial. Drawing from my years of teaching experience, I applied theoretical knowledge more effectively in practice. Additionally, analyzing recent research journals allowed me to identify emerging trends in second language research. This process has significantly enriched my experience and understanding of the ELT field." (R)

4.2. The role of research practices on teacher identity

a. Self-reflective

Findings demonstrated that research practices encourage teachers to reflect on their existing practices and consider how new insights can enhance their teaching. Research practices, especially articles which students' deal with change their perspectives. Some examples from R and T5 are given below.

> Excerpt 7
>
> "Every week in my Second Language Acquisition class, I learn new things about how other teachers run their classrooms. We talk about why we choose to teach some things directly and others more indirectly. We read some articles about the implicit and explicit teaching. I used to think that teaching indirectly was always better, but now I see that there is nothing wrong with teaching things directly, especially for adults. My opinion about teaching grammar has changed a little bit." (R)

> Excerpt 8
>
> "I want to study written corrective feedback, and I read a lot of articles about this topic. Slowly I noticed that while I was giving feedback to my students I tended to focus on lower-order concerns but after reading one article about teacher feedback, I prefer to give more feedback on higher-order concerns because after giving more feedback in terms of higher-order concerns I realized that students' writing abilities and their essays improved in many ways." (T5)

b. Sense of accomplishment

Participants mentioned that their research practices helped them to feel more confident about themselves. Teachers mentioned that they integrate the insights gained during their doctoral studies into their classrooms and that they experience a profound sense of fulfilment.

> Excerpt 9
>
> "My students appreciate my education and often compliment me on it. I incorporate newly acquired strategies from my PhD coursework into my classroom, mentioning to my students that I learned these methods during my doctoral studies. Hearing some compliments from my students and the people around in this academic journey, I feel myself proud." (T4)

> Excerpt 10
>
> "I feel myself under pressure generally but at the end of all tasks, it was a big relief to say I finished! I am doing my tasks and I feel that this time I am applying the theories into practice. I feel more confident, and I trust myself more." (R)

4.3. Teacher-researcher role on classroom practices

a. Dual roles

According to participants' views, it is difficult to effectively manage two responsibilities and achieve the demanding requirements of a PhD. Participants stated that sometimes they neglect their homework as a PhD student or their in-class responsibilities. Among the participants, five instructors explicitly identified the teacher role as the most neglected in the data. Example statements from T1, T5 and R are given below.

> Excerpt 11
>
> "I neglected some of my not-so-urgent responsibilities, such as grading my students' essays. The balance of the week was on urgent tasks. Also, we had some relatives in our home, and it occurred to me that being a Turkish married woman is a hindrance to PhD because we are expected to make cake and serve people." (T1)

> Excerpt 12
>
> "This week needed a lot of written feedback on students' academic writing tasks. Also, I fell behind the academic pacing, so I needed to prepare more intense lesson content, which took a lot of time and energy. Also, it was the post-exam week, so students were a bit relaxed and distracted. This made the lessons more challenging. As a result, I didn't have time to find a research topic, which I should have found about 2 weeks ago." (T5)

Excerpt 13

"…balancing work life and student life is becoming more challenging each week compared to previous weeks. The tasks in the classes, which are accumulating and becoming more demanding as well as the daily tasks at my own school, can make the process more difficult. I can't find a time to plan my lessons before entering the classroom." (R)

b. Problem solving

Participants mentioned that their acquired researcher perspective and practices helped them to reconsider their classroom practices and pedagogical beliefs from a researcher perspective. Furthermore, the newly learned concepts in PhD helped them to improve their classroom practices as well. T2 and R mentioned their improved problem-solving skills with the sentences below. They mentioned that utilizing the knowledge and skills they acquired in one role to perform better in the other role.

Excerpt 14

"I am gathering my data through COCA nowadays, and the research area is highly related to the grammar points I teach. I detected some points where I had difficulty explaining to my students and I solved it. However, I can do it more easily from now on. Also, I had to conduct action research as a requirement for my PhD, and I implemented it in my classroom." (T2)

Excerpt 15

"We learned how to integrate AI tools in the lesson and also, I noticed that I could use these tools as a guide while assessing students writing skills, which is a good problem solver when having trouble with time management." (R)

c. Empathy

T5 and R noted that the combination of their institution's workload and responsibilities associated with their PhD studies sometimes posed challenges. As a result, they found themselves having a strong sense of empathy toward their students. When assigning new tasks, they approached it cautiously, opting for extended deadlines due to the dual considerations of task demands and their roles as teachers.

Excerpt 16

"I don't have time to read my students' writings this week due to the tasks I need to finish in my PhD class. This also happened last week. In such cases, I extend the deadlines, which is advantageous for my students and me. This way, I can allocate more time to go through the papers at my own pace, and I don't want my students to feel burdened like I do." (T5)

Excerpt 17

> "At the end of the semester, I found myself struggling with three term papers, and I considered that my students had some problems with their in-class presentations and were very inexperienced about it. My final tasks helped me remember my university years—the trouble with the deadlines. Therefore, I understand that my students need more time to handle their presentations, and I am flexible with the deadlines, just as I expect my teachers in PhD to be." (R)

5. DISCUSSION

This study was designed to investigate the intricate relationships between the professional and personal experiences of PhD candidates, with an emphasis on understanding how these experiences collectively shape their teacher identities and pedagogical approaches in the classroom. The study revealed that doing a PhD is a social and collaborative journey toward creating a teacher's identity, and candidates' prior experiences and aspirations for future greatly influence how they negotiate this path and understand their teacher identities as well.

5.1. What are the roles of professional and personal experiences of Turkish EFL teachers' identity during the PhD journey?

With respect to the first research question which focused on the roles of professional and personal experiences on Turkish EFL teachers' identity during their PhD journey, it was evident that participants have developed roles such as collaborative teacher, critical thinker and pedagogical expert. As stated in the participants' diaries and interviews, the support from peers and the opportunity to learn from each other increased their sense of belonging in the PhD environment. With the help of intellectual support, PhD candidates were able to enhance their methodological, analytical, and communication skills, contributing to overall professional development. As demonstrated by T1 and T3, there is a tendency for them to share in-class activities and engage in research discussions during coffee breaks, fostering the exchange of ideas. Through this collaborative strategy, colleagues had the opportunity to learn new perspectives from each other's teaching techniques and research methods. It can be asserted that this cooperative sharing not only influences and strengthens their researcher identities but also contributes to their overall personal development (Meihami; Dimitrieska 783). As stated in the studies cited above, doctoral candidates learn what it means to be a researcher in academia, on campus, or elsewhere from the academics they interact with. Such interaction and learning occur in formal and informal settings and various physical contexts (Çakmak and Çelik; Aladegbaiye et al.) especially with peer learning (Boud and Cohen; Boud and Lee 512). This finding contributes to our understanding of the teacher identity construction process by making it clear that out-of-class experiences can also influence teachers' professional development.

In the first semester of their doctoral studies, the participants mentioned significant improvement in their critical thinking abilities. This change showed that throughout the PhD journey there is a progression toward thinking and behaving like researchers as their identities evolve throughout the PhD journey. This transformative journey, resonating with the insights of Keefer signifies that "A novice researcher recognizes (s)he is no longer the same person who entered their program, a threshold is crossed and one's identity has shifted" (18). Engaging in professional environments empowers teachers to assume the roles of critical thinkers and change agents, thereby enhancing their professional teacher identity. Improved critical thinking skills enable them to adapt their actions to change and address any dissonance that may arise, either by accommodating or taking actions against change (Pantić et al. 147).

Based on the findings from the statements of T1 and R, students were able to learn about new concepts and developments in the field of English language teaching. The lessons they took during their first semester of PhD programs had increased their field knowledge which is a requirement for professional identity development and for building researcher identity as stated by Inouye and McAlpine (16). It can be said that PhD education helped participants to develop professionally and offered teachers the resources, skills and experiences to keep up with recent methods and techniques in their own field, which is also the key for quality in education, for organizational change and educational reforms. As called for by the literature (e.g., De Costa et al.; Leow et al.), participants were able to connect theory to practice in their teaching and research practices.

5.2. How do research practices of Turkish EFL teachers during their PhD journey affect their understanding and reflection on their teacher identity?

The second research question aimed to find out the role of PhD candidates' research practices in relation to their teacher identity. Results showed that EFL teachers became more self-reflective in their classroom practices and completing or dealing with research practices that enable them to feel self- accomplishment in their teacher identity. From the statements of T5 and R, research practices in their PhD programs offered doctoral students the opportunity to reflect on their preferred classroom methodologies and gain new insights. This transformation in their identities can be attributed to an improved ability to think like researchers and increased self-confidence. This transformation is in line with the theory put forward by Wisker and Robinson, according to which candidates move from a sensation of "being stuck" to a place of ownership, confidence and autonomy in their research endeavours (302). This finding is also significant because reading articles helped participants to reflect on their teaching in terms of their beliefs about grammar teaching (e.g., statements of R) and feedback provision (e.g., statements of T5). Reflection is not only about looking back at past thoughts and practices but also about anticipating or looking ahead to future practices or ways of thinking. This forward-looking aspect of reflection has the potential to inform teacher

development. Reflection is a valuable tool for teachers to thoroughly understand and explore their teaching identities and research practices. Having a PhD helped the participants to reflect on their beliefs about teaching and classroom practices. Apart from this, it can be concluded that research practices during doctoral studies are more about imprinting a researcher-self than they are about just acquiring the necessary research instruments and methodologies. This is because a PhD provides teachers with the opportunity to not only acquire research skills but also to internalize a researcher identity, shaping their approach to educational research. Research practices enable them to construct educational knowledge that extends beyond their classrooms (Okolie et al. 1244).

Another transformation in the PhD candidate's identity is clearly stated in their diaries, referring to the sense of accomplishment they felt after engaging in research practices. It can be said that early attempts at research and tasks undertaken by the teachers helped them experience a sense of fulfilment, as is evident in the statements of T4 and R. This study provides evidence that external validation and approval (e.g., approval of students to her doctoral education in the example statements of T4 influences internal validation which is critical in the candidate's experience and for a positive researcher experience, as stated by Yang and Yuan (97). In contrast to findings in previous literature that underscored the necessity of publishing to gain a teacher-researcher identity (Aitchison; Aitchison and Guerin; Aitchison et al.; Guerin; Kamler; Kamler and Thomson; Lee and Kamler; Mewburn and Thomson), the result of this study shows that researcher identity might take root in the early stages of a doctoral program, shaping their teacher identity as well.

5.3. How does the teacher-researcher role in PhD programs shape Turkish EFL teachers' teaching philosophy and classroom practices?

The third question was about teacher-researcher role on Turkish EFL teachers' classroom practices. While not directly connected to PhD research, teaching is a practice that many PhD candidates take on. It is an intricate endeavour dealing with the two roles of doctoral candidate and teacher. It requires managing the obligations and expectations of both roles efficiently. Therefore, as is stated by the participants, one role can be neglected during the process. In the data, contrary to the research results of Hillbrink and Jucks, the most prominent challenge identified in the data was the difficulty in managing dual roles (117), with the teacher role being the most neglected, consistent with prior research (Byers et al.; Greer et al. 714).

Pursuing a PhD is already a difficult path one to take and balancing a multiple role-driven life is harder as suggested by Smith, et al. (601). The academic requirements of a PhD posed challenges in keeping pace, allocating time for providing feedback as teachers, and managing stress levels. Therefore, it can be said that the imposition of research practices for teachers creates more of a burden for teachers as the teaching profession itself is challenging enough (Billot et al. 441; Bao, Fang and Hu). Strong personal agency is essential for PhD students to succeed in taking on numerous tasks, but it is also critical for them to finish their degrees

while preserving good physical and mental health. As noted by Bandura, people must integrate all agentic qualities and forms of agency to function well and achieve the intended results in the academic environments (133). The present study diverged from Choi et al.'s findings, as it revealed that participants' professional identity also experienced positive impacts through the management of multiple roles (90). Nonetheless, participants in the study pointed out the adverse effects of PhD requirements on their teacher identity.

The workload and the requirements of the PhD program boosted participants' empathy towards their students regarding deadlines and the assignments of homework. This might be regarded as a negative role of PhD journey on teachers' actual classroom practices (Dann et al. 1180). Although instructors' empathy for their pupils is generally seen as constructive and advantageous for creating relationships that are supportive, there may be situations in which having too much empathy could have unfavourable effects such as problems with the classroom management, bias in evaluation and boundary issues (Aldrup et al. 1180-1185).

A problem-posing perspective and solution-oriented awareness were influential in participants' teaching practices, requiring reflection on the class experience. Participants mentioned that they improved their problem-solving skills. With the help of the teacher-researcher role, they noted that they can detect problems, determine underlying reasons (as stated by T2 and R), and implement effective solutions when equipped with problem-solving skills. The ability to solve problems is crucial for teacher-researchers who use research and newly acquired information to enhance the quality of their teaching. This includes addressing student learning gaps, refining instructional tactics, and adapting to new educational technologies. This finding is also related to the sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy of teachers (Symeonidis and Schratz). The persistence and effort that teachers invest when facing difficulties improve their sense of efficacy and enable a positive professional identity (Bandura 136).

6. CONCLUSION

The study delves into the transforming path of Turkish EFL teachers who are pursuing a doctorate. It illuminates the ways in which their identities are shaped by their professional and personal experiences, research methods, and the integration of the teacher- researcher role. The PhD participants' increased critical thinking skills, expanded field knowledge and shared experiences all contributed to their development as collaborative educators, critical thinkers, and pedagogical experts. Research practices were crucial in encouraging introspection and a feeling of achievement. In the classroom, participants developed a greater capacity for self-reflection, and the research advances our knowledge of the attitudes and methods of instruction. Additionally, the early research endeavours fostered a sense of accomplishment, which contradicted earlier studies that stressed the importance of publication for the development of a teacher-researcher identity. However, combining the duties of researcher and instructor presented difficulties, especially when handling

two roles at once. The study found that teachers had trouble juggling their roles as doctoral candidates and educators, affecting their teaching. The demands and stress of the PhD program led to increased empathy towards their students.

This study creates opportunities for more investigation into the complexities of juggling several responsibilities and the long-term effects of PhD journey on teacher identity. However, this study has limitations, despite the insightful information that was obtained, the results may not be as applicable in other educational contexts due to the study's concentration on Turkish EFL teachers in a particular environment. Additionally, some participants are connected to identical PhD programs and institutions. This similarity may restrict the explanation of the range of experiences and difficulties they face while pursuing their PhDs. The results were derived from the first semester experiences of PhD candidates, suggesting the potential for future research that comprehensively covers the entire journey.

7. IMPLICATIONS

Institutions should think about offering support systems to assist instructors for juggling the demands of their PhD programs with their teaching duties better. Incorporating reflective practices and opening gates for research practices into teacher preparation programs can also help teachers become more self-aware and flexible. It is crucial to create opportunities and provide support for teachers who are PhD candidates to engage in their research within their institutions, facilitating the integration of theory into practice. The outcomes of this study aim to provide valuable insights and practical solutions for EFL instructors engaged in or considering a PhD journey.

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