Research Article

Professional Identity Trajectories of Rural EFL Teachers and Their Developmental Needs

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Abstract: This paper presents a qualitative multiple case study on the professional identity development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers working at rural schools. The participants of the study as individual cases were five middle school teachers from four different geographical regions of Turkey. The research foci of the study were: (1) understanding the professional identity development experiences of rural EFL teachers, (2) examining the influence of teaching context on the professional identities of rural EFL teachers, and (3) identifying the needs of rural EFL teachers. The data collection tools were field visits, metaphor elicitation tasks, and semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study revealed the challenges of teaching English in a rural school, the training needs of rural EFL teachers, and the impact of teaching contexts on the practices of rural teachers. The findings of the study can be used to design preparation courses for pre-service EFL teachers and to plan professional development activities for rural EFL teachers.

Köy Okullarında Görev Yapan İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Mesleki Kimlik Yörüngeleri ve Gelişim İhtiyaçları

Özet: Bu nitel durum çalışması, Türkiye' deki kırsal devlet okullarında görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin mesleki kimlik oluşum süreçlerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmanın katılımcıları, Türkiye'nin dört coğrafi bölgesindeki beş farklı kırsal okulda ortaokul seviyesinde çalışan beş İngilizce öğretmenidir. Çalışmanın temel araştırma odakları şunlardır: (1) Kırsal okullarda görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin meslek kimliği oluşum deneyimlerini anlamak, (2) öğretim bağlamının kırsal okullarda görev yapan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin meslek kimliği oluşum sürecine olan etkisini incelemek ve (3) katılımcıların mesleki gelişimleri için ihtiyaç duydukları hizmet öncesi hazırlık derslerini ve hizmet içi eğitim programlarını belirlemek. Veri toplama araçları, saha gözlemleri, metafor çıkarım etkinliği ve yarı-yapılandırılmış yüz yüze görüşmelerden oluşmaktadır. Veri analizi prosedürleri, verinin kelimesi kelimesine çözümlenmesi, kodlama ve sınıflandırma aşamalarını içermektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, kırsal okullarda İngilizce öğretimi ile ilgili zorluklara dair bilgiler sağlayarak, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kırsal okullarda mesleki gelişimlerini devam ettirebilmek için ihtiyaç duydukları hazırlık ve destek süreçlerine yönelik bulgular ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, öğretim bağlamının, kırsal öğretmenlerin öğretim pratikleri üzerinde etkili olduğu görülmüştür. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kırsal okullarda İngilizce öğretimi ve mesleki gelişim süreçleri için ihtiyaç duydukları hizmet öncesi hazırlık ve hizmet-içi eğitimleri tasarlamak ve planlamak için kullanılabilir.

1. Introduction

Rural education is important in all teaching contexts for both developed and developing countries, even though all countries may have idiosyncratic educational issues (UNESCO, 2015). Similar regional disparities in education are present in many countries; however, developed countries are engaged in policies and seek new techniques to increase the quality of rural education while developing and underdeveloped countries struggle to provide and sustain equal educational opportunities for rural children (Aksoy, 2008). Teachers in rural areas experience serious challenges in unprivileged teaching contexts (Cobbold, 2006). The interaction and interconnection between teachers and their teaching contexts play a crucial role in shaping teacher cognition, teaching practices, and professional development (Hofstadler et al., 2021; Larenas et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2021). Teachers' professional identity is under the influence of teaching contexts since *the school* is identified as a pedagogical construct (Flores & Day, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003; Reagan et al., 2019). With the emergence of place-based paradigms in teacher education, there has been a growing interest in the practice and research in rural teacher identity development (Aulia & Batubara, 2021).

Teacher professional identity has come to the forefront for teacher educators to get in-depth insights into what teachers experience and feel while becoming teachers (Bullough, 2005; Flores & Day, 2006; Hammerness et al., 2005; Olsen, 2008). Teachers form multiple selves influenced strongly by their experiences, what is expected from them, the world around them, their own plans, and teaching contexts (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005). In that sense, teacher professional identity development is an "ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and reinterpretation of one's own values and experiences" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). Teachers enter the classroom with their own values, beliefs, and attitudes that can be either in harmony or tension (Pleasance, 2016). Similarly, second language teacher identity reflects educational, pedagogical, and professional aspects of being a teacher (Bailey et al., 2001; Williams, 2007) and, more importantly, "the imprints of the complex interconnectedness of one's cumulative life experiences as a human being" (Bukor, 2015, p.323). A very recent study conducted by Aliakbari and Sadeghi (2022) is very crucial to understand the relation between teachers' perceptions of their commitment to professional practices and how their perceptions were influenced by teaching experience. They found that teachers' professional identities are influenced by contextual factors, macro-political policies, and teaching experiences.

Rural schools harbor their own challenges related to limited access to professional development opportunities and isolation (Hardwick-Franco, 2019). In a similar vein, PISA (2015) indicates that rural teachers experience difficulties in finding in-house professional development activities because of the unwillingness of invited specialists and teacher trainers. While urban teachers have various opportunities for professional development, rural teachers have few chances because of spatial, motivational, and financial reasons (Rossi & Sirna, 2008). Le Roux and Möller (2003) mentioned that nearly all teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers "to teach children like themselves and perpetuate practices which have historically benefited middle-class children" (p. 185). In many countries, teaching in unprivileged schools is mostly neglected by teacher education programs, and hence pre-service teachers do not receive a training or formal education about the pedagogy, content, or classroom practices for teaching in rural areas (TALIS, 2013). Rural teachers find themselves unprepared to design lessons in accordance with the needs, knowledge, background, and interests of rural children because teacher education programs train them

by "giving a rural flavor to the curriculum while preparing them for a globalized world and economy at the same time" (Echazarra & Radinger 2019, p. 39). In the general sense, the aim of teacher education programs is training teachers who will teach in "First World conditions" (Amin & Ramrathan, 2009, p. 70). Likewise, Burton and Johnson (2010) say: "Many teacher education programs emphasize the unique needs of urban education" (p. 384).

Coleman (2006) explains the significance of training pre-service teachers for the local needs of students: "Pedagogies that ignore local exigencies and lived experiences will ultimately prove to be so disturbing for those affected by them, so threatening to their belief systems that hostility is aroused and learning becomes impossible" (p. 11). In order to achieve this, inviting guest speakers to rural schools, organizing conferences, or creating e-mail groups, and developing partnerships for visits of teacher educators to support in-service teachers can be used in rural areas (Collins et al., 2016; Goodnough & Mulcahy, 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Monk, 2007; Munsch & Boylan, 2008).

Novice teachers experience the dissonances between theory and practice in the classroom, resulting in identity tensions (Farrell, 2003; Flores & Day, 2006; Pillen et al., 2013; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013;). It is noted that rural schools have several features in common, such as low teacher retention, limited English skills of students, the unwillingness of students to go to school, poor school facilities, limited teaching resources, and lack of professional development activities for teachers (Gregory, 2018; Hannaway et al., 2018; Ralph, 2003; Reid et al., 2009). A considerable number of pre-service teachers feel themselves unready for rural teaching; therefore, there is a need to investigate rural teaching and add a rural-based framework to existing teacher education programs (Halsey, 2006; Monk, 2007). Bryant (2006) underlines that the solution is not training more teachers to recruit in rural areas but redesigning the teacher education curriculum to adopt an integrated approach between course work and rural teaching. Likewise, Starr and White (2008) investigated novice teachers in rural schools and found that they were struggling with personal and professional isolation. Moreover, they feel themselves "bypassed and forgotten by the profession" (Ankrah-Dove, 1982, p.10). In addition, cost-of-living and cost-of-education were reported as disadvantages in rural areas (Botha & Baxen, 2018, Boylan et al., 1994; Jimerson, 2003; Sharplin, 2002).

Many studies indicated that problems related to recruiting and retaining qualified English language teachers in rural schools cause poor English performance of rural children (Kabilan, 2007; Marwan et al., 2012), rural students' limited exposure to the English language (Musa et al., 2012), and parents' indifference to education (Mosha, 2014; Mudra, 2018; Yawman et al., 2019). Implementing English curricula is also a big challenge for rural teachers (Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003; Çiftçi & Cin, 2018; Kızılaslan, 2012; Putri, 2021; Sari, 2021) as a result of insufficient teaching materials (Cirocki & Anam, 2021), inadequate infrastructure (Aulia & Batubara, 2021), parents' unwillingness to participate in rural education, and high student-teacher ratio (Milon, 2016).

There are prominent theoretical frameworks to address professional identity construction in teacher education, from sociocultural theory (Kelly, 1991; Lantolf, 2001; Lantolf, 2006) to spatial map theory (Agnew, 2005; Halsey, 2006; Lefebvre, 1991). Investigating teacher professional identity is generally informed by the above-mentioned frameworks; however, social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and conceptual metaphor theory (Gibbs, 2011; Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff

& Turner, 1989; Lakoff, 2006; Thomas & McRobbie, 2007) were the central frameworks adopted for this study.

Role identities are shaped as a consequence of a match between the behaviors that an individual experience and the individual meanings of occupying a particular role while interacting with others (Burke, 1980). This match is "the negotiation of meanings for situations and identities" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227). Rural teacher identity is developed as a result of an intersection of individual experiences and individual meanings of a particular role in a context (Stets & Burke, 2000). To this end, contextual factors affect social identity and provide a theoretical room for the conceptualization of social norms. In this sense, social identities are the products of historical and sociological pieces beyond human agency.

Metaphors are used to get a grasp on experiences, actions, and emotions of human beings by means of concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Creating metaphors is a process of self-understanding, and it is "the continual development of new life stories for yourself" (ibid., p.233). Metaphors help human beings develop self-awareness about what they live and how they interpret them in their daily lives (Dickmeyer, 1989). Conceptual metaphor theory suggests that there exists a set of universal conceptual metaphors in human minds, and metaphors are not poetic devices in language, but they are conceptual tools for structuring, restructuring, and sometimes creating the reality, and therefore, they are pervasive (Lakoff, 2006).

Contexts include elements such as setting, audience, artifacts that can all influence metaphorical conceptualization (Kövecses, 2015). The metaphors we create depend on our personal histories and our long-lasting concerns or interests. Thus, the use of metaphor may reveal new perceptions in our contextual and cultural understanding. Teacher identity studies are informed by metaphors, since teachers often use analogies while talking about their teaching practices and the teaching profession (Clandinin, 1986; Craig, 2018; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001; Tobin & LaMaster, 1995). Pajak (1986) suggests that metaphors are tools for teachers "to verbalize their *professional identity*" (p. 123). It is beneficial to examine teacher metaphors to become aware of teachers' practices, expectations, and beliefs (Antonek, McCormick & Donato, 1997; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Massengill-Shaw & Mahlios, 2008). When teachers decide to *unpack* the metaphors they hold, they begin to see what they really think about the teaching profession and the factors guiding them as they teach (Nias, 1989). Metaphors turn tacit understandings into utterances by means of bringing hidden conceptualizations to light.

Teachers' self-awareness of metaphorical thinking helps them reflect on teaching practices (Farrell, 2018). In the field of ELT, research studies were conducted to investigate both novice teachers' (Erickson & Pinnegar, 2017; Farrell, 2016; Fenwick, 2000; Knowles, 1994; Marchant, 1992) and experienced teachers' (Farrell, 2016; Yeşilbursa, 2012) metaphors. The most uttered metaphors are as follows: adventure guide, caregiver, judge, parent, movie director, orchestra conductor, advocate of change, traveler, model, candle, light, resource, and gardener. Research studies on EFL and ESL teachers' metaphors (Asmalı & Çelik, 2017; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Nguyen, 2016; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011) were specifically conducted, and the following metaphors were commonly used to highlight the theatrical part of language teaching: *singer, painter, songwriter, storyteller, dancer,* and *artist*. In addition, EFL teachers defined themselves with the following metaphors: *cultural ambassador, intercultural worker, cultural intermediary, and bridging cultural gaps*. Teachers see foreign language teaching as a window opening to different cultures and a tool to promote intercultural communication.

In Turkey, there is a lack of continuous professional support in the form of coaching or mentoring for rural teachers (Çiftçi & Cin, 2018). In response to this gap, the present study aims to understand the views, needs, and expectations of EFL rural teachers by means of theoretical paradigms and approaches. From this point of view, this study aims to reveal a holistic picture of how teachers' professional identities are shaped in rural areas and their experiences about being a teacher in rural schools. Also, the challenges of teaching in rural contexts are provided, and some preliminary solutions are suggested. The outcomes of this study may help teacher educators develop new strategies to mentor and support rural teachers. In addition, the findings of this study may show the versatility of the teaching profession and the urgent need to design context-rich school practicum experiences for pre-service teachers. The current study aims to show the similarities and discrepancies between different viewpoints of EFL teachers by offering detailed and rich descriptions of real-life situations. In order to achieve this aim, this study addresses the following inter-related research questions:

1. How do EFL teachers in rural areas define their professional identities?
2. How do EFL teachers in rural areas make a relation between their professional identities and their teaching contexts?

2. Method
2.1. Research Design

In this study, a qualitative multiple case research design was employed since this type of design focuses on individuals or groups in order to understand their perceptions and also provides a chronological narrative of events being studied (Creswell, 2007). Data are gathered rigorously and systematically to have *a fuller picture* of the case by means of providing a thick description of participants' feelings, thoughts, and lived experiences (Yin, 2003). Case studies investigate the complexity of human relations, incidents, and sociological or psychological realities in a unique context with its own dynamics. Considering this point of view, every teacher's professional identity formation experiences inside and outside the school can be considered as cases for this study.

2.2. Research Setting

In rural areas, thirty-five percent of rural children are in the hardest conditions to reach the school due to the sociocultural and economic reasons, and also parents are unwilling to send their children to the school by bus (Dülger, 2004). The main problems related to rural education in Turkey can be listed as follows: transportation problems and difficult climate conditions, poor physical conditions of schools, insufficient teaching materials, the indifference of parents to education, lack of pre-service preparation and in-service training for rural placement (British Council & TEPAV, 2013).

According to UKA (2015), rural areas are settlements with less than 20,000 population, and all villages and towns, regardless of population. Regarding this criterion, this study was conducted at five rural schools located in four different cities in Turkey. Based on the observations, brief information about schools and their neighborhoods is presented in this part. Rural School 1 is a middle school in the Central Anatolia region. The school is a four-story building with 14 classrooms and a small play garden. The school is equipped with very limited facilities. The neighborhood is very isolated. Rural School 2 is a middle school in one of the rural areas in the Aegean region. The school is a three-story building with 10

classrooms and a small play garden. The building is old but good-looking. It is a village school surrounded by cows, sheep, chickens, and single-story village houses. The school is far from the city center. Rural School 3 is also a middle school in one of the rural areas in the Aegean region. The area tends to have a high crime rate because of irregular migration, unemployment, and poverty. There are shanty-like houses made of mudbricks and corrugated metals. The area is far from the city center. Rural School 4 is a middle school in one of the rural areas in the Eastern Anatolia region. The school is a single-story building with 8 classrooms and a small play garden. It is a village school surrounded by small animals and small village houses. The neighborhood is very quiet. Rural School 5 is a middle school in one of the rural areas in the Southeastern Anatolia region. The school is a two-story building with 10 classrooms and a play garden. There are very small village houses spread out over a wide area. Because of this dispersed settlement, the school is very isolated. The school is extremely far from the city center. Seasonal agriculture and animal husbandry are the main means of livelihood in the village.

2.3. Participants

The participants of this study were five EFL teachers working at different rural schools. This gave both novice and experienced teachers a voice. Profiles of participants were diverse in terms of years of experience, teaching contexts, personal histories, and backgrounds. Participants will be called Emel, Ece, Tuna, Bahar, and Zeynep for the sake of anonymity. Table 1 below shows the profile of each of the five teachers:

Table 1.

Profile of participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	Years of teaching experience	Teaching context
Emel	9	A town middle school
Ece	12	A village middle school
Tuna	6	A town middle school
Bahar	3	A town middle school
Zeynep	1	A village middle school

Emel is 32 years old, and she has a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature. Then, she received the certificate of pedagogical formation. Her first rural teaching experience was in a remote village school. She had worked there for four years. Afterwards, she was appointed to a relatively bigger rural school which is her current teaching context. Ece is 37 years old, and she graduated from the department of English language teaching. After her graduation, she worked at different suburban schools for seven years. Afterwards, she decided to change the region she was living in and came to a village school as an experienced teacher. Tuna is 28 years old and has a B.A. degree in English language teaching. After her graduation, she had worked at a rural school for four years. Then, she decided to change the region she was living in and came to a new rural school where she has been working for two years. Bahar is 24 years old and has a B.A. degree in English language teaching. At first, she was appointed to a middle school and worked there for two years. Then, she decided to work at a rural school where her family members are currently living. In that sense, she is a homegrown rural teacher. Finally, Zeynep is 23 years old, and she has been teaching for three

months. She is the only novice teacher in this study. She graduated from the department of English language teaching, and she also pursues a master's degree in Educational Sciences.

2.4. Data Collection

Interviews and narratives (Creswell, 2007), drawings (Beltman et al., 2015), and metaphors (Buchanan, 2015) are the main data collection tools for qualitative research studies. Yin (2003) refers to six data collection tools for qualitative case studies: documents, interviews, archival records, physical artifacts, direct observation, and participant observation. In this study, the data were obtained through multiple data collection tools, including observations, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Firstly, five field visits were conducted to have a detailed picture of the teaching contexts being studied and their surroundings. The areas were observed before the first interviews in order to become familiar with the research settings. Secondly, a metaphor elicitation task was implemented to unearth the hidden thoughts, experiences, and emotions of participants. A metaphor elicitation task was comprised of sentence completion and open-ended questions. The main aim was to have more credible insights before conducting the interviews. Afterwards, the first semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the focus was on teachers' personal histories, professional and academic backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences related to their own teaching selves, teaching contexts, and the teaching profession. Finally, the second semi-structured interviews were conducted to further probe the details revealed in the first interviews. The second interview focused on teachers' strategies to overcome personal and professional challenges in rural schools, their plans, needs, and recommendations for teacher educators and teacher candidates. There were 59 questions in total asked to the participants during the interviews. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted for at least 40 minutes.

The participants were given the informed consent form to provide necessary information about the research study. Once a participant consented to be a part of this study, pseudonyms for the participants were given, and the school names were hidden to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

2.5. Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis procedure suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was implemented. First, after reading the transcripts and employing the data reduction strategy, participants' responses were grouped in accordance with the interview questions and research questions, respectively. The most salient statements were identified by highlighting and marking, and then the descriptive codes emerged as the early labels of raw data, including little inferences and short interpretations. After this step, pattern codes were identified to indicate how many times the same codes were used repeatedly throughout the study in order to form categories. Finally, categories were grouped to reach the broader themes to show both commonalities and differences of views of participants.

While analyzing field notes, new codes were not generated. Field notes were read several times thoroughly, and the significant parts were marked for reporting them easily. For the analysis of the metaphor elicitation task, documents were read, re-read, coded, and grouped to create themes. Afterwards, they were interpreted because analyzing documents in qualitative studies includes coding and generating themes similar to analyzing interviews (Bowen, 2009). As a final step of analyzing the metaphor elicitation task, the umbrella

metaphors of each case were presented. After reading and re-reading the findings of each case gathered from three data collection tools, the cross-case analysis procedure was employed (Stake, 2006). First, after within-case analyses, the findings of each case were presented. Then, the significant findings were identified separately in a different section as a result of employing the cross-case analysis. The reason behind this is the fact that multiple case studies are not for comparing cases, but for gaining a better understanding of the similarities and differences among cases on a relative issue. The data analysis process is shown in Figure 1 below:
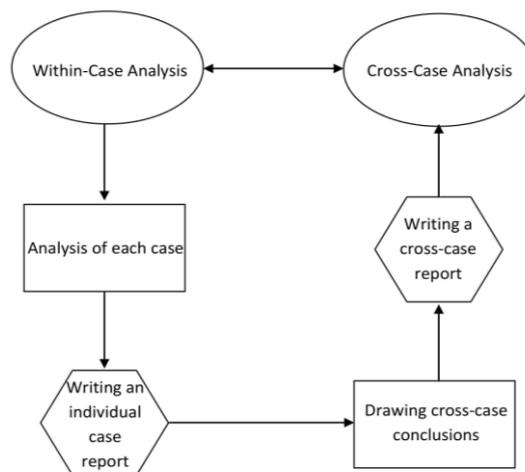

Figure 1. The process of data analysis (adapted from Yin, 2003)

Finally, strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to ensure that the account is insightful and accurate in this study. Firstly, triangulation was provided by using multiple data collection tools. The second strategy used in this study to ensure trustworthiness is the thick description. The third strategy used to ensure trustworthiness is the dependability of the study. An external audit, who was an EFL instructor and not involved in the research process, examined both the process and product of the study. The inter-rater reliability was 0.89, while the intra-rater reliability was 0.85 for this study. Additionally, the participants were requested to examine rough drafts of the findings.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section is divided into four sub-headings to provide a holistic illustration of findings and make it easier for the reader to follow. While the first part presents the findings of the metaphor elicitation task, the rest of the three parts present the findings of field visits and semi-structured interviews.

3.1. Self-Reported Metaphors of Teachers on Their Professional Identities

The participants created metaphors that reflected their teacher selves and the teaching profession in rural areas. It was found that the metaphors they created were interrelated and dynamic. By using metaphor elicitations, a holistic visual representation of what rural EFL teachers think about themselves is illustrated in Figure 2 below:
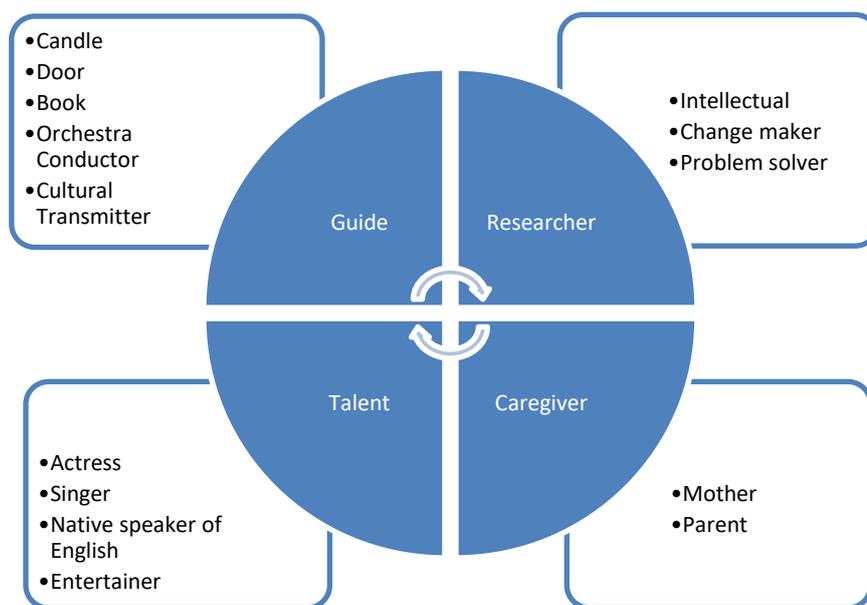
Figure 2. Metaphors created by rural EFL teachers

The most uttered metaphors will be presented below to conclude how EFL teachers perceive their roles in rural areas. According to the participants, an English language teacher is an intellectual person who are interested in different cultures, able to present a new language through using his or her talents and broadens students' perspectives of the world. Specifically, Emel defined an English language teacher as a *candle* and explained her metaphor by saying:

> *When you teach a rural student, you take a step to transform the community. English lessons are comprised of very different topics, such as art, literature, science, and geography. Our lessons have the potential to make students curious and interested in the outer world. So, I see myself as a candle that helps rural kids have a brighter future.*

In parallel with this, Tuna mentioned that an English language teacher is a *guide* who "leads the way to a better future for rural kids through teaching a language and improving their communication skills." Likewise, according to Emel, a rural teacher is a *guide* who enlightens students and raises parents' awareness of the significance of education in rural areas. Ece created the metaphor of *entertainer* to define a professional English language teacher. Also, the participants used the metaphors of *singer* and *actress* to define a professional teacher. Zeynep remarked on the role of an English language teacher's intellectual profundity, especially for the development of rural children. According to her, an English language teacher is a *book that* widens the horizon of rural students:

> *People generally think that English language teachers have knowledge about different topics such as cinema, history, literature, art, or sports. Therefore, they are seen as books that you can consult about many things.*

The participants created metaphors by indicating the different duties of rural teachers. For instance, according to Emel, a rural teacher adopts multiple roles and has different personas. She associated herself with a well-known novel character Jane Eyre. She provided the following statement to explain the metaphor she uttered:

> *I am becoming Jane Eyre because most of the time, I experience her feelings, including despair and being stuck. My students come to the classroom, but they do not want to learn English. They just want to have some fun and learn some words to use while playing video games. The current situation does not motivate me to stay in this area.*

Bahar indicated that teaching English in rural areas means being a second mother to rural kids at the same time:

> *I see my students as my little brothers and sisters. When my students have a good score on an exam or when they read more than before, I feel myself like a proud mother. I know that this feeling is related to being a rural teacher.*

In short, the participants all shared the common thoughts of being an English language teacher in small areas. The discourse they used during the metaphor elicitation process represents the relation between the context they teach in and their professional identities. According to the participants, they have various responsibilities in addition to teaching English. Their responsibilities are nurturing and caring for rural kids, guiding them for their future lives, and also being role models for them. Since the participants define themselves as a second mother for rural children, they become *proud parents* when students show even small increments of success. In a similar vein, research studies conducted by Marchant (1992), Knowles (1994), Fenwick (2000), Farrell (2016), and Erickson and Pinnegar (2017) asserted that *parent, candle,* and *light* are the most uttered metaphors by teachers to define their roles. In line with the findings of the current study, different from other subject matters, language teachers identified their roles with theatrical activities such as painting, singing, dancing, and acting (Nguyen, 2016; Asmalı & Çelik, 2017). Besides, it is found in the current study that rural teachers defined the relationship between their teacher roles and the context they teach in. This finding is parallel with the assertions of conceptual metaphor theory outlining the fact that contextual factors are linked to metaphors uttered by rural teachers to define their role identities (Kövecses, 2015; Lakoff, 2006).

3.2   Contextual Limitations and Challenges Affecting Teaching

Teachers suffer from deprivation of extra-curricular activities for students, lack of classroom materials, and cultural activities for personal and professional development since rural areas often lack the leisure activities and opportunities that cities have. Teachers in this study underlined that teaching in rural schools is directly related to persistent problems such as defects in the school building, technology deficiencies, and financial challenges. Participants live in the surrounding where they also teach English. For instance, Emel explained her teaching context with the following words:

> *There are no cinema or theatre, no major shopping facilities here. We have very small grocery stores. We need bookstores and libraries. You must go to another town for emergency service when you are ill. All these problems are related to my teaching context because I experience the reflections of these problems in my school every day* (Interview 1).

Tuna wanted to show her classroom and the physical situation of the building. She pointed out the classrooms and described the unsuitable teaching conditions:

> *Look at this, please. This window was broken by one of our students on purpose three months ago. We immediately informed the principal and asked for a new window. As you see, we close the broken*

part with a cardboard. It is very dangerous for us. The classroom is very cold. None of the classrooms has curtains, so the classrooms become very hot when temperatures rise outside (Interview 1).

It is seen from the quotations above given by the participants that rural teachers struggle with the limitations of schools and their surroundings. Zeynep was a novice teacher. During the interviews, she compared the facilities of her practicum school and the rural school she was teaching in. It was reported by Zeynep that classrooms were lack of technological devices. According to her, they cannot even watch a video or play a song during English lessons. She elaborated her thoughts with the following words:

I would like to teach in a better-equipped classroom. I think my teaching context is limiting for me. I cannot use audiovisual materials. Rural kids find the English language unnecessary or even unapproachable, but if they see or hear the language in its natural context, I think they may begin to make a relation between the language and the real world. Technological tools also boost student interest and make a remarkable change in learning outcomes; however, most of the classrooms are lack of even electrical circuits in rural areas. Therefore, we have difficulties while performing listening and speaking activities in English lessons (Interview 1).

It was also mentioned by Bahar that rural teachers often take full responsibility of their students' personal growth and academic success. She said:

My only responsibility is not to teach English. For example, when I observed that my students had problems in developing a reading habit, I created a book club. I found shelves and hung them on the wall in our corridor. I bought some books for our little library. As you see, I created a reading corner without having extra space or budget. I try to be a role model for them. I am responsible for their personal growth (Interview 2).

As illustrated in the excerpts above, rural teachers define their teaching contexts by underlining the disadvantages of rural schools. They defined their teaching contexts with the following words: financial challenges prevailing in rural communities, defects in school buildings, technology deficiencies, teaching with limited resources, lack of cultural activities and social life, and remoteness from the city center. It was stated by EFL teachers that they struggle with doing listening activities because of the deficiencies in technological devices. This finding was also suggested by Aulia and Batubara (2021). It was also found that rural teachers have different roles in addition to teaching English. Outlining similar findings, Ralph (2003), Reid et al. (2009), and Hannaway et al. (2018) declared the lack of resources, including books, classroom facilities, stationery, and outdoor equipment in rural schools. They also mentioned a lack of parental involvement, which is the most important reason for unmotivated students and teachers in rural areas. This finding is in line with the findings presented in very recent studies conducted by Sari (2021), Cirocki and Anam (2021), and Putri (2021). It is also a striking finding that there is a discrepancy between practicum schools and rural schools. Pillen et al. (2013) put forth a similar outcome in their study. Finally, it is found that contextual factors play a critical role in teachers' professional development experiences, and this finding is also found by Aliakbari and Sadeghi (2022).

3.2. Challenges in Designing Lessons for Rural Students

Experiencing difficulties in designing lessons in a productive way is a big challenge because of having limited classroom materials. Tuna drew attention to the discrepancy between the lessons she prepared, and the activities done in the classroom:

I was very idealist at the university, and I had lots of dreams about teaching. Then, I saw the realities of a rural school. Everything is perfect on paper; however, it is very problematic in the classroom. I try to find solutions to overcome the problems. For example, I prepare vocabulary lists for each unit. I prepare extra worksheets. Most of the time, I spend my own money to prepare flashcards. I buy lots of extra books to create different activities. We are in the technology age, but I feel that I live in the 80s (Interview 1).

Similarly, Emel mentioned the challenges that inhibit her instructional practices in the classroom and the strategies she found to overcome these problems. She said that all rural teachers make sacrifices to create an effective learning atmosphere for rural kids. She shared her experiences as follows:

I collect lots of things, such as magazines, balls, news, cartoons, photos, worksheets to use them as teaching materials. I cut, I stick, I paint, I draw… I use my own budget to buy extra materials. My instructional strategy to overcome the problems is designing vivid and active lessons because I try to make my students love English lessons. All the positive things happening in the classroom depend on my own effort and desire (Interview 1).

Even though Emel and Tuna work at rural schools located in different regions of Turkey, they experience similar difficulties and try to find solutions for them on their own. In terms of classroom practices, Zeynep indicated that she was changing almost all the activities in the course book in order to adapt the course materials to her students' readiness levels. She explained her thoughts as follows:

My students are not ready to learn the present perfect tense or to do listening activities. I think they are still in the 'concrete operational' stage. I have illiterate middle school students. For example, there was a paragraph about siblings called Jack and Joy. The paragraph was about comparatives. I asked my students to read the paragraph silently. But they asked me the meaning of "he" and 'she'. They were 13 years old. It was impossible for me to explain comparatives because they asked me what 'he / she' meant. Then, I realized that they did not know what 'opposite' meant in their native language. So, we looked at the photos, I taught the pronouns, and I explained opposites a little bit. That's all. We skipped the writing activity (Interview 1).

In brief, rural teachers mentioned that their students have problems understanding English instructions and cannot grasp even very basic concepts. According to them, this situation results in instructional challenges for rural teachers. This finding is also in line with the findings of a qualitative study conducted by Çiftçi & Cin (2018).

3.3. The Need for Professional Development and Support

The participants criticized very limited professional development opportunities in rural areas, and they were planning to leave the area in the course of this study. Bahar shared career plans as follows:

I have plans to teach in an urban school to pursue my professional development. Good schools have good students, so teaching good students is a challenge for teachers. I love teaching rural kids; however, teaching in a rural school for a lifetime may cause stability in my professional development. I would like to work in a prestigious urban school because I have concerns about my professional development (Interview 2).

Emel stated that in-service trainings and continuing education are indispensable parts of professional development; however, she was concerned about her career. She said:

> *My future plan is to live in the city center. I know that rural kids need my guidance, but I have to pursue my own professional development. I would like to teach in an urban school because they are eager to learn, and they know the importance of English lessons. If your students are motivated, you become motivated automatically. If parents are educated, you become motivated* (Interview 2).

Tuna grew up and went to school in one of the big cities in Turkey, so it was the first time she had to live in a rural area. She did her teaching practicum in a high school equipped with the latest technology and sufficient teaching materials. To this end, in the course of the current study, she was struggling with adapting to a rural school. First, she mentioned her concerns about in-service training in rural areas. Then, she expressed the discrepancy between first-year teaching and her practicum experiences:

> *I think I cannot improve my teaching skills as a rural teacher, and I cannot reach in-service training opportunities. I prepared incredible lesson plans and materials during my practice teaching. Then, I started to work as an English language teacher in a remote area. This school is 'a place of impossibilities' for me. I am puzzled while trying to teach in a school with limited facilities. Well, now I know that realities are very different from practicum* (Interview 2).

In line with the previous statement, Emel uttered that she could not participate in in-service teacher trainings because of remoteness. She thought that professional development depended on budget, place, and time. She said:

> *I need professional trainings organized specifically for rural English language teachers. They should be free of charge. In addition, my teaching environment plays a significant role in the way I perceive myself as a teacher. I need advice from professionals to overcome the following two problems: my students' unwillingness to participate in my lessons and my demotivation* (Interview 2).

It was also implied by all participants that university-school partnerships are crucial to help rural teachers overcome challenges. University-school partnerships are necessary to have mutually beneficial and dynamic learning opportunities for both rural teachers and teacher educators. Bahar thought that university-school partnerships should be two-fold: the partnership to prepare pre-service teachers for rural placement and the partnership for professional development of in-service teachers:

> *University-school partnerships should begin during pre-service teacher education and continue to support teachers after their graduation. English language teaching departments should organize field trips to the nearest towns or villages to make senior year students familiar with the realities of rural schools. We used smart boards and projections during our micro-teachings when I was a teacher candidate, but it is not the reality. Micro-teachings should be done with limitations. For example, the instructor should say, 'Design a lesson for a class by using no electricity.' We can invite rural teachers as guest speakers to ELT departments or have Skype meetings with them. I think communicating with rural teachers can be very beneficial for teacher educators in terms of having a different perspective on the teaching profession.* (Interview 1).

In a similar vein, Tuna mentioned the urgent need to support rural teachers with the following words:

> *I have never heard about any collaboration between universities and rural schools. Teacher educators should visit us to see the realities. Teacher educators say 'You can give projects to your students by*

using online platforms'. This is a perfect suggestion! But ninety-five percent of my students do not have an internet connection at home. We do not have technological facilities in our school. It is very easy to make recommendations. Please visit us and listen to our challenges (Interview 2).

In sum, all teachers stated their urgent need for professional development opportunities and university-school partnerships in rural areas. It was also found that rural teachers showed interest in an urban placement. Likewise, it is mentioned by Hardwick-Franco (2019), Rossi and Sirna (2008), and PISA (2015) report, rural schools have challenges in terms of professional isolation, limited access to professional learning, and lack of collaboration between teacher educators. Rural teachers proposed that in-service trainings should be designed and implemented by taking into consideration the specific needs of teachers and students. Also, trainings should be suitable for rural teachers in terms of location, transportation, and time.

4. Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the findings of this study put forth that rural EFL teachers develop their professional identities through the combination of multiple selves. It is clear that the development of rural EFL teacher identity is under the influence of teachers' background knowledge, expectations, beliefs, role perceptions, pre-service education years, practicum experiences, needs, and teaching practices. Additionally, the teaching context plays a key role in how teachers describe their teacher selves, how they make choices, and how they interpret their teaching experiences. In this study, teachers mentioned that rural teachers have more responsibilities than urban teachers since parents are not interested in their children's education and, therefore, teachers play a critical role in rural children's personal growth and academic development. The participants showed a considerably high concern for rural children's lives beyond the classroom; however, they felt unprepared and needed support to pursue their motivation and enthusiasm for the teaching profession.

The participants remarked that poor physical conditions of schools, lack of teaching materials, transportation and accommodation problems, lack of pre-service preparation for rural placement, insufficient in-service training, and thus, personal, and professional isolation are the main challenges of being an English language teacher in rural areas. The participants recommended short-term practicum experiences in rural areas as a highly beneficial component of preparing pre-service teachers for rural schools. Moreover, they suggested that pre-service teacher education programs should design courses by adopting *the social approach* instead of training pre-service teachers to teach *urban middle-class* students.

The current study presents the following suggestions for Education faculties and in-service teacher training programs. Firstly, undergraduate pedagogical courses should be enriched by reading and discussing case studies from rural schools, inviting guest speakers, designing micro-teachings with limited teaching sources, and organizing online meetings with rural teachers. Furthermore, university-school partnerships should be developed to support rural teaching and pre-service preparation. Secondly, offering student teachers short-term rural practice can provide them with an authentic teaching experience before graduation. Considering the findings of this study, the rural practicum sessions should be designed with two cycles of training: 1) school visits and online collaborative lessons, and 2) discussion sessions for pre-service teachers, rural teachers, and teacher educators to elaborate practices, challenges, and possible solutions.

The lack of in-service training for rural teachers restrains their professional development. Thus, workshops, collaborative research, seminars, and conferences should be organized to motivate rural teachers. Online professional development activities, such as e-mentoring, can be an effective method to meet the needs of larger audiences, especially in geographically dispersed areas. Through this encouraging, reflective, communicative, and supportive process, rural teachers can overcome the challenges of their teaching contexts.

Finally, further research on classroom practices in rural schools may shed light on teaching in diverse contexts. Conducting regular classroom observations may reveal the challenges of teaching the English language in rural areas in-depth. Moreover, providing pre-service teachers with rural teaching content for several weeks to investigate their perceptions about the course may provide valuable implications for the field of ELT.

Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that ethical approval was obtained from Middle East Technical University (Approval Date: 11/12/2018).

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