TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING TEACHERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Mustafa Abdo Hersi

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TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING TEACHERS IN
SAUDI ARABIA

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2018
Dedication

To the most faithful person in my life,
who has been my most profound teacher and my best friend.

You have shown me how beautiful a soul can be.

To my beloved mom, Fatimah.

Also to my wife and soulmate, Reem,

and my beautiful and patient children,

Shahad, Sarah, Ahmed, Yousef, Lamar, and Rateel.
Acknowledgments

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I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Holbrook Mahn. Dr. Mahn knows what practices work in the classroom. He never forgets the importance of helping students, and he gave me much information that will inform my pedagogical practices throughout my teaching career. His discussions of Vygotsky’s theories were particularly insightful and helpful. I thank him for his help and encouragement. I like his saying that “the best dissertation is a done dissertation.” This helped me focus on completing this undertaking.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how five in-service male non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) constructed and negotiated their professional identity as teachers to make meaning of their lived experiences in an EFL milieu, a Saudi Arabian university. The study also explores the challenges related to NNESTs’ teaching lives and how they negotiated them as they constructed their professional identities. I approached the studied phenomena by employing a narrative inquiry method. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and an autobiography. The study draws on Clandinin and Connelly’s framework of *three-dimensional space* (temporality, sociality, and place), Bourdieu’s theory of *forms of capital*, and Gee’s model *identity as an analytical lens* as the most important theories in this study. The data were analyzed by coding and thematic analysis. Additionally, to conceptualize the themes that emerged, discussions in a form of cross-case analysis as well as a dialogic investigation have been conducted. The study revealed sociocultural and economic factors that had a significant impact on how the NNEST participants constructed
their professional identities, such as their religious identity, professional development programs, and their linguistic and cultural competencies. The study also uncovered the challenges that NNEST participants encountered that hindered them from positioning themselves as legitimate professional NNESTs, such as being treated inferior to NESTs and people who carried passports from inner circle countries, as well as strategies that they employed to cope with these impediments. One of the strategies was to emphasize NNESTs’ social capital built with students through shared religious and affinity identity. The study recommends challenging the current power relationship, including criticizing the deficit model of NNESTs by amplifying teachers’ voices, practicing professional collaboration, and allowing NNESTs to give constructive professional feedback. The study concludes with practical implications, caveats of the study, and the need for future research.
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<td>CBSR</td>
<td>Classroom-based Social Research</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>CEFR</td>
<td>Common European Framework of Reference for Languages</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>CLA</td>
<td>Critical Language Awareness</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>CLT</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Communities of Practice</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ELI</td>
<td>English language institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>ESL</td>
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<td>LAD</td>
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<td>LLSS</td>
<td>Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies Department</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

The term identity is prevalent in many fields of study. As Stryker and Burke (2000) pointed out, “the language of ‘identity’ is ubiquitous in contemporary social science, cutting across psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology, and history” (p. 284). The field of education has also in recent years witnessed numerous studies on teachers’ professional identities (Beijaard, 1995; Lamote & Engels, 2010).

Researchers in the field of education have investigated topics about identity for several reasons. Beijaard (2004) offered a threefold rationale for his work on teachers’ professional identities. His first rationale was to recognize the stories of non-native English speaking teachers’ (NNESTs’) identity in an English as Foreign Language (EFL) context. The second reason was to create space to enlighten NNEST candidates on teachers’ professional identities. Finally, Beijaard’s work provided an initial framework for future research in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). For Amin (2004), the drive to develop “a pedagogy of empowerment” (p. 72) was a compelling motivation for his study on pedagogical practices, which challenged the normative ideal that an individual has “to be white and a native speaker of English in order to teach the language” (p. 72).

Studies on teachers’ professional identities have fallen into three categories. For Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004), the first category was how teachers form their professional identities. The second one focused on identifying features and characteristics of teachers’ professional identities, while the third classification explored how teachers represented themselves through narrating their life stories.
Teachers’ identities have been an important area of research in education recently (Liu & Xu, 2011; Norton & Early, 2011; Tsui, 2007). These studies have focused broadly on how language teachers form their identities in the field of TESOL by modeling themselves on Western-trained international English teachers’ identities by translating that identity to conditions in their home country (Barnawi & Phan, 2014; Menard-Warwick, 2014; Phan, 2008). In those studies, the term speakerism (Phillipson, 1992) has been used ubiquitously to convey the purported superiority of native English language speakers over NNESTs, a concept that is described in those studies as subjective and biased (Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999; Kachru, 1994; Kramsh, 1998; Mckay, 2002; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Rampton, 1990). Ha (2008) stated, “Language acts as a means through which identity is communicated, extended, confirmed, constructed, negotiated, and reconstituted” (p. 25). Ha suggested that language, which is embedded within a cultural context, provides a valuable means for teachers’ enactment of identities.

Other studies have also examined how teachers who are native English speakers construct their identities in EFL and ESL contexts (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Johnston, 1999, 2003; Morgan, 2004; Pavlenko, 2003). These studies explored issues of how bilingual, multilingual, or monolingual teachers form their identities. These studies have offered valuable contributions to the profession by challenging several cultural, political, and ideological norms resident within the field of TESOL.

These studies have led to investigating issues of contexts, suggesting that most studies on teachers’ professional identities have focused on NESTs’ professional identity in an English as a Second Language (ESL) background. Little attention has been paid to the construction of NNESTs’ professional identities in the field of English as a Foreign
Language (EFL) (Mahboob, 2010). Prior to this study, no studies had been carried out to investigate NNESTs in the EFL context in Saudi Arabia.

Thus, in view of the paucity of research in this field in Saudi Arabia, I was inspired to carry out my research, which investigated how in-service male non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) constructed their professional identities in an EFL higher education setting in a Saudi Arabian university. This qualitative study started with my own autobiography to narrate my experiences as an English language learner (ELL), a graduate student, and NNEST in an EFL milieu. This study used a narrative approach to the lived experiences or stories of in-service EFL NNESTs’ professional identity, which involved recruiting and interviewing four other participants to collect data to address the research questions. I collected their stories because narrative knowledge is constructed through stories to make sense of human experience (Bruner, 1986).

This study drew on Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of forms of capital as a theoretical framework for examining the subject matter. As Bourdieu posited, the concept of symbolic capital consists of three forms. The first is economic capital (wealth, property, and financial assets). The second is social capital, which focuses on the social relationships that an individual has that produce benefits to that individual in his or her society. The third is cultural capital, which indicates an individual’s values, rules, knowledge, codes, and norms, as well as how an individual behaves in society. Cultural capital, as discussed in greater detail in chapter 2, takes the forms of embedded cultural capital (e.g., socialization, manners, and rules of etiquette), objectified cultural capital (e.g., goods to be consumed or skills to be used, such as expertise in social media or proficiency in multiple languages), and institutionalized cultural capital (e.g., graduate degrees and other academic credentials).
This study also drew on Gee’s (2001) concept of “identity as an analytical lens.” Unlike other scholars from psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, and educational fields who discussed identity by using the relationship between an individual and context, Gee explored the concept of identity using a methodological approach, framing identity as an analytical tool to examine issues in education.

Statement of the Problem

NNESTs have been treated as inferior to NESTs in the fields of ESL and EFL (Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999; Fairclough, 1993; Holliday, 2005; Kramsch, 1997 & 1998; Rubin, 1992; Ruecker et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the educational experience and the formation of professional identity of NNESTs have rarely been studied, even though NNESTs outnumber NESTs by four to one (Crystal, 1997). As a non-native English-speaking teacher of English, I have direct personal and professional experience of this prejudice against NNESTs.

Scholars have agreed that teacher identity in TESOL is important for teacher education and professional development to identify best practices (Cheung et al., 2015). However, most studies in teachers’ professional identities have investigated only NESTs’ professional identities in ESL, with scant focus on NNESTs’ professional identities in EFL settings. NNESTs live and learn in contexts very different from those of NESTs.

Context is critical in the formation of professional identity; professional identity is closely related to social, cultural, and political contexts (Duff & Uchida, 1997). As White and Ding (2009) explained, “We encounter and understand ourselves in relation to others, shaped by particular sociocultural contexts and practices” (p. 4). This study examined NNESTs’ professional identity in EFL settings, particularly in Saudi higher education, a
milieu that has hardly ever been studied in the research literature. This study explored how NNESTs have constructed and negotiated their professional identities, which involved examining their lived experiences within and outside the professional context. This study also revealed the challenges that the participants faced and their strategies for negotiating them. This study of NNESTs’ construction of professional identities provides a lens into how EFL teachers’ learning and teaching practices could be improved.

**The Theoretical Significance**

Several published studies have described how NNESTs construct, deconstruct, and negotiate their personal identities and professional identities (Block, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Most of these studies were devoted to examining personal identities and professional identities for NNESTs in an ESL context, particularly in North American universities. According to Cheung et al. (2015), “Research on learner or teacher identity has been extensively conducted in ‘Inner Circle’ English-speaking countries” (p. 120). This study might encourage future research in this field in Saudi Arabian settings.

**Professional Significance**

A compelling factor for this study was to give NNESTs an avenue to tell their stories, amplifying their voices on the subject matter. This study identified challenges that hindered NNESTs’ construction of professional identities so that improvements in professional practices might be implemented, as discussed in the implications of the study in chapter 6. How the NNESTs in this study negotiated challenges to their professional identities could also be used to generate a better understanding of how practices in the profession could be improved.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold: (a) to examine how in-service male non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) negotiated, constructed, and developed professional identities in EFL in a Saudi Arabian university, (b) to discover the challenges that male non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) encountered as they constructed their professional identities in a Saudi Arabian university, and (c) to identify the strategies that NNESTs used to negotiate the challenges that they faced in their careers.

Research Questions

In connection with the research goals or purposes, two theoretical concepts or frameworks—Bourdieu’s (1986) forms of social capital and Gee’s (2001) concept of identity as an analytical lens—have been used in this study to answer the following research questions:

1. What do the stories of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) reveal about how their lived experiences have shaped their professional identities?
2. What challenges do non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) encounter related to their careers?
3. What strategies do non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) use to negotiate emerging challenges?

Context

This study was conducted in a public university in the western region of Saudi Arabia, Al-Salam University (pseudonym). The university offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees in many disciplines in a wide range of subjects. Within the university, the English Language Institute (ELI) is responsible for teaching general English to foundation-year
students. The English Language Institute provides general English-language courses to over 2,000 male and female full-time foundation-year students annually and employs approximately 100 faculty members (NESTs and NNESTs) on the men’s and women’s campuses. Four intensive English-language courses serve students whose skills range from beginner to intermediate (A1 to B1), based on Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Council of Europe in 2011 categorized language communicative proficiency at six levels, arranged in three bands—A1 and A2 (Basic User), B1 and B2 (Independent User), C1 and C2 (Proficient User).

Subjects (Participants)

This study involved the researcher and four male NNESTs who were recruited for the study. Participation was voluntary. The study used a purposive sample chosen according to the following criteria:

1. Working as an in-service male English teacher
2. Being a non-native English speaking teacher
3. Being an in-service teacher for at least five years
4. Being licensed as a full-time English teacher
5. Being recruited directly from the university.

Overview of the Study

This chapter has provided the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the theoretical and professional significance of the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the context, and finally a description of the participants. Chapter two provides a review of the literature on the subject of the professional identities of NNESTs. Chapter three covers the research methodology and theoretical frameworks employed in the
analysis of this study. Chapter four provides a narration of each individual subject’s experience as a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) and a discussion of the themes that emerged from their narrations. Chapter five provides a cross-case analysis of common themes that emerged from the participants’ narrations. Chapter six presents concluding remarks, implications, the caveats of the study, the need for future research, closing remarks, and an epilogue.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

What is Identity?

The term identity is pervasive in many academic fields of study, especially in the social sciences. For two decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of research that has been carried out concerning the concept of identity and issues related to it in the social sciences, in the humanities in general, and in education in particular. Stryker and Burke (2000) pointed out, “the language of ‘identity’ is ubiquitous in contemporary social science, cutting across psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology, and history” (p. 284). Additionally, identity issues have been widely discussed by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field theorists to articulate a framework that emphasizes the relationship between second language learners (L2 learners) and their social milieus (Block, 2004; Norton, 1997, 2000, 2001; Norton Pierce, 1995; Omoniyi, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Ricento, 2005). As Zhang (2016) observed, there are both psychological and sociological influences upon the construction of identity, which is thus a product of an interaction of an individual person (psychological factors) and the rules and dynamics of a context, profession, institution, or milieu (sociological factors) (p. 321). Teachers’ identity construction rests upon their perceptions, as filtered through emotions, their reflections, and their sense of agency as they negotiate who they are, where they are, and who they wish to become (Zhang, 2016).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the concept of identity and how it has been defined, conceived, and studied in the social sciences and in the realm of applied linguistics. The chapter is divided into three parts: the first succinctly reviews definitions of the term identity from etymological and social science disciplines, as well as in educational research.
The second examines the rise of the concept of identity in the field of SLA and reviews a wide variety of the definitions of the concept of identity in SLA research. The third explores the relationship between identity and power and highlights different types of identities to understand how second language learners construct their identity in different milieus.

**The Essence of the Concept of Identity**

The word *identity* originated in the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) century from the Latin words *identitas* and *idem*, meaning “the same.” Klusáková and Ellis (2006) pointed out,

Etymologically, the word for identity in most languages comes from the classical Latin *idem* and the verb *identificare* and also the low Latin noun *identitas*. These give us, for instance, “identity” in English, *identité* (French), *identità* (Italian), *identita* (Czech and Slovak), *identität* (German), and *identiteetti* (Finnish). Only in some languages, however, do these words have much of a history. (p. 11)

The first definition of the word in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2015), “identifying an individual or a thing,” concerned “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.” The second definition focused on the features of a person or a thing. The third meaning involved what other people describe someone’s identity to be. This meaning of the word *identity* is one of the most commonly used in social life, and it always refers to an identification card or an ID that is used to verify one’s personal individuality. These definitions of the word *identity* evoke some ideas, as discussed in what follows.

Several definitions of identity have been used to convey the notions of belonging and individuality, as well as the sense of being the same or different from others. In other words, the word *identity* seems to signify two contradictory meanings: both belonging to a group and being different from another. In addition, the term *identity* reflects the notion of human
nature. The concept of identity embodies the human being’s persona, behaviors, subjectivity, experiences, and emotions. Nevertheless, one observer has already drawn attention to the paradox and pinpointed that the term identity incorporates the entire universe and all creatures. Jenkins (2014) pointed out, “in principle, the notion of identity applies to the entire universe, things, and substances, as well as humans” (p. 17).

I have shown that identity has multiple definitions and that it can convey two opposing senses: both the idea of being the “same” and of being “different.” It is also important to mention that the term has been variously defined in different fields, including the social sciences. What follows covers the development of the concept of identity in the fields of the social sciences, particularly psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education. Thereafter, I will describe how the concept is constructed and used in SLA theories.

**Identity in the Social Sciences**

The concept of identity has been a controversial and much-disputed subject within the social sciences in general, and within applied linguistics in particular. It is important to see how the word identity has been used in relation to the field of the social sciences. The psychologist Erik Erikson (1950) has most often been cited as the originator of the concept of identity and of the term identity crisis. He coined the term identity in proposing stages of human development in his psychosocial development theory (Homans, 1995). In his theory, Erikson revealed that in the adolescence stage, an individual creates what is known as “self-notion,” which allows an individual to become different from the group and to construct a distinct personal identity. Erikson identified the role of identity in human development stages: he defined identity as a sense of self that develops throughout one’s life in response to
one’s social environments, including ones that involve values, models, norms, social roles, and relationships to others (Fearon, 1999, p. 11).

In a similar fashion, Fearon (1999) categorized identity into two types: “social identity” and “personal identity.” She defined the term identity as “how one answers the question who are you? Or, my identity is how I define who I am” (Fearon, 1999, p.11). She also defined personal identity as a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguishes her in socially relevant ways and that (a) the person takes a special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which still orients her behavior that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to (Fearon, 1999, p. 11).

Another psychologist who contributed significantly to the field of identity is Henri Tajfel (1970), who along with his student John Turner, has been cited as the initiator of the “social identity theory.” The essential assumption of the theory is that social people have a distinctive need to connect with a group or groups. The social identity theory proposed that an individual construct not just one self, but rather many selves based on social context. Therefore, social identity refers to the individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership in social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Moreover, Tajfel (1981) identified the construct identity as “that part of the individual’s self-concept [that] derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (p. 255).

In psychology, the concept of identity has also been discussed from various other perspectives. Psychologists have contended that the concept of identity is a multifaceted construct. It is believed that there are two categories of identity. The first is the most
common and is called “social identity”; this refers to “understanding what people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them” (Tajfel, 2010, p. 17). This type of identity implicitly provides an understanding of the characteristics that are attributed to the membership of certain groups. The second type of identity is “self-identity” and refers to the concept of identity with reference to what sets a person apart as a distinct individual (Meijl, 2008).

In the field of anthropology, the notion of identity has been viewed and developed through lenses that affiliate the subject to human nature. Although anthropologists consider the concept of identity as an “anthropology category,” they find this concept very difficult to explain because of the complex ways in which this term can be interpreted. Therefore, there are a number of definitions used to explain the genesis of this construct. For instance, Golubović (2011) pointed out that identity is

a socioculturally conditioned phenomenon, whatever forms it takes in different historical conditions in the long run in the historical process. This in essence refers both to the collective identification and self-identification of individuals (the latter being named as: ego, self, or moi). (p. 28)

In this definition, the author took the position that identity is not something natural or biological, but rather a combination of both personal identity and collective identity. The author argued that identity is not static or natural, but that it is a dynamic experience that is created by both personal (individual) and collective (societal) beliefs and dispositions. There is no clear-cut definition of identity in anthropology, due to different epistemological approaches that have been used to examine the concept. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to dwell on the details of such disparities.
Identity in Educational Research

Educational researchers have been studying identity issues from diverse theoretical premises. In this section, I will highlight the overarching key concepts of two epistemological stances that qualitative researchers frequently use to guide their works. By comprehending the philosophical underpinnings of these paradigms to better understand how these two theoretical foundations view identity research, I will briefly explain how structuralism and poststructuralism can be used as theoretical frameworks in forging knowledge about the role of language in identity construction research.

Structuralism is a set of 20th-century intellectual theories, which began in the field of science and was later employed by social scientists to fashion an understanding of human behaviors via a specific system (“Social Science,” n. d.). The aim of structuralism is twofold: first, to identify a structure, and second, to establish relationships between different structural elements to categorize them. For instance, in chemistry, the periodic table is a structure, and the relationship between elements in the structure uses rules to categorize items in a system. Structuralism is grounded on the idea that elements in a structure represent objective and uncontestable truth. As Geo (2007) explained, in viewing “structural elements as objective facts or a reality independent of human subjectivity, structuralism is associated with ‘objectivism’ or ‘realism’ “(p. 04).

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, on the other hand, explored structuralism through the lens of linguistics. He proposed that language has two surfaces: a low surface, which is represented by a system, and a deep a surface, which manages the relationships between the different elements of the structure. That is to say, structuralists view language as a system (lingue, which means language or tongue), and they have argued that the structure
breaks down into an intricately linked segments or rules, which Saussure called “parole” (meaning speech). Accordingly, from structuralism’s perspective, we could speculate that language is considered a fixed system of structures. Structuralism interprets identity in a fixed stable fashion. “Saussure distinguished his ‘scientific’ or synchronic approach against the prevailing historical, developmental, or dichromatic study of language through his distinction between la parole—actual speech or [a] speech event and—la langue” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, pp. 12–13).

On the contrary, poststructuralism, refers to a philosophical and literary critical movement that started in the late 20th century in Europe, particularly in France. Poststructuralism emerged as a reaction to structuralism movement in the 1960s. At the time, France was in the midst of critical sociopolitical crises. In addition to the rebellion by French people over traditional social principles, there was political unrest in some of France’s colonies, such as Algeria. The concept of poststructuralism is based on problematizing structuralism’s views about “Truth.” Poststructuralists argued that there is no ultimate Truth; therefore, they contended that knowledge is socially and historically constructed. Poststructuralism proposed that there is no fact, so there is no absolute truth (Peters & Burbules, 2004).

Another key point that poststructuralism suggested is that language plays a major role as mediator between culture, self, and power. Hence, poststructuralists argued that identity is constructed, co-constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed by language. Norton (2012) asserted, “poststructuralism depicts the individual (i.e. the subject) as diverse, contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and social space” (p. 4). Poststructuralists explicated that language plays an important role in reflecting knowledge, as well as in
making meaning. This implies that identity issues are multiple, fluid, and unstable. Norton reported that “the teacher had an essentialized conception of the individual as unified, stable, and unchanging, rather than a poststructuralist conception of identity as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (2013, p. 4).

Based on the preceding discussion of the concept of identity, it is apparent that the construct identity is problematic and difficult to define across social science disciplines. As noted, among social science scholars, there is some overlap of definitions, while there are also divergent definitions. Areas of agreement in the definitions used across social science disciplines are as follows. First, scholars have argued that it is unequivocal that the concept of identity is a human construct. In other words, identity as a concept is something that describes an individual or a group of human beings in a given society. Second, they agree that the concept of identity is a multifaceted concept. Therefore, different types of identities have been articulated, such as personal identity, social identity, and national identity. Third, these scholars postulated that the construct of identity mainly embodies the notion of one’s self and the belonging to a group or groups. Finally, these definitions have emphasized the integration between the self and the social context in constructing identity. That is to say, these scholars argued that identity and social context are meticulously intertwined to construct identity.

Noticeably, there are wide distinctions between the definitions of the concept identity not only across disciplines, but also between scholars within the same discipline. For instance, it has been noted in the previous discussions regarding the psychological viewpoints of the concept of identity that there are many differences in conceptualizing identity. The emphasis has been placed on assorted criteria that include persona, behaviors,
norms, values, self, individual, and belonging. Sometimes, the definitions appear contradictory. The variations of identity definitions in different quarters, therefore, imply the elusiveness, vagueness, and ambiguity of the term.

Drawing on the discussion of the definitions of the concept of identity so far on the ways in which it is conceived in different disciplines, I would say that the various perspectives on the term clarify the paradoxical nature of the term identity. These definitions have spawned common arguments about the role of language as a mediator of identity. These different perspectives on the definition of identity emphasize the robust relationship between self and context in identity formation and construction. In addition to that, these definitions shed light on the impact of time and space on constructing identity. However, there is still ambiguity in capturing the nature and meaning of the construct of identity. For instance, identity sometimes refers to self, but also it can be applied to certain characteristics that inform the construct of an individual self or persons. Considering that there is no single definition of the concept, it is imperative to collate the various ideas and thoughts from divergent perspectives on the definition to select or formulate one that is suitable as the operational or epistemological standpoint of this study.

In the pages that follow, I delve into the relationship of the construct identity, language in general, and language acquisition in particular. Also, I will review the inception of this concept in literature, particularly in sociocultural studies. Then, I will discuss identity studies in SLA research to argue that the construct of identity should be problematized to reify and to have a richer insightful perspective of it. Furthermore, I will address the confusion owing to the large spectrum of definitions and overlapping terms, such as self and
subjectivity. Therefore, recent advances in the field of identity have heightened the need for more exploration of this topic in the literature.

**The Rise of Identity in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Research**

The first serious discussions and analyses of the notion of identity have antecedents in the field of sociocultural studies in the early 1990s. It is axiomatic to view the sociocultural theory to better understand the crux of the construct of identity in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Actually, this research was dominated by structural linguistics around the first half of the last century (Bloomfield, 1940; Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957; Saussure, 1919; Skinner, 1957). Structural linguistics upholds the view that language comprises an intertwined structure; in other words, each linguistic unit is believed to have an internal interconnected identity and validity. Subsequently, structuralists’ views were reflected in second language teaching textbooks, pedagogies, assessments, and teachers’ practices. Walt (1992) commented, “The structuralists’ approach to language was coupled with behaviorist learning principles, resulting in a scientific and confident application of linguistics to second language teaching in the audiolingual method” (p. 170).

In 1959, Chomsky broke through the SLA field with his new model, which showed that language is developed in the child’s mind; he also introduced his theory of Universal Grammar and the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Since then, cognitivists’ theories and methodologies have dominated the second language acquisition (SLA) area of study for quite a long time. “The discipline of SLA has been largely experimental and quantitative in its approach. ‘Social factors,’ such as gender, motivation, or ‘social distance’ between language groups (Schumann, 1978) are seen as variables that can affect IL restructuring” (Warwick, 2005 p. 258).
Later, in the 1990s, there was a genuine attempt to break the domination of cognitivists in the SLA arena and to consider a sociocultural perspective in the field (Bonny & Pierce, 1994; Lantof, 1995). After about 30 years of such domination, Firth and Wagner (1997) called for more sociocultural perspectives in SLA research. Firth and Wagner initiated a greater balance between cognitive and social theories; they proposed a broader perspective that includes sociocultural viewpoints. Larsen Freeman reported, “It was then approximately 30 years after the birth of a cognitively oriented approach to SLA that Firth and Wagner presented their 1997 paper, a work that called for an enlargement of the parameters of the field to include a social and contextual orientation to language” (Larsen-Freeman, 2007 p. 775).

Since then, in the past 20 years, there have been increasingly rapid advances in studying identity issues through the sociocultural lens in the field of SLA. Social contexts and the power relationships between L2 learners and native speakers have been thoroughly examined. This has occurred within the broader context of seeing how power relationships and the social construction of reality and the social construction of identity are embedded in discourses, which underscores the importance of language. As a second language is acquired, the learner’s sense of identity may shift, something known as “instructed acquisition” (Avalos-Rivera, 2016, p. 2). This is significant in examining how NNESTs acquire and construct their professional identity. Studies in that area, Avalos-Rivera (2016) noted, have fallen into four main areas: (1) NNESTs’ sense of being at a disadvantage to NESTs (or, in some studies, able to compete successfully with NESTs) in the job market, (2) NNESTs as more rigid and formulaic in their approach to teaching English, (3) the tendency of educational administrators to prefer NESTs over NNESTs, and (4) the tendency of
students to prefer NESTs. The results of many (but not all) of these studies upheld what Phillipson (1992) termed the native-speaker fallacy (Avalos-Rivera, 2016, p. 3). Less studied has been how L1 dominant NNESTs “face the challenges of teaching English” (Avalos-Rivera, 2016, p. 74). One study to address that issue (Sayer, 2012, cited in Avalos-Rivera, 2016, p. 74) pointed to the abilities of Mexican teachers of English to draw upon contradictory ideologies from discourses embedded in L1 (Spanish) and L2 (English). Their goal was to define and understand their social role and to gain a sense of legitimacy as English teachers (Avalos-Rivera, 2016, p. 74).

Avalos-Rivera (2016) provided a meta-analysis of 74 studies on NNEST issues, which he divided into seven distinct categories: (1) employers/TESOL authorities’ perspectives, (2) teachers’ perspectives, (3) narratives of teachers’ perspectives, (4) students’ perspectives, (5) teachers’ discourse, (6) teachers’ perspectives and discourse, and (7) triangulation of perspectives (p. 79). Many of these studies were based on qualitative research designs and incorporated classroom observation or teacher documentation, such as journals, lesson plans, emails, and posts to blogs (Avalos-Rivera, 2016, p. 101).

Hayat (2011) examined the political dimensions of SLA in Algeria, including the shift from teaching French to teaching English, as well as the opposition from fundamentalists to teaching those foreign languages as “antagonistic to Islamic precepts and values,” as the teaching of these languages entailed teaching or promoting the Western cultural values embedded in those languages, placing language teaching in the midst of the conflict “between the forces of radical Islamism and Western globalization” (p. 8).
Definitions of Identity in SLA Research

Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have studied identity issues from various perspectives. A substantial amount of literature has been published on second language learners’ relationship with the entire social world (Block, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Ricento, 2005). Moreover, a large and growing body of literature has investigated how ESL learners’ social and cultural identity is constructed. These researchers studied how English language teachers construct their professional identity (Goldstein, 1995; Kim, 2003; McKay & Wong, 1996; Morgan, 1997; Nero, 1997; Norton Pierce, 1995; Uchida, 1997). Other studies focused on the relationship between language and social aspects of society. For instance, these researchers explored how social factors, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality affect language learning and teaching (Kailin, 2002; King, 2008; Kubota, 2001; Ladsen-Billing, 2001; Moffatt & Norton, 2008; Pavlenko, 2003). In addition, there has been a large volume of published studies that described the role of power relations between second language learners and native speakers of the target language (Goldstein, 1995; MacKay & Wong, 1996; Norton Pierce, 1995). Furthermore, there is a large and growing body of literature that has been investigating L2 writing identity (Cox, Jordan, Ortmeier-Hooper, & Schwartz, 2010; Hyland, 2008a; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Shen, 1989).

Unfortunately, many of these aforementioned identity research areas have been conducted in the ESL context; very few studies have been conducted in an EFL context. Therefore, in the next section, I will focus on how the concept of identity is defined, developed, and applied in the study of SLA by delving into the definitions of the concept of
identity from the perspectives of different scholars. I will also trace the genesis of the concept of identity in applied linguistics research.

Structuralism views identity as clear-cut external group categories, such as nationality, gender, socioeconomic class, or subjective classifications based on such categories. When it is subjective, the classifications are taken as objective and fixed entities. “Unlike in the past, when identity was viewed as “a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories,” it is now more commonly seen as a “relational and sociocultural phenomenon” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 209), the concept of identity is viewed in light of the relationship between self and the entire world. Therefore, poststructuralists do not intellectualize identity as static and consistent, but as a never-endingly, historically, and socially constructed concept (Johnson, 2006; Morgan, 2004; Toohey, 2000; Watson, 2006).

In contrast, a constructivist viewpoint of identity concerning “who a person is is a constellation of constructs rather than monolithic ones” (de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006, p. 2). Blommaert (2005) stated that identity is “what and who you are” (p. 203). On the other hand, the poststructuralists’ viewpoint of identity is revealed by their emphasis on the intertwined relationships between language and identity, so they have articulated these relationships as “the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet, it is also the place where the sense of ourselves, that is, our subjectivity, is constructed” (Weedon, 1997, p. 21).

Erickson (1993), who coined the term identity, defined it as a sense of self that develops through an individual’s life as a reaction to one’s social environments. The process involves the incorporation of social roles, rules, beliefs, and socialization to constantly
reproduce images of self and experiences so as to be positioned as a redesigned individual. This definition is drawn from the psychoanalytical perspective and connects an individual identity to his/her biological roots; hence, identity is enunciated as dynamic and constantly changing.

The sociological definition of identity places a stress on “that part of the individual’s self-concept [that] derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Unlike the psychological views, the sociological perspective professes that there are two categories of identity, self-identity and social identity.

Weedon (1997) defined subjectivity as “precarious, contradictory, and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (p. 32). From this definition, it can be inferred that the term subjectivity gives the same meaning as the term identity. That is to say, although she did not mention the term identity, it is nevertheless apparent that both terms are equivalent. It is also understandable that Weedon considered discourse as a major factor in identity construction. Conversely, West (1992) defined identity as a “desire for recognition, association, affiliation, visibility, and being acknowledged” (p. 20). It is equally essential to understand the relationship between identity and desire. Such understanding provides insights into our knowledge of the individual’s desires and actions.

Drawing on both Weedon and West’s descriptions of the concept of identity, Norton pointed out that identity is “how people understand their relationship to the world; how that relationship is constructed across time and space; and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). Norton emphasized the roles of time and space in
constructing identity. Therefore, it is safe to say that Norton unequivocally denoted that the concept of identity is unsettled and under constant construction. In other words, the author has argued that the concept of identity is dynamic.

Equally, Norton (2012) described identity as “socioculturally constructed, and scholars draw on both institutional and community practices to understand the conditions under which language learners speak, read, and write the target language” (p. 5). By the same token, Osguthorpe defined identity as “the general long-term perception that one has of oneself as someone who easily can learn whatever is necessary or as someone who has to overcome problems to learn” (qtd. in Maftoon, Sarem, & Hamidi, 2012, p. 1161). Another definition that expresses the same notion of identity is “the ways in which individuals view the world and their perceptions of themselves within the world, particularly within a learning situation” and the way it plays “a major part in their learning” (Williams & Burden, 1997, as cited in Hirano, 2009, p. 96).

There is a consensus among SLA scholars who draw on poststructuralism perspectives that identity is not fixed but dynamic, multifaceted, and complex. As Omoniyi (2006) pointed out, “identity has been expanding from self to language, social factors affecting how people perceive and are perceived, how they construct identities through social contexts, and a new paradigm as a moment of identification” (p. 178). Hall (1996) explained, “Identities are never unified, increasingly fragmented and fractured, and never singular, but multiply constructed across different discourses, practices, and positions” (p. 4).

According to other scholars, the concept of identity is conceptualized as a representation of self. Thus, the concept of identity and the term self or selves are used interchangeably. Wooffitt (1992) agreed with this notion that identity means self. Similarly,
Owens (2003) stated that identity and self are related. McCool (2009) emphasized this idea and confirmed that identity is constructed when “everyone is faced with developing a sense of self, a process that begins in adolescence” (p. 6).

**Language, Identity, and Theories**

The relationship between second language acquisition research and identity reflects certain elements. First, identity research attempts to propose a comprehensive theory that incorporates the language learner in social life (Norton, 2013). In other words, Norton argued that identity theorists’ inquiries have some variables claimed by other theorists, and Norton underscored the usefulness of their contribution to the second language acquisition process. Second, it is commonly believed that identity is constructed and deconstructed in particular linguistic interactions. Thus, language is a space where identity is formed. In this regard, communicative events in a particular social interaction have norms that pertain to “speech rights,” which decide who is legitimatized to speak or who has the right to speak and who does not, according to the power dynamics of each context. Thus, identity issues involve investigating the impact of power in the social world. As Bourdieu (1986) claimed, power is an essential element in “structuring discourse” because there are unequal speaking rights between speakers. That is to say, the “right to speech” is a concept that is fair to speakers; it is not always true because power and privileges are the decisive factors for giving people the right to speak.

Third, second language acquisition (SLA) theories have proposed that there are some effective variables that play sufficient roles in facilitating the second language acquisition process. For instance, Stephen Krashen proposed five hypotheses that are fundamental in second language acquisition. First, he mentioned the filter as significant in the process of
acquiring a second language. He added psychological traits, which comprise the other elements (motivated, unmotivated, introvert, and extravert) to describe traits of second language learners that influence their ability to acquire L2.

Fourth, a sociological construct, investment, has been conceptualized to supplement the psychological concept of motivation. Norton argued that the L2 learner could be highly motivated but might still have little investment in the learning context. For example, if the class instructor marginalizes the L2 learner, doing so would undoubtedly affect the second language acquisition process. Finally, the two terms of imagined communities and imagined identities Wenger (1998) were presented to reconstruct imagined communities for the L2 learner, which might enhance the learning process.

**Power Relations in Identity Research**

One of the most significant issues currently in discussion in identity research is the influence of power relations on learning and teaching L2. SLA researchers have argued that society has always been unjust in oppressing learners and marginalizing them based on the color of their skin, class, gender, and sexuality. Kubota and Lin stated, “Teaching second or foreign language entails complex relations of power fueled by differences by racialization” (2009, p. 16). Therefore, the educator and researchers need to problematize this issue and use critical perspectives, such as critical race theory, to investigate learners’ rights. This has resulted in a growing number of studies that have examined learners’ rights and that have explored the impact of power in education (Dewey, 1934; Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992; Janks, 2009; & VanDijk, 2008).

The approach has equally led to an increased volume of studies in applied linguistics; studying identity topics related to power relations in multilingual and ESL contexts (Kanno,
Foucault (cited in Block, 2009) contended, “power is seen to exist in all levels of human activity and practice, from the level of international cooperation or government or nation states down to micro-level interactions between individuals on a moment-to-moment basis” (p. 31).

The emerging research field in SLA that investigates race, ethnicity, class, and gender primarily inquiries about the ways in which the Teaching of English as Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) emphasizes that respecting learners’ identity involves measuring how this is discursively constructed against this backdrop. Norton (2000) noted, “ethnicity, gender, and class are not experienced as a series of discrete background variables, but are in complex and interconnected ways implicated in the construction of identity and the possibility of speech” (p. 902).

Language is a means of communication among members of the particular society in which people engage in various social interactions. In other words, language functions to express individual needs, emotions, concerns, and so forth. So, given that an individual expresses his/her feelings, opinions, attitudes, and judgments via social interactions, the role of language is not limited to conveying messages between interlocutors only, but through the exchange of such messages, individuals construct their own identity. Thus, it can be inferred that there is symbiotic relationship between identity and second language acquisition. This suggests that identity plays a significant role in investigating second language learners’ social contexts and the power relationships between L2 learners and native speakers of the target language need thorough consideration to clarify any understanding of second language acquisition. Identity studies are particularly effective in examining how power plays out in
the context of social interactions between L2 learners and native speakers of the target
language. “Identity researchers frequently seek to better understand how power operates
within society, constraining or enabling action” (Norton, 2012, p. 14). In addition, identity
research has discussed how power relations negatively impact L2 learners’ interactions with
native language speakers of the target language to the extent that often, L2 learners are
marginalized. Therefore, identity research has pedagogical implications that help to
empower the L2 learners’ “right to speak” (Norton, 2000) inside and outside the classroom.

**Types of Identity**

There are many categories of identity in literature. These are social identity, national
identity, and cultural identity. The three types of identities will be briefly examined as
follows:

Social identity conveys a person’s sense of who he or she is based on his or her
membership in a group, which may be ethnic, racial, national, professional, tribal, virtual,
migrant, spiritual, and so forth (Tajfel, 1979). The associations promote a sense of pride and
self-esteem in the individual. Turner and Oakes (1986) presented the same idea. Turner and
Oakes (1986), a tutee of Tajfel, argued that social identity is an integral part of a person’s
self-concept in connection with his or her membership in a social group. That means that
whatever identity organization typifies, the individual is immersed in some identity.

National Identity mirrors Bourdieu’s in-habitus concept, suggesting that it is an
identity that is constructed through discourse, involving mental structures that are aligned to
specific contexts. According to Billig (1995), national identity is not static, nor is it acquired
through an individual’s biological place of birth, but national identity is a concept that
evolves progressively thorough patriotism and commitment to the cultural context of a national polity.

Cultural Identity projects an identity of a group, culture, and individual as exemplified by the influence of an affiliation to a group or cultural entity. It thus reflects an individual self-concept and self-identification, based on the tenets, feeling, values, and beliefs that are propagated by the group from which he or she draws such an identity.

**Language and Identity**

Language plays vital roles in our social life. The connection between identity and language is fundamental to our life experiences as human beings. The relationship between language and the society is the scope of inquiry that is called sociolinguistics. This field assumes that society reflects multifaceted patterns of behaviors or practices on gender, race, and language, cultural issues among others. For instance, the role of the language in the society is to communicate and convey meanings, while it also promotes social relations. In other words, language is not only a means of communication with an individual or a group/groups, but also, language provides us with the way in which we express our sense of being. Simpson (2011) emphasized, “Language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but it is understood with reference to its social meaning in a frequently inequitable world” (p. 319). NESTs and NNESTs can seem worlds apart, both in their language proficiency and in their teaching practice (Zhang, 2016, p. 322).

Thus, sociocultural theorists argue that sociocultural factors and cognitive forces play a significant role in second language acquisition. As Schmitt (2002) pointed out “the relationship between culture and mind, and that all learning is first social then individual” (p. 122). Drawing on this argument, a considerable amount of literature has been published on
SLA research to investigate the influence of L2 identity construction on the learning and teaching of L2 (Block, 2004; Norton 1997, 2000, 2001; Norton Pierce, 1995; Omoniyi, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

In the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), various definitions of identity have been prescribed. Jenlink (2014) pointed out, “The meaning of identity is as varied as are the theorists, philosophers, and psychologists willing to posit definitions” (p 21). As a result of his assertion, this paper draws on the concept of identity based on Norton’s (2000) definition, that identity is “how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). Therefore, from this perspective, this paper presents identity as socially constructed and involving constant narratives on individual and social performance. This is to say that identity is multiple, dynamic, and complex. For example, we identify ourselves to others, telling them who we are. We ask several questions such as; how do we deal with the society at large, and why do we act in a certain way? All these inquiries and reflections happen through language. In other words, language and identity are inextricably interconnected.

Llamas and Watt (2010) reflected on how language mediates identity: “Language – [the] mediated attribution of identify to [the] individual is so ingrained in human social affairs that we consider a person lacking a name to also lack an identity” (p. 1). It is widely known that both language and identity are not static; they change over time and space. Language changes in use, forms, and lexicography. Also, identity is negotiated, constructed, deconstructed, and co-constructed inconsistently. In view of these principal elements of
identity construction, SLA researchers study identity constructions from various theoretical frameworks, such as feminist, critical, and poststructuralist perspectives.

Investigating identity construction in SLA research through a poststructuralist lens is grounded in the notion that L2 learners cannot be defined in binary terms. However, many poststructuralists view L2 learners on the basis of a dichotomy (e.g., motivated vs. unmotivated, introvert vs. extrovert); therefore, these theorists problematize identity as ephemeral in nature and constantly changing across time and space for the same individual. Consequently, poststructuralists propose a theory of identity that places L2 learners in multiple positions, either as marginalized or autonomous. In addition, poststructuralist theorists tackle the impact of power in the social world and its implication on L2 learners. Poststructuralists contend that identity practices and resources are vibrant variables, meaning that social institutions have numerous effects on identity. The social institutions in reference include home, school, workplace, church, and other societal institutions, in which individual learners can negotiate, construct, and deconstruct their identity. Delanty defined the term identity as “a construct for social scientists who proscribe to a generally poststructuralist view of the world” (qtd. in Block, 2010, p. 2).

A milestone study in SLA research on identity was conducted by Norton in 1994. She drew the concept of investment from Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of forms of capital (social capital, cultural capital, linguistics capital). Norton argued that the psychological concept of motivation does not adequately capture the relationship between the second language learner and the social world. She argued that identifying the second language learner in a binary structure, such as motivated vs. unmotivated and introvert vs. extrovert, presents an incomplete picture of the essence of the relationship between the second language learner
and social milieus. Her study and other SLA research about L2 learners’ identity construction have offered theoretical and pedagogical knowledge that has supported our understanding and that has facilitated the L2 learning process in an ESL/EFL setting. In what follows, I will discuss theoretical and pedagogical implications of the following aspects: identity in the ESL/EFL classroom of immigrant students, identity research and investment in learning L2, identity research in ESL students’ classroom participation, and identity and second language writing.

**Identity in the ESL/EFL Classroom of Immigrant Students**

Norton Peirce (1995) emphasized the importance of utilizing “classroom-based social research” (CBSR) and described this practice as “collaborative research that is carried out by language learners in their local communities with the active guidance and support of language teachers” (p. 26). She argued that experiences by second language learners should be incorporated in the design of language curricula. She proposed that CBSR offers ways to effectively engage L2 learners in their learning and promote their involvement in the process as “ethnographers” in communities of practice in collaboration with their instructors. Moreover, she maintained that helping L2 learners to participate in real-situation conversations enhances their competence in speaking and writing.

Norton Peirce (1995) drew on the French sociologist Bourdieu (1986) and his notion of “forms of capital,” which is based on the premise that individuals have their own sociocultural and linguistic resources from their own background, which are great assets. Norton Peirce’s investment concept is consistent with Bourdieu’s forms of capital, through which she argued that the L2 learner’s investment in learning L2 validate his or her cultural capital for empowerment. Norton Peirce’s suggested that CBSR invest in learners’ social-
cultural assets in facilitating the construction of their knowledge and identity. In addition, CBSR promotes L2 learners’ communication and speaking skills through authentic tasks beyond the classroom context.

Apparently, providing the L2 learners tasks enables them to engage in research in a societal context that helps them to achieve “the right to speak.” Consequently, exposing L2 learners to authentic social contexts helps them to understand speaking cues and taking turns, as related to their improvement of their communicative competence (Hyemes, 1973). Applying the CBSR approach helps language development, while overcoming the basic challenges that those L2 learners encounter. In addition, these learning experiences enhance the learners’ self-esteem and efficacy. Norton (2013) provided the following as the objectives that CBSR fulfills:

1. Investigate opportunities to interact with native English speakers.
2. Reflect critically on engagement with native English speakers.
3. Reflect on observations in diaries or journals.
4. Pay attention to the current events in the world.
5. Compare data and research with fellow students.

Identity Research and Investment in Learning L2

Identity research has developed rapidly in the last three decades in the studied topics, paradigms, and methodological approaches that are implemented to investigate how L2 learners acquire L2. With respect to the topics studied in SLA, little has been undertaken to examine the impact of the interactions of L2 learners’ identity in relations to gender, race, and class. SLA researchers use both positivist and structuralist views in their approach and have predominantly studied identity issues, using qualitative research methodology. A
dramatic paradigm shift occurred in the way SLA researchers have investigated phenomenon through the use of poststructuralism and critical approaches to exploring identity studies in SLA research. This paradigm shift has resulted in increased adoption of same technique by researchers in other fields in discussing identity issues. As a result, the number of identity studies has soared since the 1990s. The changes in thinking in how researchers have explored L2 learners’ language acquisition have contributed to some pedagogical suggestions that help in facilitating and interpreting how a second language is acquired. These changes have provided a number of ideas that facilitate how L2 learners learn in the target language in the ESL context. These pedagogical implications are as follows:

1. SLA researchers, educators, and the ESL teachers consider that “speech speakers and social relationships are inseparable” (Norton, 1997, p. 410) as an essential factor in the success or failure of L2 learners in acquiring L2. That is to say, the interaction between the L2 learner and the social relationship in the ESL context is significant in learning L2 in the ESL context.

2. The identity of L2 learners is highly influenced by the interaction between the L2 learner and the position and forms of capital that the native speaker of the language possesses. In other words, the interaction between L2 learners and the responses of the native speaker of the language impact L2 motivation.

3. “Investment” as a concept in SLA research has been widely studied in diverse ESL contexts (Angelil-Carter, 1997; McKay & Wong, 1996; Starfield, 2002). All these studies concluded that L2 learners’ success in acquiring L2 is heavily based on how L2 learners invest their needs and desires in learning the target language.
Identity Research in ESL Students’ Participation

In the last few years, the population of international students in U.S. universities and colleges has grown. The Institute of International Education (IIE) (2015) stated, “The number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by eight percent to a record high of 886,052 students in the 2013/14 academic year, confirming once again that the United States remains the destination of choice for higher education” (p. 49). International students who pursue their studies in North American educational institutions come from different countries with diverse linguistic, social, cultural, and educational capital, which is usually different from that of the host country, the United States. As a result, there is always a mismatch of educational preferences, in terms of international desire as related to their capital and what the host country and its approach are providing. Unfortunately, North American universities have not recognized the need to familiarize themselves with materials and the pedagogical theory that could enhance professors’ instructional practices and social relationships with the diverse students in the classrooms. In response to the unresponsiveness of the educational system, there has been a considerable amount of literature examining how ESL students personally negotiate and construct their identity in the Western-based classroom.

Morita (2004) examined how L2 learners negotiate and construct their identities in ESL classrooms, including their socialization experience. Morita (2004) showed that personal efforts on the part of the students in shaping “their own learning and participation by exercising their personal agency and actively negotiating their personalities . . . were locally constructed in a given classroom” (p. 573). The study also pinpointed “the complexity, variability, and significance of [L2 learners’] relative silence, [which] was
socially constructed (Morita, 2004, p. 596). The suggestion here that international students are often caught in conflicts between two binary identities, which requires the support of the host countries to support negotiating a plausible identity to enrich their academic and social experiences.

**Identity and Second Language Writing**

Writing, as a complex sociocultural process, plays a vital role in students’ personal, academic and professional journey. To enhance the learning experience of international students, there is a need to scaffold the writing process, to promote their integration of personal “voice or identity in their writing” (Hervd & Belcher, 2001). This is based on the grounds that the different forms of capital (i.e., linguistic, cultural, and social capital) that international students bring to the U.S. classroom erode their writing of personal “voice.” International students often bring their writerly habits to writing in the U.S. classrooms; these habits are useful resources for professors to apply in their classroom. These forms of capital should not be marginalized (Canagarajah, 2000), but should rather be incorporated into student learning, even though few studies have specifically explored and documented the ways in which linguistic, social, and cultural peculiarities brought to U.S. classrooms by international ESL stand to deepen their writing. Bourdieu’s (1986) form of capital concept signifies the use of a theoretical framework for improved learning among those from a minority culture.

By the same token, to better understand how the forms of Capital play out in an ESL context, Hersi (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore how Saudi Arabian female students construct their writing identity in U.S. universities. He argued that in Saudi Arabia, females are positioned to be voiceless because of Islamic tenets that confer headship on men.
Coming with such cultural capital to the U.S., female Saudi Arabian students often have to deal with identity crises to be able to negotiate and construct their identities as they participate in U.S. classroom communities in ESL contexts. He also investigated the construction of identity in academic writing in the life of Saudi ESL female students studying at a Southwestern university in the U.S. The study focused exclusively on how the students negotiate, resist, and construct writerly identity throughout their ESL program. The findings suggested the need to develop a teaching framework that could support both ESL educators and Saudi female ESL learners in academic writing classes. The study also suggested that when the cultural capital of international students is not factored into the learning process, this oversight ruins both their academic and social identities.

According to Canagarjah (1993), ESL instructors should create a “secure atmosphere” in the ESL classroom to encourage Saudi female students to express their own voices. Canagarjah (1993) proposed that “minority students in an academic setting employ some of the same strategies, including constructing “safe houses” to resolve some of the conflicts [that] they face.” He further suggested that “identifying and understanding the literate activities of safe-house spaces opens up pedagogical possibilities inside and outside those spaces” (p. 54). The suggestion here spotlights the importance of promoting teachers’ understanding of learners’ capital because of the positive outcomes on learners’ identity formation. The findings in this study also provided some support for a conceptual premise that could be beneficial in exploring academic writing issues in the ESL milieu.

The preceding discussion has explored the ways in which the writings of ESL students typify their identities, including other elemental factors that are involved in a writer’s discoursal identities. It is necessary to explore the pedagogical implications of the
notion of a writer’s identity in writing. As Tang (2006) suggested, there is a need to promote students’ awareness of how language represents their identity through writing. It is also important to promote this approach among writing teachers in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) classrooms for them to be able to teach self-representation in writing. Tang (2006) suggested that introducing students to self-representation in writing helps them to be able to critically analyze and infuse conventional and unconventional differentiated types of writing in reconstructing their writerly identities.

Clark and Ivanic (1997) viewed writing as a sociocultural and sociopolitical act that is shaped by the social, ideological, and political environment of writers’ context. Thus, things such as what gets written, how it gets written, who writes, for whom, and why, are all determined by power dynamics and ideological structures or stratifications in a social context. These circumstances have implications in shaping writers’ identities in conformity with hegemonic ideals. These aspects of writing are usually reproduced and perpetuated in certain social contexts by some social institutions, such as schools and the press, which are usually controlled by people in power. Also, such institutions play significant roles in marginalizing other aspects of writing and/or types of discourse and writing. These experiences make writing a site of social and political struggle because some social groups in a social context may resist and refuse to accommodate privileged types of discourse and other valued aspects of writing that run counter to their preferences and interests.

In addition, gaining access to the socially valued and predominant discourse types and other aspects of writing is affected by power relations as these exist in a given social context; access to different types of writing is not equitable. This unequal distribution of access to socially prestigious and socially valued types of writing is related to and determined
by a person’s identity and social status. Clark and Ivanic (1997) highlighted the educational, social, and cultural status quo that denies some learners access to certain types of writing, and they suggested the need to empower marginalized voices through critical discourse and/or writing. They contended that apart from cultivating awareness of a written text, it is of importance to be aware of the physical context, as well as the social and cultural context in which the text functions and negatively or positively shapes writers’ identities.

Critical Language Awareness (CLA) provides an important platform for the construction and negotiation of a writer’s discoursal identities. CLA involves the critical discussion of discoursal choices, particularly the ways in which they position language users. CLA involves recognizing the character dimension of a writer’s identity, raising it to consciousness, and helping writers to gain control over it (Ivanic, 1994, 1995). CLA facilitates writers’ understanding of how language can position its users, which then can lead to action and social change, potentially liberating writers from socially privileged discourses. These ideals suggest the principal goal of CLA, which is the attempt to encourage writers to make conscious choices as they write in line with their social values and beliefs, rather than those perpetuated through the dominant culture.

Being critically conscious of the effects of language and dominant ideals in some aspects of writing provide learners with alternative discourses other than what is being socially projected through hegemonic “powerful discourse” (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1994, 1995; Ivanic & Camps, 2001). Thus, writers need to question and problematize the authorial presence in writing: which, how, and why are certain discourse(s) conventionalized in certain contexts by certain people?
Studies that are further discussed here show the educational implications of writers’ discoursal identities in the digital or computer-based context. Lam (2000) urged TESOL practitioners and researchers to factor in the idea of how digital technology repositions writers’ identities while they learn to read and write. She stated that learners’ construction of a textual self occurs through their socialization through social and discourse communities on the web. This process allows learner users of digital tools to reflect on self. According to her, the Internet affords learners an important opportunity for them to made changes to their identities; in the process, it promotes positive changes in their environment. In addition, Lam showed that the use of computer technology in TESOL has the capacity to help students develop critical strategies of articulation that enable students to interrogate dominant discourses and power relations, even as they create alternative discourses through their writings.

The studies discussed the implications of the construction of writers’ discoursal identities from rhetorical and critical literary perspectives. For instance, Cherry (1988) argued that distinguishing between “ethos” and “persona” guides us to a better understanding in distinguishing between the representations of the “real” and “imaginative” selves. The knowledge of such differences, she explained, would help enhance rhetorical and literary criticism skills of learners, while it helps their self-representation a single text or in multiple written texts.

Some scholars argued that scientific and technical discourses are embedded in rhetoric. Thus, self-portrayal, according to Cherry (1998) is essential in scientific and technical texts as well (p. 266). Cherry (1998) showed that the ethos/persona distinction is useful for an emerging theory of writing evaluation because it provides educators with the
platform to understand the complexity of evaluating tasks by students using hypothetical rhetorical situations, especially ones in which the students use a multilevel representation of fictional rhetorical situations embedded within the larger real situation. In other words, when educators evaluate the writers’ intelligence, integrity, and competence, they are examining their practices and assessing qualities within the confine of rhetorical ethos. Cherry (1998) emphasized writers’ voices or tones and roles as creating an evaluation of persona for them.

Identity and Language Teaching

Much literature has investigated L2 learners’ identity and English teachers’ practices in the ESL/EFL classrooms. Simpson (2011) stated, “Teachers conceive of language not only as a linguistics system, but [also] as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated” (p. 321). That is to say, language practices have an impact in constructing L2 learners’ identity. Lee (2008) conducted research to examine the influence of postsecondary English teachers’ classroom practices on L2 learners’ identity construction. The research concluded that there are discrepancies between English language teachers’ pedagogical conceptions and their teaching practices in the classroom. The understanding here is that this can negatively affect the L2 learner and extend the limits that L2 learners have in maximizing their opportunity of language learning. The study also revealed that English language teachers’ classroom practices could perpetuate inequities among diverse L2 learners. These findings are compatible with Ramanathan’s research (2005), as well as Clemente and Higgins’ study (2008). These studies suggested that investing in classroom practices would provide L2 learners with unlimited opportunities to acquire and practice language. Moreover, the authors concluded that if English language teachers did not invest in language practices in the classroom, this failure would maintain educational inequities
among L2 learners. In short, there is a consensus among the aforementioned researchers that the relationship between English teachers’ classroom practices and L2 learners’ identity construction is critical in providing multiple identity positions to make L2 learners more engaged in classroom activities, as well as in school and society at large.

**Studies in Teachers’ Professional Identity**

This section gives the reader an overview of research on identity that investigates the influence of teachers’ professional identity in learning and teaching in ESL/EFL settings. Exploring teachers’ identity is another aspect of study in the identity field that has been developed recently. Many researchers have been investigating teachers’ identity from different points of view, particularly by examining the role of a teacher’s professional identity in constructing L2 learners’ identity (Britzman, 2012; Kompf, Bond, Dworet, & Boack, 1996; Mayer, 1999).

Native English speaking teachers (NESTs) still have a more prestigious status than non-native English speaker teachers (NNESTs) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Mahboob (2010) emphasized, “In our globaliz [ed] world, English has a hegemonic status as an international lingua franca, creating an unequal relation of power between native speakers and non-native speakers of English” (p. 216). SLA researchers have published several studies to advocate NNESTs rights and to challenge the status quo. SLA research recognizes non-native English speakers from different dimensions and validates their types of Englishes (Canagarajah, 2005; Davies, 2003; Faez, 2001; Park, 2012). The idea of non-native English speaker teachers’ NNESTs fallacy, Phillipson (1992) argued, is widely rejected in the SLA field. There are other constructive notions about non-native English speaker teachers NNESTs, such as that proposed by Cooks (2000): to use the terms
“L2 users or multicomponent” in SLA scholarship instead of the term NNESTs. In the midst of this debate about whether NESTs or NNESTs teach better, the issue of English language teachers’ professional identity becomes significant. Language teacher identity (LTI) research in applied linguistics and TESOL scholarship has, however, been gaining momentum (Tsui, 2007; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005).

Many studies have investigated how the L2 learner constructs his/her social and cultural identity in acquiring L2. Simultaneously, other studies have explored the influence of teachers’ professional identities in constructing L2 learners’ identities (Goldstein, 1995; McKay & Wong, 1996; Morgan, 1997; Nero, 1997; Peirce, 1995). All of the aforementioned studies have been conducted in ESL contexts only; few studies have been carried out in EFL settings (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Ha, 2008; Kim, 2003). Studies on the identities of both EFL/ESL have concluded with insightful pedagogical implications that could contribute to improvements in L2 learning and teaching. The implications are that language learners set up their own counter discourse that empowers them instead of being subject of positionality. Improvements in reflective thinking on the part of both teachers and learners and broadening learners’ acceptance and belonging beyond their immediate environment could also improve things.

It needs to be highlighted that teachers also have a way that they perceive their identities. Several studies have issued important findings that have shown how their perception of self-identity has helped teachers in discharging effectively their professional responsibility (Beijaard et al., 2000; Dworet & Bloak, 1996; Jansen, 2001). Their language proficiency is a critical factor affecting both the self-perception and the professional standing of NNESTs vs. NESTs, but other factors are also important; these include effective use of
idiomatic expressions, accents, and mastery of English grammar, areas in which many
NNESTs have room for improvement (Zhang, 2016). These studies offered the definitions
of identity in different ways. According to Jansen (2001), identity is people’s self-created
sense of self, “as well as their knowledge and beliefs, dispositions, interests, and orientation
towards work and change” (p. 242).

Beijaard et al. (2000) stated, “teacher identity is an understanding and
acknowledgement of what it feels like to be a teacher in today’s schools, where many things
are changing rapidly, and how teacher cope with these changes” (p. 109). This definition
further stated that teachers’ professional identity “involves a personal part of the teacher’s
professional identity because teacher identity is a profoundly individual and psychological
matter; it concerns the self-image and other image of particular teachers” (p.109). Some of
the other definitions further acknowledged the cultural and political factors in the formation
of professional identities (Varghese et al., 2005).

Teachers are not immune to the influence of power relations and the relative prestige
of one language versus another. Teachers are embedded in and enmeshed with larger
structural power hierarchies. In some educational systems and in some countries, teachers
have more or less power and autonomy than they have in others. Even the terminology used
for the professional preparation of teachers varies from place to place. As Hayat (2011)
noted, the dominant term used in Algeria was “teacher training” instead of “teacher
education” (p. 13), which frames the teacher preparation as a matter of acquiring technical
knowledge to apply a preset and invariable collection of skills and techniques rather than
teaching someone how to master a complex and unpredictable art in which personal insight
and autonomy are valuable.
As Hayat (2011) commented, this approach of training teachers overlooks “the idiosyncracies of the teaching profession” (p. 13). Hayat implicitly argued that teachers are far more than mere technicians; they need self-awareness and subtle perceptions of the human elements of the teaching context to be effective. This involves a different form of teacher identity than a robot who stores, retrieves, and delivers upon demand a body of knowledge. The alternative is to subject students to “predetermined coercive discourses” (Hayat, 2011, p. 13). This different social construction of teacher identity in Algeria was particularly problematic for teachers who had returned to Algeria after having pursued graduate studies in Anglo-Saxon countries, who informed Hayat (2011) of such beliefs as “the way we were taught English in Algeria was completely erroneous” (p. 16). The problem with this view, in Hayat’s opinion, was that it perpetuated the self vs. other construction of teacher identity in which native English speakers were inherently superior to non-native English speakers (Hayat, 2011, p. 16).

Factors that adversely affect teachers’ self-esteem and professional status—including the lower value often placed on NNESTs and the reduced opportunities and less advantageous salary and benefit packages—affect teachers’ effectiveness. Ruohotie-Lyty (2013) contrasted the differences between two new language teachers and the narratives of their identity formation: one had an easy transition after gaining the professional certification and qualifications, whereas the other one had a painful beginning as a full-time teacher. Ruohotie-Lyty (2013) was particularly interested in their identity narratives: the stories that these two teachers told themselves about their identities as teachers.

As Ruohotie-Lyty (2013) noted, the transition from training to teach to teaching can put expectations and classroom experiences into a sharp juxtaposition (Kelchtermans &
Ballet, 2002; Le Maistre & Paré, 2010; Sabar, 2004; Varah, Theune, & Parker, 1984). These initial challenges—both pedagogical and personal—can be severe, especially if the new teacher does not receive adequate professional support from colleagues and school administrators (Ruohotie-Lyty, 2013). Support is needed to form a positive sense of oneself as a professional in the context of school, classroom, and in relationship with and connection to other individuals, both students and colleagues. If teachers are left feeling “insecure and perplexed,” it is hard for them to form a positive professional identity and self-image (Ruohotie-Lyty, 2013, p. 124).

Teachers’ identities have much to do with the way they run classrooms and the ways in which these practices shape and inform the learning process and outcomes. Notably, teachers’ identity is a complex process because it involves the weaving of their personal, professional, and other political, psychological, and cultural processes. Identity in this case exemplifies the notion of sociocultural factors through teachers’ interactions in their social world beyond the school environment. The consequent effects of positive professional identity on teachers is that it brings about “their job satisfaction, occupational commitment, and changes the level of motivation” (Yesilbursa, 2014, p. 21).

**Summary**

This chapter has provided a discussion of the term *identity*, types of identity (e.g., national identity, cultural identity), and a discussion of what identity means in the social sciences and in educational research, including how this has been shaped by poststructuralism. The chapter has addressed the increased importance of identity in research into second language acquisition and theoretical constructs about this relationship, including those offered by the field of sociolinguistics. The role of power relations in identity research
is explored. In particular, the concept of identity is examined in the ESL/EFL classroom of immigrant students and in the context of writing. This chapter has also summarized research findings about the formation of the professional identity of language teachers, especially in the context of teaching ESL and EFL.
Chapter Three:
Methodology and Research Design

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology that was used in this research, beginning with a restatement of the purpose of the study. I delineate the philosophical underpinnings of this study. I discuss the research design and provide justifications for using a qualitative method, narrative inquiry to examine participants’ lived experiences and their stories. I outline the research questions, provide a brief discussion of the participants, the sampling method, and my positionality in the study. Finally, I describe the data-collection instruments, the data analysis, and the evidence for the trustworthiness of the study.

The purpose of this study was to examine my lived experiences and of five in-service male non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) regarding how they negotiate, construct, and develop their professional identities in a Saudi Arabian higher education (HE) institution called Alsalam University (pseudonym). The study attempts to explore potential elements that influence the construction of participants’ professional identities and the challenges that they face while working as teachers in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. The study also identifies the strategies that NNESTs used to negotiate the challenges that they encountered in their careers.

Philosophical Paradigm

The philosophical underpinning of research guides the investigation and analysis of a studied phenomenon. That is to say, a philosophical paradigm is the overarching view that researchers position, articulate, and draw upon to outline what they mean by knowledge and realities. Baden and Major (2013) argued that
a philosophical stance is not simply a tool. Rather, a philosophical stance is a
philosophically informed view about reality, knowledge, and the way to gain
knowledge that serves as a guide for a particular study; it is a guiding perspective
about the nature of the truth and human behavior, and this is a very foundation of
research. (p. 54)

It is worth noting that the choice of a philosophical paradigm influences all the
choices that a researcher makes (including the delimitations of the research), such as research
design, research methods, tools, research questions, and data interpretations when conducting
a qualitative study. Baden and Major (2013) observed that choosing a particular
philosophical stance not only suggests a view of reality and knowledge, but also “informs
researcher perspectives, approaches, and methods. It also clarifies a set of assumptions that
enable researchers to be clear about reasons they have chosen a particular research design”
(p. 54). As this study is qualitative, I think that it is necessary here to clarify exactly what is
meant by the philosophical paradigm.

The philosophical orientation of research can be viewed from two main perspectives:
ontology and epistemology. Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of reality
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ontology reflects what we know about certain truths. Ontology
falls into two main kinds: realism and relativism (Luper, 2004; Palecek & Risjord, 2013).
Realism embodies the premise that truth exists and can be discovered, verified, and
generalized. In contrast, relativism denotes the existence of different types of realities. It
also holds that reality evolves and is shaped by context.

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and acceptable belief, in other words,
how we get to know what we know. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explained that
“epistemological assumptions concern the origin of knowledge. What is the relationship between the knower and the known?” (p. 7). The distinction between ontology and epistemology is further exemplified by Mack (2010) and reported that “one view of reality and being is called ontology and the view of how one acquires knowledge is termed epistemology. In the social sciences, researchers embrace diverse paradigms for examining the nature of knowledge. These paradigms are positivist/postpositive, interpretive/constructivist, critical, and postmodern/poststructural. The qualitative and quantitative approaches extend into diverse philosophical research paradigms, namely those of positivism and post positivism. Post-positivism (postmodernism) is characterized by two sub paradigms, namely interpretivism (constructivism) and critical theory (critical postmodernism), while realism is seen as a bridge between positivism and post-positivism” (Creswell, 2013).

Positivist research attempts to address how and in what ways knowledge is objective, measurable, and consistent so that it can be quantified and ultimately generalized. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contended that the “positivist orientation assumes that reality exists ‘out there’ and is observable, stable, and measurable” (p. 9). Unlike the positivist paradigm, interpretive paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed. In other words, interpretive stresses the ability of the individual to construct and construct meanings. Cohen et al. (2007) summarized the role of interpretivist research as to “understand, explain, demystify, social reality through the eyes of different participants” (p. 19). It is worth noting that in qualitative research, interpretive research is considered the most common kind of qualitative research.

Central to the discussion of this paper is the poststructuralist (interpretive) paradigm. This study specifically engaged with this epistemological framework for several reasons. For
instance, it is appropriate to use interpretive paradigm in this study because it is in line with nature of the study in which I seek to understand and construct and co-construct meanings with the participants of the lived experience of the five participants. The epistemological position of this study, for instance, attempted to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions of language teachers. A classic example is the perception of native speaker as an ideal teacher or superior over NNESTs. The interpretive paradigm posits that an individual or group of people construct reality through interactions with the social environment.

As this study revolved around the examination of the lived experiences of its participants, it naturally required an interpretive philosophical foundation that is consistent with the tradition of qualitative research. The purpose of interpretive research is to “begin with [individuals] and set out to understand their interpretation of the world around them” (Cohen & Morrison, 2013, p. 24). This implies that reality within the lens of interpretive research is socially and contextually constructed and is subject to diverse interpretations. Seen in this manner, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained, “Interpretive research, which is the most common type of qualitative research, assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single observable reality. Rather there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (p. 9).

**Qualitative Research**

Considering the aim of this study, which sought to examine the lived experiences of NNESTs respecting how they negotiated, constructed, and developed their professional identities, I found the use of a qualitative research approach to be appropriate to explore and provide insights into the topic. A major justification for the use of such a research approach was that this study did not aim to provide any generalizations of the ultimate findings, but
rather, in the virtue of qualitative research, sought to provide thick descriptions, explanations, and understanding of the subject through holistic elicitation of data (Burns, 1996). This study aimed to collect data around the lived experience of the participants in a natural setting that was consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research methods, which require collection of data from naturalistic settings. Creswell (2013) argued, “Qualitative research tends to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (p. 185). Baden and Major (2013) lent credence to this view: “Qualitative researchers tend to examine phenomena in their natural settings, often striving to interpret these phenomena in context” (p. 13). Hence, this study drew on the fundamental principles of qualitative research in terms of conducting studies in the sociocultural environments of the participants (i.e., Alsalam University).

Creswell (1998) identified a number of characteristics that are associated with qualitative research, as reflected in this study. These are: (a) the researcher being the key instrument for data collection, (b) collection of data in words, pictures, and artifacts, and (c) inductive analysis of data. In addition, this study is consistent with qualitative research in terms of collecting in-depth and rich data to better understand how participants make meanings out of their lived experience (Merriam, 1998). Another reason for the choice of qualitative research in this study is that it enables researchers to reflect on their positionality, personal experiences, and cultural backgrounds, which are crucial in shaping the trajectory of studies (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative researchers employ five common research designs in executing their studies. These are case studies, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Case studies (sometimes called qualitative case studies)
refer to a qualitative research method that provides in-depth descriptions of the studied phenomena. It began in anthropology, sociology, and psychology and was introduced in other major fields as a methodology in the 1980s (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1980; Yin 1988). Case studies aim to search for meaning and understanding. Yin (2009) argued that “case studies are the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 5). He further defined case studies as “an empirical inquiry that examines phenomenon in a real-life context” (Yin, 2016, p. 37).

Phenomenology is a specific qualitative research methodology that is employed to examine “lived experience.” Yin (2016) defined phenomenology as “the way of access to the world as we experience it perfectly” (p. 26). Therefore, the task of phenomenology is to investigate the essence of human experience, such as phenomena of love, anger, and betrayal.

Grounded theory is a qualitative method introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It focuses on generating a theory that is grounded in the emerging themes in the analysis. Lichtman (2013) explained that in a grounded theory the researcher “presents a case for using data to develop theory rather than using data to test the theory” (p. 67). In this case, the researcher embraces an inductive stance. That is to say, grounded theory implies a bottom-up strategy in terms of data analysis.

Ethnography is a research method started in anthropology and sociology that seeks to describe people and culture and their social interactions. Mertens (1998) argues that ethnography is “a research method designed to describe and analyze practices and beliefs of culture and communities” (pp. 164 165). One important hallmark of ethnography is that it is
time-consuming because the researcher spends a lot of time in the field to collect data. In this study, I used the narrative inquiry approach to frame this study, as addressed below.

**Narrative Configurations / Narrative as a Research Design**

First and foremost, storytelling is one of the oldest means of human communications. The significance of the notion of narration is eloquently expressed in the historical aphorism “Human beings are storytellers by nature.” The oldest piece of writing known is the Epic of Gilgamesh, a narrative of an ancient king of Uruk (in Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq). There are many theories about narratives. Some scholars believe that the first narrative presented was in religious discourses. Baden and Major (2013) argued that ‘Early narrative appeared in in religious texts” (p. 226). They drew on Dawn (2010) in their discussion in backing up their arguments regarding the relationship between religious texts and narratives, and they contended that narratives have preserved elements of culture. Other scholars traced back analysis of narrative to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who interpreted poetic works and dramatic texts as narratives. Davis (1997) situated narrative as an approach that refers to the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’ work in interpreting myths. In recent decades, narrative inquiry has been of increasing interest in the social sciences. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) claimed that narrative inquiry earned a significant place in the social sciences, history, psychology, psychotherapy, education, sociology, and studies of experiences in education. For instance, Riessman (1993) believed that storytelling is essential to study people’s reflections on their past experiences.

Moving to a different point beyond the historical origin of narrative, I think that what is more important to highlight is how narrative is employed particularly in social science disciplines. It has been widely discussed in the literature that narrative theory is used in four
different ways: First, to understand human experience. Second, to use narrative as data. Third, to employ narrative as a method, and four, to utilize narrative as a research product (Baden & Major, 2013).

**What is Narrative Inquiry?**

Narrative inquiry offers researchers an important framework for exploring lived experiences or stories. They have defined narrative inquiry as “the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 21). Barkhuizen et al. (2013) described narrative inquiry as “an established umbrella for research involving stories” (p. 3). This study uses a broad definition of narrative inquiry that has been suggested by Schaafsma and Vinz (2011), who characterized a narrative as “an account, tale, interview with narrator/s; artifacts, objects, or action with inherent narrative, co-constructed narratives; a story or stories” (p. 2).

Narrative inquiry has gained momentum in the social sciences, particularly in education (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). This approach has been used to investigate how teachers develop or construct their professional knowledge and identity (Elbaz, 1981, 1983; Golombek, 1998; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Tsang, 2004; Tsui, 2003, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005). Barkhuizen and his colleagues pointed to the significance of narrative inquiry in terms of affording teachers the stance to reflect on their own personal and professional experiences and encounters to amplify and represent their voices based on first-person narrative. They argued, “narrative inquiry can help us to understand how language teachers and learners organize their experiences and identities and represent them to themselves and to others” (p. 78).
In general, narrative inquiry has gathered momentum in education in applied linguistics in particular. Benson (2016) claimed that “Since the turn of 21st century, narrative inquiry has begun to play a significant role in applied linguistics research” (p. 159). For instance, this approach has been used to investigate how teachers develop or construct their professional knowledge and identity (Elbaz, 1981, 1983; Golombek, 1998; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Tsang, 2004; Tsui, 2003, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005).

In the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), perspectives of narrative inquiry provide researchers frames to explore lived experiences and the stories of participants using a spectrum of narrative inquiry approaches: autobiographies, biographies, journal writings, family stories, photographs, and personal-family social artifacts. On the contrary, Phil Benson reported that most of the narrative research in early applied linguistics studies relied on merely four sources of data: autobiographies, reflections, memoirs, and interviews (p.157). Because this study aims to explore the social and professional lives of the participants and tell their human experiences, I employed narrative autobiography and biography to collect data because they “can make valuable field texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93). Baden and Major (2013) stated, “biography and autobiography explore at an in-depth level personal views, social views, and values” (p. 234). They stated further that narrative inquiry is commonly “empowering when it involves autobiographies and forms of this perspective” (Barkuizen et al., 2014, p. 13). Canagarajah (1996) stressed the value of autobiography: “One of the immediate benefits of completing autobiographical narratives is that knowledge is constructed from the bottom up” (p. 327).

Nevertheless, employing narrative inquiry as an instrument to collect or interpret the data has not escaped criticism in the research literature. For instance, the epistemology of
narrative inquiry is an issue because it focuses on the participants’ experience. Therefore, one of the problems with narrative inquiry is the discrepancies that might occur between the original told story and the retold story and the interpretation of that story. I argue that such challenges could be solved by member checking. Another drawback is that what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) called “Hollywood plot” in narration; in many plots, everything works out well. Participants may fake the data to force a happy ending. Another major drawback that researchers need to consider in employing narrative inquiry is the ownership of the story. That is to say, a researcher might decrease the participant’s voice when narrating the stories. This could be overcome by sharing the research analysis with the participants to avoid any fuzziness and seek participants’ confirmation pertaining to the authenticity of the story.

Benson (2014) denied that summarizing findings of narrative research is always problematic; however, he stated that narrative research could lead to looking at the phenomena from different perspectives, thereby opening up new ways of inquiry.

Interestingly enough, there has been a dearth of studies that employ narrative inquiry in examining teachers’ professional identity in higher education in Saudi Arabia. To the best of my knowledge, there are only few studies that have examined Saudi English language learners (Barnawi, 2009; Sheridan, 2015). What is more, these studies have focused on issue as second language learners’ identity constructions. There is no study that address how and what ways in-service NNESTs construct and negotiate their professional identity remained under researched. To fill this critical gap, this research employed a narrative inquiry approach that entailed autobiographical and biographical narrative to explore in-service male NNESTs’ construction of their professional identities. The study examined five NNESTs’ professional identities by narrating and amplifying their personal, social, and professional
experiences. One way to examine this lived experience of these NNESTs was to draw on the
concept of the three-dimensional space that these NNESTs inhabit.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**The three-dimensional inquiry spaces.** The three dimensions of inquiry space have
been defined as temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin
and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry as a research approach that is situated within
these three dimensions to capture the complex nature of studied phenomena. Temporality is
central to narrative research. When carrying out a study, the researcher considers the past,
present, and future in relation to his or her prior and present experiences, social and political
backgrounds, education, and epistemological stance. This means that temporality points
inquirers toward the past, present, and future of the people, places, things, and events under
study.

Sociality is also critical in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers describe the personal
and social situations of a study. The personal situations, according to Connelly and
Clandinin (2006), refer to “the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral
dispositions” (p. 480) of the researcher and participants, while their social situations describe
the setting or conditions under which participants’ lived experience and the events
surrounding them are explored. The social situations, according to Connelly and Clandinin
(2006), exemplify sociocultural, institutional, and linguistic narratives of the inquirers and
participants. In general, sociality focuses on inquiry into the relationship between the
participants and other people.

Place refers to the specific research setting or physical locations where research
occurs, entailing data collection and other relational activities between the inquirer and
participants. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) described place as “the specific concrete,
physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and
events take place” (p. 480). The occurrence of narrative inquiry within the three-dimensional
space considerably informs all aspects of the study, beginning with the conception through
the writing of the study report. Hence, the narrative evolves throughout a journey that is
situated “inward, outward, backward, forward” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 49),
suggesting that researchers look back at their texts historically, presently, and futuristically.

In this study, I employed narrative inquiry in framing the research because this
approach is in alignment with the paradigm that this study drew on, poststructuralism. This
is to say that the notion of positivists that knowledge is “out there” and that it is measurable
and observable is rejected; instead, human phenomena are socially constructed, and reality
has multiple facets (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, I am aware of and took into account
participants’ subjectivity and inter-subjectivity throughout the narration, as this creates
reality, knowledge, and understandings. In other words, narrative inquiry advocates
subjectivity, relativity, and pluralism, all of which are unequivocally in alignment with the
research paradigm employed in this study.

Equally importantly, I used a narrative inquiry approach to better understand
NNESTs’ lived experiences. Through the inquiry, I was able to associate NNESTs’ lived
experiences with the past, present, and future in the context of this study. The stories of the
four participants and my story are situated within the three-dimensional concept of Connelly
and Clandinin (2006). The narratives in this study look backward and forward at the puzzle
at who we were and how our identity will shape the future. The concepts are also rooted in
exploring our inward feelings and perceptions, which affect our own decisions, as well as
outward perceptions, which represent our interactions within social contexts. This is depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Study Narratives.

**Bourdieu’s Forms of Capital**

Having discussed the philosophical underpinnings of the study coupled with the research methodology and the narrative approach, in the following section I address Pierre Bourdieu’s forms of capital as well as Gee’s Concept of Identity as an Analytical Lens. Specifically, I demonstrate how and in what ways Bourdieu’s forms of capital are played out in Gee’s concept of identity as an analytical lens?

Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, is considered one of the most influential scholars of the twentieth century. His prolific scholarship covered a wide range of academic
subjects, such as sociology, anthropology, and education. He extensively discussed various concepts in education, such as symbolic power, symbolic violence, social reproductions, Habitus, and forms of capital.

In his analysis of human society, Bourdieu (1986) discussed power dynamics between individuals and elaborated how power relations operate in education in structures of social space. Bourdieu (1986) argued that the human society consists of different fields, such as schools, churches, and factories and that for an individual to interact with other individuals or groups of people, he/she has to be aware of a system and sustain unconscious knowledge of certain rules, values, attitudes, dispositions, expectations, and lifestyles of a given social group or field. Consequently, in Bourdieu’s analysis of human society, he proposed the concept of Habitus and in his words, Habitus is “a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 16). Habitus is knowledge that an individual upholds that makes him/her interact and navigate successfully in a given field.

Unlike Karl Marx, whose analysis of human society is governed by class, in which economic capital plays a pivotal role, Bourdieu proposed that there are different forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social) that an individual brings with him/her in interacting in society, and they can be converted into economic capital or money, wealth, and power. The first concept of Bourdieu in forms of capital is cultural capital, which refers to the information, knowledge, experiences, and credentials that individuals hold. This can be illustrated briefly by getting a graduate degree from an ivy league school in the United States. Another example of what is meant by cultural capital is speaking many languages fluently in
a given field. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can be divided into three main broad types: institutionalized, embodied, and objectified.

Bourdieu’s first category of cultural capital is institutionalized cultural capital, which refers to information, knowledge, and quality of education that an individual attains in a certain field in the society. A well-known example in the context of this study is the prestige and honor that an individual who graduates from a North American school gets over the honor and prestige gets who graduates from a European university or Saudi Arabian. The second type of cultural capital, embodied cultural capital, is the skills, personality traits, experience, and background that an individual illustrates in a certain milieu in the field. This type could be illustrated briefly by the way and quality an individual speaks in a certain context in the society, which could empower or hinder him from pursuing certain goals. Finally, objectified cultural capital is manifested in tangible objects, such as clothes, cars, etc.

Social capital, the second type of capital, refers to the personal connections of an individual in the field. For an individual to succeed in a certain context in a given society, it is necessary to focus and invest in personal relationships. For instance, an individual could attain relationships either by inheriting them through the family he/she belongs to or by developing them by socializing and networking within a certain class or group of people in the various fields in the society.

In a nutshell, Bourdieu posits in his theory of Habitus and forms of capital (1986) that society does not only consist of economic capital per se; there are other forms of capital. That is to say that an individual is de/valorized not merely on the economic sources he/she possesses but also on other forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital, which are ultimately legitimatized as symbolic capital.
Gee’s Concept of Identity as an Analytical Lens

Several studies have been conducted on the concept of identity as an important element in life, in relationships, and in general social experiences (Block, 2004; Pierce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Gee’s (2000) perspective is one of the most significant and well-cited perspectives on identity studies. Unlike other scholars from psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, and educational fields, who have discussed the concept using the relationship between an individual and the context, Gee’s (2000) view is explored from a methodological approach: “identity as an analytical lens” (p.100).

Gee (2001) defined the concept of identity as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context” (p 99). He categorized identity into different types, as follows: “Nature perspective” (N-identity), “Institutional perspective” (I-identity), “Discourse perspective” (D-identity), and “Affinity perspective” (A- identity): (N.I.D.A) (p. 100). Gee viewed the concept of identity as an analytical tool to investigate an individual identity in the education setting. His categorization of the identity types he explored was based on perceptions.

The nature perspective (N-identity) type of identity refers to the state of being natural or biological. It suggests a natural state of an individual, based on his or her birth configuration. Gee argued that N-identity is created by the power of nature. For example, being a Native American is a state of N-identity; it is not acquired but rather bestowed by birth. The second type of identity is the Institutional perspective (I-Identity). This refers to the type of identity one has based on affiliations with social institutions, such as a lawyer, who is recognized as such based on his judiciary institutional affiliation. This state of identity
is shaped and informed by the power of principle, tradition, or authorities inherent in institutional entities.

The third type of identity is discourse perspective (D-identity), which is neither constructed by natural, biological, nor institutional processes, but is informed through an individual participation in dialogue or interaction. Traits or characters could represent D-identity, such an individual who is characteristically funny in his discursive relationship with others.

The affinity perspective (A-identity) is the fourth in the categories of identities types and refers to the state of an individual affiliating with a group of people. This type of identity mirrors traits of group identity elements and shared values in the group, based on the commonality of interests and goals. A good example in this case is identities that are acquired through association to political parties, religious bodies, professional association, etc. Gee used the term *affinity space* to typify the type of identity. Affinity space or spaces are used to describe membership in both offline and online locations where people converge to interactively exchange ideas and perpetuate common ideals and principles.

Gee proposed the use of the different identity types as an analytical tool to explore issues in education. The methodological identity approach has since gained momentum among scholars. For instance, Overton (2012) associated the benefit of using Gee’s “identity as analytical tool” as a research tool and with it the potential to provide deep understanding about participants, as well as to provide specific information on the process of their identity construction through interactions and social experiences.

Despite the wide acceptance of Gee’s perspectives of identity as a research tool, several criticisms have followed its adoption, particularly of his Discourse perspective (D-
identity). Critics have argued that the process of identity formation or reformation is more complex than the way Gee proposed it in relation to dialogue. It is suggested that an individual’s identity is fluid, multifaceted, and complex to the extent that it cannot be simplified just to the process of discourse. For example, if we would say that an individual is labeled as charismatic, this does not mean that this individual trait is unchangeable, as this trait may be evident only in certain contexts.

Another issue that emerges from Gee’s concept of identity is the notion of affinity identity (A-identity). An individual’s belonging and associating with a group or groups may not suggest a permanent affiliation; hence, for instance, he or she might withdraw his or her membership (student graduates or drops out of school, for example), and the identity (of being a student) fizzles. In some cases, an individual could be affiliated with a group with opposing binary identities at the same time. In that regard, an individual may hold bidirectional affiliations and identities. However, despite the shortcomings of Gee’s identity framework, it has provided the means through which many scholars have investigated critical issues in education, such as literature, language, digital literacy, second language acquisition, and pedagogy.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, I argue that Gee’s notion of employing identity as an analytical lens for research in education intersects with Bourdieu’s theoretical framework forms of capital. Informed by Bourdieu’s theoretical conceptual framework forms of capital to understand human action in an educational milieu and Gee’s model identity as an analytic lens to understand schools and society, I propose to adopt both conceptual frameworks to examine how male non-native English speaking teachers
(NNESTs) negotiate, construct, and develop their professional identities in higher education institutes in Saudi Arabia.

**Research Questions**

I explored the following research questions in this study to engage with ways in which the five participants, including myself, negotiated, interacted, and constructed our professional identity in a given social and educational setting (Saudi Arabia in the case of this study). This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

**Q1.** What do the stories of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) reveal about how their lived experiences have shaped their professional identities?

**Q2.** What challenges do non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) encounter related to their careers?

**Q3.** What strategies do non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTS) use to negotiate emerging challenges?

**Positionality/Researcher Role**

This study includes my own reflections as a participant researcher. I wrote my personal and professional life experiences, language learning experience, and teaching experience; and my autobiography drew on Connelly and Clendenin’s (2000) concept of three-dimensional space, which is situated within “inward, outward, backward, forward” inquiry space (p. 49). This suggests a narrative that is embedded within a historical, current, and futuristic context.

When I graduated more than two decades ago from the English department of King Abdul-Aziz University, having majored in linguistics, I was engaged to teach in a junior high school as an English teacher in a public-school system in the eastern part of Jeddah in Saudi
Arabia. That was the beginning of my career as a teacher. My capital at that time was in the
form of a degree rather than in any on-the-job experience or expertise, so my cultural and
intellectual capital was theoretical, not practical. I still recall my first class. Other teachers
of English colleagues in that school had graduated from schools of education or had teacher
training and had many years of teaching experience. I had none, so my teaching capital was
nonexistent; hence, I faced copious challenges in teaching and managing my class. Although
I was highly motivated and excited about the job, I realized that being an enthusiastic and
hardworking teacher did not necessarily translate engaging into effective pedagogical
practice. I had not yet gained the cultural or experiential capital needed for effective
teaching. To generate that capital, I had to learn more about the pedagogical aspects of
teaching and students’ different styles of learning.

I realized that I needed to learn strategies, theories, teaching methods, and other basic
skills to discharge my responsibilities as a classroom teacher effectively. Subsequently, I
started a rigorous development plan towards educating myself in the areas of my deficiency.
I took courses and obtained a diploma in education. I also enrolled in professional
development training programs and also attended workshops, forums, and conferences. I
obtained two MA degrees in education. This added to my linguistic and cultural capital.
This in turn led to my current pursuit of a doctoral degree at the University of New Mexico.
This was a significant investment in acquiring cultural capital.

My desire to broaden my knowledge of teaching and learning informed this study and
my positionality in the examination of how teachers construct their professional identity. I
have invested a lot of effort (through my education, training, and job experience) in gaining
social and linguistic capital, ongoing work reflected in my positionality in this research. I
strongly believe that identity issues are lifelong, involving ongoing social constructions of
the self and of professional identity. As the saying goes, “Life isn’t about finding yourself;
life is about creating yourself.” My position here will be that of a lifelong learner within the
frame of this study.

Although an emic (insider), I also remain an etic (outsider), one who is still trying to
learn. I am an emic because I have worked for much of my life in Saudi Arabia and have
extensive and diverse teaching experience there, which gives me an affinity with the
students, the other teachers, and the context. I am aware of my biases and sufficiently
conscious of these biases to protect the validity of the study. As an outsider, I had been away
for a long time, during which dramatic changes occurred.

In view of the fact that that I am a researcher and participant in this study, I adhered
to some conditions to achieve the objectives of the study. For example, I maintained and
built a relationship of trust with the participants. From the onset of the research, I explained
to the participants the purpose and processes of the research and discussed duly my
expectations with them. This enabled me to gain their confidence and to elicit thick
narratives filled with information from lived experiences. I was obligated to create a safe and
comfortable environment through interviews during the study. As the study was grounded in
lived experiences, I equally shared my own stories with participants as a basis for a cross-
analysis of findings.

I attempted to minimize such bias by taking the measures explained below (e.g.,
member checking). Member checking was one of the strategies used to minimize bias. My
advisor and a colleague checked the thematic analysis and coding to double-check for
possible bias. Also, I went back to the participants and shared with them via email their
narrations, as transcribed and analyzed, and they provided their own insights into whether I had captured their experience and points of view accurately. Member checking was one measure I to avoid allowing my own preconceptions, values, beliefs, and biases to distort the research findings.

**Participants and Sampling**

This study used a purposeful sampling (also called criterion-based selection) in selecting the participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified purposeful sampling as a sample that is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96).

All participants were recruited and selected based on certain criteria, congruent with the purpose of the study and research questions. Creswell (2000) identified four principles in choosing a purposeful sampling, which imply that the participant must be (a) representative of target population, (b) the source of the subject matter, and that (c) the researcher must address the difference between participants and context. These principles of selecting purposeful sampling were strictly adhered to in selecting participants in this study. The participants for this study were chosen according to the following criteria:

1) In-service male English teacher.

2) A non-native English speaking teacher.

3) An in-service teacher for a period between four and 10 years.

4) Licensed as a fulltime English teacher.

5) Directly recruited by the university under study.
Participants’ Recruitment

I followed the approved protocol set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of New Mexico in conducting this study (See Appendix A). To recruit non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), I sent an email to the dean of the English Language Institute at Alsalam University to request an approval letter to conduct the research in the English Language Institute. (See the attached email requesting approval from Alsalam University). The university sent me a permission letter to conduct the study (See Appendix B, the approval letter from the research site). The administrative office emailed me with names and emails of teachers who were interested in participating in the study.

I communicated with the prospective participants via email to invite them and to arrange meetings at which to discuss the research procedures. I moved to the research location at Alsalam University to consult with the English Language Institute’s administration office to brief the designated officer about the study towards eventual recruitment of participants through emails. A meeting was held after receiving a response from each contacted prospective participant to explain the purpose of the study and criteria for participation. Participants were given up to four days to sign the consent letter and return it to me after our initial meeting (See Appendix C, the Consent to Participate in Research form). I think this gave them space to think and make their own decision whether take part or refuse to participate in the study.

Data Collection (Interviews; Autobiography)

Central to narrative inquiry is the interviews. Interviews are one of the most commonly used instruments for collecting data (Creswell, 2013; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Polite and Beck (2006) defined an interview as a method of data collection in which
an interviewer asks some questions of another person responds. He added that interviews can be conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. Interviews are generally used in qualitative research to give profound understanding of how the interviewees view the world. Cohen et al. (2001) asserted, “interview enables participants to discuss their interpretation of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their points of view” (p. 267).

The open-ended nature of the questions enabled in gathering substantial information about the interview. The interviews’ main purpose was to generate data by cooperating between the researcher and the interviewee. The interview was not only an instrument to collect data but, also between researcher and interviewee. This view of reciprocity in the nature of interview is supported by Atikainen (1996), who described interviews as “a kind of framework within which the participants try to exchange meanings that are negotiated and that can be understood by both participants” (p. 25).

There are generally three types of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Cohen et al., 2011). The type of interviews chosen for a study has a substantial effect on its quality and the amount of data collected. There are a number of significant distinctions between these three kinds of interviews. For instance, structured interviews (sometimes called highly structured interviews or standardized interviews) refers to interviews that shaped by prearranged questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined a structured interview as “an oral form of the written survey” (p. 109). In contrast, an unstructured interview is the opposite of structured interview and more like a conversation. Therefore, it is expressed as informal, flexible, and exploratory questions. Norman and Yvonna (2005) explained that an unstructured interview is advantageous in “capturing
precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behavior within pre-established categories” (p. 706).

The third type of interview, the semi-structured interview, is often used to generate a lot of data in a short time. Bernard and Ryan (2010) pointed out that “semistructured interviews produce a lot of qualitative data quickly” (p. 30). The semistructured interview is quintessentially based on the notion that the researcher opens up the discussion with a number of questions around specific topics. The researcher asks the participants to response to various kinds of probes. An important feature of the semistructured interview is that it generates deep and rich data (Rossman & Rallis, 2013). Wengraf (2001) listed three fundamentals of the semistructured interview. First, the interview questions must be partially listed and suitably prepared. Second, it requires the spontaneous construction of interview questions. The last characteristic allows for holistic data analysis and interpretation.

The use of semistructured interviews in this study allows a participatory approach to explore social phenomena in focus (Bryman, 2012; Warren, 2010). Furthermore, the choice of the semistructured interview is consistent with the essence of my study, which examines the lived experience of the participant, and in turn gives thick descriptions and details of the findings. In the present study, participants’ recruitment was limited to male NNESTs only in view of the religious and cultural belief system in Saudi Arabia, which restricts male to female interaction. That is, male and female are segregated in the Saudi public, as well as, the higher education system; thus, the research had access to male participants only. This is one of the limitations of this study as discussed in a later section of this chapter. The number of four in-service male teachers were recruited for the present study to provide detailed and thick descriptions of their specific lived experiences.
**Interviews Questions**

The interview questions were designed to address the aforementioned research questions. Each participant took an average of 60 to 90 minutes to respond to the questions. These interviews were designed to elicit a better understanding of the lived experiences of NNESTs and the challenges that they encounter. Hence, the narrative interviews allowed the participants to reflect on themselves and describe who they are as NNESTs.

These interviews consisted of four major parts that allowed me to explore NNESTs’ lived experience. The four parts of the narrative interview were: (1) life stories and personal, experiences in the past, (2) language learning and becoming a language teacher, (3) current teaching experiences and self-descriptions, and (4) challenges, self-perceptions, and future plans (imagined identity)(See Appendix D, Interview Questions).

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues in qualitative research are significant for relational purposes with human subjects and in delivering a valid and reliable study report (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), strict adherence to ethics significantly supports the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. The authors asserted, “the trustworthiness of a qualitative study also depends on the credibility of the researcher” (p. 265). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) mandated researchers to submit their research proposals for a prior ethical review process to ground participants’ engagement in research in ethical principles and to ensure their safety Lichtmam (2013) pointed out that “as more research is conducted in schools, it became necessary to many institutions to establish a review board. Universities followed suit and set up procedures to review students’ research” (p. 51). Consequently, researchers using human subjects in their studies are required to follow basic
codes of interactions with participants subjected to the approved codes of conduct, as meticulously articulated in the IRB protocol submitted to the institution beforehand.

Some of the ethical considerations that have been identified at different stages of research to protect participants’ vulnerability are respecting privacy and confidentiality, ensuring informed consent via distribution of consent letters to participant, and minimizing harm in the process. Cohen and Manion (2013) pinpointed common causes of ethical dilemmas in research, which include the nature of research project itself (ethnic differences in intelligence, for example); the context for the research; procedures to be adopted (producing high level of anxiety); method of data collection (covert observation); the nature of the participants (emotionally disturbed adolescents), the type of data collected (highly personal information of a sensitive kind); what is to be done with data (publishing in a manner that causes the participants’ embarrassment) (p. 348).

To maintain the ethical requirements in this study, the participants’ identities were protected by keeping information pertaining to them highly confidential. The names of the participants were not disclosed. Instead, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. To protect participants’ privacy from the onset of the study, I treated the collected data anonymously. The interviews were recorded and then kept in my password-protected personal computer. Next, the data were transcribed, analyzed, and saved in my password-protected computer, and the files pertaining the study were also password-protected. Moreover, the data have not been copied, duplicated, or saved in any other device whatsoever. The Principal Investigator (PI), Dr. Lucretia Penny Pence, and I are the only people who could access to the data. Finally, hard copy of the data are kept in a safe cabinet in the advisor’s office at UNM. At the end of this study, I destroyed all the data and deleted
anything pertaining to the study. The audio file recording has been destroyed. However, the consent letters signed by the participants will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the IRB office at the University of New Mexico (UNM).

During the interviews the participants might have faced minimal risks. For example, the interviewer might have tackled issues that could have made the participants feel uncomfortable or stressed. In this case, I told the participants that they did not have to answer the questions, or they could change the topic to another subject or stop the interview and reschedule it. There might have been risks or potential stress due to the power relationship or cultural issues regarding the interview; the participant might have felt uncomfortable about sharing certain issues about the institution or administrators with me; therefore, I reassured the participants that all information would be kept confidential and that the names of all individuals, institutions, and places involved would never be associated with their identifying information in any report.

**Research Participants**

This research recruited five participants (including myself) who came from different countries of origin (Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia) and different socioeconomic backgrounds. Patton (2002) stated that, it is the selection of information-rich cases that is more significant than the size of the sample in qualitative research. They also speak diverse languages and some had more experiences abroad and taught in different parts of the world than others. Moreover, some of the participants (but not all) studied abroad. Although each one came from a Muslim country, the Islamic faith was a more significant influence on some participants than others. The impact of culture and background therefore were highly diverse and led the participants to hold different views of professional identity.
In other words, I could have chosen a more homogeneous sample, all from the same country and socioeconomic background, but I wanted to tackle different issues that might affect NNESTs’ professional identity construction. In what follows is a snapshot of each participant, educational backgrounds, degrees, languages spoken and teaching experiences as summarized in the following table (see Table 1), with more information below about each participant:

Table 1

**Participant Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>Spoken Languages</th>
<th>Teaching Experience in SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>PhD candidate</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Urdu and English</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Abdullah</td>
<td>MA Phonology</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Arabic, French, Amazighen, and English</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mass</td>
<td>MA TESOL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Malay and English</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mohsen</td>
<td>BA English</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Arabic, French, English, and German</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mustafà</td>
<td>PhD candidate</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Arabic, Somali, and English</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ahmed**

Ahmed is a Pakistani teacher in his mid-forties, who was born, grew up, and studied in a small village in eastern part of the country. His middle-class family had a great impact on his future and had always been loving and encouraging him to pursue his studies. Therefore, with the support of his family, he was able to graduate from the local university and double majored in English and science. Right after his graduation, he taught English in
Pakistan’s public schools. Because Ahmed has always been a highly motivated teacher. He positioned himself as legitimatized and professional teacher. He obtained two MA degrees: in TESOL and statistics. He moved to Saudi Arabia to teach in public schools in a remote area. He managed to move to work in the private sector at a renowned industrial company as an English teacher. He moved to teach in the public sector again, where he taught in two different public universities in the western part of Saudi Arabia (SA). At the time of the interview, he had been teaching English as a foreign language for about 15 years in SA, while at the same time being a PhD candidate in a TESOL program in the UK.

Abdullah

Abdullah is a biracial (half Arab and half Amazighen [Berber] Moroccan teacher in his mid-thirties. He was the youngest teacher of the participants. He was born and reared in a small town in Morocco. Because of Abdullah’s Amazighen family, he spoke four languages: Arabic, French, English, and Amazighen. After Abdullah graduated from university with a bachelor’s degree in linguistics, English, he matriculated at Oxford University and earned an MA in phonology. After he had finished his first year in a doctoral program in the UK, he decided to go back home and teach English to support his family financially. Although he passed the first year in a PhD program, he could not pursue his studies further because his family was in need, so he started working as an English teacher to support his family financially. Abdullah’s dream had always been to have a PhD degree in phonology; however, his family obligations forced a change in his career path.

Although Abdullah did not plan to be a teacher, his career journey was an intriguing one, and he developed a passion for teaching, so he frequently attended professional development programs in the UK for self-fulfillment reasons as well as to get qualifications
in the field of TESOL. Hence, these credentials opened the door for him to get decent jobs as an EFL teacher. He started his teaching abroad by spending one year in a private school in Kuwait. He moved to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to teach in an American university for a couple of years. First, he was hired by a vocational training institute to teach in a technology college in Jeddah for three years. Later, he got a better offer to teach in Al-Salam University, and he had been teaching English there since then. Abdullah’s religious identity was pivotal in his decisions. It was demonstrated in many practices. For instance, although Abdullah taught in a big city, he chose to live 75 kilometers away from his workplace in another city, Makkah, which is a sacred place for Muslims all over the world; he commuted daily to work.

Mass

Mass was a 45-year-old Malaysian EFL teacher. He was born, lived, and studied in Singapore. He did not come back to his country of origin until his father retired from the army. At that time, Mass was in middle school. Mass considered himself a fluent bilingual who spoke Malay and English. In his early education in Singapore, English was a medium of instruction in schools. He came back with his family to Malaysia when he was in middle school. He entered university and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English. He repeatedly reported that one of his English teachers had a great impact on him and was what made him love English and want to become a teacher. Mass worked as an English teacher for one year before he was sent to the UK and got an MA in TESOL. He had always been confident, proud of his cultural competence, and considered himself a native speaker of English. “I know the American culture, how you speak, all kinds of colloquial [expressions] and things like that, I understand very well, even the British.” His second teaching post was
in SA. He joined a university in 2008. Throughout the informal chatting and the formal interviews and data analysis, it was revealed that he was the only participant who taught in both an EFL and an ESL context. He was the only one among the participants who spoke little Arabic.

**Mohsen**

Mohsen was a 56-year-old Tunisian teacher who was born in and grew up in a rural village in Tunisia. He reported that his family was poor. He had always been dreaming of being a soldier to fulfill his hunger to have power and authority. He studied throughout his education in Tunisia. He majored in English and was planning to become a teacher. He reported that he was born to be teacher. He spoke four languages: Arabic, French, English, and German. He married three times and had 11 kids. Mohsen embarked on his teaching journey as a primary school teacher in Tunisia. He had taught English for more than 15 years in his country before he started his overseas teaching journey.

**Mustafa**

I am in my late forties. I was born and grew up in a coastal city by the red sea, Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. Because of my diverse family I speak three languages: Arabic, English, and Somali. Learning and teaching a language shaped my life and future career path. I studied elementary, junior high and high school in public schools in SA and joined King Abdulaziz University, majoring in linguistics. Right after I graduated and obtained a bachelor degree in English, I was appointed as an EFL teacher in ministry of education in a small middle school in the eastern part of the city. I never thought that I would be a teacher one day; however, I fell in love with teaching and consider myself born to be a teacher.
First and foremost, I taught for seven years in middle and high schools. Then, I worked as an English supervisor in charge of teachers’ professional development as well as their assessments. Although I worked as an English teacher and supervisor, I did not have any educational preparation background in the university. Therefore, I joined a one year educational program. I also obtained an MA in educational supervision from the same university. I had several training courses for professional development in the UK and the USA universities. Another phase of my life was when I worked in a Foreign education department.

The Context

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is located in Southwest Asia and situates most of the Arabian Peninsula with approximately 829,995 square miles (2,149,690 square kilometers). Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, and it was established by King Abdulaziz Al Saud in 1932. Muslims have always regarded it as the cradle of Islam and as highly spiritually significant to the Islamic world because Islam was revealed there in the seventh century (about 640 C.E.) and due to the existence of the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. In 1938, vast oil reserves were discovered, which made Saudi Arabia the largest oil-producing country in the world. Since then, the KSA has been transformed from a nomadic desert country to a wealthy prosperous country. These drastic changes have had a great impact on life in general in the KSA and particularly on its socioeconomic and educational aspects.

According to the data provided by the General Authorities of Statistics (GAS), the current population of Saudi Arabia is 31,742,308 million. Over 18 million are Saudi citizens, while 12,666,728 are expatriates; most of them work in the private sector. There is a difference between some regions in traditions, norms, and culture, but in general, the KSA is
considered to be a homogenous society. Despite the large number of expatriate workers with
diverse cultural values, a strict control is imposed on practices that deviate from Islamic and
Saudi culture. Furthermore, demographic surveys released by the GAS show significant data
pertaining to age groups. Those under 15 years old comprise 24.8% of the Saudi population,
while about 72% of the populations is in the age group of 15-64 years old. The proportion of
the population in the KSA that is of school age is relatively high. The educational system in
Saudi Arabia is divided into general education (primary schools, junior high, and high
school), literacy and adult education, private schools, and higher education. In 1975, the
government established institutions of higher education for men and women, including
universities, women’s colleges, and scholarships and professional development programs.

Education in Saudi Arabia is free of charge to all Saudi citizens and expatriates who
want it, from primary school up to high school. There are three stages in the Saudi education
system. The first one is primary (from six to twelve years old). The second one is junior
high school (from thirteen to fifteen). The last one is high school (from sixteen to eighteen
years old). The Saudi Arabian government has been increasing funding for education and has
developed many schools in the last three decades. The Ministry of Education (2014) stated
that the number of the students enrolled in primary school in Saudi Arabia was 1, 266,266, in
junior high school 1,230,577, and high school 543,886. Therefore, the total number of
students enrolled in Saudi Arabian public and private school was approximately 3,040,729.
The number of Saudi students enrolled in colleges and universities was 1,622,441. About
86.15% of the students were in a four-year program.
Women’s Education in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, 1959 was a milestone for education. The king of Saudi Arabia, Saud bin Abdul-Aziz, gave a historical speech to establish the first formal public female education in the kingdom. In that speech, the king laid down many crucial and controversial policies in female education. For example, he announced that female education would be under his own supervision and care (Prokoo, 2003).

In 1960, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia instituted women’s education. Before then, there was no formal public female education. Nevertheless, there were very few private schools for girls and women. These were scattered mainly in the western part of the kingdom, especially in the holy city of Makkah. These schools concentrated on teaching the Holy Quran and other religious subjects. Furthermore, females from rich families were in a better position than were most female citizens because females from rich families were either educated at home or sent to private schools outside the country. Since that day, women’s education has been legitimate. The Saudi Arabian educational system still segregates male and female students, starting in the first year in school.

Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia was established in 1975 to supervise, coordinate, and develop public and private higher education in the country. It also encourages Saudi citizens to specialize and develop their knowledge and skills in all fields: medicine, engineering, pure and applied sciences, administration, and the social sciences (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia is the only institution responsible for public and private universities and colleges. The Ministry has offered unprecedented development of much education since 2009. For instance, in the
last five years, the number of public universities has increased threefold. Nowadays, there are 25 public universities in Saudi Arabia.

Education is segregated (male and female), however, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), which focuses on research and technology is the only government educational institution that embraces co-education. However, in 2010 the Ministry of Education established the biggest female university in the middle east, Nora University in Riyadh which accommodates 40,000 female students on its campus. The education Digest of UNESCO (2000) stated that in the Arab state including Saudi Arabia, the statistics depict that gender parity was and almost identical, yet there had been recent much higher growth for women. The report also pointed out that if this trend continued females would take a lead in the region. Moreover, according to the Human Development (UNDP) for 2014, Saudi Arabia has achieved 64% in global development education surpassing the average of the global development in education.

The increase in the prices of oil in the last few years has led to unprecedented economic growth in Saudi Arabia; this has had a great impact on improving the educational system. The changes experienced by the educational system in Saudi Arabia over the past decade remain stupendous. For instance, the government has invested billions of dollars in education and encouraged male and female students to pursue their studies overseas. The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Scholarship Program was launched in 2005 as a political intuitive between Saudi Arabia and the United States to help young Saudis to pursue education in the United States. Golden opportunities were opened for both Saudi males and females. As an example, the number of Saudi students studying in the United States in
universities and colleges in 2014 exceeded 106,000. Many of these students will hold leadership positions and serves as change agent in the country.

The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, (SACM, 2011) stated that based on a political agreement between the United States of America and Saudi Arabia to increase the number of Saudi students in the USA, the government of Saudi Arabia lunched the largest scholarship in the history of the country. The King Abdullah Scholarship Program in 2005. Since then Ministry of Higher education has invested billions of dollars in educating Saudi male and female significantly the program gives equal opportunity to males and females.

**Alsalam University.** Alsalam University (pseudonym) was established in 2009 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It has ten faculties and over 5000 students in four different campuses in two different towns. The university was initially established as the north campus of a large university, and in 2015 a royal decree was established to be a state public university. Although English is not a medium of instruction in all of the faculties, all students regardless of their planned majors have to be enrolled to study two intensive general English courses in the English Language Institute (ELI) at the university. This prerequisite exists in educational institutions throughout Saudi Arabia and prepares students for academic success, while also providing them with enhanced opportunities for professional success.

**The English Language Institute (ELI).** The English Language Institute (ELI) aims to provide excellent instruction and training for foundation-year students so that they can master proficiency in English as a foundation for their future academic success in the major field of their choice. In the most recent completed academic year (2016-17), the ELI enrolled 1,919 students. Of the ELI’s 41 teachers, 14 were native speakers of English
(NESTs), while 27 were non-native English speakers Teachers (NNESTs). This information is summarized in the following table (see Table 2).

Table 2

**ELI Enrollment Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>No of Students in ELI</th>
<th>Number of ELI’s teachers</th>
<th>NEST</th>
<th>NNESTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016/2017</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Baden and Major (2013) explained the term *qualitative data analysis* as an ongoing process that includes breaking data into meaningful segments to make meanings out of the data to answer the research questions. Wolcott (2001) defined data analysis as “the examination of data using systematic and standardized measures and procedures” (p. 32). Analysis is validated to make sense of the data in a systematic process. However, Strauss and Corbin (2014) asserted that data analysis is not a systematized procedure but a “free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding” (p. 58). This study followed Rossman and Rallis’s (2013) definition of data analysis, which is the “process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p. 273).

Several participants contributed their stories to this study, so a thematic analysis was used, which is “useful for theorizing across a number of cases” (Riesman, 2005, p.3). Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) found thematic analysis ideal for multiple case studies because it helps delineate “shared themes, as well as highlighting individual differences” (p. 78).
I transcribed all the participants’ interviews verbatim. Transcribing involved listening to the interviews carefully, an opportunity to gain great understanding of the participants’ life stories. “Transcription facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data” (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 82). The insights gained in this way might otherwise be overlooked. As this study involved exploring the life stories of the participants, obtaining complete transcripts was essential. The principal objective was to obtain “accuracy of meaning” and “the meaning conveyed in the words used by the storyteller” (Atkinson, 2002, p. 134). Riessman’s (1993) noted that the story is the data. Therefore, those stories must be transcribed accurately.

I commenced the process of analyzing the raw data using Rossman and Rallis’s (2013) structure of narrative analysis, which entails eight phases of data analysis. These are: (1) organizing the data after transcribing it, (2) becoming familiar with the data, (3) identifying categories, (4) coding the data (first and second cycles), (5) generating themes, (6) interpreting, (7) searching for alternate understandings, and (8) writing the report.

The process of analysis requires identifying themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). This analysis is “a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis” (Fereday & Muir Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). A careful thematic approach can produce an “insightful analysis that answers particular research questions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

The preliminary phase of analyzing the data is “data organization,” which encompasses the process of cleaning up and organizing data, for example, editing, writing down hunches, and analyzing ideas. The second phase is “familiarizing yourself with the
data,” which means that after transcribing the audiotapes, I repeatedly read the scripts to familiarize myself with the participants’ narratives. Categorizing the data was the third step. Before categorizing the data, I differentiated between two significant terms: category and theme. Whereas category refers to a word or phrase that describes some part of the data, theme refers to the pattern or process that emerges from the data.

The fourth step of the process was coding the data and involved thinking through what I believed was the evidence for a category or theme. The fifth step was generating themes, which refer to the features of a studied phenomenon. Themes from the data emerge from frequencies, similarities, differences, transitions, and language connectors in the data. The sixth step included interpreting data and denotes the process of making sense of the results or drawing conclusions. The seventh phase was to search for alternative understandings, which assumes that there are always other alternative ways to interpret or explain the results. Finally, writing the report was considered an indispensable part of data analysis because choosing words, phrases, and ideas reflects the density of the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2013).

Subsequent to the coding of data and emerging themes, which added depth to the analysis and better understandings of the participants, I rewrote the biographical narratives of each of the four other participants in this study. These biographical narratives were situated to depict temporality, sociality, and place of the studied phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I analyzed the narratives thematically. While all this was happening, I also presented how the findings of this study complemented, challenged, and/or contradicted the existing literature on teachers’ professional identity. Therefore, I also used the participants’ own words and analyzed connecting the major aspects that emerged from the data to infer the
teachers’ professional identities to answer the research questions. More importantly, I discussed the analysis in relation to the research questions.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argued, “narrative inquiry challenges Western views of scientific research, in which notions of data validity, reliability, and generalizability are paramount” (p. 40). Therefore, this study will employ different procedures to build trustworthiness. I used a member-checking strategy to double-check the authenticity of the retold stories with the participants. After narrating the participants’ stories, I re-contacted them to validate the narratives. The second consideration relies on providing thick description of the phenomenon. Eventually, since I am a researcher participant in the study, I collaborated with the participants in reciprocal fashion.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

I adhered to the procedures outlined by Saldaña (2009) concerning the two stages of coding cycles and within-case and cross-case analysis strategies explained by Merriam (1998) find meaning in each narrative and between narratives. I viewed each narrative as “a comprehensive case in and of itself” (Merriam, 1998, p. 194). Each individual participant was unique and possessed a unique narrative voice, as well as a unique social construction of his own reality in formulating his own “holistic descriptions and explanations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

To further conceptualize running themes beneath the participants’ responses, in chapter five, I took these discussions further in a form of cross-analysis, as well as dialogic investigation. Cross-case analysis helped me to identify (Merriam, 1998) the commonality and differences between the five participants. I winnowed the data to categorize common themes as I looked for patterns and dissimilarities. This process helped me to have an
overarching perspective of the five participants as I addressed the research questions of my study.

**Trustworthiness**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argued, “Narrative inquiry challenges Western views of scientific research, in which notions of data validity, reliability, and generalizability are paramount” (p. 40). This study employed different procedures to build trustworthiness. First, I used a member-checking strategy to double-check the authenticity of the retold stories with the participants. After I narrated the participants’ stories, I contacted them to validate their stories. The second consideration relies on providing thick description of the phenomenon. I also sought to bolster the rigor and trustworthiness of the study’s findings by considering four criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Eventually, since I am a researcher participant in the study, I collaborated with the other participants in reciprocal fashion.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the philosophical paradigm used in the research design, in part by explaining ontological and epistemological approaches. Constructivism and positivist approaches were compared. This chapter also justified using a qualitative method for this research study, narrative inquiry, to examine participants’ lived experiences and their stories. It reviewed diverse kinds of qualitative research methodology, the essence of narrative inquiry, and the following theoretical frameworks: the three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and milieu), Bourdieu’s forms of capital, and Gee’s notion of identity as an analytical lens. The research questions were presented, as were the research and sampling methodology. The participants were recruited via purposeful sampling. Data were collected
via semi-structured personal interviews about their personal experiences to explore their professional identity as NNESTs. The role of the researcher was explained, as was positionality. The ethics of the research (IRB), plans for the data analysis, the research context, and the trustworthiness of the research, including checking for researcher bias, were covered. A table provides a concise summary of the participants, followed by a description of each participant.
Chapter Four:

Narration and Data Analysis of the Five Participants

This chapter introduces thorough portraits of each of the research participants individually to capture unique information that lead to interpretations of their lived experiences. Specifically, I provide an in-depth examination of the participant teachers’ lived experience, personal and family backgrounds, and reports about how their personal experiences have shaped their professional and personal identities. I relay the life histories of five non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) using the data collected by semi-structured interviews of the four other research participants in this study and an autobiography that I wrote. The four other participants are: Ahmed, Abdullah, Mass, and Mohsen (pseudonyms). In recruiting participants for the study, I took the specific criteria that were listed in chapter three of the study into consideration, which encompass the sociocultural and geographic diversity of the participants. For example, Ahmed is from Pakistan, Abdullah is from Morocco, Mass is from Malaysia, Mohsen is from Tunisia, and I am from Saudi Arabia. Also, participants come from different professional and socioeconomic backgrounds, with divergent skills, perspectives, and experiences. These criteria helped me to enrich my study and allowed me to examine the lived experiences of participants in relation to the research questions.

This study employed a narrative inquiry method that drew on Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) concept of three-dimensional space: temporality, sociality, and space, which was profoundly informed by Dewey’s framework of interaction and continuity (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Their approach proposed that to better understand
people’s experiences, it is crucial to situate and interweave their stories within the three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They asserted that,

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated, . . . narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

In this study, I constructed narratives that describe participants’ interactions embedded within the sequential space of a three-dimensional space—temporality sociality, and space—to capture the complexity of the studied phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The first principle of the three-dimensional concept is temporality, which denotes that the researcher encompasses in narrating the stories experiences that happened in the past or the present, as well as events that might occur in the future. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated this notion eloquently: “The idea is that experiences grow out of their experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself, that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experience base and leads to an experiential future” (p. 2). Therefore, old experiences, current events, and stories about the future will be explored. I report the lived stories of the participants based on past experiences, current events, and stories of what could happen in the future.
The second dimension, sociality, refers to the personal and social interactions that participants engaged in. The researcher reports about each participant’s personal conditions (inward), such as intentions, perspectives, and emotions. Sociality also involves examining the participants’ social conditions (outward), which are manifested in the participants’ relationships with other people. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contended that narrative inquiry stems from participants’ experiences, both individually and socially. In other words, to narrate lived experiences involves not only positioning them as to their mental state, but also describing the interactions of the participants with the environment.

The third dimension of the framework is space, which refers to the interplay of contexts, time, and scenes in a physical setting and how this interplay reveals participants’ goals, meanings, and perspectives. On the whole, I elucidated the interplay of the historical, social, and spatial setting in narrating participants’ lived experiences and how that constructs their professional identities. In what follows, I report the story of each participant in detail based on the interviews that I conducted coupled with their respective narratives.

**Ahmed’s Narrative**

**Ahmed’s background.** I met Ahmed on the first day I went to Alsalam University to meet with the recruited participants for the study. During the meeting, we chatted about issues regarding his teaching English, curricula, and textbooks. I was intrigued by his charming personality and impressed by his achievements, experiences, and motivation. After we finished the discussion, we exchanged phone contacts, and I sent him an invitation via email to participate in my study. He did not respond to my email promptly. Unfortunately, by the time he responded, I already had the required number of participants for the study.
Nevertheless, considering the depth of his experiences as applicable to the study, I could not refuse his delayed acceptance of my initial invitation; therefore, I recruited him.

Ahmed’s teaching experience is unique. He worked in three different educational landscapes in Saudi Arabia: in a public school (as a teacher trainer in Hafr al Batin area), in the private sector (the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu), and in higher education (two universities in the western part of Saudi Arabia). The public-school system provides education for K–12 students. The Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu (RCJY) was established by a royal decree in 1975 by the Saudi Arabian government in two industrial cities—Jubail and Yanbu—for comprehensive management of fabrication facilities and landscaping, as well as administration of schools, colleges, and health facilities (see the following link for further information regarding the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu (RCJY): https://www.rcjy.gov.sa/en-US/Pages/default.aspx). Ahmed worked as an English-language teacher in one of the training centers of the fabrication facilities in Jubail for three years. The two universities in the western part of the country where Ahmed taught provide liberal arts and science education for both undergraduate and graduate students. Ahmed currently holds a managerial position at Alsalam University, which is one of the two universities. He coordinated the teachers’ committees in the university and facilitated its professional development training sessions.

Before narrating Ahmed’s stories, I was haunted by an issue: how to report Ahmed’s experience due to his unique and diverse experiences; hence, I decided to break his story into three parts. In each part, I drew on Clandinin and Connelly (2000) concept of the intersectionality of the three-dimensional space to narrate and describe how Ahmed constructed his personal and professional identities. The first part of his story mirrored his
early education and his work in Pakistan. The second part reflected his movement from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia and his professional teaching engagements in the public and the private sectors in the northern and eastern parts of Saudi Arabia. The third part of Ahmed’s story portrayed his teaching endeavors in higher education in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

**Ahmed’s early life and education.** Ahmed was born in Pakistan in 1972, and he grew up there. He attended primary, intermediate, and secondary schools in a small village. His family’s middle-class socioeconomic status enhanced his pursuit of education. Many of his peers went through mounting financial difficulties to acquire education. His middle-class parents gave him the best education possible. He matriculated at a four-year college in 1987 and majored in science and English education. His multilingual background became a strong asset for him as a student and as a teacher of English-language education. Growing up in a multilingual society enabled him to be able to speak six languages fluently. Ahmed stated glowingly about his family and his educational background,

> Economic status. I’m a teacher and economically, I am all right, (from a) middle class family. My interests are reading, staying with my kids, and playing cricket over the weekend. That’s my hobby, and yes, I started from a small school in my village, and I did my matric in 1987. Then, I went to college, and I did (received) my bachelor’s after studying four years in college.

Ahmed came from the famous Chaudhry family, which is scattered across locations in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Chaudhry is a surname that is commonly used to identify a profession in those countries. Although the meaning of the term differs from one country to another, in Pakistan, it refers to one of the highest-status tribes in the caste system. That tribe is essentially feudalistic and is comprised of agricultural landowners; its members are
eminently wealthy, hence, well-respected in the country. By virtue of his family heritage, Ahmed recognized himself not only as financially and socially prominent, but also as educationally accomplished. In reference to his privileged background, he remarked, “I did my first master’s in 1995 in the area of statistics; then I started teaching in a school for some time, and I did my second master’s in applied linguistics in 2001.” He also said, “I chose this because I was good in that, and I did my third master’s in TESOL from the University of Exeter in 2014. I did a little bit everywhere.”

Inevitably, Ahmed’s story suggests a strong influence of his family heritage and education in shaping and constructing his personal and professional identity. The achievement of that identity made Ahmed feel self-fulfilled and confident. This cultural capital from the Chaudhry family’s prominence and prestige was a big part of his story.

Recalling his experience while learning English in college, Ahmed characterized the teaching approaches and methods used as normative. He stated, “It was just a traditional way of teaching English.” I inferred from his responses that his English professor seemed to have used the Grammar-Translation Method, which dwells on detailed analysis of grammar rules and students’ engagement in copious reading of literature. Such an approach, according to Richards and Rodgers (2014), historically lacks an experiential or a collaborative interface of teacher-student interactivity. This method was prevalent not only in Pakistan, but also in many other expanding-circle countries (Kachru, 1983) during his school days. In spite of his classroom learning experiences, Ahmed successfully adjusted and coped with this outmoded learning approach. However, his classroom experiences were not all gloomy. He acknowledged a professor who mentored and inspired him in his language studies through a more practical approach, which enabled him to achieve optimal competency in his education
and eventually to become an English-language teacher himself in college. He acknowledged his attraction to the professor’s British diction and accent, which he said drove his intense interest in English learning and teaching; it subsequently prepared him to emerge as an effective English teacher himself. This suggests that Ahmed favored native speakers of English (NSET) and the way they express themselves in the language, compared with non-native speakers of English (NNESTs). He stated that his professor “was a doctor in literature, and her accent really inspired me, and I’m a teacher maybe 50% because of her.”

Ahmed’s perception about native speakers’ superiority was not surprising to me because British English was well-entrenched in Pakistan and India at that time. Like him, many NNESTs in outer- and expanded-circles countries (Kachru, 1983) have demonstrated the same inferiority complex in relation to NESTs. Phillipson (1992) argued that the spread of English from former British colonies has led to a number of adverse effects on these countries, instead of leading to development and success. As Mahboob (2004) pointed out, “By 1947, when Pakistan and India gained their independence from the British, the English language had been entrenched in the sociopolitical fabric of the region that was retained as an official language in both countries” (p. 1). Ahmed thus explained that his English teacher inspired him. He stated,

> During my university time, I learned from a real teacher who is still alive, and may Allah bless her. Her name was Dr. Fazana, and she was qualified from England. She did her PhD in Shakespeare. In her lectures, I learned one thing: she [did] not panic about anything. She was really cool, very calm, very patient, and she used to teach in a way that was so musical for you to listen to her and keep the things in your brain.
In this context, Ahmed’s interactions are well-illustrated in narrating a story when he was in college. This narration reveals two essential points about Ahmed’s perspectives. First, his views about English language learning was positive; it was not surprising that he had positive attitudes, as Ahmed always positioned himself as a distinguished and exceptional student. The second point is that his willingness to continue to learn and grow as an educator made him always look for improvements in his career. After Ahmed graduated from college, he had a full blast of first-time experiences. He got his first formal teaching position as an EFL teacher in Pakistan’s public schools. Afterwards, he got married and had two daughters. As a long-time teacher who remained constant to family and profession values, Ahmed was holding multiple identities, as he perceived himself as a family supporter and a professional teacher. I argue that these interactions and negotiations of these multiple juxtaposing identities revealed a new positioning towards his family and his career, what Gee (2001) called “affinity identity.”

Ahmed’s family grew, so he needed to find another position that provided him with a better income. He read the context well and knew that a master’s program was commonly shown to be a cash cow in the teaching job market. Therefore, he decided to invest in his graduate education by pursuing his graduate studies and gained two MA degrees (in 1995 and 2002). Ahmed’s investment in improving his professional knowledge, competencies, skills, and teaching effectiveness yielded various kinds of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), including cultural and linguistic capital, which ultimately allowed him to become a legitimate NNEST. Subsequently, Ahmed was able to achieve a higher status as a professional teacher who was self-confident and aware of the theoretical and practical knowledge of the profession. Therefore, these kinds of capital gave him access to teaching abroad and
increasing his income. Ahmed turned these kinds of capital into financial resources: economic capital.

When Ahmed was in Pakistan, his life was marked by his personal and social identities as a villager from a middle-class family, a special person who belonged to a well-respected tribe in the caste system, and an English language teacher who sought opportunity to teach abroad, to become an educator with three MA degrees. That being said, his career path was fairly smooth, indicating continuity in the process of his professional identity construction. Therefore, he was able to gain a teaching position in a Saudi university. He said,

After a year, I came to Saudi Arabia due to my financial reasons. Since then (I have been) Saudi. I have worked at three different levels. I started from Hafr Al-Batin in 2002, and I switched my job in 2005 from Hafr Al-Batin to the Royal Commission, Jubail.

**Ahmed’s overseas position.** Ahmed came to Saudi Arabia to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in 2002; and he worked in two different sectors: the public schools (the Ministry of Education) and the private sector. Although Ahmed was hired to teach English in a very remote area in Saudi Arabia, he was able not only to adapt to that atmosphere, but also to succeed. He was promoted to design and deliver teacher-training sessions to Saudi English-language teachers. The following excerpts illustrate how Ahmed developed a sense of a professional awareness, self-confidence, and legitimate recognition that influenced him positively in constructing his professional identity. He narrated,

During my stay there, I was given a secondary school where I taught for six months, and my supervisor transferred me from school to an educational training college
where I taught, or rather I trained a Saudi teacher of English. Over there, I gave three training packages by the name of “Factors Affecting the English Language”: being in the classroom, achievement and testing, and classroom activities.

Ahmed’s first experience with the Ministry of Education in an EFL setting was a cornerstone in his career; it not only provided a sound foundation for his teaching practices, but also built his self-confidence and shaped him as a competent teacher. During the period of working in public schools, Ahmed gained an experience that made him perceive himself as high-caliber professional teacher. He began to perceive himself as an effective EFL/ESL teacher. His self-esteem motivated him and boosted his confidence so that he was able to excel smoothly in his career. Ahmed accomplished intrinsic achievement in his new job and got promoted in a short time. However, in this context, he felt that the profession did not appreciate him extrinsically the way he had expected. Hence, it was not surprising that Ahmed looked for a better position. This time, he chose to work in the private sector. He said,

I stayed in Hafir Al-Batin; it’s a remote area. Thus, I looked for a better position in the private sector, the education job market. In 2005, I joined the Royal Commission in Jubail and Yanbu, in Saudi [Arabia]. That was a real learning process, a learning area, or you can say learning time for me. Over there, I didn’t look back. I kept on working, kept on producing different things, and in the second and third year, I got the best teacher prize in the Royal Commission in Jubail, and I have the certificate for that with me, which is the evidence of my efforts over there.

**Teaching in higher education.** In spite of Ahmed’s job satisfaction and becoming teacher of the year in the Royal Commission in Jubail, he decided to leave the private sector
to teach in higher education. This is the third episode of Ahmed’s career experience, which was the most significant one due to the substantial construction of his personal and professional identities. I would not hesitate to consider Ahmed’s third phase as the heyday of his career. He joined King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah in 2008. He repeatedly expressed his excitement about working in KAU. I think that could be attributed to many factors. First, it could be due to the fact that teaching in higher education is considered an honor and confers a more prestigious status in the Middle East. Second, teaching in higher education resonates with his entrenched feelings of intrinsic satisfaction through seeking symbolic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. He was enthusiastic when he was reporting about KAU. He said,

> Once I got a job here at King Abdulaziz University, I didn’t do anything special except doing my CELTA from the University of Sheffield in 2009. That is because King Abdulaziz University paid me [for it], and I got a certificate. . . . I owe this to King Abdulaziz University; and I really respect it for that. Here in this university; this has given me a name; this has given me identity; this university has given me a lot of things.

Based on the interview, Ahmed pointed out that he has gained new skills and experiences in his new job. He claimed to be a multitasker. Therefore, he perceived himself as a researcher, a facilitator, and a technology expert. He believed that he was capable of all theoretical and pedagogical aspects that he faced. In spite of Ahmed’s positive perception about the job at KAU, he considered resigning to seek a better opportunity. Thus, after three years of working at KAU, he decided to leave the job and join another university in the western part of Saudi Arabia; I will refer to this university as Alsalam University (ASU).
Ahmed was extremely thrilled about his new position at ASU because he was not working only as an instructor but also as a head of a teachers’ committee. He was extremely proud and excited in describing his responsibilities and duties to me. In the following excerpt, Ahmed said that at ASU, he learned about the use of technology (and gained) my exposure to different conferences, plus I am a researcher, and I’m working on that. . . . My two papers are in the pipeline. They will be printed out really soon, (inshallah), and I’m a different guy now. I mean I’m more confident, and I can talk on your subject without hindrance. I can speak my thoughts. I can tell what’s in the theory and what’s in practice. My analysis is listened to and considered with weightage that the guy is speaking, he is speaking some wisdom, so we have to listen, so that’s the difference. Sixteen years ago, when I used to talk about anything, people used to say, “Oh, he is a child.”

In spite of Ahmed’s heavy responsibilities and duties, he stressed his satisfaction and passion about all the tasks that he performed at ASU. Ahmed believed that he had honed his personal and communicative skills, and the new job challenges and their nuances increased his self-confidence. He gained a legitimate recognition, and ultimately this helped construct his professional identity. For instance, he was working as a full-time English language instructor, a coordinator for an English teaching committee, and a teacher trainer. He shared with me day-to-day work anecdotes at ASU. For instance, he commented on his own teaching practices in teaching English by employing an old-fashioned approach: he used students’ first language (L1) in teaching L2 (English in this context). Paradoxically, when Ahmed was a student, he used to criticize his teachers who utilized the grammar translation method, which he called boring and dull. However, Ahmed’s perspectives on teaching
approaches have changed, so Ahmed stated that he uses Arabic (L1) in teaching. This shift in Ahmed’s teaching paradigm could be attributed to the low level of students’ English proficiency. Ahmed gained a lot of insights from his lived experiences, particularly in dealing with students. In the following excerpt, Ahmed explained how he developed a rapport with his students that helped him in his interactions and teaching. He reported,

Honestly, (students) help me a lot. I mean once they do such a kind of thing, I still don’t understand what they are talking about. They switch back to their mother tongue sometimes, and once they do such a kind of thing, I catch those things. I say, “Why do you do this?” It (speaking to them in Arabic) helps me to interact with them to show the lighter side of my class. They laugh maybe for a minute, [and] then we come back to our studies. It helps me to maintain the discipline of my class. It helps me to make them motivated. It helps everything inside the classroom.

Interestingly enough, Ahmed’s narrative about native and non-native issues is quite different from what he used to believe when he was in college. Now he argues that there is nothing that makes a so-called native speaker superior to a non-native speaker of English. In other words, he claims that the terms native and non-native are irrelevant in the English language teaching (ELT) landscape. This notion has been widely and heatedly discussed in the field of TESOL. For example, Phillipson (1992) argued that “the native speaker fallacy” is a myth. Ahmed espoused interesting views regarding native and non-native teachers:

Because it’s a kind of a rift created among the teachers. Teachers are teachers; there’s no native and non-native. If you have studied something thoroughly and you understand top to bottom everything and you are teaching in the best possible way. Where does this come from—native and non-native? Anybody who can speak in the
Cockney accent or an RP (received pronunciation) accent of London is a better teacher than a person who is in a far-flung area of Peshawar and who speaks English like anybody who can understand and you call him that he’s not a good teacher. He knows all the techniques and all the advancements whatsoever are done in the field of English-language teaching and applied linguistics. Still you will create a kind of a rift.

Ahmed elaborated in his narrative on the native and non-native speakers of English issue. He pointed out that there are many challenges that NNESTs face. He ascribed these problems and frustrations experienced by NNESTs to unfair hiring policies regarding the salaries and benefits of NNESTs receive compared with those that NESTs get. He claimed that hiring policies at Saudi universities are prejudiced against non-native speakers of English. He believed that he had been discriminated against in his contract regarding his salary and benefits. He also criticized the hiring policies and questioned who is considered a native speaker. He narrated,

I felt sorry. In the beginning, when I came here in 2008, some of the native speakers were given some charges without consulting the qualified teachers because they were native speakers, and it was presumed that they would perform well, but later on, they got the message. It has nothing to do with [any] passport. It is something related to the qualification of the teacher. If he is up to the merit, he should be on board. Like here in x, Mashallah, we are from I think 13 or 14 different nationalities, and everybody is working hard.

Remarkably, Ahmed’s criticism of the institution’s hiring policies was based on the fact that English teachers are hired based on their passport documents rather than their linguistic
competencies in Saudi Arabia. When schools recruit an English teacher, they look at the passport documents that the candidate holds rather than his or her linguistic competencies to distinguish between NESTs and NNESTs. Ultimately, NESTs get higher salaries and more benefits and privileges than NNESTs. Ironically, it has been widely reported that that institutions in EFL contexts discriminate against NNESTs more than any other entities in other settings. As Canagarajah (1999) stated, “In fact, among the worst culprits to popularize or legitimatize the native-speaker fallacy are the periphery academic institutions themselves” (p. 83). Although Ahmed revealed his uneasiness and frustration with hiring policies that discriminate against NNESTs at AUS, he stated that administrators have recognized his merit at the university. He is grateful that his skills and abilities have been recognized. He believes that merit is more important than whether the teacher is NEST or NNEST. He told me a contradictory story by telling me that he had not personally faced discrimination, even though he sees the issues of NEST versus NNEST as a problem within the profession. He backed up his argument by stating that the native speaker fallacy is a myth. He said,

If you talk about native and non-native, in that case, I might not be given privilege over a native speaker of the English language, but to be honest, anybody who is sitting on the other side of the table and taking my interview with regards to any kind of a post [that requires] certain skills and I fulfill, I can say for sure that they will accept me because I have expertise in that. Generally speaking, I’ve never come across such things where I am given a kind of demotion in place of a person who is a native speaker and he is given [a] promotion.

Ahmed emphasized that he gets along well with everyone, and his colleagues, both NESTs and NNESTs, at AUS, have always perceived him as a competent teacher. He stated
that he perceived himself as a competent teacher. I sensed that Ahmed wanted to convey an important message in regards to hiring policies at Saudi universities in general and ASU in particular. He proposed that hiring policies should be based on factors that are relevant to the assigned job. Ahmed believed that meritocracy is the only valid criterion for recruitment. He said,

Well, in my case, I’m a bit fortunate. I have some native speakers as well in my group, and I am a non-native speaker of English, and there are teachers who are on my team . . . because they know that this is the expert guy, we cannot beat him. They feel that he is good [with language]. He can manage whatever they communicate with me, I communicate with them. I have never come across any kind of problem with any native speaker here in my group, although maybe some other coordinator might have this one with them.

Ahmed’s lived story in Pakistan has unequivocally shaped and constructed his personal and professional identities. For instance, Ahmed’s socioeconomic and educational background prepared him to work hard and succeed. In spite of that, Ahmed’s lived experience in public and private sectors was relatively short. Nevertheless, he enriched his professional knowledge, competencies, and skills, which helped in building his self-confidence and gaining recognition as a legitimate professional teacher. Ahmed’s best days have been at ASU. Based on co-constructing knowledge to make meanings of Ahmed’s lived experiences and the world at large, I have discussed how three-dimensional space played out in constructing his professional identities.

Ahmed’s lived experience had been diverse and rich. He had lived in different countries and cultures, worked in various organizations and atmospheres, and learned
different sets of rules. Ahmed was able not only to adapt in these different contexts, but also to achieve success across boundaries. In spite of the discrimination against NNESTs, he had not complained. Ahmed’s self-perception, self-confidence, flexibility, and opinions were his tools to negotiate and construct his personal, social, and professional identity.

**Abdullah’s Narrative**

**Abdullah’s background.** Abdullah is the youngest of the participants. He graduated with an MA in phonology from Oxford University. Abdullah was born in Morocco to a middle-class family in 1975. He identified himself as biracial, half Arab and half Amazighen (Berber). He attended multilingual schools in primary, intermediate, and secondary in Agadir, which is located on the Atlantic Ocean close to the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. He lived with his family in a large Amazighen-speaking community in Agadir, and he acquired that language as a child. In addition to his native Amazighen language, he spoke three foreign languages fluently: French, Arabic, and English. Arabic and English were mandatory languages and means of instruction in basic education, while in high school, students were required to choose either English, German, or Spanish as a foreign language. Abdullah opted for English as a foreign language.

**Abdullah’s early life and education.** Abdullah shared a turning-point anecdote with me, one that changed his perspectives on education and life. He pointed out that in his first year of high school, he was not good at English, but he had to pass the final exam to be promoted to the following grade. Abdullah knew that he could not make it; therefore, he asked a proficient classmate to sit next to him in the final exam to copy his answers. Then, on the day of the English final exam, they sat next to each other as planned. Once his classmate finished answering all the questions, he passed the answers to Abdullah so that he
could copy them. Of course, both of them passed the exam. However, Abdullah got a lower grade than his classmate. Then, Abdullah asked his classmate about the discrepancies of their grades, and his classmate told him that he did not give him all the right answers so that he would get a higher grade than Abdullah. In the following excerpt, Abdullah narrated his classmate’s justification for not giving him all the right answers:

He said, “I wanted to make sure I would be the best student in English because that mattered then. You know what I mean?” I said, “No problem, Habai. You did me a big favor. I wouldn’t have got even a two or three,” but that affected me immensely.

I was surprised that Abdullah disclosed this story in our first interview because I assumed that someone from his culture might feel a bit uncomfortable about sharing it with others because people perceive and judge others based on the stories that they tell. This incident had crucial influence in Abdullah’s education. It was a real wakeup call for Abdullah. Fortunately, he took it seriously and made a lot of changes in his perspectives and attitude towards education and life. He recalled, “I felt ashamed of myself, and I thought, ‘Why shouldn’t I try to make the effort he was making?’ That was the turning point. That was in the first year in high school.” Abdullah also stated that he was an irresponsible and tumultuous student who used to spend most of his time playing soccer and barely did his school assignments.

Abdullah’s self-perception was negative, but he refused to perceive himself as an incompetent student. He started working hard to learn English to achieve success in his last two years in high school. I believe that Abdullah began to develop a sense of responsibility after that occurrence, which was a transitional experience that made him believe in his potential. Unequivocally, that experience helped him to be a better individual than he used to
The analysis revealed that Abdullah’s interactions individually and socially on the spatiotemporal landscape were the most important factors in shaping his identity. Weneger and Lave (1998) asserted that identity is constructed throughout day-to-day experiences that occur through an individual’s interactions with various groups; they call this the community of practice (CoP). Abdullah not only became a responsible and rigorous student, but also became fascinated with English. He recalled memories in relation to his high school English teachers’ teaching approaches and stated that they were teacher-centered. He recalled,

> Of course, I’ve learnt from my previous teachers, but I wasn’t impressed because we were in [a] large class, and when it came to language teaching, it was more of a lecturing mode than being as close as they should have been to the students. We were put in groups of 30, 35 students. . . . You can’t blame them because large classes are not easy to handle.

In the aforementioned excerpt, Abdullah reflected on his English teachers’ teaching method when he was in high school and described it as “lecturing mode.” He also was skeptical about teachers’ rapport with students. After he finished high school, Abdullah joined the public university in Agadir and majored in English linguistics. He graduated with a distinguished record and was acknowledged by his professors for his academic performance, unlike many of his peers. Abdullah decided to pursue graduate studies at Oxford University in the UK. He explained to me why he did not become a teacher and talked about his MA studies:

> I wasn’t meant to be an English language teacher originally. I loved phonology. I was a student of linguistics, and I did my first research paper in phonology as an undergraduate student. Then, I got an offer to do my master’s degree at Oxford
University. I did linguistics again at Oxford, and I wrote my second paper in phonology. I was very successful. I was very lucky, very successful - *Alhamdulillah* - then, because I could research things that were at the front years of phonology. . . .

Then, I got a place at University of Essex, which had the largest department of linguistics in the UK, and I was honored by the supervision of _____, Professor _____, and I was exempted from doing my first doctoral year.

I think the second most critical situation in Abdullah’s lived experience was when he shifted from the academic atmosphere where he was pursing his postgraduate studies at the renowned Oxford University to become an elementary EFL teacher in Kuwait. In spite of Abdullah’s shortfalls in pedagogical aspects of teaching, he worked hard and educated himself to meet the school’s expectations. Furthermore, Abdullah used certain strategies to overcome the challenges that he faced and to fill the gap in the practical aspect of his teaching. He recalled,

I was kind of an outsider that intruded [on] the profession of teaching. I was aware of that. That’s why I kept carrying my guide, primary teacher guide around, in my first schooling in Kuwait. I had that in my bag, and once I left it in one of the classrooms, [so] I bought it in the UK somewhere, and that was the only reference that I had because all my other colleagues were females, so I couldn’t consult with anyone. It was a very conservative environment.

Abdullah’s lived experiences constructed his identity through his engaging in various interactions, with diverse individuals, in different times, and in varied landscapes. The aforementioned excerpt reveals three pivotal aspects of Abdullah’s life. First, Abdullah’s personal anecdote about passing English in the final exam in an illegitimate way shows his
negative self-perceptions and conceptions that he possessed about learning English at that
time, which in turn shaped his future education. Extraordinarily, about six years after
receiving his diploma, he not only joined the university and specialized in English linguistics,
but also attained an MA degree from Oxford University. This drastic change in Abdullah’s
attitudes, feelings, and perspectives toward the English language says a lot about his
motivation and determination.

The second aspect in Abdullah’s lived story is manifested in a decision he took. After
finishing his undergraduate studies, he discarded the notion of becoming an English teacher.
He took high risk and followed his hunch to fulfill his life dream by pursuing graduate
studies. Amazingly, Abdullah was able to overcome all of the challenges that he encountered
in his educational pathway and demonstrated incredible tenacity and strong will. He not only
finished his MA from Oxford University, but also pursed his objective to proceed to the
doctoral program of phonology at the University of Essex. He was also exempted from
studying the first year in the program and promoted to the second year due to his prior
accomplishment at Oxford.

The third aspect is related to Abdullah’s predisposition to learn and find solutions to
all the challenges that he encountered. He was able to negotiate meanings that mattered in
the community and hence shape his identity. For instance, as a novice teacher, Abdullah
encountered many complications and pressures, especially in his first year of teaching.
Nevertheless, when he was in the profession, he hastily started to change his perspectives
about it. The most crucial problem was how to reconcile between what he studied at Oxford
University and teaching young learners in an EFL setting. He attempted various strategies to
solve challenges that he faced, which Farrell (2010) called “reality shock.” This can be
illustrated briefly by the fact that Abdullah literally followed a teacher’s guide book as one solution to his teaching problems. He recalled, “I was kind of an outsider [who] intruded [upon] the profession of teaching. I was aware of that. That’s why I kept carrying my primary teacher guide around, in my first schooling in Kuwait.”

Abdullah further invested in his education by enrolling in professional development programs. He said that

Every year or two years, I would go to the UK to take a training course. Yeah. I took several training courses. I took a course in teaching English to medical students, technology for language teachers, and there was another course in Edinburgh. I took courses in Edinburgh and Leeds.

Based on Abdullah’s narrative, I think that looking at the fact that he did not engage in the process of becoming an English teacher as his peers had done and instead decided to pursue his graduate studies at a renowned university in the UK reflected the way he perceived himself.

Abdullah repeatedly stated that his English teachers in high school had never inspired him; hence, he did not perceive himself as an EFL teacher but rather as a scholar in English linguistics. Moreover, his attainment of an MA degree from Oxford University, one of the oldest and most prestigious schools in the world, built his self-confidence and shaped his professional identity. His credential from that prestigious university bestowed on him institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which suggests his potentiality to earn a high position in his professional calling and therefore enhance his successful living.

Subsequent to his MA program, Abdullah had enrolled in a PhD program in phonology, but he dropped out of the program due to an unexpected challenge that he encountered.
So, *Alhamdulillah* (Thank God). . . . But then I married, and I realized [that] I couldn’t depend on my father anymore. Especially when it came to providing for my wife with what she needed. So, I felt this need to look for a job. So I dropped out. Yeah, that was very sad because I was doing very well. I was in my second year.

And that was in 1996. A long time ago, yeah. *Alhamdulillah*.

Dropping out from the PhD program was not an easy choice for Abdullah; however, it revealed a lot about his identity, that is, his personal family-oriented values. Abdullah made his decision to drop out of the program because he did not wish to compromise between his life dream of getting a PhD degree and his family obligations. He repeatedly expressed the Arabic phrase, *Alhamdulillah*, which means “Thank God for whatever happened.” Abdullah’s decision not only demonstrated his strong allegiance to his family, but also reflected his identity as a breadwinner, a fact that also showed his sense of religious identity. That decision led to Abdullah’s choice of becoming an EFL teacher and seeking gainful employment in a bilingual private elementary school in Kuwait for one year. He resigned from the position one year later and moved to a technology college in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He worked there for three years and thereafter, moved back to Morocco due to family emergencies. He stated,

Yeah. And then, I resigned [from that position] to be with my elderly parents in Morocco. *Alhamdulillah*, after 16 months, their situation improved a lot. A lot more they can handle. And then I ran out of money, okay? Because I didn’t work in Morocco. The salaries were very humiliating, very low.

Abdullah did not hesitate to resign from his work for the second time. That resignation illustrated a sense of Abdullah’s personal identity, as he viewed himself as a
supporter and as faithful to his parents and his wife. Abdullah did not elaborate on his lived experience in Jeddah, and a possible justification could be that he might have felt uncomfortable about revealing a lot about his lived experience. As far as teaching approaches and pedagogical practices are concerned, Abdullah faced challenges, and he stated how he overcame these challenges. He recalled,

I started from square one. Luckily, I had this chance of working in a school. . . .

They knew that I hadn’t had any teaching experience, so they didn’t put any pressure on me, so I taught very freely. But I had a guide, a teachers’ guide. I had a book.

From his comments, I inferred Abdullah’s tenacity and motivation to improve himself, which gave a sense of how his personal and professional identity were increasingly shaped by the circumstances he encountered. Abdullah had constantly negotiated his experiences to make meanings. In addition to Abdullah’s reflections on his lived experiences, he was well-equipped with resilience and adaptability, which helped him to position himself in various contexts. Richards (2017) argued that there are two main components that construct teachers’ professional identity: language proficiency and content knowledge. Abdullah had an excellent level of language proficiency; however, he fell short in content knowledge. Therefore, he educated himself. He said, “When I joined the university, the College of Technology, I had to go for a couple of times to the UK during the summer to take training courses in teaching. Now I’m preparing a doctorate in education.”

Abdullah, a phonologist who gained a graduate degree from a renowned school, built his self-confidence and made others perceive him as legitimate and professional teacher, thereby gaining linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This was measured as an asset highly valued in the job market, so it was easy for him to be recruited. On the other
hand, Abdullah was fully aware of his weakness in the pedagogical aspect of the profession. He invested in his professional development by taking summer courses.

Abdullah’s social interactions with his NEST counterparts also affected his professional identity construction. Abdullah repeatedly stressed that he enjoyed a mutual respect with his NEST colleagues.

Most of the native speakers [whom] I’ve worked with are very efficient, to be honest. . . . There’s mutual respect, but whether there’s anything else behind that could not be seen or perceived. I don’t know. Generally speaking, there has always been mutual respect.

Abdullah repeatedly stressed that he enjoys mutual respect with his NEST colleagues. I anticipated his response because I thought that as Abdullah had lived in the UK and he was also proficient in speaking English, this might have given him self-confidence and privilege in interacting with NESTs. Most of the tension between NNESTs and NESTs is in pronunciation issues, yet he had mastered the British accent. Therefore, it is possible that having linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) helped him in positioning himself as a native-like teacher. Nevertheless, Abdullah believed that NNESTs are discriminated against. He said,

There is discrimination when it comes to payment, definitely. . . . But again, it’s not because you’re a native speaker. It’s because you hold a passport from a Western country. Like, for example, I can be an Arab. Even myself, Abdullah, I can resign here, go to Canada, come back with a Canadian passport, you know what I mean? And would get a better salary. So it’s not a matter whether you’re native.

Abdullah thus reported that hiring policies are unjust and discriminate against NNESTs, even though a substantial number of studies have advocated for hiring NNESTs and equality
between NESTs and NNESTs (Canagarajah, 1999; Holiday, 2005; Kurch, 1995; Phillipson, 1992). Nevertheless, recruitment policies and advertising practices in Asia and Gulf state countries still favor NESTs over their counterparts in relation to salaries and other advantages (Mahboob, 2010). Additionally, the TESOL organization released letters condemning hiring policies that discriminated against NNESTs. However, what Abdullah complained about was the fact that recruitment policies in Saudi Arabian schools require a candidate to hold a passport from any of the inner-circle countries (the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) regardless of language proficiency level. Abdullah pinpointed that some of his colleague were not originally from the inner-circle countries even though they held inner-circle country passports. Therefore, they were treated better and given higher salaries than their NNESTs counterparts.

Abdullah’s narrative highlighted tension between NNESTs and NESTs. Abdullah identified that some of his colleagues had been recruited as NESTs just because they held passports from the inner-circle countries. He believed that recruitment policies were discriminatory against NNESTs, even though some NESTs do not speak English as their mother tongue; however, they are treated as native speakers just because they hold passports from one of the inner-circle countries. Nevertheless, Abdullah never gave up hope. He recalled his best days in teaching and said,

At the university, probably those still remain the golden years of my career because I was, my superior trusted me a lot to be honest and with almost everything. We improved the curriculum. Imagine. We had 11 different English subjects for students of medicine. Anything you can think of, we had in that unit for our students, for students of medicine in King Abdulaziz University (KAU). We taught them the
traditional four skills: Reading, writing, speaking and listening. We had autonomy. We felt [as if] we were treated as intellectuals. . . . [That] was between 2002 and 2006. . . . I was head of the unit for four years, and then another director came and decided to change everything back to the four skills.

In this excerpt, Abdullah recalled his best days in the profession, which occurred at King Abdulaziz University (KAU). He provided discursive indicators of how a successful teaching and learning environment could be created. He argued that gaining superior trust, integrity, and autonomy are essential ways to motivate teachers and create a healthy atmosphere in the workplace. Moreover, Abdullah explained, “Teachers were treated as intellectuals”; this image was deep-rooted in his subconscious, giving him acknowledgement as a legitimate professional teacher, which ultimately shaped his professional identity.

Abdullah mentioned one of the biggest challenges that he faced. He complained about management and expressed his profound frustration over many decisions that deans or heads of institutes take without consulting teachers. He narrated,

There’s a decree, like, royal decree or whatever you call it, like a decision is taken here. Go ahead. Implement it, okay? But then, as a teacher, if you have kind of an initiative, if there’s only one person who does it. . . . You got my point? If there’s only one person, they might block it. If only one persons [is] against you. You might have evidence from research for decades, like, tens of years, and you keep, you know, “Please!” You keep demanding, “This is the way it should be done! Here’s proof! Here’s evidence!” They wouldn’t listen to you. . . . I feel there’s a lot of managerialism, you know what I mean? There’s managerialism here being
implemented in the wrong way. . . . So at the end of the day, you feel you’re kind of
deskilled as a professional teacher.

In the preceding excerpt, Abdullah referred to certain management issues, which he
called “managerialism,” which are manifested in the way that educational entities and the
whole country at large is run. He criticized the decisions-making process at the university; so
he noted that teachers are not only marginalized, but also neglected by those in authority
rather than being asked to voice their opinions or to be consulted. Abdullah also revealed
another kind of marginalization usually practiced at the middle-management level. He said,

It’s contradictory, it’s paradoxical, in my own experience. You get this satisfaction
that you’re producing something. You’re given a voice, you have a voice, and all
that. You contribute to the learning of the students, and then all of a sudden, the last
touches, things are imposed on you. “Sorry. Please, don’t ask too many questions.”
Things like this. “Just get it done.” So maybe, maybe, had we worked separately
from the ladies, it would have been totally different. Probably, I would be telling you
a different story now.

Abdullah here referred to the chaos and miscommunications that sometimes occurred
in male and female campuses (separated in Saudi Arabia) in relation to vital decisions. It
was really frustrating for him. In spite of Abdullah’s disgruntlement with discriminatory
school hiring policies, he always negotiated to be perceived and treated as a legitimate
professional teacher. Nevertheless, in Abdullah’s narration about his lived experiences, it
was unequivocal that he developed many skills as negotiation strategies to shape his
professional identity.
As I said earlier, we should be prepared to face more and more challenges, not only in the classroom, but also at the level of the institute. There will most probably be decisions that we won’t be happy with, but life goes on. . . . We should try to approach people in a way that they accept to get them to make changes. It’s not as bad as it might sound. Luckily, our dean holds a PhD in education, unlike in some other places. Sometimes you’re sent somebody from a totally different discipline.

Abdullah’s identity became more clearly delineated when he stated, “we should try to approach people in a way that they accept to get them to make change.” Abdullah’s engagement with society made him more aware of the complexity of context. Thus, he changed his position and perceived himself as an intellectual and a proficient teacher and enhanced his self-confidence. These shifts shaped and constructed his professional identity as a legitimate teacher. Abdullah’s identity had gone through qualitative transformations. The following anecdote illustrates the most important theme that emerged: adaptability. He explained how his contextual and professional knowledge helped him to negotiate challenges that he encountered in dealing with culturally sensitive topics in the textbook. He stated,

This [textbook] is a product of a different country. We don’t have a problem. We understand the Western culture. If there is something that we regard as a negative, it’s not there intentionally. The author believes that that’s part of the culture, and he or she wasn’t taking into consideration that people from another culture would use it. We make adaptations. I don’t find that to be a problem. For example, let’s say there is mention of pigs. Pigs are creatures. There’s nothing wrong about talking about pigs. What’s wrong is to eat the meat. No meat is being served in the classroom, so it’s never a problem. Even the idea of having a girlfriend. In the West, a girlfriend is
more or less the equivalent of a wife in our culture, and the students know that. They
are [mature] enough. It’s not an issue in our classrooms.

When I asked Abdullah in the second interview how he perceived himself, he took a
deep breath and immediately revealed one of the most salient themes that emerged from the
interview, which is the ability to adapt and learn constantly. He said,

Someone who has this predisposition to learn, to want to learn from peers, colleagues,
and from trainers if a professional development session is being held. Someone who
loves the job. For this person, the teaching profession is regarded not as a source of
income but as a kind of vocation. Something that they have passion for. Somebody
who’s ready to cooperate with others, collaborate, share, [and] help others.

Abdullah repeatedly emphasized that he had always been passionate about learning
and developing theoretical as well as pedagogical knowledge of teaching. Abdullah reported
that he discarded the notion of becoming an EFL teacher when he graduated from university.
Paradoxically, in the aforementioned excerpt, he expressed his passionate love for the
profession. This drastic change in Abdullah’s professional identity could be attributed to the
fact that when he graduated, he was not prepared to be a teacher; however, he grew
professionally and gained a lot of teaching experience in various milieus. A sense of giving
and belonging to his family, career, and society at large emerged from the interviews with
Abdullah. He stated,

We’re here to serve others. I feel like I’m, it’s like the rest of my life is going to be
like you just keep helping and serving. Whether you’re, as a husband, as a father, as
a teacher. You just keep working for others. The years, the golden years, were over
the moment I got my first job.
Abdullah did not consider embarking on a teaching career after he finished university. His career was not following a linear pathway but rather an unconventional one full of both pleasant and dismaying events. Abdullah consistently positioned himself as a giver and a person who serves his students to achieve his ultimate goals. He said, “The same thing applies to my identity as a teacher. I should keep giving and giving and giving, and that’s my role in my workplace. You just keep serving.”

The analysis of Abdullah’s story of his lived experiences shows how he constructed and changed his professional identity; it also reveals how his multiple identities shaped his professional identity over time, including the effects of personal and social interactions in various landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I conclude Abdullah’s story with an excerpt that shows his views about the profession when he started teaching and now. He stated,

In [the] first year [of] my teaching career, I came to the Gulf States as a phonologist. It was only the need for an income that made me choose this profession of teaching English. Now it’s different. Now I’m more aware of the secrets of the profession like the teaching, the learning. I was struggling at the beginning. I’m still learning, to be honest. Every day, I would come across different situations, where I would find myself as a learner. It’s a huge difference [from] how I started.

Mass’s Story

Mass’s background. Mass is a 54-year-old Malaysian who was born in Singapore. His father was an army officer in Singapore, and his mother was a teacher. He attended elementary and middle schools in Singapore. When his father retired, his family moved back to Malaysia. At that time, Mass was 16 years old, and he was enrolled in a secondary school
in Kuala Lumpur. Mass reported that he was bilingual, speaking two languages fluently: Malay and English. His family had always communicated with him in English. In addition, English is the means of instruction in Singapore. Although Mass acquired proficiency in the English language in an EFL milieu, he perceived himself as a native English speaker. He commented on his secondary schooling in Malaysia:

That was back in 1978. I continued my secondary schooling in Kuala Lumpur as a normal secondary student. . . . As you know, [in] Singapore, [the] first language is English, so when I came back to Malaysia at that time, our medium of instruction in Malaysia was still [the] English language. All right? Then after I finished my secondary schooling, I did my O Levels, I did my A Levels, and then I went to the local universities doing English-language studies.

Mass’s early life and education. Mass explained that his high-school education was smooth. He attributed that to the similarities of the education systems in Singapore and Malaysia, specifically the means of instruction. He did not encounter problems when he started to study in Malaysia because English was the means of instruction in both countries. Mass completed his secondary schooling in the British system of education and received a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). He believed that his English teacher’s personality, characteristics, and care had a great impact on his decision to be an English teacher. Mass repeatedly mentioned the significance of the notion of “teaching by fun.” He argued that creating an environment free from stress was the most effective teaching strategy. He commented on how he became fascinated with English. He said,

All right. To see how I got really interested in language, the first thing [was that] when I was in high school, I got a very good teacher, a lady who never gave up,
[kept] on pushing, motivating me and of course the class. I found out that the way she approached teaching language [was to do so] in a very fun way, not imposing, and then you wanted to learn more and more, I mean to improve yourself.

In this excerpt, Mass told a story of how he became intrigued by English. He mentioned that the way his English teacher taught had inspired him. Mass stated that eliminating stress from the environment is helpful for students’ learning.

Mass specialized in English at university. He commented on his university experience:

My experience, yeah, my early years, okay. Well, I went to these theoretical trainings. Of course, [at] university, they teach you the methodology, the pedagogy. . . . Right? I did my first experience when I was doing my practical. That was for three months. I was put in a real school and [was] faced with real problems, not teaching native [speakers] but teaching the local students back home, where . . . English [was] already a second language in Malaysia.

**Born to be a teacher.** After Mass graduated from university, he got his first formal teaching assignment at a language institute in Singapore. Soon after that, he got married. In his first formal teaching job, he followed the example set by his role model, his high-school English teacher. Mass stated that he had been always fascinated by her style of teaching. Therefore, he imitated her approach to teaching. He stated,

I’m just like copying her. All the nice traits that she [had]. So I try to copy her style.

. . . If she could make me interested in this, her class, that’s how I try to make my students interested in my class . . . . To me, [a teacher can] make anything fun. . . . So
when I have my class, my class is always fun. It’s full of laughter. We’ll make jokes, [but] at the same time, you know where you are going, without them realizing it.

In the following excerpt, Mass answered my question about the reasons for becoming a teacher. His answers were typical in that they emphasized the importance of job opportunities. However, he also stressed that to him, personal commitments and religious purposes were equally important. Unlike what was true of the other participants, Mass indicated that his family had a great impact on his future career. Moreover, Mass had a strong sense of belonging to the community, which he stated as an essential factor in making his decisions. He said,

My late mother was a teacher . . . She told me, “Serve people. If you can serve people and share something good, especially as a Muslim, whatever you do [that is] good, you will be rewarded in the hereafter.” So it’s [so] not much about the monetary side of it, but also to me, . . . especially when I’m teaching these Muslim brothers, you know, same religion as me, that’s how I go about it.

In the following quotation, Mass provided another reason for why he embarked on teaching by giving an interesting analogy. He said,

Teaching is really in my blood, so I enjoy teaching. That’s all, so my future is teaching until . . . One day, I’ll go home, you see, but I want to leave something nice before I leave the country. . . . I still [want to] meet my eight-years-ago students who are now doctors. They all just come and greet me everywhere, in Jeddah. I want to be somebody remembered nicely.

Religious identity has emerged as one of the most prominent themes in Mass’s comments about his teaching. This spiritual perception has been manifested throughout the
data. For instance, Mass contended that he chose to be a teacher because doing so provided him not only with a decent secure job, but also with spiritual deeds that would ultimately reward him with God’s satisfaction. After Mass graduated from college, he went back to Singapore to get married. He said,

I’m married to a Singaporean lady as well. Then, when I came back to Kuala Lumpur back in 1994, I was attached to the government education sectors. I was teaching with the government, in the government schools, for quite some time, and then I resigned when I got an offer to teach in private universities back home.

After Mass came back to Malaysia, he worked in the public sector, where he was assigned to teach English in a magnet school. Mass taught for 15 years in that school before he transferred to work in a private university. Although the students in that school were carefully selected to enroll them in a magnet school and they were considered intelligent students, Mass reported different challenges that he encountered in teaching advanced students who demonstrated high English proficiency. He stated,

When you have to cope with the students which is high intelligent, you’re a bit tired. You need to prepare yourself with a lot of knowledge. So you need to do a lot of homework. This is a bit, I mean it’s something, you know, a bit tired, make you tired.

Other than that, you enjoy.

During his working years in Malaysia, Mass had an opportunity to pursue his graduate studies. He got a scholarship to the UK to study for an MA in TESOL and ended up studying in Edinburgh, Scotland. Reflecting on his lived experience as a graduate student, Mass reported that he built a good relationship with Scottish people, and he enjoyed his life
in Scotland. He also stated that his character as a good communicator helped him a lot in constructing his identity through interacting with people to assimilate. He said,

The most important thing, which [was] very nice for me when I was back in the UK. . . . That was the time that I really enjoyed myself, where I was put up in a community with natives, especially Scottish. I had a hard time [understanding their speech] as well, in the first place, but I made it there. I got along with them very well, with my professors, things like that, and I enjoyed my stay there.

Linguistic and cultural competence was an important theme that emerged from a data analysis of Mass’s story and an important theme also in his professional identity, in line with Bourdieu’s concept of forms of capital (1986). This experience had a great impact on Mass’s life, especially on his education. For instance, Mass repeatedly mentioned that his experience as a graduate student drew his attention to various avenues to interact and better understand the community. Ultimately this experience built his self-confidence and helped him to construct his professional identity.

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Teaching abroad. After Mass worked for more than 20 years in an ESL context in both Singapore and Malaysia, he decided to apply for a teaching position abroad. He was accepted to teach English at a public university in the western part of the Kingdom of Saudi
Arabia (SA) in 2008. Mass’s first year in Saudi Arabia made him realize that teaching in an EFL setting is more complex than is teaching in an ESL setting. Mass had to deal with various challenges concerning different kinds and levels of students, as well as a new milieu (EFL). Mass had more than 20 years of teaching experience before he arrived in Saudi Arabia, so he had been well-prepared and was highly qualified to teach and deal with students. Nevertheless, it seems that Mass might have experienced “teacher’s reality shock,” which typically occurs with the novice teacher. In the following excerpt, Mass reflected on his first year of teaching in SA. He recalled,

When I first came here, I was shocked, actually, because English here is not a second language. It is a foreign language. Number one. And their level of ability is very low [compared with that in] the school [where] I taught back home, you see. I made that kind of comparison. So I said, “Oh, my God, what’s happening?” So I tried to find the reason why, and I asked them, “What did you learn in high school before [you] came to the university?”

They said, “We have English, but what did [we] learn? Nothing.”

“How do you mean, nothing? [Did you read] novels?”

“No.”

 “[Do] they have literature in the Saudi schools?”

“No.”

“How about your teachers?”

They say sometimes yes, sometimes no. So I found that the curriculum, compared [with that in] my country, is totally different.
Mass was shocked. He expressed his frustration about the students’ proficiency level in English. He tried to investigate the issue by asking the students about the reasons for their low performance in English.

The school administration should have prepared Mass and other newly recruited teachers for the context, regardless of their previous experience. Although Mass was shocked by the students’ poor English-language performance, he did not give up. Instead, he used various teaching strategies. For example, the first thing Mass did was to investigate students’ socioeconomic status to better understand about the city’s socioeconomic and demographic dynamics. As a result, he identified that students at the university fell into two types:

There are many, I mean there are good students in Saudi Arabia who went abroad during holidays, and their attitude, I don’t know how, but they are different, you know. They take my word seriously. I said, “Okay, you go home and read,” and they did. But [the] majority [were not like that]. Maybe that is another research [study] you should make. The socioeconomic [factors]. The status of your family, maybe. That is the reason why. All those people who are living in this prime area. . . . They [have a] different style. They have [a] different mentality. And this is very easy to differentiate. The way they talk to you, the way they argue with you, [is] different. They ask you [a] question which is like, aha, high-level, you know. But those who come from [a] low social background, they really don’t bother. They don’t even bother; they don’t care. . . . There must be something behind it. So I could see, for nine years, [that] there are two standards, even in the same community. Those who come from the northern part. They are I could say [from a] well-educated family.
They are different from [those who live in] the southern part. . . . They have this kind of rejection. When I ask them to form a group, they appear reluctant because they know that this guy will not perform, or just like plain laziness. So if he is the only one of certain people, [a] group of people that they have to do a thing, they feel very tired.

In the preceding excerpt, Mass manifested his awareness of the local culture by not only identifying the main characteristics of the two categories, but also spotting nuances within each classification. Mass’s narration reveals many challenges that he encountered in the EFL context. However, the lessons that he had learned from his previous experiences became more available to him when he analyzed the context and negotiated his identity to cope with these issues. For instance, Mass employed many strategies to motivate the students. He argued that becoming fully aware of the local culture, improving his relationship with the students, and fulfilling students’ needs might have had positive effect on student motivation and ultimately on their learning. In the following excerpt, Mass explained how he motivated the students. He said,

Study the culture of this student. What they like, what’s their philosophy like, what’s the vision and the mission, and try to get all these things and insert them [into the instructional context]. . . . They have dreams; they have plans. “Oh, I study in this university because I’m gonna be an engineer.” Or, “I want to be a doctor.” . . .

So just push them, tell them, “Where do you want to go?” Of course, everybody wants—everybody is trying to be a doctor, but I tell them, “A medical doctor is not an easy [program of study]. It takes you a longer time, and you must be very good because you are dealing with lives.” So they understood that, so they are
ready for that. So when readiness is there, then you just go. Make them aware. This is one of my duties, I think. What I’m doing with my students to give them awareness.

*Cultural competency* is one of the themes that emerged from the analysis of Mass’s interviews. The preceding excerpt exhibits how Mass used distinctive approaches and culturally informed teaching strategies to motivate the students. The next excerpt covers *religious identity* as one of the major themes from the data analysis. Throughout the narrative, Mass repeatedly mentioned religious issues as pivotal components of his personal and professional identity. Commenting on the link between faith and profession, Varghese and Johnston (2007) pointed out, “It is also relevant to note that [for] a number of English evangelical Christians, faith and professional work are inextricably intertwined” (p. 5). Similarly, Mass’s narrative demonstrated a strong sense of religious commitment, which had great influence on his pedagogical practices. In this next excerpt, Mass explicitly juxtaposed religious discourse with his teaching practices to motivate his students. He stated,

> We had all these Muslim scholars. These are all brilliant scholars. So it means that we too can become like them. So we are very lucky because we are in this Islamic country. . . . I told them, “Be a clever, brilliant Muslim. Then people won’t look down upon us.” So, this is what we are doing. “Be the best doctors, the best Muslim doctors, be the best Muslim engineers.” So this will push . . . their spirit a bit, you know. . . . We can do it.

In the next excerpt, Mass responded to a question regarding the reason for choosing Alsalam University, a relatively new school compared with other universities in the Gulf States. He boosted his argument by providing religious justifications. He said,
I never regretted being in Saudi Arabia. I am very grateful to Allah. Makes me nearer to Mecca, nearer to Medina. If I were to be in Riyadh or Dammam, maybe [I’d] have a second thought, when they offered [it to] me. Like . . . for example, so, we got the place there. I was making my own research and homework, where is Jeddah, how far, you know, cause everybody wants to go to Saudi Arabia, at least once [in] a lifetime. . . . I never regretted being here.

Mass built a strong and close relationship with his students very quickly. This could be attributed to the fact that Mass had already had successful experiences for long time in an ESL milieu in building rapport with students. The stronger the relationship with the students, the more they are engaged in the class.

Norton (2000) and Cummins (1996) investigated the relationship of power and its impact on learning and teaching English. In the next excerpt, Mass expressed how he perceived students, which was not based on a deficiency model but on a successful model. He said,

I read a book about this: What do you want to find in a man? . . . [The author asks] what are you looking for in a man? If you are looking for dirt, rubbish, you’ll find rubbish. But if you are looking for gold, you’ll find gold. So why should you find rubbish? Find gold in the man. Find something good. Everybody has [his or her] good points. . . . We have many bad points, but groom [students] from the good points, and so they will never . . . feel like they are an alien in my class. Ah. . . . There’s good in something; everybody has something. So groom from there. Especially in language. Even though today he learned only one word, fine, you learned something. You see? The rest learned ten; you learned one. Good
achievement for you. Only one? Then, well: very good. Okay: tomorrow another
one, yeah? Let’s go home. I like to teach them in this kind of manner. Because I
know I was a student before. I [didn’t] like to be scolded. I [felt] embarrassed. So, I
don’t scold them. The more they are now, in high school, in our university, I always
remind them, . . . you are a . . . student, [so] please behave like a university student.
And they understood.

In the next excerpt, Mass elaborated upon his relationship with NESTs. Mass still
perceived himself as a native or near-native English speaker. He claimed that he was not
only fluent and accurate, but also culturally competent. Mass reported that he never
encountered any problem with NESTs. He commented on his relationship with NESTs by
saying,

Yeah, I mix well with them. . . . Oh, actually, let’s see. I can drink coffee with
natives as well because my policy is very easy. I learned the English culture. That is
my strong point. If I speak to a British [person], the natives here, I know their culture
because I was there. American, I know the American culture. You see? Whatever
you communicate to me or you converse with me, I know your [culture]. I know the
American culture, how you speak, all kinds of colloquial [expressions] and things like
that. I understand very well, even the British. That’s how maybe I can just adapt
myself in this community. I never feel like I’m an outsider.

Mohsen’s Narrative

Mohsen’s background. Mohsen was born in 1961 to a poor Tunisian family and
grew up in a rural area. He got married three times. His third wife was German. He had
eight children. He claimed that he was born to be a teacher and had been teaching English
Mohsen regarded himself as multilingual because he spoke four languages: Arabic, French, English, and German. In the following excerpt, he reported about the significance of English as a lingua franca, as well as the significance of other languages. He said,

If you speak English, you love languages, because when you travel and you find out that you can have communication with anyone in France [or] in Italy through English, then you think that if you knew another language, that would have been much better. German is spoken in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. So [if you speak German], you can [communicate in] those countries [that] were once colonized by Germany.

Like others whose families lived in villages, he went to local schools in his village. When he finished high school, he had no vision, and his future seemed vague. Mohsen believed that his low socioeconomic status shaped his future, and he bluntly admitted that he saw himself as “not really ambitious.” In the following excerpt, he described himself:

Um, during my high school, uh, education, um, I wasn’t really very ambitious. I come from a very modest village, and, of course, that doesn’t really build big ambition as compared to living in a big city, where you can see rich people, aristocratic [people]. You see highly ranked people [in a big city]. So, you can try to imitate them, but in a small village, the best, uh, profession was just the primary teacher.

Mohsen reflected on his lived experience in his small town by starting his narration by making a comparison between life in a small village with other Tunisian counterparts who lived in big cities regarding access to economic and social opportunities. He emphasized the
significant impact of the educational environment on an individual’s life experiences and future plans. He stated that he felt that his future was vague. He believed that this could be attributed to his negative self-image, his low self-seem, his lack of enthusiasm for education, and his family’s low socioeconomic status. Furthermore, Mohsen deemed that he had a lack of inspiration from others when he was in high school, which had a negative influence on his personal identity and his view of the future.

Although in his narrative, Mohsen stated that his life dream was to join the army or become a policeman because the prestigious status of such an occupation would provide him with power and respect in society. Mohsen explicitly stated that he had always been thinking of the feeling of being an honored individual or one who held a high rank. He also said that it was always a privilege to have people address you as “Sir.”

**Mohsen’s early life and education.** After Mohsen graduated from high school, he studied in the local university. Reflecting on his learning experience in college, Mohsen relayed an emotional story that drastically changed his perceptions about life in general and education in particular. He said,

There was a question to the professor, and he started, uh, crying, and I didn’t know why he was crying. All the class was really silent for two minutes. Then I went to him, and I said, “Why are you crying?” And he said, “At this minute now, my mother is having an operation and, uh, although I could have been absent, I preferred to come and look at these questions, which are trying to make fun of me.  

In this excerpt are cultural clues that need to be explicated to contextualize this situation. In Islamic tradition, parents have copious honor, so their children are obliged to respect and blindly obey them unless they ask their children to commit sins. Moreover, many Quranic
verses emphasize the notion of obedience to parents and consider it the second most significant obligation for individuals after witnessing that there is only one God. Thus, it is a common practice that an individual stay home and provide service to parents all the time, especially when they are elderly or in need. Hence, based on Muslim cultural norms, it was uncommon for the teacher to leave his mother in the hospital and come to teach because family comes first. Nevertheless, the teacher sacrificed familial duties and instead attended the school. Consequently, he was expecting the students to appreciate and respect his sacrifices rather than making fun of him. The students’ manners made the teacher emotional, and he shed tears. This incident has changed Mohsen’s perspectives toward teaching. Since then, Mohsen has viewed teaching as a message rather than career. He said,

At that moment, I discovered how a teacher is really, although not very well paid, but you can have a very good message to give to other people, love of giving, love of sacrifice. So I turned to teaching. I applied to the Ministry of Education, and I became a teacher of English. I succeeded because I was teaching in, um, a mixed school, boys and girls. And, um, like I was gifted with the highly communicative skills.

Mohsen’s first job choice was to be a policeman or any job that would provide him with prestigious status in his community. However, he decided to become a teacher, and he attributed his choice to intrinsic and extrinsic factors. First, he started with the economic reasons. He repeatedly stated that teaching is “not a very well-paid” job. Nevertheless, he chose to become a teacher and tried to find ways around low-paying teaching jobs. He explained,
I got money and, uh, you know, English opened many, many gates for me, the gate of Europe, the gate of America. I read history. I read civilization books. I read literature. And, um, it’s a job like all other jobs, you know. Even if I were a doctor, I would have loved my job because if you don’t love what you are doing, then you are wasting your time. . . . Because Tunisia is a tourist country and everyone wants to learn English even to have business with tourists, like selling the, uh, things to them, working in hotels, working in a restaurant, or even, even getting, uh, love relationships with girls and getting papers to reside abroad. . . . And the more they enjoy, the more engaged you become. And in Tunisia, also, when you are an English teacher, you can have plenty of private lessons. You can make a lot of money.

Interestingly, based on the data, evidence suggested that Mohsen’s decision to specialize in English and become an EFL teacher may have been shaped by social and religious beliefs, as well as his pursuit of cultural capital. Mohsen provided myriad motives that made him become an EFL teacher. For example, listening to British songs, an insistent obsession with holding power, and securing for himself a prestigious status were among the most significance motives that made him learn English and become an EFL teacher.

Furthermore, Mohsen constantly mentioned other stories that illustrated how he had always been captivated by the notion of how he positioned himself and was positioned. Self-perception of his status was an essential motive that led him to become an English teacher. Mohsen imagined that being a teacher would offer him respect and power because teachers at that time were well-respected and honored by both students and students’ families. That was a large part of why he chose this career, something consistent with Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of symbolic power and social capital. These examples are clear manifestations of how forms
of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) played pivotal roles in Mohsen’s life decisions, such as embarking in a teaching career. Ultimately, they formed his personal and professional identity. He recalled,

I didn’t know that I was going to be a teacher. I chose English because I liked it from the British music and American music. . . . How I became a teacher is really very strange. When I was young, I wanted to be, uh, in the police, because, uh, during the days of, uh, our first president, the police, uh, [were] a very strong body. And when you are a policeman, especially if you are, uh, highly ranked, [a] captain or colonel, you can do anything you like, and no obstacle can really hinder you.

Mohsen pointed out the value of being a teacher in an Islamic community as religious capital. He talked with emotion about how being a teacher is highly appreciated and respected in Islamic and Arabic culture. Teachers are cherished, well-respected, and privileged. Mohsen backed his argument by mentioning an Arabic wisdom and religious text (Hatheth-prophet’s sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad: “Peace be upon him who highly values teachers to the extent he considers teaching as a spiritual task.” He said,

Even our Arab, uh, poetry praises the teacher, and they say, “He [a teacher] was going to be a prophet.” We are the representatives of the Prophet because we have got the message. A teacher has got the message, not only the science he’s teaching, because now with the Internet, you can have a lot of knowledge from the Internet.

Mohsen graduated from the university in 1981, and he embarked as an elementary EFL teacher in a coeducational public school in Tunisia because being a teacher was an honor and privilege at that time. He commented on his teaching experience in Tunisia for 15 years as a “successful” journey. Mohsen also pinpointed that he developed communicative
competence, effective communication skills, and a better understanding of the job duties and responsibilities that helped him to negotiate more effectively in various situations that he faced at work, as well as in life in general. Furthermore, he taught different levels with diverse audiences and employed various teaching styles and approaches in Tunisia. He described himself as a passionate hard worker and as a responsible and caring teacher. Ultimately, this was palpable evidence that Mohsen perceived himself as self-confident and as a legitimate NNEST. His self-perception produced a positive self-image that constructed his personal and professional identities.

In analyzing Mohsen’s data, what he termed the “sense of giving” emerged as a major theme. For instance, when I asked Mohsen questions that referred to the notion of self-image and how he felt that others perceived him, he often defined himself as a passionate teacher who was willing to give. In another situation, when I asked him to choose a metaphor that he felt represented or resembled his lived teaching experience, Mohsen gave an interesting Arabic-culture-based analogy and said he was a “Dana,” a pearl. In Arabic culture, a pearl was a very valuable gem that sailors worked hard a long time to get. Mohsen described himself as a treasure, a valuable and beloved object. This analogy certainly manifested Mohsen’s perception of being positioned within a specific esteemed category of teachers. The following excerpt unequivocally illustrates Mohsen’s intrinsic inclination to give, help, and assist. He said,

Uh, I love teaching because I love doing. . . . I love, uh, teaching because, uh, it’s giving, and I love giving. Uh, as I told you before, I have good, very good communicative skills, so my students usually enjoy my teaching.
In another aspect of Mohsen’s professional identity, what emerged from data were these themes: a “sense of belonging,” a “sense of being a competent EFL teacher,” and “being a communicative and competent NNEST teacher.” The most salient feature of Mohsen’s identity was his high-level competency in communicating with students, teachers, and administrators. Mohsen’s dynamic and charismatic personality was conspicuous in the institute. His charming smile, tenor voice, and humorous character might make him seem to be a friendly and approachable teacher. Although I had an amiable relationship with all the participants, I felt that my relationship with Mohsen was the strongest one. This could be attributed to his sociable and good-natured character. Throughout Mohsen’s stories, he successfully interacted and achieved a robust rapport with his students. In the following excerpts, Mohsen narrated two incidents that apparently manifested how he navigated and negotiated with the students to build positive relationships with them. He said,

> The touch of the teacher is punctual, the touch of the teacher is modest, the touch of the teacher is to ask, “How is your father?” Today, I was tying the tie of a student. He had the tie, and he said, “Sir, could you tie it?” I made a knot for him.

> Another student was videotaping. He said, “I have never seen a teacher being modest and making a knot for the student.”

> I said, “I will tie your shoes. I feel happy to give you a hand.” Tomorrow, you will give it to my son, you will give it to my grandson. That’s how it happens.

This excerpt exemplifies the intimate relationship between Mohsen and his students. It is obvious that Mohsen is aware of Saudi culture, which made him feel comfortable in interacting with his students successfully. Mohsen connected his relationship with his
students and his duties as a teacher. This is illustrated in what he mentioned about punctuality.

In the next excerpt, Mohsen narrated a story of something that happened to him the day before I interviewed him. He said,

Could you imagine [hearing] from [a] lieutenant [who] now is a general? He sent me an SMS in which . . . he wrote, “Your student has become a general. Ceremony of giving the new rank will be tomorrow, December the 6th. Uh, thank you, professor.”

No. He isn’t forced, but he said [in French], “Your student has become a general. Thank you, teacher.” Most students, they don’t most of the time remember [their] English [teacher] because maybe they have specialized in [some] other thing.

Thus Mohsen serendipitously received a text message from one of his students in Tunisia, who had been promoted to the rank of general in the army. Mohsen got emotional reading the text message out loud in French; then, he translated it into Arabic and English. This remarkable story shows that Mohsen had built strong rapport with his student, a relationship based on care, respect, and sacrifice. These two incidents, the student for whom Mohsen tied his tie and the general who invited him to the promotion ceremony, provide clear evidence of Mohsen’s success and cultural competency. They reflect that Mohsen had great communication skills to negotiate with his students and ultimately construct and develop his professional identity.

Mohsen had not only good relations with his students, but also respectable relationships with most of his NNEST and NEST colleagues. In the next except, Mohsen commented on his relationship with a colleague. He said,
You know, if we go to these teachers, we will find two groups. One group who are humble, and they are amazed how an African guy or a Saudi guy can teach English. They are happy. They push you. They encourage you, and they help you. And some others say, “No, you cannot teach English.” And there’s one here who one day made a very hurt[ful] remark to a teacher. This teacher is Pakistani, and he was knocking at the door. Now, he gave him a set of questions. He told him, “What do you think?”

[The student] told [the teacher], “It’s clear [that] they are written by a nonnative.”

And it hurts. Look, why should I be like the native? I am who I am. If he is native in English, I am native in Arabic.

Mohsen viewed his colleagues based on binary perspectives: NNESTs vs. NESTs. He argued that each category has strengths and weaknesses. He identified a third category, which is prong from NESTs. (I elaborate on this issue in Chapter 5.) In spite of such issues, Mohsen built a strong rapport with teachers across the aisle; however, he reported that tensions between NNESTs and NESTs have always been at issue, particularly in EFL settings.

In another story, Mohsen openly expressed his weakness compared with NESTs in terms of phonological competence. In the following excerpt, Mohsen narrated how he cooperated with NESTs. He said,

I worked with a teacher. Now, he is no longer here. I used to tell him, “Please correct my mistakes.”

And he was amazed; he said, “You don’t mind?”
I said, “No. If I had a free teacher, why not?” I don’t see myself as less than [they are]. No. If I am able to teach the curriculum, I am a good teacher. Teaching is not only intonation. It’s not [about being a] native speaker.

In the preceding excerpt, Mohsen expressed his belief that the relation between NNESTs should be based on trust and cooperation. He was aware that he was not as good as native speakers of English in terms of producing some phonological features; however, he perceived himself as more competent than NESTs regarding metalinguistic awareness of the target language (L2), which in this context was English. For instance, Mohsen argued that NNESTs have a deeper understanding of English language learners and their cultural context than NESTs do. Mohsen emphasized that he was associated with students more than NESTs were, based on their cultural, religious, and emotional understandings. Mohsen believed that he negotiated his position as an Arab and a Muslim to show his affiliation with the students and express a sense of shared linguistic and religious identity with them, which ultimately helped him to construct his religious identity. He said,

So, at least I am a Muslim. There is, uh, an historical relationship with these Saudi students, so they trust me. They know that I love them because we are Arabs; we are Muslim. This fact, you cannot neglect, you cannot ignore.

Mohsen expressed his frustration with the prejudice against NNESTs in institutional administrative practices and unfair hiring policies. In the next excerpt, Mohsen got emotional in narrating how some institutional faculty and administrators perceived NNESTs. He said,

I hate to be compared because I am unique. I am not an apple to be compared to the other apples. My name is X (Mohsen). So, you should know that I have a good kind
of integrity. I have a good kind of identity. Please try to understand me. Don’t ask me to understand you. Try to help me by being like me. Don’t ask me to be like you or to do like you. I’m ready to learn. Give me time, and don’t forget where I come from. Don’t forget where I learned. Don’t forget that there are certain things [that] I can do, [but] that I can’t drive at night. Don’t give me a schedule, an evening schedule. I may get tired. Give me a chair.

In this excerpt, Mohsen expressed his frustration at being perceived through a binary filter of NNEST vs. NEST. He also articulated deep disturbance at being positioned in a deficiency model compared with NESTs. Mohsen referred to an urgent need to problematize prejudicial institutional practices, notions that might be normalized and routinely perpetuated, particularly in an EFL context. Mohsen stated that the native-speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992) was deep-rooted in the Arab world. He said,

But now in the Arab world, we still have that complex of the native. Uh-huh (affirmative), look at the United, uh, Arab Emirates, all non-natives are going to be fired, and they are bringing [in] native [speakers of English] because there’s investment in education.

Canagarajah (2006) argued that these negative perspectives towards NNESTs and discriminatory hiring policies are commonly practiced and perpetuated in outer-circle countries. Certainly, these institutional practices are banned internationally because they help to create an unhealthy atmosphere by fueling the tenuous relationship between NNESTs and NESTs. Furthermore, these negatives perceptions might be reflected negatively in the NNESTs’ self-confidence and self-perceptions.
The negative perceptions towards NNESTs are not the only challenge that they encounter. Other challenges also hinder their professional development. Mohsen referred to these problems in the next excerpt. He identified two essential challenges: first, students’ behaviors cause problems; second, students’ English proficiency is low. He said,

We should include more than English in high school—English and French, English and German—and show the student the importance of foreign languages. Also, rules in high school should be tightened. We should stop giving to students cars, uh, giving them a lot of pocket money. We should teach them that if they don’t succeed, they won’t be able to get a job. Students come to the university as an achievement, as a personal achievement, not as a preparation for hard work. They are happy with the scholarship. They are happy with the car. They are happy with coming late, using mobile [phones], as they are not really responsible. Now, a few luxuries should be taken from them. Student buses are much better. They come together in a community. They learn to be punctual because the car is making them late, but there’s a bus [that] comes at eight. If you don’t take it, you will be late. And if you are late, after three or five absences, you will miss a test. Let them feel the heat of education.

When I asked Mohsen about his legacy and how he wished to be remembered and about his advice for the novice teacher, he said,

You know, we are creating the love of building in our students. Although they are not all English teachers, but an engineer will always remember that you taught him to be honest, not to cheat, because bridges fall because they were built by fake engineers. Many people died because fake doctors diagnosed them. So, as a teacher,
you don’t only teach the topic you are specialized in, but you build personality in a student. You make of him a man. And when you say a man or a woman, you say a father, you say an uncle, you say a friend. But doing that will not always be beneficial if your students do not believe you.

You can be with your sister, because in Saudi Arabia, women don’t drive. Women don’t drive [but] you allow [men to drive]. Laws are good, but sometimes they are better when they are broken, but you make a change in the life of your student. You teach him humanity. You teach him that you are not a set of rules. You are sometimes a human, the human touch. Even when you tie his tie, he will remember that. He will say, “Oh, my teacher was very humble and he tied [my tie for me because] he wanted me to look smart.” Don’t say, “I’m not your, uh, servant.” Am I working in your house? No. That’s how to become a teacher, when you make a change.

Mohsen lived in a small village in which limited amenities, infrastructure, and services were provided. He had always been obsessed with gaining an authoritative job, one that had a great influence on shaping his personal identity. Mohsen’s early lived experiences in a modest area with limited sources had impelled him to seek social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, Mohsen’s narratives about his lived experience revealed that he was fully aware of the great impact of his early life experience on constructing his identity because he overtly stated that he has always been seeking to be perceived as a prestigious and esteemed figure in his community.

If you praise, if you help, if you don’t show that, you give this 25,000 and you give this 10,000, although they are teaching the same section, here you are making a big
mistake. The native will not teach very well because he knows you cannot do without him, and the nonnative will not perform because whether he performs or not, you are not giving him credit because we forget that teachers are human creatures, human beings. We say, “Uh-huh (affirmative), if you don’t perform, I will fire you.”

“Okay, fire me. You will bring someone like me. He will do the same.” I am not against native teachers, but make something like 50–50 so that the nonnative learns from the native.

**Mustafa’s Narrative**

**Mustafa’s background.** This section contains my autobiography, with reflections on various sociocultural and educational factors that informed my worldview, scholarship, and identity. I believe that my lived experiences affected the way I perceived myself and the way others in the profession perceived me. As Canagarajah (1996) argued, autobiographical narratives are useful because “knowledge is constructed from the bottom up” (p. 327). As people gather knowledge and incorporate new ways of looking at the world, they reflexively revise the stories that they tell about themselves and the world. One of the participants, Mohsen, said to me after all the interview sessions, “I never thought of my story like this. Thank you for giving me the chance to tell my story and to reflect on it.” Clandinin and Connelly (1999) argued that there is a reflexive relationship between “living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story” (p. 265).

My aim was to narrate my story as a major source of investigation, so I documented and organized my personal, social, and educational stories. Then I narrated and reflected on many different stories of myself as a language learner, of my learning and teaching practices, and of my professional development and professional issues. Reflecting on these stories...
helped me to provide myriad details about how my lived experience had a great impact on how my professional identity was constructed. Furthermore, writing my autobiographical narrative in this study was significant in that it provided etic and emic perspectives on the research, unlike the other four participants, who provided etic standpoints only. The narration of my autobiography is palpable and self-explanatory. It illustrates how my own stories had influenced the construction of my professional identity.

I approached my own story differently from the analysis of the narration of the stories of the other four participants. I integrated the narration of my autobiography with analysis of the themes that emerged from my stories. Kamhi-Stein (2016) asserted, “Autobiographical narratives should not simply tell stories; narratives need to be thoughtful and analytical and need to address issues that are important to the discipline” (p. x).

Mustafa’s early life. My background was marked by the diversity of my heritage. Different cultures shaped my life, and I am grateful for that. My father was born and raised in Somalia. When he was in his twenties, he decided to leave the country and headed to South Yemen to look for better opportunities and decent work. (At that time, North Yemen and South Yemen were separate countries). There he met my mother, who was born to Somali immigrants in Aden City in South Yemen. They got married and had two daughters. However, due to a financial crisis of that time, they immigrated to the north of the Arabian Peninsula, to Saudi Arabia, for better opportunities. Another reason why my family moved was religion; residing in the holy places of Islam is the dream of many Muslims all over the world. Therefore, they settled in Jeddah, a beautiful city that lies on the Red Sea and is considered the gateway to the holy places of Islam. They spent the rest of their lives in Saudi
Arabia. Aside from their first two daughters, they had six other children. I grew up in a big family, and my birth order in the family was as the seventh of eight children.

The aforementioned part of my autobiography focuses on my diverse background as an essential life theme that loomed around my early life and shaped it. For example, it could be my parents’ ideology that had shaped the way I perceived myself as a moderate conservative. Consequently, this ideological view might have shaped many other aspects of my life, such as the way I was intrigued by acquiring languages. Coming from a rich heritage and a multilingual and multicultural family might have influenced me in the way I interacted with others and could have shaped me as an outgoing person, an extrovert. It is also clear that as a result of all the above-mentioned elements that cultural capital was a crucial component in constructing my professional identity. I was aware from an early age (before I knew that there was term for it) that cultural capital was important.

**Saudi Arabia.** Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country and has two holy places, Makkah and Madinah. The vast majority of the Saudi population is Muslim. Islamic law or Sharia is applied in the judicial system, and the foundation of the Saudi lifestyle is the holy book, the Quran, and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which are used as the constitution of the country. The population of the country is principally comprised of Sunnis, along with a Shia minority in the eastern and southern parts of the country. In recent times, the population of Saudi Arabia has grown extremely fast and is now estimated to exceed 29 million. Three fourths (75%) of the population lives in big cities.

According to the census held in 2012, the population of the country was estimated to be 29,195,895, the 43rd largest in the world. But recent estimates made in March 2014 indicate that the total population has grown to 29.65 million (Census).
than 10 million expatriates work in Saudi Arabia. Most of these workers come from different countries in Africa and Southeast Asia.

**The influence of the Sunni faith and Somali culture on my family.** Faith played an essential role in my family. My parents were both born and reared in extremely conservative Sunni Muslim families, so Islam was not only a creed to my family, but also a way of life that had to be adhered to meticulously. It also was an essential source of strength that kept my family together and provided us with a sense of purpose in life. My family dutifully followed Islamic rituals, such as praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan (the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, which is lunar), paying annual alms, and performing pilgrimages. My siblings and I adhered strongly to these ritual practices.

Similarly, Somali culture, customs, and traditions had a great impact on my family’s life. As was the case in many other immigrant families, my father worked extremely hard. Although he did not have a high school diploma, he achieved many things. For example, he spoke five languages fluently: Arabic, Somali, English, Italian, and Urdu. First he worked as a chauffeur, and then he saved a lot of money and started his own business to buy and sell livestock, which connected us to our native country, Somalia. The business involved my importing livestock from Somalia and selling it in Saudi Arabia. This business was a link to my family ties with our country of origin.

In spite of the aforementioned cultural and social influences on me, I was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on August 29, 1966, and reared there. Like many other immigrants, my parents kept my family in touch with Somali culture. For instance, the only language allowed for communicating in my family was Somali. All of my brothers and sisters were bilingual because they had already begun studying in school before I did; they spoke both
Somali and Arabic fluently. I was the only monolingual child in the family. Somali was the only language that I spoke until I was enrolled in a school district in which I learned Arabic as my second language.

The religious identity was prominent in my upbringing because my family knew that it was central to the proper formation of character and identity. This upbringing stressed to me the concept of accountability (to a Higher Authority) and the importance of service to others, especially those in need or difficult circumstances. Even the Prophet said that when someone does something, he had to do so in a perfect manner. With this in mind, I have always tried in my teaching to do my very best.

**Difficulties in school learning Arabic.** Learning the Arabic language in my first year of primary school was a nightmare. My teacher talked to me in Arabic, but I understood virtually not a single word of it. I used to respond to questions and expressed myself in Somali, telling him, “I do not speak Arabic.”

The teacher responded, “It’s shameful that all your brothers in the school speak Arabic, but you don’t. You must be dumb.” I received only insults and humiliation. I was beaten up almost every day in school because I could not speak Arabic, through no specific fault of mine, but my family’s fault and great sin was that I did not speak Arabic! I still remember those days. I used to come back from school every day and throw my bag in the corner and cry because of what had happened at school. Thinking about it now, it is unbelievable to me that because a five-year-old boy could not speak Arabic, which is the means of instruction at that school, he had to be subjected to daily beatings and torture.

I told my mom about the brutal teacher and the embarrassment that I had suffered. I kept telling my mom that I didn’t want to go to school anymore. My parents were very sad,
but they could not do anything about my situation for several reasons. First of all, at that time, most of the teachers in the Saudi educational system routinely beat up students as a form of punishment. Second of all, there were no rules or regulations that banned teachers from beating students. Finally, there was a common belief in Saudi culture that punishing students by beating them was right and it was believed that this was the most beneficial technique to make students learn. In spite of all the bad experiences I went through in my early school days, they did not have negative effects on me in terms of learning languages in my future. However, when I look back over what happened, my misery still has not faded.

Fortunately, I learned Arabic by hook or by crook. Now, I consider it to be my first language, although it was my second language when I started learning it. When I was in junior high school, I started learning English. Since then, I have fallen in love with English, and it has become part of my life. I was keenly interested in Western culture. I used to listen to pop music. Tina Charles, Bonny M., the Bee Gees, and Mariah Carey were my favorite singers. I read many short stories, such as “Around the World in Eighty Days” and some of William Shakespeare’s plays. Moreover, I love American movies. I wanted to learn more. I dreamed of going to the UK or the United States to study English.

In spite of the harrowing educational experiences in my early school years, those years of my life were highly beneficial because they pushed me forward to learn more and never to give up. My family, my race, my culture, and my social life shaped my views and how I perceive the world, as well as how I relate to others and pursue my endeavors. This is particularly true for my professional and educational undertakings.

Although my early education was miserable, I learned from it the importance of the role of the teacher (for good or bad reasons) and the importance of education in shaping
someone’s life. I wanted to become a teacher, but I did not want to be like my early teacher. I wanted to be sure as a teacher that I did not inflict misery upon my students as it had been inflicted upon me. This showed the significance of social capital in communicating with students. The teacher who has a good rapport with students can accomplish much more than a teacher who does not cultivate that social capital.

**Higher education and my career in teaching.** I matriculated at King Abdul-Aziz University in the fall of 1984, a key turning point in my life. To begin with, I was enrolled in the geography department for one semester. However, I changed my major to English because something deep in my heart told me that I would be an English teacher. My English teacher was my role model. I had a dream of being a teacher, and I was always aware of that dream, which has stayed with me ever since then. I specialized in the English language and linguistics. I graduated in the spring of 1998.

In that same year, I started my first job as an English teacher. I felt that my dream had come true. Nevertheless, I discovered that it was just the beginning and that I had to learn a lot to become a great teacher. I taught in an intermediate school in the eastern part of Jeddah. After that, I taught in two different high schools. During my work as a teacher, I took two different summer courses. In 1995, I travelled for the first time to Bournemouth, England, to take an English course.

In the summer of 1996, I visited the USA for the first time. I took a three-week course in TESOL at San Diego State University. That trip was the best in my life. I experienced many great things and lived in a university dorm for the first time in my life. I learned many things about school life in the USA. I visited many cities, including New York, NY; Washington, DC; Charlotte, NC; San Francisco, CA; Los Angeles, CA; and Las
Vegas, NV. I took a train from Las Vegas all the way to New York City. I spent almost two days on the train. I wanted to see all 50 states.

I learned a lot during my first visit to the United States, more than I learned in my entire time at the university. I still recall that was the first time in my life to learn about the communicative approach to teaching. Sharon Bassano presented a one-day workshop about the communicative approach. Since then, I have visited the United States four times for various purposes.

Right after I came back from my trip to the United States, I was awarded the prize of the ideal teacher in the east and south of Jeddah. Not long after that, I was promoted to an English supervisor. I worked in that capacity for five years. Then, following a one-year course of study, I received a diploma in education from Um AlQura University.

After that, I had one of the best and most beautiful years in my entire career. I worked as an assistant director of the foreign education department in Jeddah. I enjoyed working with different foreign communities. There were more than 16 different international schools, which represented different parts of the world. I used to visit these community schools on a regular basis. I also attended their Independence Day festivals and different social events. Nine years in all in that rich environment reshaped my life and attitudes.

In the summer of 2004, I was chosen as a delegation leader and participated in the Seeds of Peace International Camp in the State of Maine in the USA. The program was for educators in Arab countries. There were six Arab delegations from six different Arab countries, as well as six American delegations from different states in the U.S. The main purpose of the camp was clearly stated on its official website: “Seeds of Peace Educator Programs seek to inspire and equip educators in conflict regions with the relationships,
understanding, and skills needed to transform schools and communities and contribute to a culture of peace” (Seeds of Peace, 2012). That experience had a great impact on my life. I learned many lessons from my fellow Americans. Thinking back on all these experiences that I had at the summer camp made me more convinced that learning and knowing could be more meaningful through fruitful dialogue and debate with mutual respect in a free atmosphere.

At that time, English was my third language, so I focused on mastering the English language. After I graduated with my degree in English, although I had no preparation for teaching, I knew that I was entering a new era in my life. I started to invest in my professional development to develop cultural capital. That is why I went to summer courses in the UK and the U.S.: to build cultural capital and to become more proficient in English in speaking and in academic discourse. I also wanted to gain exposure to the popular culture of those two countries. Being culturally competent involves a separate set of skills and a different base of knowledge from being competent in speaking, comprehending, and reading in a language. Gaining linguistic capital was my biggest concern (along with gaining cultural capital), so I took many courses. Knowing all of this related to my self-image, my self-perception, and how others perceived me as a teacher. All this factored into my professional self-identity. The time in the U.S. and the UK boosted my self-esteem and my cultural capital, and I was promoted and won the best-teacher award after returning to Saudi Arabia as a result of these undertakings.

My family. Having lived all my life in a very conservative and closed society had a great impact on the way I proposed to the woman who became my wife. I got married; it was an arranged marriage. It really worked. I do love her. We have been married for 16 years. I
have five lovely children. The eldest just entered high school last year; the youngest is four years old. Having experienced a terrible education system in my own early education created great concern in me over my children’s education. My wife and I believe that education is the best investment. I never compromise when it comes to my children’s education. Therefore, I enrolled them in a decent private international bilingual school back home. The languages of instruction are English and Arabic. As a result, all of my children are bilingual in Arabic and English.

**Graduate studies and furthering my teaching career.** In 2007, I received my first MA, a master’s degree in education from Um AlQura University. My thesis was on novice teachers. I worked in the education department. Right after I got my MA, I decided to pursue further graduate studies. Two years later, I joined King Abdul-Aziz University English Language Institutes (ELI) as a lecturer. I was granted a scholarship and joined the TESOL program at Murray State University (Kentucky, USA). While in Kentucky, I taught ESL, mostly to immigrants at two institutions, one in Mayfield, the other in Murray. I continued my studies by enrolling in a PhD program with a focus on teachers’ training.

When I graduated from the European languages department in King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, I thought that I did not need further studies. I thought that I knew almost everything that I needed to know about my career as an English teacher. My students were happy and content with my teaching and their achievements in the English language. However, I used to encounter some difficulties while teaching due to causes that I did not understand. I always used to think that there was something missing in my teaching, but I did not know how to identify what was missing.
While I was in that state of confusion, a friend of mine who was studying at Northern Arizona University called me and told me about the TESOL program there and how it could help me to understand my career more fully. I took the matter seriously and decided to move to the United States to find out about the magic master who could offer quick remedies for my problems and teach me to tolerate other cultures. I was quite sure that the voyage would not be as easy as my friend explained, but I decided to take that risk.

I had already held many different positions in the field of education. I had worked as an interpreter and as an EFL teacher in public intermediate schools and high schools, where I also worked as a supervisor. I had worked in an education department. However, teaching has been my passion because it is how I most desire to help others. Patient, knowledgeable, inspiring, and creative are the most important attributes that describe a successful teacher. As a successful teacher, I strive to be patient and to keep encouraging students, no matter what their proficiency level is. I always see potential in my students. Successful teachers are knowledgeable in their fields and well-rounded, knowing about other majors. I exert immense effort to inspire my students to excel. Outstanding teachers exploit normal situations to make significant changes in their students’ lives.

At this time of my life, when I got an MA in TESOL, I came to another avenue of professional development. I attended conferences, presented papers, and increased my participation in professional associations. My self-confidence increased, and my proficiency in teaching also improved. I taught for the first time in the United States as an ESL teacher. This made me aware of the differences between teaching EFL and ESL. In ESL, I did not feel as comfortable as I did in teaching EFL because in EFL, I felt a greater affinity for the
students because their background was much closer to mine in language and cultural division between English and their native languages.

**Philosophical views that have influenced me.** Regarding knowledge, I do believe philosophically in realism, especially the way in which realist philosophers view knowledge. Therefore, I reckon that God has already created knowledge, and the role of people is to strive to discover knowledge. Thus, by teaching, I could not only share my knowledge and expertise, but also interact with others to discover the way they learn so I could learn from others. In this case, I always ask my students to comment on whether I have met their learning needs through student feedback and interviews. This feedback helps me to reflect on my own teaching performance to improve my own teaching practices on an ongoing basis.

I consider myself a constructivist. As Kuhn (1962), an American philosopher, elucidated constructivism, scientific knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (Savin & Major, 2013). Because truth is similarly culturally and socially constructed, I believe that the individual person constructs his or her own knowledge and realities, and that process of the construction of knowledge does happen through engaging with others in society. Thus, I am more interested in qualitative research than in quantitative research. Henceforth, I see myself immersed in interviews and inquiry using qualitative methods.

Correspondingly, as an extroverted person, I like to socialize and engage with other people. I believe that I am patient and strive for understanding. These traits have helped me to hone my research skills.

I value intuition, and hunches have been always being among my strong points. Writing about my philosophy of teaching helped me to reflect on such things as metacognition and the importance of rapport with students. Social capital emerged as even
more important in my view of teaching; without rapport and social capital, the teacher is handicapped in helping the student to develop and learn.

**My views on teaching.** In my career as an ESL and EFL instructor, I believe that my teaching methods depend on the types of audience that I am teaching. When I teach students with a low proficiency level, I usually rely on dialogue and task-based activities that create interactions between students and me. When I teach more proficient students, I try hard to use sources and authentic materials that motivate them. In general, the bottom line of my teaching strategy is to create a student-centered classroom environment. In that environment, I create real-life situations and adopt and design learning materials that suit the students’ needs.

Building good rapport with students has positive effects on students’ learning. I am fortunate in being a sociable and outgoing person who believes in having good rapport with my students. However, I am always in charge and control the class when it comes to behavior issues.

I also believe that motivation has a great impact on my students’ learning. It is edifying to know that motivation is one of the keys to successful language learning. Maintaining a high level of motivation during a period of language learning is one of the best ways to make the whole process more successful. I believe that every learner should be motivated when coming to class. Motivation has nothing to do with achievement. If the learner is not doing well in the class, this does not mean that the teacher is unintelligent. But after I taught for a long time and joined the MA TESOL program in Murray, many concepts related to motivation have changed radically for me because I love to get people motivated, and I keep discovering new ways to do that.
The ultimate goal of teaching is transforming learners’ thinking. Students’ needs should be the first priority. My role as a teacher is to inspire learners. My job is teaching learners how to learn, not to feed them expert knowledge. Teachers’ relationships with learners are decisive in motivating or frustrating learners. Integrating technology, research, and experience in teaching can make teaching productive and can increase effectiveness. I want to do these things by all means possible.

After two years at Murray State and four years of postgraduate studies in the USA, I realized that I was still in the shallowest area of the ocean when I sailed towards my ultimate dream. That meant getting a master’s degree was the beginning, and there was still much for me to discover about TESOL. I realized that after this small part of the journey, I had a great message to carry back and impart to my colleagues, my friends, my family, and all of Saudi society: Keep pushing forward.

**How my background has helped me as a teacher.** Although I had a hard time in my early education, I feel blessed. I speak three languages fluently. I have a dream and hope that someday, I will change the Saudi educational system. I am grateful for the diversity of my experience and heritage. I am thankful to my parents, my wife, and to my children.

My background as the child of immigrant parents who learned to speak different languages has influenced my research interests on writing and identity. Writing and speaking languages other than Somali, which I learned at home, kept me engaged, challenged, and motivated to learn more. The moment I got immersed in learning other languages and writing in them, I knew that a significant part of me had shifted progressively. Respecting this, I want to know how the same situation has affected Saudi students, especially females, a
subject that I hope to explore in future research. How are they experiencing their transition from mainly writing in Arabic to writing in the English language in America?

Many things have shaped my life and my sense of professional identity. However, the really important ones are social capital, cultural capital, and linguistic capital. Affinity, identity, and rapport are also critical concerns for me in my professional identity. Paradoxically, the misery in my early education led me to value rapport with students and made me a teacher more determined to help my students.

**Common Themes**

Rich data were generated from each participant to the extent that I thought that each participant could be studied as an individual case study by itself. The themes that emerged from each individual participant intersected with the themes of the other participants. Therefore, it is worth looking at this intersectionality through investigating common themes, which ultimately formed patterns that needed to be addressed. For example, participants’ spiritual identity was one of the most prominent and common themes that appeared across the participants’ stories.

In his response to his sister-in-law when she asked him about his satisfaction with his job in Saudi Arabia, Ahmed replied, “Look, I am teaching Uma (Islamic nation) students, and they are direct children of our prophet.” Ahmed’s answer was an obvious manifestation of the role of faith in his life and his professional identity. He possessed embodied cultural capital that made him perceive himself as contributing to the development of a Muslim nation. He stressed religious influences upon his practices and his decisions. They ultimately became a salient element in shaping his professional identity.
Equally, in Abdullah’s narrations, his spiritual identity was pronounced. For instance, Abdullah resided in Makkah (the Holy Mosque is in Makkah) and commuted daily to his place of work (in Jeddah) because he wanted to satisfy his religious desire to be close to the holy places of Islam. He pointed out, “I have lots of audios about teaching in my car. On my way from Mecca, it takes me 45 minutes to get here.”

Mohsen’s spiritual identity was manifest when he talked about his close relationship with students based on being Muslims. His religious identity was reflected in how he positioned himself as a better teacher than his counterpart NESTs because he possessed cultural capital and religious affinity, which enabled him to identify with his students. “At least I am a Muslim. There is [a] historical relationship with these Saudi students, so they trust me.”

Similarly, Mass attributed his choice of teaching, particularly in Saudi Arabia, not only to economic factors, but also—and more importantly—to religious ones. He expressed his spiritual identity in his concern about students because they shared his beliefs. He said, “To me, teaching is an (Ebada) worship to God, especially when I’m teaching these Muslim brothers, you know, same religion as me, so that’s how I go about it.”

Finally, I have long felt that my belief (Islam) has been an indispensable factor in my life and my professional identity. I lived in a conservative family, one in which Islamic religious rituals and practices had a great impact on my identity. I have always viewed Islam as a way of life. That religious identity had an influence on my professional identity.

Summary

This chapter presented in-depth portraits of each of the participants, based on transcripts of the semi-structured interviews. These covered their personal histories, their
education, and their careers as teachers. A few themes emerged from the data, and these are mentioned in passing in this chapter, but they are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
Chapter Five:
Cross-Case Analysis

In chapter four, I analyzed data from each participant to trace and capture each participant’s personal history, education, and career as a teacher. To further conceptualize running themes from the participants’ responses, in chapter five, I take these discussions further in a form of cross-analysis, as well as dialogic investigation. Cross-case analysis helped me to identify (Merriam, 1998) the commonality in and differences between the five participants. I winnowed the data and categorized them based on common themes, whether in the form of recurrent patterns or dissimilarities. This process helped me to have an overarching perspective of the five participants that led me to address the research questions of the study. In what follows, I present the common themes that emerged from the data, starting with the unexpected ones.

This study aimed to examine the lived stories of four NNESTs, plus me as a researcher participant. I collected the data by conducting semi-structured interviews to explore how the NNESTs constructed their professional identities in an EFL context and to get a better understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. The study also explored participants’ stories to reveal the hardships that NNESTs encountered while constructing their professional identities. The study drew on a three-dimensional framework: temporality, sociality, and space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). The study also employed two other theoretical conceptions, namely “forms of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) and “identity as an analytical lens” (Gee, 2001), to analyze and interpret the data. This section presents a cross-case analysis of the themes that emerged from the data. Another layer of analysis of the
findings occurred through looking for common themes and differences that emerged from the data.

Cross-Case Analysis

In post-structuralism, identity has been described as complex, fluid, multifaceted, multilayered, constructed, reconstructed, and co-constructed progressively, while an individual learns and claims various memberships and is influenced by power relations (Black, 2006; Gee, 2001; Norton, 2000). Moreover, identity is considered to be a psychological, as well as a social, conception (Varghese et al., 2005). Consequently, there is a consensus among social scholars that teacher identity is constructed and developed through internal and social factors. Internal and environmental aspects—time, interactions, and space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006)—play significant roles in forming teachers’ identity. Teachers’ professional identity should be examined and understood holistically through personal, social, and situational frameworks. The findings of this study show that teachers identify themselves as legitimate professionals by virtue of practical life experience. Therefore, exploring participants’ lived experience is critical. Moreover, sociocultural aspects are a crucial way to reflect on the participants’ interactions through time and space.

This section presents a cross-case analysis of the themes that emerged from the data. Another layer of analysis of the findings occurred through looking for differences that emerged from the data. Thus, I thought that looking at the responses of the five participants from a comparative perspective would be insightful.

1. The Role of Faith in Constructing Participants’ Identities (Religious Identity)

The first unexpected theme that emerged from the cross-case analysis of the participants’ narratives was the significance of religious beliefs in shaping participants’ lives
and their professional identity. The participants’ individual identities and professional identities have been shaped by their religious identities. The impact of religious identity is predominantly manifested in four ways: (1) the role of faith in participants’ career choice, (2) the role of faith in motivating students, (3) the role of faith in participants’ instructional practices, and (4) the role of faith in participants’ rapport with their students.

A considerable body of literature has been published on investigating various motivations behind an individual’s choice of career (Olsen, 2008; Richardson & Watt, 2005; Watt & Richardson, 2008); however, little attention has been paid to this topic in the EFL context or in Saudi Arabia. Also, importantly, the role of religious beliefs in shaping teachers’ professional identities in TESOL is still underexplored in the professional literature; addressing this issue is therefore one of the major contributions of this study. In this study, the analysis of the findings of the five participants explicitly revealed various motives behind their career choices. For example, Mohsen and I attributed our decisions to become teachers to some psychological aspects of our personality, such as our sense of giving and a sincere passion for the job. However, Mass declared sociocultural reasons: teaching was his mom’s career, and she encouraged him to be a teacher. Ahmed’s narrative unequivocally showed religious and cultural capital causes had a great impact on his career choice. Abdullah was the only participant who did not join the university to be a teacher; nevertheless, he changed his perceptions and became devoted to his teaching career.

Despite the various psychological and sociocultural reasons that the participants revealed regarding their decisions to choose teaching as a career, religious considerations were the most unexpected finding of the study. The findings of this study apparently support the notion that teachers’ professional identity is profoundly entrenched in the individual’s
early life, beliefs, and social environment. Consequently, the influence of these factors in participants’ career choices, experiences, education, and professional lives was inevitable.

All of the participants in this study overtly and covertly indicated that faith played a significant role in constructing their identities. Throughout the interviews, all participants emphasized how their early lives, upbringing, and faith shaped their identities. For example, serving parents is one of the crucial tenets in Islamic teachings. Therefore, Islam has outlined religious teachings pertaining to parents’ rights to encourage their children to be kind, modest, humble, and obedient to their parents. Many verses in the holy Quran address the importance of serving parents.

God says, “And worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and show kindness to parents, and to relatives, and orphans, and the needy, and to the neighbor that is a kinsman and the neighbor that is a stranger, and the companion by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom your right hands possess. Surely, Allah does not love the proud and the arrogant.” (Al Nes’a. verses 36)

All five of the participants illustrated their tight bonds with their parents and families. For instance, the first participant, Ahmed, spent his early life in a homogeneous conservative small village in Pakistan in which social and cultural norms are blindly practiced. He repeatedly said that his intimate bonding with his family—obeying and serving parents and family—is one of the most prominent values in Islam. He stated that

First thing which was the source [that] pushed me to come to Saudi Arabia was basically a small incident in my family. My father had an accident, and I was the
only one who was in a position to feed him, to take care of his health. He was injured. I had to take care of him. He lost his memory, and for that matter, I needed money at that time. I came out from my country because whatever the money I was generating, it was not enough to fulfill the health requirements of my father, so I [returned].

In respect to this issue, Abdullah was loyal and close to his parents and family. He sacrificed a lot to be near them. He repeatedly stated that his parents were a high priority. Abdullah indicated to me an event that he unequivocally complied with the Islamic teachings regarding parents’ rights. He said,

I resigned to be with my elderly parents in Morocco. *Alhamdulillah*, after 16 months, their situation improved a lot. A lot more they can handle. And then I ran out of money, okay? Because I didn’t work in Morocco. The salaries were very humiliating, very low.

In the same vein, Mohsen’s interviews displayed how close he was to his family. In the following excerpt, Mohsen made an interesting analogy between the role of teacher and the role of family. Mohsen believed that his responsibility as a teacher was as important as that of a parent or caregiver. Mohsen believed that the role of teacher was not instrumental but rather affective; it exists to fulfill emotional and psychological needs of an individual. He said,

Here, we should remember the role of the family. We should provide students with, uh, psychological, uh, at, uh, assistance in, uh, entertainment clubs, sports clubs. We increase libraries. Uh, we talk whenever it’s possible about what should be done,
what shouldn’t be. This is your task, not only as a teacher, but also as a parent because you are teaching my son, and I am teaching yours.

Indeed, Islamic traditions have also played critical roles in Mass’s life and in his career. His sense of religion was powerfully tied to his family and culture. Consequently, he had always been encouraged to be obliging to people by his family members, especially his mom, because that was considered good deeds based on Islamic teachings. Islam has paid substantial attention to teachers for their being the first bone in the structure of social development. Mass narrated how his mom used to influence him to help students and considered this form of doing good deeds as a core principle of Islam. He said,

My late mother was a teacher. . . . She told me, “Serve people. If you can serve people and share something good, especially as a Muslim, whatever you do good, you will be rewarded in the hereafter.” So it’s not much about the monetary side of it but . . . when I’m teaching these Muslim brothers, you know, same religion as me, so that’s how I go about it.

The following excerpt is from my autobiography, where I explicitly illustrated how faith occupied a tremendous position in my family, as well as in my early education.

Moreover, the social environment had a big impact on my identity. I have always identified myself as a Muslim first. To elaborate on this issue, I said,

Faith played an essential role in my family. My parents were both born and reared in extremely conservative Sunni Muslims families, so Islam was not only a creed to my family, but also a way that has meticulously shaped our lives. It also was an essential source of strength that kept my family together and provided us a sense of purpose in life. My family dutifully followed Islamic rituals, such as praying five times a day,
fasting during Ramadan (the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, which is lunar), paying annual alms, and performing pilgrimages. My siblings and I adhered strongly to these ritual practices.

Influence of faith in participants’ career choice. A significant aspect of teachers’ professional identities is their views on choosing to be a teacher and how they perceived themselves. Therefore, I looked carefully at the narratives and investigated the motives that led each participant to embark on a teaching career. The analysis of the data revealed the following: When I asked Ahmed about the motives behind choosing teaching as a career, he reported that he was fascinated with British accents and inspired by one of his teachers and the way she used to manage the class. However, in another narration, Ahmed gave another reason. He proclaimed that teaching Saudi Arabian students is a blessing for him because the students are descendants of the early prophets’ companions (Sahaba). Once his cousin asked him about the value of teaching. He responded,

My sister-in-law, she is big, big boss in the . . . She is, I think, above a dean, one step to the vice president. She asked me, “How is your job going?”

I said, “Alhamdulillah, I’m teaching these children of Uma (an Arabic Muslim nation), so I’m satisfied.”

She said, “I never thought like that.”

I said, “Look, I am teaching Uma students and they are direct children of our prophet.” It’s pretty emotional for me. I consider them like that, alhamdulillah. It helps me out.” The only point [that] is discouraging for me is when my big boss doesn’t give me a chance to explain; that will demotivate me.
However, English teachers did not inspire Abdullah; he was the only participant for whom this was true. Therefore, he had not planned to become a teacher when he graduated from college, but he ended up as a primary school teacher in Kuwait. Abdullah had encountered many hardships in teaching. Nevertheless, he pursued his studies to improve his teaching skills. He explained,

I wasn’t meant to be an English language teacher originally. I loved phonology. I was a student of linguistics, and I did my first research paper in phonology as an undergraduate student, then I got an offer to do my master’s degree at Oxford University. I did linguistics again at Oxford, and I wrote my second paper in phonology.

Unlike Abdullah, I found that my English teachers inspired me. Despite my early difficulties in elementary school, I was inspired to persevere in my studies because of the encouragement that I received from my teachers. At first, in college I planned to major in geography. After three years, I changed my major to English.

I changed my major to English because something deep in my heart told me that I would be an English teacher. My English teacher was my role model. I had a dream of being a teacher, and I was always aware of that dream, which has stayed with me for the rest of my life. I specialized in the English language and linguistics. I graduated in the spring of 1998.

In the absence of a generally accepted theoretical model and in an academic atmosphere in which many scholars are still uncomfortable when dealing with religion, it is understandable that no clear picture has yet emerged from the largely unrelated studies of religion and English language teaching. In general, little scholarly attention has been paid to
the close interactions between religion (whether beliefs or practices) and teaching ESL or EFL. Why this is so is not easy to explain, but it may well have been because many of the scholars interested in studying language learning were themselves so steeped in secularism to such an extent that they did not readily perceive the depth of religious beliefs and life.

However, the exact opposite is true for some teachers. “A number of English language teachers are evangelical Christians for whom faith and professional work are inextricably intertwined” (Varghese & Johnston, 2007, p. 5). Some Muslims in Saudi Arabia were worried about the possibility that these teachers would try to convert Muslims to the Christian faith. Consequently, I would argue that participants might be unconsciously aware of the influence of some cultural components when teaching English as well as the impact of non-Muslim teachers who might preach their faith to students. Some Muslims in Saudi Arabia also saw teaching English as a way to spread their faith. Therefore, the first objective of teaching the English language in Saudi Arabia was to spread Islam.

Over anyone who knows everything, there’s someone who knows a little bit more. … We have gotten our religion many stories like that. The story of, uh, Moses, Musa, and Al-Khidr. At that moment, I discovered how a teacher is really, although not very well paid, but you can have a very good message to give to other people, love of giving, love of sacrifice.

A very good place in society. And even our Arab, uh, poetry praises the teacher, and they say, “He was going to be a prophet.” We are the representatives of the Prophet because we have got the message. A teacher has got the message, not only the science he’s teaching, because now with the Internet, you can have a lot of knowledge from the Internet.
2. Professional Development Programs

The second finding that emerged from the data was a common theme that was touched upon by all of the participants. The most predicted theme was the relationship between professional identity and professional development programs. All of the participants addressed theoretical and practical issues regarding teachers’ education. The participants reflected on professional development and noted its significance in shaping who the participants wanted to be and in shaping how they perceived themselves and were perceived by others.

As teachers’ training is a pivotal part of teachers’ education, Varghese and Johnston (2005) argued, “Teachers’ professional identity is considered a critical component of the sociocultural and sociopolitical landscape of the classroom and in teachers’ professional development” (p. 5). This theme emerged by clustering several relational codes. In what follows, I outline the factors that led me to identify this theme, followed by some excerpts drawn from the participants’ interviews. These prominent factors emerged from the cross-case analysis: teachers’ background and early education, inspirational figures, teachers’ knowledge, communication skills, and teachers’ training programs. Throughout the interview sessions and my autobiography, teachers’ knowledge cast its shadow upon the participants’ narratives. It was expected that this theme would press heavily on theoretical as well as practical knowledge in shaping their professional identities.

In the findings from the analysis, the significance of teachers’ knowledge stood out. For instance, Ahmed believed that a teacher should not stop learning, and he went further and argued that teachers who do not read are not considered proper teachers. He argued for the
importance of reading and learning about whatever helped him to be a distinguished teacher.

In summarizing his reading habits, he said,

Read, read, and read. Read means you are in the habit of reading; obviously, you read, and you speak. You are a teacher. A teacher cannot be stopped from speaking. They keep on speaking, like I’m speaking, nonstop. If you read more, you will learn more; that’s the bottom line.

On the other hand, Abdullah did not study education and was not prepared to be a teacher; however, he explored phonology in depth and studied pure linguistics at Oxford University. Abdullah’s story regarding teachers’ knowledge was an example of the resilience. Abdullah challenged his position as an incompetent EFL teacher. He worked hard and got an MA from one of the top universities in the world (Oxford University). He had always imagined that he would become a university professor, but because he changed career paths, it was difficult for him to adjust his portrait of himself. Nevertheless, when he changed his career path to become an EFL teacher, he was disturbed by the fact that he had not prepared to be that kind of teacher. What motivated Abdullah to complete extensive coursework was his feeling that he was not sufficiently competent. He used to perceive himself as a less competent teacher than his colleagues. He expressed this fear by saying, “I wasn’t meant to be an English language teacher originally.” He added, “I felt the need. I felt I wasn’t a competent teacher, so I wanted to become one.”

Abdullah spared no efforts to learn as much as he could about teaching strategies, pedagogical approaches, and other issues related to teaching English to improve his theoretical knowledge and teaching practices. Abdullah mentioned that he frequently
travelled to England to take summer courses that would help him to do his job more effectively. He said,

Yeah. This happened during the first five years. I felt the need to improve myself. Unfortunately, the school where I used to teach and the college where I used to teach in my first years were not keen on offering professional development for the teachers. I took the initiative.

Abdulla’s strategies in coping with his perceptions of himself as an incompetent teacher are similar to mine. When I first graduated from the university with a bachelor’s degree in linguistics, I was not prepared to be a teacher. I had never studied or practiced teaching in any form during my five years in college. When I started teaching, I felt awkward. I determined to work hard to improve myself. Like Abdullah, I challenged the status quo and took the initiative in my own professional development programs. Thus, I used to go every summer either to the UK or the United States to enroll in teacher-training programs. Nevertheless, I think that Abdulla’s position was more critical than mine. Abdullah was taking courses because he was working in the private sector where competency was high and depends on credentials. Nonetheless, I think that my position was safer than Abdullah’s.

Mohsen was the oldest of all the participants; however, he was the most passionate and energetic participant in his views and responses, particularly in issues regarding teacher development programs. He reported that teachers should “thirst for learning more and more.” Mohsen perceived that teacher-development programs are pivotal for being a successful teacher. He strongly believed in teacher-development programs as a lifelong venture. In his narration, he shared with me a story of a colleague of his who refused to join
a teacher-training program because his colleague claimed that he was more knowledgeable than the presenter. Mohsen criticized this attitude. He argued that even if the training program presenter was a novice, there was still something to learn. He asserted this notion when he said:

The thirst for learning, now if you go to a conference, on the first benches, you will see very old professors. Many of them are, uh, Nobel Prize winners, we are taking notes [from] a young man presenting something. The young man is about 35 years old. They are 70 years old. They are taking notes, [demonstrating] a thirst for learning. You will never have enough. The thirst for learning more and more, the love of the job, and formation training. Don’t say, “I know enough.” Like, uh, one of our teachers, when they were asked to, uh, attend the training, he said, “No, I know more than the presenter.”

Nonetheless, Mohsen’s views about teachers’ knowledge could be ingrained in some traditional teachers’ perception of themselves as classroom teachers who are the source of knowledge. That being said, traditional teachers who had such an attitude have an influence on the teaching environment, particularly when they adopt an authoritative stance in teaching.

Mass conceptualized the notion of teachers’ professional-development programs in a businesslike way. He perceived his students as clients or customers. He said, “They are my clients. I don’t care about any other, what do you call it, facilities out here. I have to please my students first, and to me, number one, teaching is an [Ebada] worship.” Mass’s perception about teacher development programs was revealed by perceiving students as clients and seeing himself as a contractor. The relationship between client and contractor is
based on satisfaction through some fundamental liaison, such as providing regular status updates, which sustains client satisfaction. Thus, Mass deeply believed that a teacher must be knowledgeable, with an updated base of knowledge, not only in the subject matter, but also in global and local issues. He underscored this point by saying,

I would say that [teaching is] maybe a candle that lit up somebody’s hopes, somebody’s feelings, somebody’s heart, so that at least I contribute something for the benefit of my students because I always believe that my students are my clients. Whatever you do is for your students, so I always think of them first. Anything I do is always [for] my students because I always believe in my students.

In response to a question regarding the types of training-development programs that were provided by the institute or voluntarily, his discourse revealed high awareness. He understood the significance of the goals of the teachers’ professional-development programs. He explicitly pointed out that he attended many training sessions and said,

Yeah, we have that [professional-development programs] now and then, off and on. The last one we attended was a conference, the first conference. It was good, you know, new insights from various speakers, new challenges and how to overcome them, new solutions in the world of EFL/ESL, so that’s nice. It’s good, and we had just a sharing of ideas with colleagues.

Mass explained in detail the significance of teacher-development programs as an essential part of his profession. Mass’s perceptions regarding professional-development programs were positive. He conceptualized his awareness of these training programs by illuminating how these programs contributed in his profession.
3. Linguistic and Cultural Competencies

_Linguistic competency._ One of the common themes that emerged in narrations from all five participants was the significance of linguistic, cultural, and communication skills in shaping their self-images, the way they are perceived, and their self-confidence, which ultimately helped them to construct their professional identity. Language proficiency, including speaking English with the appropriate accents, was a great concern for all the participants. I noticed in the narrations of all the participants that language-proficiency issues were ubiquitous. Also, they considered that speaking the target language effectively was an essential factor in their professional identities.

Ahmed placed stress on the notion of language proficiency and described himself as having a good command of the English language. He reported that he learned the language in childhood. “I started learning English when I was in class four in primary school.” He added that he had a good command of the English language. Ahmed expressed his full confidence in his language proficiency to the extent that he believed that native-speaker teachers were never superior to him. “I’ve never come across such a thing as being given a demotion while a person who is a native speaker is given a promotion.” Ahmed was self-confident in his English proficiency. He perceived himself as professional and competent enough for teaching. This shaped his professional identity. He narrated that he was confident enough that if he were interviewed for a job, he had no doubt that he would be hired. He said,

I mean obviously if you talk about native and non-native, in that case, I might not be given privilege over a native speaker of the English language, but to be honest, anybody who is sitting [on the] other side of the table and taking my interview with
regards to any kind of a post [that] requires certain skills [that] I fulfill, I can assure you that they [would] accept me because I have expertise in that.

In this excerpt, Ahmed explicitly expressed the view that his language proficiency had given him job security because if he needed to apply for a job, he would have no doubt that he was competent enough to be picked. Also, Abdullah demonstrated that he mastered English and had specialized in phonology. He was proud of his British accent, which he believed in one way or another opened the door for him to pursue his graduate studies at Oxford University. He expressed his desire for his first career path before he became an EFL teacher:

I loved phonology. I was a student of linguistics, and I did my first research paper in phonology as an undergraduate student. Then I got an offer to do my master’s degree at Oxford University. I did linguistics again at Oxford, and I wrote my second paper in phonology.

Abdullah had an MA degree in phonology from a prestigious university, Oxford University, which made it easy to draw the conclusion that Abdullah spoke the target language fluently and accuracy. He stressed that he had the potential to speak differently according to the context. He related this to socializing with native speakers. He said, “You need to mingle with the speakers of that dialect. You do the same thing when you speak English. With native speakers, it’s different from speaking English with non-native speakers.”

Mass shared the same views regarding the importance of language proficiency in shaping his professional identity. Mass was born in Singapore, where English is considered an official language, plus Tamil, Malay, and Mandarin. He sometimes identified himself as
being like a native speaker of English. He pointed out that he perceived himself this way:
“I’m as good as a native.” However, he believed that people perceived him as native or like a native speaker. “Maybe you can see me as a native.” Mass shared with me a strategy that he used to motivate his students in learning the English language. He narrated that his students perceived his as a native speaker. He pointed out,

I always tell my students about that. Even now in Saudi Arabia, I tell my students,
“You see, the color of my eyes is not blue [and] my skin is not white, but if I can be proficient when my first language is not English, you can do it too.”

Based on this excerpt, it is obvious that Mass not only has great confidence in his language proficiency, but also holds linguistic capital that made him self-assured and proficient.

In a similar fashion, Mohsen shared the same views regarding the importance that language proficiency played in the way he positioned himself and was perceived by others. Mohsen first implicitly indicated that his proficiency in English made him value Western music. He said, “I didn’t know that I was going to be a teacher. I chose English because I liked it from the Brits’ music and American music.” He added that his ability with English gave him an access to appreciate different cultures, which consequently affected his professional growth. He stated, “English opened many, many gates for me, the gate of Europe, the gate of America. I read history. I read civilization books. I read literature.”

Mohsen affirmed his identity as a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) and his pride in his foreign accent. He expressed his linguistic capital as a multilingual teacher. “Look, why should I be like the native [speaker]? I am who I am. If he is native in English, I am native in Arabic.” Mohsen argued that English is not only what native speakers speak, but also a lingua franca. He said, “Look at the UN. When all presidents meet, they speak
different Englishes. So, what’s the mistake? There’s no harm. Of course, we like to be native-like.” Mohsen seemed self-confident and proud of his identity; at the same time, it was obvious that he questioned the native speaker myth (Phillipson, 1990). He questioned the idea of the innate superiority of teachers of English who were native speakers.

In my autobiography, language proficiency was one of my biggest concerns. Therefore, I invested in my professional growth and travelled to the UK and the USA. These training courses had a great impact on my self-confidence and self-image. Improvement in my linguistic performance led me to other avenues and to promotions. I expressed these issues in the following excerpt.

My trip to the USA and exposure to [American] culture had a great impact on fluency and accuracy, which gave me self-confidence. Right after I came back from my trip to the United States, I was awarded the prize of the ideal teacher in the east and south of Jeddah. Not long after that, I was promoted to an English supervisor.

*Cultural competency.* Knowing both the language and the culture is indispensable. Language is not only a set of rules and meanings or sounds to convey messages, but also a set of social acts. As the term *culture* is broad and can be defined in many ways, I prefer using culture here to refer to beliefs, norms, behaviors, values, and traditions that define a group of people. Therefore, language teachers in general and those who teach in a conservative country in particular need to be aware of the host culture, in this case Saudi Arabia. In the research setting of this study, most of the students’ populations were homogeneous. All students shared the same history, values, beliefs, and traditions. Teaching should be bounded by context, and EFL teachers should be conscious of the culture’s nuances and know how to navigate culturally sensitive issues, especially issues and topics
that pertain to Islamic Sharia or verses from the Holy Quran. However, some topics and views that are culturally sensitive are not easy to identify. There are unwritten rules and norms that need to be considered. These are often religious and political. Thus, NNESTs who teach in an EFL context hypothetically have more cultural awareness than their counterpart NESTs. However, this is not always the case because many NESTs who come to Saudi Arabia are also Muslims.

Another notable theme that emerged from all the five participants was related to the practices that proved that NNESTs had awareness of multiple cultures. What I mean by communicative competence is specifically the notion of culture competence, which was proposed by Dell Haymes (1966). He coined the term *communicative competence* to explicate the shortcoming of Noam Chomsky’s theory of performance vs. competence. Haymes’ (1966) framework was based on the notion that learning a foreign language entails being aware of the appropriateness of language usage, such as what, how, and where to say something in different contexts. All five participants explicitly mentioned the importance of understanding learners’ and L2 cultures. I assumed that this awareness of the L1 and L2 was critical in a conservative country such as Saudi Arabia because such knowledge would help teachers to navigate within the two cultures and avoid tackling cultural issues, particularly issues that might contradict the students’ religious values. All five participants reported that their culture awareness of the learners’ culture and L2 culture played a crucial role in constructing their professional identities.

NNESTs who teach in an EFL context generally have more cultural awareness than their NEST counterparts who work in the same setting because NNESTs share the same culture with the students. Therefore, NNESTs hold cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) stated
that this makes them more privileged than NESTs. This privilege or affinity identity (Gee, 2000) apparently contributes to their teaching practices and helps them to navigate when tackling culturally sensitive issues in the textbooks or classroom discussions with their students. In the following excerpts, I look at the cultural issues in all five participants’ narrations and discuss how these cultural issues influenced NNESTs’ professional identities.

Ahmed noted,

I read Arab news. I read the *Riyadh Gazette*. I read the opinions of Saudi writers, specifically I’m saying Saudi [columnists]. When you read the Saudi writers’ opinions, you get the touch of social events or social norms of that country. [This] helps me a lot, and still I keep on doing this. Plus, my students are the basic source for me to understand [Saudi culture].

This excerpt is a manifestation of Ahmed’s consciousness of the significance of understanding students’ culture. He stated that such knowledge would facilitate his teaching practices. Ahmed pointed out the strategies that he used to educate himself to be a more culturally aware teacher.

It’s not that difficult for a Muslim to understand the culture of Saudi [Arabia] because in Saudi [Arabia], 100% of [the] people are Muslim. They have different social norms, but you can easily [figure that out]. It can be possible to get it quickly if you interact with them, if you socialize with them. I was a bit fortunate as compared [with] other teachers [in] that I had Saudi friends, and I have Saudi friends who introduced me into their culture.

Ahmed elaborated this point in his discussion and mentioned another practical strategy that he employed to enhance his deep understanding of the host culture. Ahmed
mentioned that his cultural capital was an asset. He invested efforts to deepen his understanding of the host culture, which ultimately enhanced his bond with the students, an affinity identity (Gee, 2006). Affinity identity means that the teacher shares the same cultural identity and core values (history, religion, etc.) with the students.

**Abdullah**

The following excerpt displays that Abdullah was a multilingual and more importantly a competent bicultural teacher. It also shows that he was conscious of the importance of discussing culturally sensitive issues with his students. Abdulla’s spiritual identity and his cultural competencies made him perceive himself in a patriarchal fashion. Therefore, he explained to his students the cultural differences between L1 and the target language (English) to raise their awareness and to acknowledge the cultural differences between the two languages, particularly the ideological ideas that might be distributed throughout the textbooks topics. He said,

I don’t have a problem at all. If there’s some controversial issue, [the students and I] do discuss it. I usually make it clear to the students that this [textbook] comes from a different country. This is a product of a different [culture]. We don’t have a problem. We understand Western culture. If there is something that we regard as a negative, it’s not there intentionally. The author believes that that’s part of the culture, and he or she wasn’t taking into consideration that people from another culture would use it.
Mass

In the following excerpts, Mass acknowledged the significance of being a culturally competent teacher. He explained that being aware of the students’ culture facilitated his negotiations with students and led him to achieve efficient teaching practices. He said,

I can see that after being here [in Saudi Arabia] for nine years, I understand Saudi culture, I understand my students very well, and I know how to tackle them better, compared [with] the first time. I was like, “I don’t know. Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing the wrong thing?” . . . Cause I’m trying to learn the culture. But today, I know how to tackle the students, in whatever form. The lazy ones, this is how I deal with them. The good ones, this is how I deal with them.

I can drink coffee with natives as well because my policy is very easy. I learned the English culture. That is my strong point. If I speak to a British [person], the natives here, I know their culture because I was there. Americans. I know the American culture. You see? . . . Whatever you communicate to me converse with me, I know your part. I know the American culture, how you speak.

This excerpt provides evidence of not only his self-confident, but also his self-perception as a multilingual and multicultural teacher. He elaborated that he possessed a greater strength than his colleague NESTs. Mass related being a proficient and efficient teacher to the fact that an English-language teacher should be multiciculturally competent.

Mohsen

The following narratives show that Mohsen was self-aware of the role that culture played in choosing his career path. “I didn’t know that I was going to be a teacher. I chose English because I liked it from the Brits’ music and American music.” Mohsen was
conscious about the relationship between language and culture. He believed that language and culture were intertwined and inseparable. Therefore, when he taught English, it was imperative to highlight the L2 culture. He stated,

You are like [a] native because now when you learn English, you don’t only learn the language, [but also] you learn the culture. You learn the civilization, the history. When you come here, you’re going to speak about Bill Clinton. You’re going to speak about Margaret Thatcher of England.

Mohsen thought that when he taught English, touching on L2 culture was inevitable; however, he acted like a gatekeeper, protecting the students from ideas that might conflict with their culture. One wonders whether this could be because Mohsen believed that his spiritual, historical, and emotional bonds with the students was stronger than anything else, which made him act as a protector. As he said,

So, at least I am a Muslim. There is, uh, a historical relationship with these Saudi students, so they trust me. They know that I love them because we are Arabs; we are Muslim. This fact you cannot neglect, you cannot ignore.

Mustafa

Being multilingual and coming from a multicultural background had a great impact on my identity. I am proud of my heritage and the bicultural environment in which I grew up. I believe that my family, my race, my culture, and my social life have shaped my views and how I perceive the world, as well as how I relate to others and have pursued my endeavors. This has been especially true for my professional and educational interests.

In my autobiography, I pointed out that culture affected how I acquired English. I have always been conscious of the essence of language and its relationship with culture. I
believe that language is a social act that creates and sustains the culture; it is not just a means of communication. The following excerpt from my autobiography provides evidence of the influence of L2 culture in my life: “I have fallen in love with English, and it has become part of my life. I was keenly interested in Western culture. I used to listen to pop music.”

Although I graduated with a BA in English, I always felt that I had missed something; therefore, I invested in my education by saving money and taking courses in the summertime in the UK and the USA. These summer training courses helped me to be exposed to the L2 culture. In my autobiography, I emphasized the role of this cultural exposure in gaining self-confidence. This self-confidence contributed to the construction of my professional identity.

My trip to the USA and exposure to [American] culture had a great impact on my fluency and accuracy, which gave me self-confidence. Right after I came back from my trip to the United States, I was awarded the prize of the ideal teacher in the east and south of Jeddah.

4. Building Rapport with Students

Another theme emerged from all the teacher participants’ narrations that addressed the human dimensions of teaching and learning, which lie at the heart of the teacher–student relationship. This theme involves the consequence of the teacher–student relationship from the teacher’s perspective. Several subthemes emerged from participants’ narratives concerning the role of building rapport with students. These subthemes included teachers’ self-image and self-confidence, students’ motivations, and the way in which the teacher participants perceived themselves and ultimately constructed their professional identities. Positive relationships with students, in which high levels of affiliation prevailed, were mentioned as one of the primary reasons for teachers to stay in the profession (e.g.,
O’Connor, 2008; Veldman, van Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2013) and one of the most important sources of enjoyment of, and motivation for, teaching (Hargreaves, 2000).

Most of the teacher participants in this study reported the influence that their teachers had made in their lives. For instance, three of the five participants credited their choice of teaching as a profession to the inspiration of either a teacher role model or teachers who had made a difference in their lives. For example, as I narrated in my autobiography, although I had a difficult experience with my class teacher in my first year in school, I considered my English teacher in junior high school as the role model who inspired me not only to learn English, but also to fall in love with teaching. My anecdote embodied an important aspect of the experiences shared by many teachers, particularly those who learned English in an EFL setting. For example, Ahmed reported that he admired his English teacher in college and discussed the influence that she had on him. Similarly, Mass related his choice of becoming a teacher to his mother’s influence; his mother used to be a teacher. In what follows, I discuss elements of teacher–student relationships that influenced teachers’ professional identity.

As I discussed in the literature review (chapter two), a variety of definitions have been suggested to refer to the concept of identity. Throughout this dissertation, I have employed Norton’s (2000) definition of identity as an operational definition. She defined identity as “how people understand their relationship to the world; how that relationship is constructed across time and space; and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 4). In this definition, “understanding their relationship” is a fundamental aspect of constructing identity. The relationships that teachers build with students, other teachers, and administrators through time and space are an essential facet of constructing identity. Identity
is dynamic, fluid, multifaceted, and constructed in social contexts. I highlight this definition of identity in examining teachers’ rapport with students. Then I discuss the influence of these relationships in constructing teachers’ professional identity.

Ahmed

The following excerpt reveals something important: Many teacher participants reported the strong influence of teachers whom they considered as role models. Teacher participants narrated and credited their choice of profession to them. For example, Ahmed said, “She was not panicked about anything. She was really cool, very calm, very patient, and she used to teach in a way that was so musical for you to listen to her and keep the things in your brain.” Ahmed reflected back on his early education when he was in college studying for his BA in English literature. He stated how he perceived his model teacher, who inspired him to be a teacher and why she inspired him. He elaborated, “Dr. Fazana was qualified from England. She did her PhD in Shakespeare. She was a doctor in literature, and her accent really inspired me. I’m a teacher maybe 50% because of her. She inspired me to become a teacher.” Ahmed’s perception about his teacher was an important resource of identity construction for him as it allowed him to conceptualize his imagined future identity as a professional teacher (Norton, 2000).

Ahmed discussed rapport with his students. He built strong relationships based on mutual respect. Ahmed trusted his students and frequently asked them about how they perceived him. He reported what they said: “You are very friendly, you use the whiteboard effectively, and you manage the class in the best possible way.” They also said, “At times, when you are a little bit angry, it’s not a good part of your personality.” Thus Ahmed’s students gave both positive and negative feedback about his teaching practices because they
felt secure enough to be honest with him, a measure of strong rapport. Ahmed took action to give them a safe space in which they could express themselves frankly. This reflects Ahmed’s desire to achieve a twofold task: First, Ahmed might have been seeking constructive feedback from his students to take these comments under consideration to improve his performance. Second, he might have wanted to train his students to be confident enough to express their views. Either of the two intentions revealed the strong rapport that bonded Ahmed with his students and ultimately helped to construct his professional identity.

In the following extract, Ahmed reported that he gave advices to his students about life in general. He told them,

The world out there is like that, they will not look at your positive points all the time; they will always look for your negative points. You need to be careful in your life. With me it’s okay. You said that I accept, but the world is very cruel; you have to prepare for that.

They said, “You made a point. You gave us a call, which is actually indirectly a shut-up call for us, but you also woke us up that don’t speak [to tell us] don’t make silly mistakes [because] people will not excuse you, so you have to prepare yourself for the future life.”

It is apparent that Ahmed felt comfortable in evaluating and judging students and consequently giving them advice regarding life in general. This behavior reflected the intimacy between Ahmed and his students. He was acting in a patriarchal and protective fashion. Ahmed’s practices reflected his deep concern for his students’ well-being, which they perceived and which helped generate the rapport that he shared with his students.
**Abdullah**

Unlike Ahmed, who was open and friendly with his students, which made him build strong rapport with his students, Abdullah had different perspectives regarding his relationship with his students. He perceived them as grown-up and trusted them. Therefore, he acted as a role model or mentor. He commented on this relationship and said, “Students are mature enough to understand.” His relationship with his students seemed more formal than Ahmed’s. It was a business relationship in which he perceived the students as the clients. Therefore, boundaries were clear between Abdullah and his students. In the following excerpt, Abdullah referred to positionality in his profession. He stated,

> Before you feel like all people around you are serving you, and now it’s different. We’re here to serve others. I feel like I’m, it’s like the rest of my life is going to be like you just keep helping and serving. Whether you’re, as a husband, as a father, as a teacher. You just keep working for others.

However, Abdullah crossed these relationship boundaries with his students and acted as a mentor. Part of his job was to raise the students’ awareness about some critical issues regarding culture. Abdullah identified himself as a professional teacher. He described himself as

> Someone who loves the job. Like for this person, the teaching profession is regarded not as a source of income, but as a kind of vocation. Something that they have, he or she has passion for. Somebody who’s ready to cooperate with others, collaborate, share, [and] help others.
Mass

Mass mirrored Ahmed’s practices. Their practices adhered to a consistent pattern, particularly in the way in which they narrated how their teachers had inspired them in their early education. Mass reported that he liked his English teacher’s performance and pedagogical practices. Mass talked emotionally about his teacher and elaborated on her character, which inspired him. He said,

That was in high school. That was a starting point, . . . my turning point. Why I started to become interested with this English language. It’s because I found that her character, you know, very, as I said, I could say the best teacher that I ever had. So from there, I started to, she introduced me to all sorts of learning venues. All right. For example, through TV, through newspapers, music, and also communicating with people in your life. So, I was very interested. So I went to music because I started picking up English through music. Especially the lyrics. Without understanding it at first and then later I understood the content, the meanings of the lyrics of a song. And then I moved on. You see?

Mass was inspired by his English high school teacher to the extent that she exerted great influence, not only on his career path choice, but also in his teaching practices, in which he started to imitate her example. He stated,

Yeah, I learned, I learned. I’m just like copying her. All the nice traits that she has. So I try to copy her style. . . . If she could make me interested in this, her class, so that’s how I try to make my students interested in my class.
The following extract provides clear evidence of the nature of the relationship between Mass and his students. He identified himself as a native speaker teacher. He situated himself in this narration.

Of course, I’m a teacher, [an] educator. I like to see success, especially [in] the younger generations. My principle is always this: I can do it, [so] he can do it. I always tell my students about that. Even now in Saudi Arabia, I tell my students, “You see, because my color of my eyes is not blue, my skin is not white, but if I can be proficient when my first language is not English, you can do it too.” There must be a strategy, and I share this strategy with the students. So far, they like it, and they look at the living evidence, so this is how I do that [to] motivate them.

In the following excerpt, Mass adopted his previous teacher’s performance. He reported that he used a strategy of humor in his instruction as a way to make it easier for his students. This method of instruction made it clearly evident that Mass built strong relationships with his students.

To me, make anything fun. The way is fun, so when I have my class, my class is always fun. It’s full of laughter. We’ll make jokes, [but] at the same time, you know where you are going, without them realizing it. . . . You know, just to get them hooked to you. That is most important thing. I’m very grateful, very glad when the students like to be in my class. They enjoy it, to be in my class. Moreover, I don’t speak Arabic. I can’t speak Arabic, so I have to communicate in English.

Mohsen

Like the other participants, Mohsen had as his main purpose for choosing teaching as a profession a desire to get symbolic capital. Mohsen unequivocally expressed that his wish
to be a teacher was related to his wish to be a lieutenant in the army: to be privileged. However, he could not achieve that objective. Therefore, he looked a job that provided him with similar privileges and respect. The following excerpt provides evidence that Mohsen’s profound intention in choosing his professional career was to possess symbolic power. He narrated that

being a teacher is a good job because it gives you too many breaks, and you are called sir. You are called sir by all the kids, whether their fathers are presidents or kings or ministers. So, it gives you, like, a kind of . . . a very good place in society. And even our Arab, uh, poetry praises the teacher, and they say, “He was going to be a prophet.” We are the representatives of the Prophet because we have got the message.

Mohsen’s narration revealed that rapport was an essential component of his teaching strategies. He built a friendly and strong rapport with his students to the extent that he treated them as his own children. Mohsen’s positive attitude towards his students made him act in a parental fashion. He was concerned not only with their learning, but also with their appearance, character, and behavior. He gave an example that reflected the way he bonded to his students. He said,

Today, I was tying the tie of a student. He had the tie, and he said, “Sir, could you tie?” And I made the knot for him.

Another student was videotaping. He said, “I have never seen a teacher being modest and making a knot for the student.”

I said, “I will tie your shoes.”
Mohsen raised an interesting issue that mirrored the strong rapport that he built with his students by indicating that he understood his students’ culture and circumstances. That made him friendly, and it helped and supported them to the extent that he might break the institution’s rules. He narrated a story that he was aware that some students were in charge of dropping their sisters off at the female campus. (Women did not have rights to drive in Saudi Arabia at the time of this interview.) Therefore, some of the students got to class late. He said,

You can be with your sister because in Saudi, . . . women don’t drive, and you allow him. Laws are good, but sometimes they are better when they are broken, but you make a change in the life of your student. You teach him humanity. You teach him that you are not a set of rules. You are sometimes a human, the human touch. Even when you tie his tie, he will remember that. He will say, “Oh, my teacher was very humble and he tied, he wanted me to look smart.” Don’t say I’m not your, uh, servant. Am I working in your house? No. That’s how to become a teacher, when you make a change.

**Mustafa**

I stressed building strong rapport with students to bolster students’ achievements.

The following excerpt elaborated on the influence of rapport in students’ outcomes. I wrote,

It is widely known that building good rapport with students has positive effects on students’ learning. Many times, in academia, I have experienced teachers who had taught for a long time; however, their personality traits affected their . . . relationships with their students. I believe that I am fortunate in that I am a sociable and outgaining person who believes in having good rapport with my students.
I mentioned in my autobiography that building good relationships with my students was one of my biggest responsibilities because I experienced how such relationships had great positive impacts on motivating students. I argued that

The ultimate goal of teaching is transforming learners’ thinking. Students’ needs should be the first priority. My role as a teacher is to inspire learners. My job is teaching learners how to learn, not to feed them expert knowledge. Teachers’ relationships with learners are decisive in motivating or frustrating learners.

Integrating technology, research, and experience in teaching makes teaching productive and adds effectiveness. I want to do all these things by all means possible.

5. Obstacles Encountered by NNESTs

The last common overarching theme that emerged from analyzing the participants’ narrations was the challenges that the NNEST participants encountered throughout their lived experiences during their time working in EFL settings. This theme of challenges was anticipated, as it is a response to one of the main research questions that this study addressed. I categorized this theme in two dimensions: First, the administrative dimension, such as hiring policies, teachers’ gaining legitimacy, and lack of autonomy. The second dimension was academic, mainly revolving around students’ weakness in learning English as an EFL.

**Hiring policies.** Although the teacher participants in this study reported that they built strong rapport based on mutual respect with their counterpart NESTs, they also narrated that the university had created tensions and had discriminated against them. They stated that they had been treated unfairly, and they mentioned that the university’s hiring policies benefitted NESTs, not NNESTs. They indicated that they received benefits and incentives inferior to those of their counterpart NESTs. Most importantly, participants reported that the
university hiring policies were rigid and absurd because these rules not only discriminate against NNESTs, but also are based on irrational perspectives in defining who is considered a native speaker. Abdullah reported that

There is discrimination when it comes to payment, definitely. . . . But again, it’s not because you’re a native speaker. It’s because you hold a passport from a Western country. Like, for example, I can be an Arab. Even myself, Abdullah, I can resign here, go to Canada, come back with a Canadian passport, you know what I mean? And [I] would get a better salary. So it’s not a matter [of] whether you’re native or you’re not.

In the above excerpt, Abdullah revealed another much deeper layer of discrimination against NNESTs in the EFL setting of that campus in Saudi Arabia. He expressed his profound frustration because the hiring policies disregarded professionalism, teaching experience, and language proficiency in recruiting English language teachers (ELTs). He also reported another perspective of discrimination in the university’s hiring policies, which looked only at the passport of the applicant to determine an essential credential in defining who was a native speaker. This kind of discrimination created tensions between teachers because their incentives and benefits would be assigned based on the travel documents that they held.

When Ahmed was asked about the challenges that he had faced, he mentioned becoming discouraged while being hired as an English language teacher. He said,

If you talk about native and non-native, in that case, I might not be given [any] privilege over a native speaker of [the] English language, but to be honest, anybody who is sitting [on the] other side of the table and taking my interview with regards to any kind of a post [that] required certain skills and I fulfill[ed them], I can be sure
. . . that they [would] accept me because I have expertise in that. Generally speaking, I’ve never come across such things where I am given [any] kind of demotion in place of a person who is a native speaker and he is given [a] promotion.

Mohsen reported that these hiring policies offered no incentives for him to do his best. He also was discriminated against in the process of recruitment. He stated that if you praise [the teacher], if you help, if you don’t show that, you give this [one a salary of] 25,000 and you give this [other one a salary of] 10,000, although they are teaching the same section, here you are making a big mistake. The native [speaker of English] will not teach very well because he knows [that] you cannot do without him, and the nonnative [teacher] will not perform [well] because whether he performs or not, you are not giving him his credit because we forget that teachers are human creatures, human beings.

In this excerpt, Mohsen acknowledged that hiring policies go well beyond discrimination. They are counterproductive because with such blatant discrimination, no teacher has any incentive to work hard. The native speaker is rewarded too highly, so feels that he can coast, while the NNEST believes that no matter how hard he works or how well he does, his efforts will never be recognized or rewarded. So no one does his best.

Unlike Ahmed, Abdullah, and Mohsen, Mass tackled the issue of hiring policy from a different perspective. Mass believed that he always had been perceived as native-like. He stated, “I don’t know how they [my students] perceived me. I don’t say that I am native. Of course, I’m not, but maybe I’m near-native.” Mass contradicted himself. He had stated ambivalence by saying that he never had any interest in these labels (NNEST/NEST). He said, “I’m not concerned about the title that they give me. I’m like natives or I’m near-
native. Label is not important to me. The most important to me is how can I deliver to my students?” Nevertheless, in another context, Mass said,

I always tell my students . . . , “You see, because the color of my eyes is not blue, my skin is not white, but if I can be proficient when my first language is not English, you can do it too.” There must be a strategy, and I share this strategy with the students. So far, they like it, and they look at the living evidence, so this is how I do that: motivate them.

Mass’s discourse with his students was meant to motivate them; however, it reflected and confirmed what Phillipson (1993) termed the “native speaker fallacy,” which is the notion that the native speaker is the ideal English language teacher. This discourse, which Mass used to market himself, perpetuates, normalizes, and contributes to portraying negative images about NNESTs, as if they were part of a “deficiency model,” which Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) identified as teachers’ being individually evaluated only in terms of qualifications they have (competence) and those that they do not have (deficits). On the other hand, Mass’s marketing discourse reinforced positive images for NESTs as privileged teachers and created a power structure in the realm of teacher job markets and in the university milieu. This issue could be connected with the concept of whiteness and native speakers as ideal teachers. As Motha (2006) contended, “because the spread of the English language across the globe was historically connected to the international political power of White people, English and Whiteness are thornily intertwined” (p. 496).

Truly, my case as a local NNEST was different from that of the other participants regarding the hiring policies that other NNESTs in this study were subjected to concerning incentives and benefits. However, there were many similarities when it came to the
recruitment process. Saudi universities prefer Saudi Arabian teachers who have Western
credentials, particularly teachers who have academic degrees from North American
universities and colleges. Therefore, I have always invested in my professional development
to gain cultural capital because would turn into economic capital.

I started to invest in my professional development to develop cultural capital. That is
why I went to summer courses in the UK and the U.S. to build cultural capital and to
become more proficient in English in speaking and in academic discourse. I also
wanted to gain exposure to the popular culture of those two countries. Being
culturally competent involves a separate set of skills and a different base of
knowledge from being competent in speaking, comprehending, and reading in a
language. Gaining linguistic capital was my biggest concern (along with gaining
cultural capital), so I took many courses. I knew that all of this related to my self-
image, my self-perception, and how others perceived me as a teacher. All this
factored into my professional self-identity. The time in the U.S. and the UK boosted
my self-esteem and my cultural capital, and I was promoted and won the best-teacher
award after returning to Saudi Arabia as a result of these undertakings.

I documented how I felt as part of a deficit model. I was looking for something that
would fulfill my desires and satisfy my perception, which I thought at that time was to
imitate a native speaker because he or she is the most effective English teacher.

I used to believe that NESTs are always the ideal teacher and better than NNESTs. In
parts of my life, I did not have self-confidence, and my self-image was negative.
Therefore, my biggest concern was how to be a great teacher like native speakers.
After I had taken several professional development programs, I came to know that I
was living completely in an illusion. . . . I used to encounter some difficulties while teaching due to causes that I did not understand. I always used to think that there was something missing in my teaching, but I did not know how to identify what was missing. I thought that being a native speaker was the best and the most complete way to make up for what was missing.

Challenges that thwart NNESTs’ from gaining legitimacy. The second subtheme that emerged from the participants’ data analysis pertained to factors that impaired NNEST participants gaining validity as legitimate English language teachers. Problems that NNESTs encountered in gaining legitimacy came from the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs, in which power relations played out, resulting in NESTs being considered superior to NNESTs. Phillipson (1992) called this concept the native speaker fallacy. Some of the NNEST participants reported that they encountered practices that made them feel less valued than their counterpart NESTs. For example, Ahmed expressed his frustrations over the unjust treatment that he received because university officials considered NESTs superior to NNESTs and therefore posted them to or promoted them to higher positions in the institute. Ahmed said,

I felt sorry, in the beginning, when I came here in 2008 [because] some of the native speakers were given some charges without consulting the qualified teachers because they were native speakers, and it was presumed that they would perform [better], but later on, . . . they got the message. It has nothing to do with [one’s] passport. It is something related to the qualification of the teacher. If he is up to the [task], he should be on board.
Ahmed reported that the university’s administrators viewed NESTs as expert and superior. Subsequently, they posted NESTs to managerial and higher positions in the institute because they were native speakers of English. This subjective and groundless decision marginalized Ahmed and prevented him from being regarded as a legitimate and professional teacher. Sadly enough, this is a typical administrative practice: NNESTs are discriminated against in EFL settings. Therefore, they are placed in positions in which they feel disempowered and denied the chance to become fully legitimate members of the teaching community. Canagarajah (2006) stressed this point and argued that these prejudicial practices, in which NESTs receive better incentives and benefits than their counterpart NNESTs, is perpetuated by the expanding and outer-circle institutions (in the EFL context).

Ahmed criticized the NEST and NNEST dichotomy. He seemed to be in a state of denial over being a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST), so he refused to accept that designation. He argued

Teachers are teachers; there’s no native and non-native. If you have studied something thoroughly and you understand [the subject] top to bottom, and you are teaching in the best possible way. Where does this native and non-native come from? Anybody who can speak in the Cockney accent or an RP [received pronunciation] accent of London is [seen as] a better teacher than a person who is in a far-flung area of Peshawar and who speaks English like anybody who can understand, and you [say of] him that he’s not a good teacher. He knows all the techniques and all the advancements whatsoever are done in the field of English-language teaching and applied linguistics; still you will create a kind of a rift [between him and the NEST].
Ahmed believed that NESTs should not be privileged because of birth, race, or national origin. He expressed his wishes that a day would come in which teachers would be evaluated by what and how they teach, not by who they were or what color their eyes were. Many scholars have been trying to replace the initialism NNEST with some other term; they have proposed alternatives, such as language expert (Rampton, 1990), English-using fellowship (Kachru, 1992), multicompetent speaker (Cook, 1999), and competent language user (Lee, 2005).

There are similarities between the attitude expressed by Ahmed and Mohsen pertaining to the challenges that they encountered that hindered them from gaining legitimacy. Mohsen was also furious while expressing his frustration about the injustice of the treatment that NESTs received. He echoed Ahmed’s point that the university hired native speakers because they had Western credentials or Western passports. Mohsen reported that universities sometimes recruited teachers not based on their qualifications, but rather on the passport that they held. He said,

I bring you [provide you with names of some] native speakers who can’t teach English. . . . [Some] native speakers don’t know how to teach English because they never taught in their native country. They were selling pizza. They were selling in a petrol station. [He named a university here.] Many of them are not English specialists. They are computer specialists.

Mohsen’s frustration stemmed from feeling that although he positioned himself as an expert teacher, the institute’s officials devalued his cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). On the other hand, NESTs gained privileges and legitimacy, although some of them were not specialized in teaching and did not have teaching experience. Mohsen pointed out that
English teachers should not be limited to those who come from one of the inner-circle countries (e.g., native seekers from the USA and the UK), but also should include those from the outer and expanded circles. Here, he mentioned that world English includes various different Englishes (African, Asian, etc.), as English is a world language. He argued

So, now, there are hundreds of [Englishes]: Indian English, Filipino Englishes, Malaysian Englishes. Look at me. Uh, how much is that? It’s three ringgits, three ringgits. That’s Malaysian English. I understood the lady who told me three ringgits, and I liked it.

It bothered Mohsen that this insight was not widespread in the Arab world concerning the teaching of EFL.

Mohsen seemed extremely pessimistic and held negative views about the situation in the EFL context. He said, “But now in the Arab world, we still have that complex of the native. Look at the United Arab Emirates. All non-natives are going to be fired, and they are bringing [in] native [speakers] because there’s investment in education.” Mohsen explained how power dynamics play out in positioning NESTs as superior teachers. He drew on the notion that NNESTs have always been constructed as inferior to NESTs, who have been viewed as the truly legitimate English language teachers. Thus, NNESTs are subjected to various forms of discrimination, which ultimately has marginalized them and blocked them from obtaining access to becoming legitimate English language teachers.

Mohsen mentioned a story that made him feel upset, and he thought that such an incident was discouraging and devaluated him as a human being and as a teacher. Mohsen, who was the most experienced teacher among the participants, commented on the issues of the dichotomy between NNESTs and NESTs. He said,
I hate to be compared because I am unique. I am not an apple or a cucumber to be compared to the other apples. My name is Marcin. So, you should know that I have good kind of integrity. I have good kind of identity. Please try to understand me. Don’t ask me to understand you. Try to help me by being like me. Don’t ask me to be like you or to do like you. I’m ready to learn. Give me time, and don’t forget where I come from. Don’t forget where I learned.

In contrast to Ahmed and Mohsen, Mass showed different perceptions towards gaining access to being a legitimate English teacher. Indeed, Mass reported that he did not know how his students perceived him. “I don’t know how they perceive me. I don’t say that I am native. Of course, I’m not, but maybe I’m near-native, but I never [position myself] as [an] NEST or NNEST.” Mass was the only participant who learned English as an ESL learner. In his narration, he indicated that he motivated students by being a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST), who mastered the language, although he did not have blue eyes or blond hair. Nevertheless, Mass contradicted himself and reported, “I’m like natives, or I’m [like] near-natives. That to me, that label is not important to me. The most important [thing] to me is that, how can I deliver to my students? Because to me, that is my client.”

The preceding narrated excerpts revealed that the participants in this study provided examples of their challenges, through which they asserted their identities as legitimate professional teachers, unlike NESTs, who sometimes gained their legitimacy effortlessly. Power dynamics manifested race factors and showed how not coming from a privileged status interfered with NNESTs’ goals of gaining access to being perceived as legitimate professional teachers.
Having worked in EFL, I noticed the recruitment process for a short time in an EFL setting. Unfortunately, perhaps there have always been unwritten rules that differentiate between NNESTs and NESTs. Most importantly, whiteness (country of origin), linguistic capital (American or British accent), and a Western credential and passport are among the preferential factors that cause EFL hiring policies to discriminate against NNESTs.

These practices have created inequality between NESTs and NNESTs. These are the factors that ultimately position NESTs as gatekeepers and marginalize NNESTs to the extent that this discrimination impairs their self-image and self-confidence and blocks them from gaining full legitimacy as professional teachers. Although there are TESOL caucuses in the organization that have banned such discriminatory practices against NNESTs (as in recruitment advertisements, job fairs at conferences, and websites), these practices continue, particularly in EFL institutional contexts, even though a considerable amount of literature has been published on the advantage of the NNEST teacher (Cook, 1999; Holliday, 2005; Kramsch, 1997; 1998; Selvi, 2010; 2014). In addition to these studies, TESOL (2006) declared a position statement against discrimination of nonnative speakers of English in the field of TESOL:

TESOL strongly opposes discrimination against nonnative English speakers in the field of English language teaching. Rather, English language proficiency, teaching experience, and professionalism should be assessed along on a continuum of professional preparation. All English language educators should be proficient in English regardless of their native languages, but English language proficiency should be viewed as only one criterion in evaluating a teacher’s professionalism. Teaching
skills, teaching experience, and professional preparation should be given as much weight as language proficiency.

**A lack of autonomy.** Teacher autonomy that was allowed in the structure of the teacher-education program created the need for teachers to engage in networking and collaborating. Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) argued that “both the general structure of this teacher-education program and this particular online journal project contributed to greater teacher autonomy, which encouraged us to be different, to appreciate our differences, and to learn from the differences” (p. 118).

Ahmed touched upon the significance of teachers being autonomous and gave examples of classroom activities and pedagogical practices that required teacher autonomy to generate students’ sense of self-efficacy and validation through mastery of academic tasks. Abdullah argued that autonomy was necessary for teaching his students. He said,

Yeah. We had . . . the teachers making the decisions. We felt we were very much aware of the needs of the students, and we catered to those needs in the way we deemed fit. Probably . . . that’s where I got that feeling of achievement. We had autonomy. We felt like we were treated as intellectuals.

These excerpts make obvious the importance of being granted autonomy as a teacher. When Abdullah had autonomy, he was honored and validated as an intellectual who was capable of making his own decisions, the essence of being granted autonomy. Trust and self-image are big factors in making autonomy desirable. Autonomy is one of the most important factors in having a positive professional self-identity.

Yeah, yes of course, you need to be creative. . . . Take something out of the box.

Don’t really have to be rigid with the curriculum. . . . When they, among themselves,
when they ask another class, even though we are doing the same thing, what did you learn? Oh, I learned something different. Oh, every week I learn the same thing. And suddenly . . . now he learned something different. He made it different. But it’s the same topic. But [a] different approach.

Mass also indicated in these remarks that autonomy is needed to have creativity in responding to students’ needs in the moment in the unpredictable conditions of the classroom rather than teaching by rote with a rigid structure imposed by the curriculum or a lesson plan. Such autonomy is rare in that system because of the conservative nature of how education is structured in Saudi Arabia, with a national curriculum imposed in all public schools from the earliest grades. Even in the university, there is strong pressure to conform to a certain approach to teaching. All the students must follow the same textbook, for example. This is a reflection of the national culture and transcends issues of being a native speaker or a non-native speaker.

As an emic (insider), I have experienced this kind of controlling atmosphere, which is based on a rigid hierarchy. Upper management usually makes decisions without consulting the teachers who would be affected and even without any research studies used to validate such practices. Even when teacher committees are formed, these are formalities rather than groups used to make substantive changes or give critical input.

Abdullah had a similar perspective. As he commented about serving on a curriculum committee, 

There is something really funny. Like there were 10 of us. We had also a director of the program and the dean. There were 12 of us members of the curricular committee. We would prepare the pacing guides, the lesson plans, and everything. And then it
happened that the head of the curriculum committee was the vice-dean, and she was on the women’s campus. Now, she’s the head. We would send her what we prepared, and if she needed changes, she would send it back to us with drastic changes. And then we got the feeling “Don’t ask too many questions. Just carry it out.”

**Students’ low English-language proficiency.** Another theme that emerged from the data analysis pertaining the challenges encountered by NNESTs was students’ weakness in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). All the participants agreed that students’ weakness in learning English, in spite of the exceptional efforts provided by the government (the Ministry of Education), was daunting. The participants reported distinct reasons that caused the students’ poor English performance. These factors overlapped. Some of them were behavioral, while others were academic. It was projected that the participants would report mostly academic reasons. Participants explained the solutions and strategies that they employed to overcome these impediments.

Teaching in an EFL context is completely different from teaching in an ESL setting due to the distinctions between the two milieus. In an EFL setting, students are linguistically and culturally homogeneous and have been less exposed to L2. The other participants’ frustrations over the students’ weakness in English were overwhelming. I did not expect that the students’ low level of English proficiency would be such a challenge to the NNEST research participants. They insisted that the weakness of the students’ proficiency levels in English was the most prominent obstacle in their teaching journey. For example, Ahmed stated,
Absolutely, in my class, on the roster there are 37 students, 26 students have already come, two students up and down. They come, and they go like that, 28 altogether. Out of 28, 8 students are in a position to pass level 110 at the moment. . . . If I’m not wrong, 10 students may pass 110, and 8 to 10 students will fail 110. Why? They don’t know a word of English. When you speak in front of them, they ask from other students what the teacher is talking about and what’s the meaning of this word? They cannot interpret even the speaking, whatever you speak. There 8 to 10 students who can speak very easily whatever you ask them; they try to answer.

In this excerpt, Ahmed expressed his frustration about the students’ English proficiency level; however, the points that he mentioned are essentially typical points that differentiate between EFL and ESL settings. Nonetheless, his frustrations might be coming from two issues: first, the low English proficiency level of the most of the students. He said that most of the students demonstrated a beginner level, although most of them had studied English at least for seven years. Second was the overlapping setting in which Ahmed problematized the EFL setting at Alsalam University. He argued that there were quite large discrepancies between students’ language proficiency, which created a big challenge to his teaching practices.

In the following excerpt, Ahmed illustrated his strategies for solving problems. He narrated how he acted in addressing the students’ low proficiency. He said,

I know a bit of Arabic now, *Mashallah* [God willing]. It’s because of my kids because . . . they’re actually teaching me Arabic; they bring me the homework, and I sit with them, Google the things, and try to learn [Arabic]. Learning a language, all the languages have got the same pattern you have to follow. Whether it is Urdu or
Punjabi or English or Arabic or Spanish or German. They have the same pattern. I mean you have to follow certain rules.

In this excerpt, Ahmed explained how he tried to learn Arabic and to use Google translation software to help his students to interpret new vocabulary. Ahmed’s flexibility and his knowledge of second language acquisition (SLA) theories made him utilize various teaching methods and strategies that suited the situation, even though it was more traditional to use one such as the traditional grammar method as a solution.

Abdullah, like Ahmed, commented that he was stunned by his students’ poor English proficiency level. He explained,

We’re shocked at the low level of the students. You know, having been exposed to English for so many years, and then a student comes to you who doesn’t know how to write a simple sentence, is really shocking. You know what I mean? I remember the first session this year. I had nine students. Only nine students turned up then. And I asked them to write a very simple sentence in English, like subject, verb, object. And they all went up to the whiteboard, and they wrote their sentences. None of them was correct. None of the nine sentences was correct. It’s really shocking. Yeah. But again, there are students who are good, but we don’t see them.

In the following excerpt, Abdullah pointed out how he overcame the challenges that he faced: flexibility in dealing with students and issues that pertain to administrators. Abdullah explicitly expressed his appreciation for how the dean of the institute’s background, as he specialized in TESOL and obtained a PhD in the field, played out in negotiating and solving most of the problems that teachers and students faced. He said,
We should be prepared to face more and more challenges, not only in the classroom, but also at the level of the institute. There will most probably be decisions that we won’t be happy with, but life goes on. . . . We should try to approach people in a way that they accept [those changes so as] to get them to make changes. It’s not as bad as it might sound. Luckily, our dean holds a PhD in education, unlike in some other places. Sometimes, you’re sent somebody from a totally different discipline.

Unlike other participants, Mohsen showed different perspectives in his analysis of the reasons behind students’ lack of proficiency in English. He attributed the students’ low language proficiency level in English to psychological and sociocultural factors. He stated, We should include more than English in high school, English and French, English and German, and show the students the importance of foreign languages. Also, rules at high school should be tightened. We should stop giving to students’ cars, uh, giving them a lot of pocket money. We should teach them that if they don’t succeed, they won’t be able to get a job. Students come to the university as an achievement, as a personal achievement, not as a preparation for hard work. They are happy with the scholarship. They are happy with the car. They are happy with coming late, [with] using mobile [devices given to them], as they are not really responsible. Now, a few luxuries should be taken from them. School buses are much better [than private cars]. They come together in a community. They learn to be punctual because the car is making them late, but there’s a bus that comes at eight. If you don’t take it, you will be late. And if you are late, after three or five absences, you will miss a test. Let them feel the heat of education.
The previous excerpt provides a glimpse of Mohsen’s profound analysis of what he believed negatively affected students’ English learning. He stressed behavioral issues, such as parental practices. Students are not motivated because they have had many material things handed to them rather than having to work, earn money, and buy them. Also, the universities are free, and students are even given a stipend, so it’s not a sacrifice for them to attend college or university. The students do not perceive the intrinsic value of education or education as a method for professional development and advancement.

Mohsen’s perspectives reflected his multilingual and multicultural identity. His belief in the value of multicultural and multi-linguistic understanding was reflected in the statement that students should be required to learn at least three foreign languages in public schools to hone their cognitive ability in language acquisition. His perception was tied closely to his lived experience. He invested a lot of effort and energy into mastering other languages and understanding the cultures associated with those languages. Having experienced the benefits that come from such an arduous course of study, he sincerely believed that such an effort would also benefit students. He perceived others differently due to his own depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding. This shaped his professional identity and mission as a teacher.

Similar to Mohsen, Mass experienced some frustration in the EFL context, but Mass’s frustration was even greater. Mass taught in an ESL setting for a long time in Malaysia and Singapore and also had experience in an EFL context, but he was the most frustrated participant. He expressed how upset he was. He said,

When I first came here, I was shocked actually because English here is not a second language. It is a foreign language. Number one. And their level of ability is very
low, [far lower] than [at] the school I taught back home, you see. I made that kind of comparison. So I said, “Oh my God, what’s happening?” So I tried to find the reason why, and I asked them, “What did you learn in high school before you came to the university?”

Mass had some possible solutions for this problem. In the following excerpt, Mass provided recommendations for improving English learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia. He proposed a holistic reform in the educational plan. Mass’s profound analysis of the educational process reflected his self-confidence and self-efficacy and how he positioned himself not as a teacher, but rather as an expert educator, which is what ultimately constructed his professional identity. He proposed the following.

The teacher [should] challenge [the] students’ level. . . . Number one, I would change the education policy. Where shall we bring our young Saudis in 20 years’ time or in 10 years’ time? Number one: education policies. Number two: get the right balance to deliver in schools. Number three: Saudi Arabia should have a national exam, which is standardized [throughout] the whole of Saudi Arabia. From there, you know, the students . . . from anywhere in Saudi Arabia [would be] sitting for the same subject, same questions, and let’s see the score.

Mass did not allow his frustration to paralyze his ability to analyze the situation and imagine possible solutions to the current problems via holistic approaches. He included students, teachers, the policies of educational institution, and testing, as well as teaching. He was the only research participant who advocated introducing standardized testing as a means to improve English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.
Unlike the other four participants, I did not teach for the period that I was perusing my graduate studies, although my perspectives as an etic and an emic were informed by my years of teaching. Nevertheless, reflecting on my experience, I could not agree more with the other participants about students’ weakness in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). In my autobiography, I offered my dicta regarding the strategies that I followed to improve students’ English proficiency. Teachers’ efforts are crucial in motivating and inspiring students, which might positively impact students’ learning. I argued that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play a significant role and make a great difference in students’ learning and life. I argued that

As a successful teacher, I strive to be patient and to keep encouraging students, no matter what their proficiency level is. I always see potential in my students.

Successful teachers are knowledgeable in their fields and well-rounded, knowing about other majors. I exert immense effort to inspire my students to excel.

Outstanding teachers exploit normal situations to make significant changes in their students’ lives.

Negative and positive incidents in my early educational life shaped my conceptualization of education and the significance of teachers’ roles. Teachers’ discourse-identity and affinity-identity are potentials that make NNESTs build strong respect and mutual rapport with students, which ultimately influences the way in which students perceive their teachers and themselves. Furthermore, such influence and attitudes construct the teacher’s self-efficacy and confidence and shape professional identity.
Summary

As shown above in the cross-case analysis, cultural capital informed the five participants’ professional identities and involved both discourse-identity and affinity-identity. Affinity-identity can have a subversive effect on the narrative of deficit that so often has been applied to NNESTs. The challenges faced by the five participants as NNESTs striving for professional advancement and recognition were revealed in their narratives, as in the case of those who happened to hold foreign passports being given much higher starting salaries, regardless of their actual English language proficiency or even their actual nation of origin. Beyond that, affinity identity can include the positive trait of a deeper, more informed understanding of the students’ culture, religion, and sense of identity, which can be used to build rapport and increase student motivation to master the English language.

Discourse identity has also been shown in this study to be central to the formation of the professional identity of NNESTs who were the research participants in this study. Even engaging in the discourse about their professional and educational journeys through serving as research participants helped them to gain deeper understanding of their own path as NNESTs and the challenges and successes that they have had with students, colleagues, and administrators. Self-reflection through discourse and discourse analysis is a normal part of the construction of anyone’s self-identity, but rarely is it as focused or as formal as in the case of dissertation research, which brings to the foreground, in some cases, issues that otherwise tend to remain in the background of the lived experiences of the participants. Mohsen, for example, said that he had never had his own story put together in such detail before, which was gratifying and illuminating for him. I had been disconnected from teaching for a long time. Reflecting on my teaching experience in the course of this study
gave me perspective about how to tackle such issues in the future, equipped with new insights and understandings.

This chapter had two sections: The first section examined the similarities and differences between the themes that emerged. The second section focused on the process of cross-case analysis of the themes pertaining to the challenges that NNESTs encountered through their lived experiences. It also delineated how NNESTs overcame these obstacles. The chapter presented an in-depth analysis of the themes that emerged from the data. This was another layer of investigation of the results of a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, commonality and distinctions between NNEST participants’ lived experiences was outlined as follow: Factors that influenced their professional identity included faith, career choice, professional development, competencies (linguistic and cultural), skills, programs, communicative competencies, and rapport with students.

Moreover, the analysis explored the obstacles encountered by NNESTs, which were classified into two administrative and academic aspects. Administrative aspects included hiring policies and factors that thwarted NNESTs from gaining legitimacy and gaining autonomy as professional teachers. The second aspect was academic elements, which evolved around students’ low English language proficiency.

The cross-case analysis helped me to shape an overarching perception of the five participants and provided me with significant findings to address the proposed research questions. The following chapter will present a discussion, conclusion, and the study’s implications theoretically and pedagogically. Finally, it will conclude with the need for future studies, elements of the research credibility, a caveat about the study, and an epilogue.
Chapter Six:

Conclusion and Implications

Background

This study examined the lived experiences of five in-service male non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) to provide a better understanding of how NNESTs constructed and negotiated their professional identities as teachers in an EFL higher-education milieu, such as at a Saudi Arabian university, Alsalam University. This study probed the obstacles that NNESTs encountered as they shaped their professional identities; it also revealed how NNESTs addressed the challenges that they faced in their teaching careers. This qualitative study was conducted in the form of narrative inquiry and used in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data. Four in-service NNESTs, in addition to myself, participated in this study. The data analysis, research results, and the interpretations of the findings were presented in chapter four and chapter five. This final chapter interprets the most significant findings in light of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study to answer the research questions proposed in chapter one.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to examine how in-service male non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) negotiated, constructed, and developed professional identities in EFL in a Saudi Arabian university, (b) to discover the challenges that male non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) encountered as they constructed their professional identities in a Saudi Arabian university, and (c) to identify the strategies that NNESTs used to negotiate the challenges that they faced in their careers.
This chapter is organized into four sections. The first part addresses the three research questions that guided this study to explore the complexity of the construction of each teacher’s professional identity in an EFL milieu. Also, it outlines the challenges that NNESTs faced and how they solved these problems. The second section presents the conclusion. The third section revolves around the theoretical and pedagogical implications, the caveats of this study, and the need for future research. The fourth section presents my epilogue.

Responses to the First Research Question

Q1. What do the stories of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) reveal about how their lived experiences have shaped their professional identities?

The participants indicated a number of possible elements for the construction and reconstruction of NNESTs’ professional identities. I classified the findings as sociocultural factors, which in general showed that NNESTs’ professional identity was socially constructed and involved complex interactions between individuals and groups within EFL/ESL contexts. These findings are consistent with Davis’s (2006) assertion that identity “must be conceptualized as complex, multifaceted, and socially constructed through the process of situated interpretation” (p. 4). Similarly, Alsup (2008) asserted that forces such as social roles, relationships, and identities shaped NNESTs’ professional identities in a continual process. The sociocultural factors that emerged from the data analysis of the participants’ narratives were as follow: (1) the influence of faith on NNESTs, (2) professional development issues, (3) NNESTs’ competencies (linguistic and cultural), and (4) NNESTs’ rapport with students.
1. The influence of faith on NNESTs

The first factor was the role of religion in NNESTs’ construction of their professional identities, which was not anticipated at the onset of this study. Faith played a significant role in how NNESTs constructed their professional identities. In several cases, their decision to enter the teaching profession had been guided by their faith. They were teaching in some of the religious holy places of Islam (Makkah and Madinah), but even more importantly, they were primarily teaching Muslim students. The participants perceived their students as brothers in religion; therefore, they felt compelled to be caring, compassionate, and spiritually accountable to them. Hence, the NNEST participants expressed a deep and enduring affinity identity (Gee, 2001) with their students, as well as the context. (Jeddah is considered the gate for the holy mosques.)

Gee’s (2000) conceptual framework of “identity as an analytical lens” in relation to his affinity identity concept suggested how religious identity might apply in the formation of NNESTs’ professional identities. For example, the church or mosque depicts a form of Gee’s affinity group in which believers converge to share similar views of the world, as well as common interests and goals, which in this case points to spiritual experiences and rituals. As affinity groups foster participation and interactions based on shared interests and goals, participants in this study felt a greater affinity with their students based on their shared religious identity.

Ahmed’s story provided a good example of how religion mediated participants’ identity construction. In response to a question from his cousin on how well he was doing in his job, Ahmed started off by describing his students as “descendants of the early Sahaba
Another example of religion associated with the construction of professional identities by the NNEST participants was revealed in Abdullah’s narrative. Abdullah said that he accepted the job in Saudi Arabia, even though he had received higher-paying offers from universities in neighboring Gulf State countries (the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait). Because of his strong Islamic faith, he decided to live in Makkah, even though he had to commute from Makkah (the site of the Holy Mosque) to Jeddah, which is about 75 kilometers away from Alsalam University, his place of work, daily just to stay in the sacred place (Makkah). He said,

I had a good pay in the Emirates, Alhamdulillah [Thank God]. I had to look for a job again. I went to Saudi Arabia, you know holy places, and I saw the word Jeddah, X University, and I felt nostalgia. “Oh, Jeddah. I want to go back to Jeddah!” I love Jeddah!

Based on his decision, Abdullah spent 45 minutes each way to get to his work daily. “What you commit yourself to is a significant part of what you are” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 166). The intersection of religion and work had implications for the construction of his professional identity (Trent, 2015). Drawing on the poststructuralist perspective, which depicts the construction of identity as fluid, multifaceted, dynamic, hybrid, and consistently transmuting, I argued that Abdulla’s fixation with his religious belief provided an important trigger and motive for constructing his identity.

Mohsen’s stories, similarly, reflected the importance of religion in the construction of his professional identity. He stated, “At least I am a Muslim. There is, uh, a historical
relationship with these Saudi students, so they trust me and know that I love them because we are Arabs; we are Muslim.” This was a form of shared historical, cultural, and religious capital that gave meaning to his teaching practices because he perceived his duty as extending well beyond his job description or his sense of professional duties; his job performance entailed sacred obligations.

As the study revealed, NNEST participants’ spiritual attitudes towards their students resulted in their perceiving a shared religious identity. This was manifested in caring and associated with good rapport. This bond could be attributed to NNESTs’ understanding that they should protect the students from contamination from Western culture, as informed by Islamic teachings and injunctions. This religious association and rapport with the students could be seen as an avenue through which NNESTs gained leverage to gain cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The influence of faith was displayed in participants’ decisions in various situations, such as in choosing career paths, teaching contexts, job commitments, and in building strong rapport with students. This could be understood in light of generating affinity and social capital and religious or spiritual identity through teachers’ employing their pedagogical practice on their religious affiliation and identification, which in turn provided a sacred foundation for their professional identity. Their positions and their perceived role as gatekeepers and protectors of their students also were based on religious identity. Varghese and Johnston (2007) asserted, “a number of the NESTs are evangelical Christians for whom faith and professional work are inextricably intertwined” (p. 5). So, religion as a basis for some teachers’ professional identity is not only true and relevant for Muslims teachers, but also for their teacher counterparts in other religious groups.
2. Professional development issues

The influence of teachers’ professional development programs and training sessions on constructing the NNEST participants’ professional identities is the second aspect of the findings from the first research question that pertained to sociocultural influences. The findings of this study showed that through self-agency involving the pursuit of their graduate studies (getting credentials, e.g. MA and PhD degrees in TESOL or related fields), attendance at and participation in professional conferences, and participation in professional training sessions, particularly in the summer, participants explored their self-agency to improve their pedagogical knowledge and practice. Such education and training ultimately built and strengthened participants’ self-confidence and self-image. Participants’ narratives showed that their awareness of the significance of gaining knowledge in their careers began before they came to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the more the participants gained knowledge, the more they had a positive self-perception.

Ahmed, Abdullah, and I had at least one or two MA degrees (in TESOL or in a major related to teaching), and we also were pursuing our doctoral studies in TESOL, which reflected our commitment to pursue our professional development as legitimate teachers. In the following excerpt, Ahmed narrated how his investments in his graduate education gained him access to improve his theoretical and pedagogical knowledge and enabled him to be more self-confident. He said,

I am a researcher; I’m working on that. My two papers are in the pipeline. They will be printed out really soon, inshallah, and I’m a different guy now. I mean, I’m more confident. I can talk on your subject without hindrance. I can speak my thought. I can tell what’s in the theory and what’s in practice, and my analysis is listened to and
considered with weight that the guy is speaking . . . some wisdom, so we have to listen, so that’s the difference. Sixteen years ago, when I used to talk about anything, people used to say, “Oh, he is a child.”

I also lacked confidence when I started my career, but I addressed this issue by investing and taking summer courses in the UK and the USA to improve my English proficiency, accent, and boost confidence in my perception of my English language proficiency. I remembered my attempts to practice English and improve my skills. When I received my MA in the USA, I gained confidence in my linguistic ability in English. I came to respect non-native speakers who had gained proficiency in English over the years.

The results showed that all participants had a sense of the significance of professional development in constructing their professional identities. Farrell and Lim (2005) argued that teachers’ self-perceptions, their training programs, their professional development conferences, and the contexts in which they worked constructed their professional identity. The results of this study were consistent with the findings from several other studies that investigated the factors that influenced the construction of teachers’ professional identity; all of these other studies reached the same conclusion about the importance of professional development in constructing teachers’ professional identity (Beynon et al., 2003; Burn & Bell, 2011; Lee, 2013; Park, 2012; Pavlenko, 2003).

**Linguistic and Cultural Competencies**

**Linguistic competency.** In today’s world, English is the preeminent international language (Crystal, 2012). It is estimated that non-native speakers of English outnumber native English speakers fourfold. Consequently, Braine (2010) remarked, “80% of the English teachers worldwide are non-native speakers of English” (p. x). It has become
increasingly difficult to ignore discrimination against NNESTs in the profession. For example, hiring policies discriminate against NNESTs because of the way they speak, especially their accents. These policies are not based on credentials, qualifications, or expertise in the subject matter; nevertheless, hiring committees generally seek NESTs or those with certain documents (e.g., the successful candidate should hold a passport from the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, or New Zealand). NNESTs are perceived as inferior in status in the hiring process, so they receive lower salaries and professional incentives than their NEST counterparts, particularly in the expanded circle countries (Borg, 2006; Braine 2010; Butler, 2007; Kurch, 1995; Mahboob, 2010; Medgyes, 1992).

In this study, NNESTs’ narrations highlighted the significant role of linguistic and cultural competencies in constructing their professional identities in building self-confidence, self-image, and how others perceived them. For instance, in chapters four and five, Ahmed expressed his aspiration to become like his professor because of her British accent; however, when he became a teacher, his attitude towards NESTs had changed radically. He said, “I don’t see any kind of discrepancies between native and non-native teachers; rather, I consider those who are non-native teachers [to be] better . . . because they put [in] extra effort; they try to compete with [NESTs].”

A possible explanation for the drastic change in Ahmed’s views towards NESTs’ supposed superiority could lie in the fact that Ahmed had invested (Norton, 1995) to improve his English proficiency linguistically, theoretically, pedagogically, and culturally to the extent that he established a more positive self-image and built a stronger self-confidence. In contrast to Ahmed, Abdullah did not show any appreciation for NESTs’ accents or
pronunciation, nor did he display any belief in native speakers’ superiority in his early life.

He believed that the dichotomy of NNESTs vs. NESTs has been exaggerated. He stated,

> It’s not a matter of whether you’re a native speaker or a non-native speaker. I’ll give you an example. They’ve [the administration] selected, like, 10 people to be part of the curriculum committee. These are the best teachers. And I was one of them. We had native speakers and non-native speakers.

From Abdullah’s narration, it could be inferred that NNESTs and NESTs are equally qualified and successful, so it seemed that he devalued the notion of NESTs’ perceived superiority. Abdulla’s perceptions towards NESTs were due to his positive self-image and self-confidence as an MA degree holder in phonology from Oxford University.

Mass had always had an unchanging view of NESTs, as he was born in an ESL setting (Singapore) and perceived himself as either a native speaker or sometimes a native-like speaker. Mass viewed himself as phonetically and linguistically competent, in part due to his time of studying in Scotland. He inspired his students by pointing out that complete mastery of English was possible for him even though he did not have blue eyes or blond hair.

All participants stressed the importance of linguistic competencies as crucial factors that helped establish their self-image and self-confidence. Ultimately, this linguistic competence helped them to construct their professional identities. NNESTs reported overtly and covertly that linguistic competencies affected how they perceived themselves and how others perceived them. Linguistic capital is a symbolic asset that can receive a different value based on the setting, which was revealed by the differences between the relative status of NESTs and NNESTs of the participants in the narratives just mentioned. Linguistic
capital is a decisive factor in shaping NNESTs’ professional identity, and, as just noted, some NNESTs’ linguistic capital was recognized more readily than others’ (Bourdieu, 1977).

The participants saw themselves as NNESTs who were competent and proficient in their use of English. This finding contradicted findings from other studies, in which participant NNESTs explained that being an a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST), had had an adverse influence on self-confidence. The participants in these other studies also reported feeling devalued based on others’ perceptions of their linguistic competence (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Bernat, 2008; Chung, 2014; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Tang, 1997).

**Cultural competency.** Language and culture are intertwined. Any language is laden with cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions about society and the world because history and culturally significant events inevitably and often unconsciously permeate language. Part of navigating a language skillfully involves understanding the cultural values that are embedded in that language. Gee (2001) has explained this interconnection between language and culture through the concept of discourses, conversations that are situated in specific contexts and through which people construct their identities as part of a group or an institution. Discourses also govern how people behave and encompass a “way of being” in a particular context (Gee, 2008, p. 3). Discourses govern not only what people say, but also how people say what they say and how they choose to present themselves when they say those things. Discourses therefore are inextricably linked with the formation of identity, which also shapes what people say, just as identity is shaped by what people say and how they say it. Many studies have also described the role of culture in the language classroom
(Alptekin 2002; Byram 1997; Corbett 2003). These studies proposed what is called “intercultural speakers” as an objective for L2 learners.

Power relations are embedded in language and discourse because discourses inevitably involve the issue of whose voice is heard and whose voice is silenced versus who has the right to speak. Bourdieu (1977) emphasized the power dynamics in discourses, which shape not only who gets to speak but also the effect of the speech acts on the listeners to gain their respect and agreement, which is influenced by and in turn influences the beliefs about the status and legitimacy of the speaker. Discourses therefore involve an ongoing struggle of those who have been silenced to gain the right to speak, an important dynamic related to cultural and linguistic capital for NNESTs.

The value of developing cultural competence was revealed in part through the participants’ efforts to earn degrees from prestigious universities in the United States and the United Kingdom, which added to their symbolic capital. Those degrees became a form of objectified cultural capital. The entire process was a matter not only of getting an American or British degree, but also gaining an enriching cultural experience that added to their cultural capital, which also increased their symbolic capital.

Cultural competency was important for all of the participants. All of them knew the norms, traditions, and values of Saudi Arabia, and they were fully aware that this added to their cultural competency and cultural capital. They shared the students’ history, traditions, and culture, including religious values and beliefs, and they knew how important these issues were in the context in which they were teaching, Saudi Arabia, a conservative country. This therefore was highly important to them in forming their professional identity and their sense of their own cultural capital. It was so important that Abdullah, for instance, turned down
higher-paying positions elsewhere (e.g., in the UAE) to work in a culture that he loved and respected.

The data revealed that all of participants manifested their cultural awareness of Saudi Arabia as a conservative Muslim country, which they believed made them more worthy of respect than their NEST counterparts who lacked this direct personal knowledge of the culture and such deep respect for it. Consequently, gaining such cultural competency had helped these NNESTs to negotiate for gaining respect and facilitated their effective classroom practices, as well as building rapport with the students. For example, although Ahmed did not speak Arabic, he believed in the importance of knowing students’ culture in his teaching practices. Therefore, he educated himself about Saudi culture. He narrated:

It gave me a certain outlook to approach [students’] social norms and different things, plus as I mentioned earlier, I read the Arab News. I read the Riyadh Gazette. I read [the] opinions of Saudi writers. . . . When you read the Saudi writers’ opinions, you get [in] touch [with] social events or [the] social norms of that country. . . . Plus, my students are the basic source for me to understand.

The data analysis disclosed that the participants viewed cultural awareness, such as understanding the students’ culture, as an integral part of their teaching practices. This enabled the participants to create more space and to negotiate better boundaries in their teaching. The construction of NNESTs’ professional identities, as participants’ narratives revealed, was therefore vibrant, ongoing, multifaceted, fluid, and changeable over time (Alsup, 2008). Gee (2001) emphasized, “teacher identity is an ongoing process of individuals’ interpretation of themselves and being recognized as teachers in the profession of teaching” (p. 101).
Responses to the Second Research Question

Q2. What challenges do non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) encounter related to their careers? Findings that emerged from responses to this research question relate to hiring policies, NNESTs’ legitimacy, their lack of autonomy, and students’ low English-language proficiency, as explained below:

1. Hiring policies

Scholars in TESOL have addressed the issue of native speakerism. Holliday (2005) defined this phenomenon as “an established belief that native-speaker teachers represent a Western culture from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English-language teaching methodology” (p. 6). The NNEST caucus established a movement to advocate for the rights of NNESTs and to counteract the discrimination that they encountered in the profession. For instance, in the 1990s, Braine (1999), Cook (1999), and Kramsch (1997, 1998) challenged the notion of native speakerism, the fallacy that a native speaker was necessarily a superior language teacher. Thomas (1999) explained that both students and teachers had perpetuated this belief in the supposed superiority of native speakers’ ability to teach English.

All participants encountered direct and indirect obstacles, including discrimination stemming from native speakerism. The first direct challenge, which was anticipated, was the criteria and the hiring process that institutions used that discriminated against NNESTs. Ironically, the discriminatory practices against NNESTs had been upheld in EFL contexts, as evident in the narrations of Ahmed, Abdullah, and Mohsen quoted above. Canagarajah (1999) argued that the EFL institutions were the worst when it came to discriminating against NNESTs. This unequal treatment of NNESTs has hindered the development of the TESOL
field and established a lack of self-confidence among NNESTs, as well as negative perceptions of NNESTs, which make them have to struggle to negotiate their professional identities to gain legitimacy as teachers. Fairclough (1993) described the influence that advertisements have had upon hiring and promotions in education. This commercialization of education has seemed especially prevalent in teaching the English language.

This view was supported by Ruecker (2011) and Selvi (2010), who reported that visa requirements gave privileged status to NESTs or to those who were NNESTs but held passports from certain countries (inner-circle countries, e.g., the USA and the UK), a practice noted by Abdullah. These policies have had the effect of giving greater legitimacy to teachers from inner-circle countries. However, teachers from some countries in which English is widely spoken, such as Singapore and Malaysia, do not enjoy similar privileges, as Mass noted (Ruecker, 2011).

More importantly, however, the labels “native speaker” and “non-native speaker” are problematic in hiring decisions. Such labels can devaluate the importance of formal education, linguistic expertise, teaching experience, and the professional preparation of teachers. All educators should be evaluated with the same criteria. Non-native English-speaking educators should not be marginalized due to their first language.

2. Challenges that Thwart NNESTs from Gaining Legitimacy

The second challenge that participants faced in forging their professional identities was how to gain legitimacy as professional teachers. The myth of the superiority of the native speaker thwarted them from achieving this goal. To establish a legitimate professional identity, the participants had to enter and challenge certain discourses to combat that myth. They had to take a position within the NNEST/NEST dichotomy. Although they all saw
themselves as professional second-language educators, they sometimes felt the need to defend their position when their non-native identity was mentioned. The participants mentioned actions that they had taken to validate their professional identity. For instance, their international certifications or their trips abroad (past or projected) were cited as important ways in which they gained additional legitimacy and became more native-like in their second language proficiency.

Most of the participants viewed themselves highly proficient in their English usage. However, they did not perceive themselves as native speakers of English. Other than Mass, who straddled the line between native and non-native, they freely admitted to being NNESTs and viewed their non-native identity with pride. The participants were confident of their abilities as English teachers. This could be attributed to what they had done to strengthen their proficiency in English. Despite this confidence, their professional achievements were not always fully respected by those in positions of power.

3. A Lack of Autonomy

Another challenge that emerged from the data analysis was a lack of autonomy. All of the participants expressed their frustration over the hierarchy and the teachers’ lack of autonomy. For example, all teachers in Saudi Arabia had to follow strict curricula, sticking rigidly to each syllabus that they were assigned. Pacing was strictly regimented. Each teacher had to cover the same material on the same day in the same way. This killed the creativity of teachers, as Mass mentioned. It also created a feeling of discomfort and marginalization. Abdullah mentioned discussing his work with the curriculum committee, only to have changes made without consultation.
Recent research has proven that language teachers are not just technicians who apply correct methods. Instead, they are social beings who work within a set of cultural and political processes, and these give shape to their pedagogy (Varghese et al., 2005). In the Saudi Arabian context, as elsewhere, local conditions affect pedagogical practices. For example, as noted above, Saudi society, politics, and culture are hierarchical, and this affects teaching practices in Saudi Arabia. The social and political environments are not democratic. Influence over policies and procedures rests on connections to people high up in power (who knows the dean, for example), and social capital is derived from good relationships with people in power, which makes it easier to impose one’s ideas on teaching practices.

4. **Students’ Low English-Language Proficiency**

The last theme that emerged from the data analysis that pertained to challenges that teachers faced was anticipated: students’ low proficiency in the English language. This lack of proficiency was frustrating for the teachers after such students had already studied for at least seven years. Yet these students had hardly had attained proficiency, particularly in writing and academic discourse in English. The respondents believed that such lack of proficiency stemmed from teachers’ lack of autonomy, issues of teacher legitimacy, and administrative practices, all of which inhibited the development of full proficiency.

**Responses to the Third Research Question**

Q3. What strategies do non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) use to negotiate emerging challenges?

In response to the third research question, the participants suggested that to resolve the challenges they encountered, they employed a variety of strategies. However, whatever strategies they employed, they expressed a sense of powerlessness over hiring
policies. Even though they explored opportunities for self-learning and professional
development to ensure that they were always up-to-date in their pedagogical practices and
scholarly activities, this did not necessarily result in their obtaining salaries commensurate
with those of NESTs or those with inner-circle passports.

Participants faced discrimination in applying for the positions open to them and in the
salaries offered to them in comparison with salaries offered to NESTs or holders of passports
from inner-circle countries. This discrimination in hiring policies was evident at conferences
at which recruiting occurred. Some of the NNEST participants were frustrated and attempted
to comfort themselves by making up stories of victimhood. A more empowering coping
mechanism was to use cultural capital to claim the stance of deserving better, as through
using their religious identity to construct a professional identity of being able to provide
greater service to their students in Saudi Arabia through sharing their religious and cultural
values. They saw themselves as gatekeepers and protectors of their students. Through this
stance, they acknowledged greater self-worth as professional educators. They attempted to
deconstruct the process and the criteria of the hiring policies (e.g., concerning passports and
other arbitrarily privileged forms of documentation). They advocated instead for using
credentials and competencies for hiring, salaries, and promotions.

Participants addressed the second challenge, the lack of legitimacy, by investing the
social and cultural capital of their Islamic identity in their teaching and in their relationships
with their students through mentoring them and displaying exemplary character and integrity.
Mohsen observed, “As a teacher, you should be honest, and you should be an example. I am
an example for my students. If I speak of giving, I give in front of them.” Speaking in the
same vein, Mass remarked,
I would say that maybe lit a candle to somebody’s hoping, somebody’s feeling, somebody’s heart, so that at least I contribute something for the benefit of my students because I always believe that my clients [are] always my students. Whatever you do is [-for] your students—no students, no teachers. I always think of them first. Anything I do is always for my students because I always believe that my students are my clients. I don’t care about [anything else].

These comments from these two participants indicated that they saw themselves as role models to their students and extensively pursued that strategy to establish their legitimacy, particularly from the lens of Islamic tenets of good leadership.

The native speaker fallacy is a big impediment for NNESTs’ gaining legitimacy (Phillipson, 1992). Ahmed tried to deny the NEST vs. NNEST dichotomy by saying that there were merely teachers. Studies undertaken and competencies mastered were legitimate bases for differentiating the qualified from the unqualified, but this was not true for native vs. non-native, according to Ahmed. Mohsen also raised the issue of inner-circle countries vs. other countries. Native speakers are not the only people who own English, he said. There are different Englishes, he said, not merely one legitimate form of it. English is now an international language, not merely the province of native speakers in inner-circle countries. Abdullah said that the privileging of native speakers is a practice that gets perpetuated within the Arab world by NNESTs, so they themselves must scrutinize their own self-denigration.

A lack of autonomy was the third challenge for the NNEST participants in Saudi Arabia due to the hierarchical and regimented nature of education in that country. A big frustration was the lack of teaching experience of those who formulated educational policy in Saudi Arabia. This lack of autonomy sabotaged creativity. One strategy was to stress
building rapport with students, which the participants did in unique ways, thereby subverting
the mandate to do everything by rote. Religious identity played a big role in this, as the
teachers could claim their own identity and a shared identity with their students apart from
the teaching mandates that had been imposed on them. These strategies were highly
effective in building rapport and giving both teachers and students a sense of self-respect and
empowerment, forms of social capital.

The fourth major challenge that the NNEST participants faced was the low level of
English-language proficiency of many of their students. They addressed this challenge
through pedagogical strategies, the main one being the use of L1 (Arabic) in the classroom to
bridge or scaffold into the teaching of English. Behavioral issues related to this issue. For
example, Mass motivated the students by saying that they, like him, could also master the
English language. They also stressed the practical benefits of mastery of English as an
international language used widely on the Internet, for example. Students needed an
incentive to face the challenges of mastering English. I told students not to give up, and I
always stressed their potential for learning rather than focusing on where they had not yet
achieved mastery. The participants used both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to get the
students to focus on mastering English.

Ahmed emphasized that Arabic
has helped me a lot. I know a bit of Arabic now, Mashallah [God willing]. It’s
because of my kids because I’m teaching them Arabic. They’re actually teaching me
Arabic. They bring me the homework, and I sit with them, Google things, and try to
learn. . . . All the languages have got the same pattern you have to follow, whether it
is Urdu or Punjabi or English or Arabic or Spanish or German. . . . You have to follow certain rules.

The strategies that the participants used to address these four major challenges relied on drawing on their social and cultural capital to build legitimacy as professional teachers and to build rapport with students and to mentor them to overcome their frustrations with the difficulties of mastering English. Some of these strategies (including pedagogical practices) were effective, while others left some of the professional challenges unresolved (as in hiring policies and lack of autonomy), given ongoing complexities.

Implications

I propose several implications for the future practice. I categorized these implications into two parts: theoretical implications and practical ones. Although many theoretical and practical issues have been debated heatedly (Cook; 1999; Davies, 1991; Kachru, 1992; Mahboob, 2005; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990; Swales, 1993), some of these contentious practices have been widely perpetuated in the TESOL profession and in English language teaching (ELT).

Theoretical implications. In teacher-education programs, the first implication is that power relations could be challenged by giving teachers an avenue to amplify their voices, collaborate with colleagues, and give feedback for teaching practices to those in positions of decision-making power. For example, this could be done anonymously through a blog so that there would be no retaliation (firings or demotions) against teachers who dared to challenge current practices and assumptions. As religious identity emerged as one of the major themes in this research, its theoretical implications should not be overlooked in
examining the cultural capital of teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

Another implication could be that multicompetent EFL teachers may need professional-development programs to assist them in their struggles to gain greater legitimacy in their professional identities. The participants have invested on their own through seeking graduate degrees and further training through summer courses, which have added to their cultural and symbolic capital (Norton Pierce, 1995). These professional-development programs should go beyond the influence of graduate programs and certifications to raise their awareness of the fallacy of the native speaker’s superiority and the higher status implicitly granted to holders of certain passports. In these ELT programs at colleges and universities, prospective teachers should be encouraged to challenge the taken-for-granted notion that native speakers are superior.

There is a need to scrutinize the negative representations of NNESTs manifest in the literature of TESOL. Within the literature on TESOL, many dichotomies are ubiquitous: NESTs vs. NNESTs, inner circle vs. outer circle, and periphery vs. old-timer. All of these dichotomies privilege the status of insiders while constructing others as outsiders, as lesser than. Even the term TESOL itself refers to “other languages,” which perpetuates the insider vs. outsider dichotomy, casting the outsider as the other. These dichotomies embedded in the theory and literature on TESOL need to be deconstructed and replaced with a new set of terminology, such as terms proposed by other scholars (Spivak, 1976). *Expert teacher* could be used in place of the initialism NNEST. Even the geographic locations of headquarters of professional bodies and conferences perpetuate notions of insider and outsider. The International Organization of TESOL, founded in 1966, is located in the United States, and
the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL),
which was established in 1967, is located in the UK. Both claim internationalism in their
names, but they have not rotated geographic headquarters and major conferences to make
access comparable for teachers of English located in different parts of the world.

**Practical implications.** Hiring practices have perpetuated the dichotomies discussed
above (NESTs vs. NNESTs), particularly in an EFL context (Canagarajah, 1999). TESOL
organizations have released advocacy statements regarding discriminatory practices against
NNESTs (TESOL, 2006, page x). However, prejudicial practices persist in job fairs at
professional conferences, as well as in some institutions’ websites for recruiting teachers.
These practices should be challenged more aggressively.

Teacher evaluations are another important area with practical implications.
Generally, teacher development has been measured according to the “deficit model,” in
which teachers are evaluated solely according to their credentials and competencies and those
that they lack (i.e., their deficits).

Administrative practices that should be changed include administrators’ perceptions
of teachers. Administrators could empower teachers through giving them an avenue to
amplify their voices and share their experiences with other teachers through small
conferences and meetings to address pedagogical concerns. They could also be encouraged
to write and publish papers to reflect upon their teaching experiences.

Policymakers and government officials who form and control educational policy
should acknowledge that English is an international language. However, nationality, race,
ethnicity, and other factors have been used in discriminatory ways against NNESTs. These
factors are irrelevant to teaching competency and should not factor into hiring, pay, promotion, and other forms of professional status for TESOL.

Students’ proficiency was one of the most important concerns of the participants. Students, even those who had been studying English for many years, had a low level of proficiency. This has implications for educational policy. Conferences are needed for teachers in public schools and universities to coordinate a comprehensive approach to this issue. More scrutiny is needed by publishers to see how the textbooks in use could be made more culturally sensitive and appropriate for diverse audiences. National standardized examinations should be implemented as an exit exam in high school so that students are required to demonstrate English-language proficiency before being admitted to college or university.

**Caveats of the Study**

The first caveat involves the limitations of this study from epistemological perspectives. The main limitation is inherent to the epistemic stance (poststructuralism) that underpins this study. In poststructuralism, reality is socially constructed and co-constructed through social interactions. This issue has been debated heatedly in different schools of thought. This research is a qualitative research study that employed narrative inquiry, as the studied phenomena focus on the participants’ experience. One of the problems with narrative inquiry is the discrepancies that might occur between the original story that is told and the retold story, as well as the interpretation of that story. I argue that such the challenge of reconciling changes in the story could be solved by member checking.

Another drawback in this study is related to the transparency of the data or what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) called the “Hollywood plot” or “wellness” in narration; they
referred to Spence’s (1985) concept of “narration smoothing” in some plots. This is the happy ending in which everything has an unequivocal and satisfying resolution. Participants may exaggerate or alter the story to force a happy ending or to impose a Hollywood plot. Regarding this issue, I tried to build a sound relationship with the participants. I shared my stories with them to eliminate any discomfort or hesitation that they might otherwise have had in sharing their stories with an emic (an outsider).

Another caveat was about the gender of the population. The study aimed to investigate only male NNESTs in an EFL context. Thus, the decision I made was to specifically recruit male participants due to the stringent traditions of the educational parameters in Saudi Arabia, which prohibits coeducation of male and female students, as well as public male-to-female interactions. I was aware of this pitfall, which related to the male participants I recruited, but I was obliged to take that decision to avoid any hindrance in conducting the research, particularly data collection. Had I recruited female participants, the present study could have added more diverse perspectives.

Finally, this study investigated a specific phenomenon and concentrated on a specific context. Therefore, there were only five participants in the study population, so the findings should not be construed as representative. The purpose of this study was to give deep insight into the way in which male NNESTs constructed their professional identity in a certain context that has received little scholarly attention. This study did not seek to generalize the findings to any other context or population but rather to make thick description.

Future Research

This study has raised many questions that merit further investigation. I would suggest that a future study examine female NNESTs’ lived experience and stories to see how they
might be similar to or different from male NNESTs’ lived experience and stories. I would also suggest carrying out further research to explore NNESTs’ lived experiences through employing different methodologies, such as an ethnography, in which the researcher would spend more time with the participants and observe their behaviors in the classroom and other professional settings. Further studies might examine other contexts in Saudi Arabia. A study could be done that would compare and contrast NESTs’ and NNESTs’ professional identities and how these are constructed. Non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers by 3 to 1 (Power, 2005), which could be addressed in future research by conducting more studies on the issues faced by NNESTs.

Religious identity and the influence of religion should be examined more fully in future research. Few studies in the literature have explored these issues, despite a few exceptions that have not pertained to Islam or the Middle East. No studies to date in the literature have compared and contrasted the effects of different religions on the professional identities of NNESTs or NESTs.

**Final Thoughts**

Many of the challenges faced by the NNESTs in this study were anticipated by the literature, such as hiring issues and the lack of autonomy (Amin, 1997, 1999; Braine, 2010; Kubota, 2002, 2011; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Motha, 2006). However, one of the most unanticipated findings from the study research was the significant role of religion as a basis of personal and professional identity, as well as generating social and cultural capital in the classroom and the profession. Although this social and cultural capital could be turned into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), this was not a calculation based on self-interest or career advantages for the participants, but instead a sense of sacred responsibility, righteousness,
and commitment. In some cases, it represented choosing religious identity even when this required sacrificing more advantageous economic and career prospects. The NNEST participants in this study believed that being Muslim and teaching Muslim students gave them access to a special type of rapport and mutual respect with their students, which they were able to transform into their pedagogical practices to inspire and motivate their students.

The participants dealt with the “native speaker fallacy” (Phillipson, 1992) directly, in some cases, telling their students, “Even though I do not have blond hair or blue eyes, I have mastered proficiency in the English language” (Mass). This was a form of what Gee (2001) called “affinity identity” in which for “a member of an affinity group, their allegiance is primarily to a set of common endeavors or practices and secondarily to other people in terms of shared culture or traits” (p. 105).

This affinity identity allowed the participants as teachers to step into a more familiar, even patriarchal, relationship with their students to become their gatekeepers and role models. Their professional identity was based in part on the core Islamic value of being of service to others, in this case, their students, in part through preserving and transmitting traditional cultural and religious values of Islam and Saudi Arabia, as well as protecting these from influence from Western culture. This was also the basis of NNEST participants’ being able to offer encouragement to the students in gaining self-esteem as they gained proficiency in the English language.

The NNEST participants also derived legitimacy and self-empowerment from self-awareness of where they were situated in different Englishes within English as a world language that exists in many forms, not just standard English, particularly American and British English. They confronted the NEST vs. NNEST dichotomy. They did this in part
through their participation in professional TESOL organizations, through attending conferences, and seeking publication in professional journals (Ahmed, Abdullah, Mass, and Mustafa).

The participants faced discriminatory practices from the institutions for which they worked. These institutions often unfairly privileged NESTs and gave higher salaries and status to those who held passports from inner-circle countries (i.e., the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). These discriminatory practices caused frustration and challenged their receiving legitimacy through an institutional failure to fully recognize their cultural capital.

The process of conducting this research helped the participants to gain greater self-awareness through telling their own stories and reflecting upon them. For example, Mohsen said after finishing his story, “You know, Mustafa, this is the first time I have had to tell my story. It reminds me of a lot of good things and bad things. Reflecting on these things that helped me to gain greater self-awareness.” For me, the first time I wrote my story of learning Arabic, with all the punishment and shaming that I received from my teachers early on, had the paradoxical effect of helping me to gain greater appreciation of my own accomplishments, first in learning Arabic and then in mastering proficiency in English. These experiences have made me a better teacher, one who is more aware of and empathetic with students who are struggling to learn English.

Epilogue

My journey in this study began with writing my autobiography and reflecting on it. This process of writing my autobiography led me to go beyond my story to explore the experiences of other NNESTs who have been disempowered and discouraged as they tried to
succeed in the educational system, particularly in learning and teaching languages. The number of non-native speakers is four times the number of native speakers (Crystal, 1997); however, their voices have not often been heard. Therefore, in this research, I sought to help amplify the voices of NNESTs. Although each story has its own nuances and dramatic episodes, certain commonalities emerged from these stories, especially the challenges that these NNESTs faced in gaining legitimacy as professional teachers of English.

During the process of conducting this study, I tried to challenge my own narrative in interpreting the data and my own preexisting mindset and beliefs about the context and the profession. However, it was challenging to be objective. It was hard to challenge my own biases, but I did so anyway through strategies such as member checking. I have learned a lot in this journey, and there were myriad stories that ran parallel to and diverged from my own story, showing me many ways in which NNEST participants could find self-empowerment and legitimacy as teachers of English in a profession that often devalues NNESTs. I also gained great respect for the NNEST participants whom I interviewed. They helped me gain a much greater understanding of widespread issues faced by NNESTs that have not been given the full consideration that they deserve.

I would like to thank the teacher participants in this study. They have given me a lot of their time, efforts, and help in sharing their stories. They were willing to be vulnerable and honest in exposing their experiences. For this, I am grateful. My advisor, Dr. Lucretia Penny Pence, spared no efforts in helping me and challenging me to revise the research and to go deeper in my analysis of the research that I had conducted. My family also has been supportive, patient, and understanding throughout this journey. I cannot thank them enough. Finally, thanks to God Almighty, Allah, for all his blessings to my family and to me.
Appendices

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

DATE: January 26, 2017
REFERENCE #: 23916
PROJECT ID & TITLE: [994421-1] Teachers' Professional Identity Construction: A Narrative Inquiry of Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in Saudi Arabia
PI OF RECORD: Lucetta Pence
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
BOARD DECISION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: January 23, 2017
EXPIRATION DATE: January 22, 2018
RISK LEVEL: Minimal Risk
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category 6, 7
SUBPART DECISION: Not Applicable
PROJECT STATUS: Active - Open to Enrollment

DOCUMENTS:
- Advertisement - Email (UPDATED: 01/4/2017)
- Application Form - Project Information (UPDATED: 11/28/2016)
- Consent Form - Consent Form (UPDATED: 01/4/2017)
- CV/Resume - CV Pence (UPDATED: 12/21/2016)
- Other - Project Team Form (UPDATED: 11/28/2016)
- Other - Departmental Review (UPDATED: 01/4/2017)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 01/4/2017)
- Questionnaire/Survey - interview Questions (UPDATED: 11/28/2016)
- Training/Certification - CITI Pence (UPDATED: 01/4/2017)
- Training/Certification - CITI Hersi (UPDATED: 11/28/2016)

Thank you for your New Project submission. The UNM IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to human participants have been minimized.

The IRB has determined the following:

Informed consent must be obtained and documentation of informed consent is required for this project. To obtain and document consent, use only approved and stamped consent document(s).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator submit an amendment to this project for IRB review and receive IRB approval prior
to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category.

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

The UNM IRB approved the project until January 22, 2018. A continuing review or closure submission is due no later than December 23, 2017. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of this project. If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of five years after the closure of this project.

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001, phone at 505.277.2044, email at irbmaincampus@unm.edu, or in person at 1806 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.
Appendix B: Approval Letter from Research Site

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Education
University of Jeddah
English Language Institute

Appendix B: Approval Letter from Research Site

To Whom It May Concern,

Greeting and Peace be upon you and upon your family.

I wish to provide the electronic file of the letter of approval for the research project titled "Teachers' Professional Identity Construction: A Narrative Inquiry of Non-Native English Speaking Teachers in Saudi Arabia". The letter was issued by the English Language Institute at the University of Jeddah, dated 1438/1/20, under the file number 1438/12. It hereby grants approval for the project.

Signed,

University of Jeddah

P.O. Box 30327 Jeddah 21589

Ref. 1438/12

Date: 1438/1/20

Encl.:
Appendix C: Consent to Participate in Research Form

The University of New Mexico
Consent to Participate in Research

Teachers' Professional Identity Construction:
A Narrative Inquiry of Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in Saudi Arabia

I am Mustafa Hersi, a doctoral candidate in the Language, Literacy & Sociocultural Studies program, at the College of Education, University of New Mexico (UNM). I am conducting a dissertation research project as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Language Literacy and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS). My research project is entitled, "Teachers' Professional Identity Construction: A Narrative Inquiry of Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in Saudi Arabia." In this research, I will investigate how NNESTs who are currently teaching in Saudi Arabia negotiate and construct their professional identities. In the context of this study, professional identities refer teachers' self-enactment in relation to occupation. This means that the project will explore teachers' professional identities as it relates to self-image, self-esteem, linguistics competence, job motivation and satisfaction.

I am pleased to invite you to take part in this study. This study will begin in December 2016 and will end in December 2017. Your participation in the study is voluntary but will be highly appreciated. If you choose to participate, we will settle upon a place to meet, and I will interview you twice. These interviews will ask you to share the story of how you became an English teacher, how you work with students and colleagues, and your approach to teaching English. Each interview session will take at least 60 minutes and a maximum of 90 minutes. I will record the interviews using an audio voice recorder. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, you can decline prior to the start of the interview, and I will take notes instead. In the first interview, we will discuss your background, and I will ask you to narrate your story of becoming an English teacher. Then I will ask you to bring a sample of your daily lesson plan to the second interview. In the second interview, I will ask for clarification around anything you told me in the first interview and discuss some methodological and practical issues, using your lesson plan as a focal point.

Possible Benefits and Risks

There is no direct benefit in taking part in this study, however, the benefits of your participation are that we can engage in a collegial discussion, because I am also a NNEST, and you will have an opportunity to reflect deeply on your evolving identity as an English teacher. Risks associated with your participation are minimal. Your real name will be known only to me, the researcher; you will choose a pseudonym to be used in place of your name in all data, including the audio recording. Your identity will not be revealed in any reports of this study.

If any interview questions make you feel uncomfortable, you have the right not to answer them. During each interview, you are free to request a break in order to relax yourself. You can also request that we stop and reschedule the interview. I assure you that all information gathered from all the participants would be primarily used for the purpose of this research. I will maintain confidentiality of all information obtained from you.
Confidentiality

Dr. Lucretia Penny Pence (my dissertation chair) and I are the only ones who will have access to your exact interview recordings and transcripts, although large portions may be quoted in my report, using your pseudonym. The audio-file will be kept in the researcher’s password protected computer, while the paper and documents will be sealed in an envelope and kept in a cabinet in the advisor’s office in UNM. All electronic data will be destroyed and erased and all paper data will be shredded upon completion of my dissertation.

Contact Information

If you agree to participate, you will receive a copy of this document. If you need to speak with the principal investigator of this research, Dr. Lucretia Penny Pence, you may email her in ppence@ unm.edu or you may call (505) 238 9647. If you would like to speak to the interviewer, Mustafa Hersi, email me at mblersi@ unm.edu or you may call (509) 510-59 6237 or (505) 610-8442 at any time. If you have any question about your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, you may contact the office of the Institutional Review Board at The University of New Mexico, email IRBMaintCampus@ unm.edu or by calling (505) 277-2644.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you will not incur any sanctions or loss of benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to withdraw. You can withdraw within 2 months of signing the consent letter, because by that time the project will be closed. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in any analyses, reports, or presentations. You will be enrolled in the study for a period of 6 months so that I may contact you as I analyze data to check for accuracy.

By signing this document, you indicate that you have received an oral explanation of the study, including the information mentioned above, and that you agree to voluntarily participate in this research. Your signature also means that I have answered any questions you posed about participation in the study.

Participant Printed Name & Signature
Date

Investigator Printed Name & Signature
Date
Appendix D: Interview Questions

The First Interview

Demographic Questionnaire

1) Could you please tell me about yourself, age, nationality, languages (mother tongue & L2), race, marital status, family background, economic status, and your interests?

2) Could you please tell me about your educational degrees, publications, activities, and employment status?

3) How many years have you been teaching English in Al-Salam University and in what contexts or countries (EFL/ESL) have you taught so far?

1) Life stories and learning experiences in the past.

Overarching Questions

1- Could you tell me about your childhood family stories?

2- How did you become interested in becoming English language teacher?

Follow up questions

a) When and where did you begin learning English?

b) Why did you learn English?

c) Tell me about some of the problems, fears, struggles you had learning English.

d) Tell me about some of your successes and accomplishments.

e) Who do you consider your favorite teacher and why?

f) Who do you consider your least favorite teacher and why?

g) To what extent did learning English change you?

h) How your background influenced your English language learning?

i) How do you evaluate your fluency and accuracy (knowledge and skills) in English in the past?
2) **Language learning and becoming English language teacher (ELT)**

**Overarching Question**

1- Tell me about why and how you became an English teacher.

**Follow up questions**

a) Why do you choose to be a teacher and how has your background influenced your teaching belief?

b) In the past, (before becoming a teacher) what kind of teacher did you think you would be?

c) Who has mostly influenced in your teaching in terms of knowledge, skills, and performance? Why?

d) Could you tell me about your relationship with your colleagues, students, and administrators?

e) Could you please tell me about your current professional development programs?

f) How do you describe yourself as a teacher? Why?

g) What are the most significance challenges that you encounter in your career? Why?

   How do you overcome these challenges?

h) How do your students, colleagues and administrator evaluate you as a teacher (knowledge, skills, and performance)? What do you think of their opinion?

i) To what extent, you think you hold power specifically in the class and in the classroom in the institution?

j) Could you tell me about your success and achievement as a teacher?
The Second Interview

3) The current teaching experiences and self-descriptions

Overarching Question

1- Please tell me about your present teaching situation.

Follow up Questions

a) What kind of teacher do you think you are?

b) Could you tell me about your relationship with your colleagues, students, and administrators?

c) Could you please tell me about your current professional development programs?

d) How do you describe yourself as a teacher? Why?

e) What are the most significance challenges that you encounter in your career? Why?

f) How do you overcome these challenges?

g) How do your students, colleagues and administrator evaluate you as a teacher

   (knowledge, skills, and performance)?

h) To what extent, you think you hold power in the class and in the institution?

i) What are your strengths and weakness as an EFL teacher?

j) Could you tell me about your success and achievement as a teacher?

k) Could you tell me about your plan for developing yourself as a professional teacher?

l) How do you define a good teacher?

m) Could you please tell me about contextual factors that influence you?

n) How do you feel about your colleagues or administrators’ observation your class?

   Why?
o) Could tell evaluate your experience in interacting with your NESTs and NESTs colleagues?

p) How do you collaborate in the institution if there is any? Why?

q) When do you feel angry, frustrated, self-confident, discouraged, marginalized, and empowered (in the classroom and in the institution)? Why?

r) How do you overcome negative emotions?

s) How do personal problems and critical issues impact your performance?

t) What does an EFL teacher mean to you?

4) Challenges, self-perceptions and future plans (imagined identity)

Overarching Question

1- How do you see your future in ELT?

Follow up questions

a) Could you tell me challenge that you encounter in your work?

b) How do you see yourself (ELT) in the future?

c) Do you think you are going to change your career in the future? Why?

d) Could you please tell me about your professional development plan in the future?

e) What kind of administrator you would be in the future?

f) What are the most important thing you would change if you were a responsible of this institution (curriculum policies, professional development)

g) What are your expectations of the institution in the future?

h) Do you have anything to add?

i) Do you have any question, comment or concerns?
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