

**Title of Project:**

A case study of Sudanese EFL student teachers' knowledge and identity construction

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**Project Summary:**

This study examines English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' professional identity construction through an examination of the relationship between teachers' emerging knowledge and emerging identity. The participants in this study were four EFL student teachers enrolled in the fourth and final year of an EFL teacher education program in a major city in Sudan. The data were collected over a period of nine months through interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, field notes, and curriculum documents.

The study draws on post-structural and post-modern conceptualizations of identity as multiple, a site of struggle, relational, negotiated, and discursively constructed. The data were treated as discourse and were analyzed using standard qualitative coding procedures.

In terms of professional identity, the student teachers presented themselves as knowledgeable, effective, authority figures, and so on through the deployment of their pedagogical knowledge as well as their talk about teaching conception and the sociopolitical and economic forces of English language teaching (ELT).

The student teachers' professional identities were also impacted by the politics of English as an international language, as well as the low socioeconomic status of teachers in Sudan. This led two of the student teachers to prefer other more prestigious professions than teaching while the other two maintained that they still wanted to become teachers.

Finally, there was a complex relationship between the student teachers' emerging knowledge and emerging identities represented in their everyday classroom practices. They utilized their formal and personal knowledge to aid them in their deployment of classroom materials, classroom management, the use of first and second languages in instruction, and the relationships they aspired to establish with their students.

The findings revealed that the relationship between emerging knowledge and emerging identity is complex and multilayered. It is complex because the participants constructed their professional identities on the basis of their knowledge of the English language and what they were taught in English. The process of developing a professional identity was not straightforward as it involved many conflicts, tension, and contradictions. The multilayered nature of the relationship between emerging knowledge and emerging identity was represented in how the participants constructed their professional identities in accordance with their conception of teaching and pedagogical practices and how they understood and talked about the broader socio-political and economic forces of English language teaching.

The findings suggest that teacher education programs in Sudan and other similar contexts should try to make teaching an attractive profession. This can be done by providing teachers with income producing activities, such as translation training or private tutoring. In addition, teacher education programs need to cultivate the student teachers' subjective views on teaching and prior schooling experiences as they develop their professional knowledge and identities. One way of making this connection is through the introduction of case studies based on actual and/or fictional classroom situations. Pointing out that the multiple and competing identities that the teachers in the case studies exhibit have consequences for their teaching and their students' learning would help the student teachers understand and cope with the complexities of teaching in their own contexts.

Another suggestion arising from the findings is to introduce an ELT methods course multiple times throughout the duration of the teacher education program, for it seemed to command an influential role in the knowledge and identity construction of the student teachers and in their classroom practice. Finally, the role of English as an international language will need to be re-examined in a different perspective from the current hegemony/resistance and appropriate/expropriation discourses.

The study contributes to the research in the field of identity and L2 education in a number of ways. It adds to the theorization of the discursive construction of professional identity. Teacher identity has been theorized from post-structural and postmodern perspectives that have depicted identity as multiple, negotiated, relational, and a site of struggle, among other things. Although these characterizations of teacher identity have been taken up in theoretical studies, little attention has been paid to how this identity looked empirically, especially in EFL contexts. The current study explored the nature of identity through an ethnographic lens by showcasing how the participants enacted their professional identities in their everyday classroom practices. However, not only did they perform their identities while engaged in those practices, but the practices also helped them to form these identities. These dialectical processes are important implications of teacher identity on the level of praxis.

As Miller (2009) observed, although teacher identity and knowledge are inextricably related, this relationship has remained unacknowledged in the literature. The current study, therefore, contributes to the available literature by helping to make this

relationship visible. It shows that teachers draw on their personal, practical, and formal knowledge to legitimize themselves as members of the teaching profession. This finding, important as it is, should inform how we frame future studies of teacher identity, and it can also offer teacher education and teacher development programs valuable insights into the impact of their knowledge-base on teachers' professional lives.

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