



# English Language and Literature Students’ Perceptions towards English Language Teacher Identity<sup>i</sup>

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## Abstract

Identity can be defined as how an individual is perceived as an individual in any presumable setting. When the literature is reviewed, there is a limited number of studies conducted regarding English teachers perceptions towards teacher identity. This study will shed on a light on the related area. This is a quasi-experimental study. The survey was carried out in Spring term of 2018-2019 academic year. There were 97 student participants receiving education in the English Language and Literature department of Karabük University. The age of the learners ranged from 19 and 25-over. The learners were from 2 kinds of education where students study. There were 44 students from daytime education and 53 students were from daytime education. The data obtained through the application regarding the development of Teaching Profession Attitude Scale has been transferred to SPSS . All statistical analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS (International Business Machines-Software Package for Social Sciences) Statistics, Version 23.0 (Armonk, New York). Non-parametric (Mann-Whitney-U and Kruskal-Wallis) tests were used due to the non-normally distributed data.

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**Keywords:** English; teacher identity; evaluation; method; skill

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## 1. Introduction

In our day and time in which information is the most important capital and being informed is the biggest power, qualified work force refers to individuals who are equipped with the skills. Raising such individuals who possess these characteristics is possible through a high quality education process. Although the history of teaching dates far back, its emergence as a profession began with the birth of "modern school". The institutionalization of education as a scientific discipline rendered it a must to raise people who have the special expertise and skill to tend to the education of the child (Eskicumalı, 2002, p.10).

Training of the workforce compatible with the needs of the age and the society depends upon the due importance being given to the student, teacher and curricula which are the three fundamental elements of the education system. The most important element affecting education is undoubtedly the teacher. In the education process, teacher is the element which gives meaning to other elements and the most significant element in the actualization of education (Hacıoğlu and Alkan, 1997, p. 21).

It is teachers who have the prime responsibility for the strategic structure of schools as application centers of educational institutions as well as the planning and operation of the education system (Hagmann & Answari, 2013). A host of definitions can be made regarding teachers as qualified, good, high-quality, efficient etc. The notion of good teacher can be defined as a teacher establishing student-centred class management, her/his attitudes and behaviour that will enable students to learn and actualizing student performance as individual teaching strategy (Alkan & Hacıoğlu, 2007; Ashton, 1984; Şişman, 2005; Ursano & Kartheiser, 2007). An ideal teacher can be defined as healthy, successful, self-directed, creative and easygoing (Kivinen & Rinne, 1995). In this sense, teachers' personal and professional characteristics have a significant role (Şişman, 2005).

To redound the qualities that are expected from students to teachers first proves to be imperative. The result that has arisen from many current perspectives of our day and time such as constructivism, post-modernism, globalization and multiculturalism is in the direction of altering the disagreements in the perspective towards education, expectations from students and the definition of the teacher. For this reason, it bears paramount importance to bring to light the personality, temperament and characteristics of the teacher as one of the most important elements that determine student success (Ensari and Gündüz, 2006, p.39) in specific consideration to Turkey. In the recent years, serious innovations have been made with regard to teacher training. However, it is a serious problem that teachers' personality traits are ignored while these reforms were being arranged.

Although its status and prestige varies according to societies and cultures, the profession of teaching has been seen as a sacred walk of life since time immemorial. Especially in the Turkish society, certain cultural factors are supporting teaching positively. The saying that goes "Teach me a letter and I will owe you forever" is one that has validity in all the country. Along with teachers preserving their prestige in the society, low wages, that any graduate can become a teacher because of the pressing vacancies and the tendency of form teaching being a female-dominated profession negatively affect the status of the teaching profession in parallel with the women's status in the society (Özdemir & Yalın, 2004, p.40).

### *1.1. Teacher identity*

From the moment that an individual is born, s/he is taken care of, protected, attended to and educated by other important people in her/his life. Therefore, her/his identity is shaped by the societal living that is kneaded starting with family and onto friends, religious beliefs, culture, history and traditions. Our opinions about our identity are for the most part a reflection of others' opinions about us (Browne, 2012, cited in Bilgin & Oksal, 2018).

Although it is frequently used in scientific studies, there is no consensus on the definition of the notion of identity. Since the notion of identity is defined in a multitude of conceptual frameworks including sociological, cultural, anthropological, philosophical and psychological domains, definitions and approaches are multitudinous as well. Identity can be defined as how an individual is perceived as an individual in any presumable setting.

Identity is not something a person owns but forms (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004) and it is in a constant state of tension, development and refinement (White, 2009). Identity is not a fixed state but it is constructed through social relations (Zembylas, 2003). Identity is a cognitive and emotional mental construct that shows a degree of consistency with the individual's own self, behaviour, needs, motivations and interests and which enables her/him to perceive her/himself as a separate and different being from others (Bilgin, 1996). Although the concept of identity strongly establishes the emphasis of idiosyncrasy (uniqueness), it cannot ever be defined in isolation.

In order to better understand the teacher identity, what needs to come first is a definition of the concept of identity itself. Identity is a multi-dimensional concept which has different definitions in different domains. One of the concepts that has been seen to gain importance in recent years is the concept of "teacher identity". We frequently come across this concept in the studies conducted as of late (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Cohen, 2008; Day & Kington, 2008; Katariina, Liisa, Harri & Katriina, 2014; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Trent, 2011). In these studies, the importance of the role of teacher identity in teacher development is widely acknowledged (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

As is known, teaching is a profession that requires cognitive domain competencies such as knowledge and skill as well as affective domain competencies such as attitude and behaviour. That teacher candidates gain value and attitude regarding the profession is at least as necessary as knowledge. This is because the studies conducted show us that the student is affected by the attitude and behaviour of the teacher. The teacher's

ideational attitude, emotional reactions, various habits and the personality that comprises all of these affect the student. For the most part, teachers' attitudes towards the students and school studies has a wide-ranging effect on the students' learning and personalities (Küçükahmet, 1976, p.50). Attitude is a disposition that is attributed to an individual which regularly establishes the opinions, emotions and behaviour regarding a psychological object (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1988, p.84).

Liking or not liking a given encountered situation, approving or disapproving it helps show the attitude that the individual maintains. However, it is deficient in completely revealing the whole range of what her/his attitude entails. In fact, accepting or rejecting a situation, showing tendency to a situation or not doing so, siding with a situation or avoiding it reveals the attitude of the individual in a deeper sense. The origin of the attitude is the manner that the individual maintains towards the situation. The attitude of the individual has effect on the situation being accepted or rejected by the individual (Bilgin, 1996, p.48).

Therefore, understanding the professional identity of teachers is important in terms of the cardinal aspects of teachers' professional careers such as professional decisions, motivation, occupational status and commitment to the profession (Hong, 2010). The findings obtained from the studies treating teacher identity reveal that teacher training programmes play a meaningful and substantial role in the formation of the professional identity of the teacher candidates (Beijaard et al., 2004; Krzywacki, 2009; Zembylas, 2003).

This very importance that teacher identity bears from a professional aspect has established one of the preambles of it being examined through a host of studies in the literature regarding the subject. In such studies, subjects such as what teacher identity is, what dimensions it comprises and how its development occurs have been examined (Aelterman & Vlerick, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Drake, Spillane & Hufferd-Ackles, 2001; Saban, 2004; Schepens). In summary, the findings obtained from these studies reveal that the teacher identity is affected by a host of internal and external factors such as their occupational experiences, social interactions, psychological and sociocultural characteristics and hence is constituted of a complicated and multi-dimensional structure (Chong, Low & Goh, 2011; Olsen, 2008).

In addition to these, there are studies which reveal that teacher identity is in correlation with important variables such as reasons to choose the profession of teaching, beliefs regarding the profession of teaching, staying in the profession and dedicating oneself to the profession (e.g. Lasky, 2005; Thomson and Palermo, 2014). The findings

obtained from these studies show that teacher identity is in an important position in explaining the variables in question (Hong, 2010).

### *1.2. Significance of the study*

As a matter of fact, in the literature related to English Teacher Identity, there are many studies in which the factors affecting individuals' preferences and perceptions concerning the teaching profession are examined with the purpose of elevating the quality of in-service and pre-service training. Aksu, Demir, Daloglu, Yildirim & Kiraz, 2010; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Eren & Tezel, 2010; Roness, 2011). When the studies conducted in Turkey are referred to, not many studies were encountered regarding English teacher identities. There are only a few similar studies to some extent within the Turkish context, for example the students from science-math, social sciences, foreign language and special abilities departments participated in the study regarding teacher identity conducted by Totan, Aysan & Bektaş (2010) which endeavoured to ascertain the student perceptions. Taner & Karaman(2013) investigated foreign language teachers perceptions, and Babanoğlu & Yardımcı (2017) analyzed English language teachers' ideas in both Private and State Schools. In this vein this study will shed light on the related area.

### *1.3. Research questions:*

1. What is the English teacher identity perception level of the students?
2. Do their perceptions change according to variables of;
  - a. gender
  - b. age
  - c. education type (daytime education., or evening education)

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Organization of the research*

The survey was carried out in Spring term of 2018-2019 academic year. There were 97 student participants receiving education in the English Language and Literature department of Karabük University. There were 69 female and 28 male participants who all took part in the survey voluntarily. The age of the learners ranged from 19 and 25-over. The learners were from 2 kinds of education where students study. There were 44 students from daytime education and 53 students were from daytime education.

### *2.2. Research Design*

In this study, the survey model has been used. In this part, the study group and the tools used in the analysis of the data have been addressed. The study is conducted on a voluntary basis and students who study in Karabük University English Language and Literature department and want to become English teachers in the future by undergoing formation training. The study includes a descriptive characteristics and was realized by means of the survey model. This kind of model is one of the research models which aim to describe a situation. Karasar (2006) says that general survey models are survey arrangements which are implemented in a population, the whole population or a group, with the objective of arriving a general interpretation about the population. In the study, the teaching profession attitude scale(35 item-questionnaire) survey has been used, which was developed by Çetin (2006). There are three subdimensions of the scale; *Liking*, *Value* and *Rapport*.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Data Analysis

The data obtained through the application regarding the development of Teaching Profession Attitude Scale has been transferred to SPSS . All statistical analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS (International Business Machines-Software Package for Social Sciences) Statistics, Version 23.0 (Armonk, New York). The significance level was set to 0.05. Non-parametric (Mann-Whitney-U and Kruskal-Wallis tests) tests were used due to the non-normally distributed data. 5-option Likert scale has been used ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree".

After the attitude statements were scored, item analysis has been conducted in order to choose the items that do not work well. As a result of the factor analysis carried out in order to test the construct validity of the scale, it is seen that the scale items' factor loads vary between 0.48-0.80, that Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) value is 0.95 and that internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach alpha) value is  $\alpha=0.95$ . The findings regarding the validity and reliability tests show that the scale has a valid and reliable structure.

#### 3.2. Findings

Table 1. Comparison of Mean Attendance Levels with regard to Gender

<i>Group Statistics</i>						
Sub dimensions	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
liking	female	69	3,0211	,28542	,03436	0,858
	male	28	3,0455	,34284	,06479	

value	female	69	1,4692	,51735	,06228	0,646
	male	28	1,6607	,79046	,14938	
rapport	female	69	3,8116	,88509	,10655	0,465
	male	28	3,6857	,86140	,16279	

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a difference between men and women in terms of attendance levels for each sub dimension in the study. As the p-value of the test was greater than  $\alpha = 0.05$  in all sub dimensions, it is possible to say with 95% confidence that there is no difference between men and women.

<i>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></i>			
	liking	value	rapport
Mann-Whitney U	943,500	909,000	874,500
Wilcoxon W	3358,500	3324,000	1280,500
Z	-,179	-,460	-,731
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,858	,646	,465

a. Grouping Variable: gender

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Attendance Levels with regard to Age Groups

<i>Descriptives</i>						
Sub dimensions		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
liking	19-20	27	2,9899	,42065	,08095	0,714
	21-22	34	3,0668	,23048	,03953	
	23-24	21	3,0433	,27366	,05972	
	25- over	15	2,9879	,23207	,05992	
	Total	97	3,0281	,30147	,03061	
value	19-20	27	1,7454	,60395	,11623	0,031*
	21-22	34	1,5257	,69001	,11834	
	23-24	21	1,2500	,25921	,05656	
	25- over	15	1,5083	,67392	,17401	
	Total	97	1,5245	,61068	,06201	
rapport	19-20	27	3,4296	,90078	,17335	0,071
	21-22	34	3,8294	,85014	,14580	
	23-24	21	3,8952	,94788	,20684	
	25- over	15	4,1067	,62274	,16079	
	Total	97	3,7753	,87572	,08892	

\*: significant at  $\alpha=0.05$

The non-parametric Kruskal Wallis test was used to determine whether there was a difference between four age groups. As the p-value of the test was greater than  $\alpha = 0.05$  for sub dimensions LIKING and RAPPORT, it is possible to say with a 95% confidence that there was no difference in the mean attendance level among the age groups, in other words, age did not have an effect on mean attendance levels.

However, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups by the mean attendance level of sub dimension VALUE. For the sub dimension VALUE, especially in the 19-20 age group, the average level ( $\bar{x}_{19-20} = 1,7454$ ), is higher than in older ages.

*Test Statistics<sup>a,b</sup>*

	liking	value	rapport
Chi-Square	1,365	8,853	7,037
df	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	,714	,031	,071

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
 b. Grouping Variable: age

Table 3. Comparison of Mean Attendance Levels with regard to Education Type

*Group Statistics*

subdimension	educationtype	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
liking	daytime edu	44	3,0868	,29044	,04379	0,034*
	evening edu	53	2,9794	,30447	,04182	
value	daytime edu	44	1,4858	,56304	,08488	0,898
	evening edu	53	1,5566	,65117	,08944	
rapport	daytime edu	44	3,7955	,79941	,12051	0,922
	evening edu	53	3,7585	,94165	,12935	

\*: significant at  $\alpha=0.05$

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between daytime and evening education groups in terms of attendance level for sub dimensions in the study. As the p value of the test is greater than  $\alpha = 0.05$  in sub dimensions *value* and *rapport*, it is possible to say with a 95% confidence that there is no statistically significant difference between two groups. In other words, education type has no effect on participation levels of *value* and *rapport*.



However, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between daytime and evening education by the mean attendance level of sub dimension *liking*. For the sub dimension *liking*, in the daytime education group, the average level ( $\bar{x}_{daytime} = 3,0868$ ), is higher than in evening education group.

<i>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></i>			
	liking	value	rapport
Mann-Whitney U	874,000	1148,500	1152,500
Wilcoxon W	2305,000	2138,500	2583,500
Z	-2,120	-,128	-,098
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,034	,898	,922

a. Grouping Variable: education type

#### 4. Discussion

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a difference between men and women in terms of attendance levels for each sub dimension in the study. It is possible to say that there is no significant difference between men and women except one item. It was found that there is a difference between men and women by the attendance level of item “The idea of self renewal makes me think about doing this occupation”. For men, the mean participation level ( $\bar{x}_m = 4$ ), is higher than the mean level of women ( $\bar{x}_m = 3,4058$ ).

It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups by the mean attendance level of sub dimension *value*. For the sub dimension *value*, especially in the 19-20 age group, the average level is higher than in older age groups. If we analyze the result in the *item* base, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups by the mean attendance level of item 3.(It does not give me any pleasure to do activities related to my occupation). For the item 3, especially in the 19-20 age group, the average level ( $\bar{x}_{19-20} = 3,7037$ ), is lower than in older ages.

Similarly, for the item 13 (“I do not love teaching profession), the average participation level of the 19-20 age group ( $\bar{x}_{19-20} = 3,7778$ ) is lower than in the older age group. For the item 34(Being in a continuous class irritates to me), the age group 19-20 was found as having the lowest mean attendance. In the 18th item (I do not think the teaching profession neither financially nor spiritually satisfies to me) of the survey, the highest participation was observed between ages 23-24 and the lowest participation was observed in the 19-20 age group. In contrast, for the item 33(The teaching is one of the profession whose conscientious dimension is important), the lowest level of attendance was observed

in age group 23-24. Item 27 was one of the items which had a lower mean attendance level compared to others. For item 27 (the teaching is a profession that wants self abnegation) the lowest level of attendance was observed in age group 23-24.

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between *daytime* and *evening education* groups in terms of attendance level for sub dimensions in the study. It is possible to say that there is no statistically significant difference between two groups. In other words, education type has no effect on participation levels of *value* and *rapport* sub dimensions. However, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between daytime and evening education by the mean attendance level of sub dimension *liking*. For the sub dimension *liking*, in the daytime education group, the average level, is higher than in evening education group.

## 5. Conclusions

This study has been conducted in order to identify the attitudes of the students of English language and literature department towards the teaching profession. At the end of the analysis it can be said that there is no significant difference between men and women except one item. It was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the age groups by the mean attendance level of sub dimension *value*. Especially in the 19-20 age group, the average level is higher than in older age groups. As for Education type variable, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between daytime and evening education by the mean attendance level of sub dimension *liking*. The average level *daytime education group* is higher than *evening education group*.

In this respect in a study by Babanoğlu & Yardımcı (2017) shows that teachers perceive professional development topics positively. Besides, private school EFL teachers seem more interested in some principles of professional development than state school EFL teachers in teaching. Gender factor has an effect to some extent on teachers' awareness of professional development in favour of female EFL teachers. However age factor is not a decisive item on their perceptions. Also the literature indicates that younger learners have more positive self-perceptions and higher motivation than older learners (Burden, 1998, 2012; Cain & Bracken, 1994, cited in Erten, 2015). Taner & Karaman(2013) in their research suggested the need for language teacher education research focusing on matters such as *collobaration*, *professionalism*, *motivation* and *culture*.

Teacher identity is not a finished product at the end of the teacher training process but university education is an important phase of the identity development process. The

identity awareness that begins at the early childhood stages and is shaped by the pre-university school life and social environment as well as the attitudes and beliefs concerning teaching will gain consistency throughout the university education process and be directive in the development during professional career.

Teacher training programme is an important turning point in the formation of teacher identity. Identity formation is a process of constructing practical knowledge and this process is one of personal and collective integration of what are considered relevant to education (Beijaard et al., 2004). Some teacher training programmes, in their aim of relaying to teacher candidates what a teacher does regularly, offer courses suitable to this purpose. However, the development of teacher identity usually arises not as a result of the fundamental aim of the teaching programme but as a by-product (Lamote and Engels, 2010).

In this process, it is important for instructors to give importance to the beliefs and life experiences of teacher candidates in the applications they carry out and during classes along with making the beliefs and experiences of teacher candidates a part of the programme. Otherwise, graduates who are equipped with knowledge and skill but whose emotional investment with regard to the profession is low and who are not open to new ideas.

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## Appendix. *The Teaching Profession Attitude Scale*

Please write down your evaluations regarding the statements provided below in bullet points as numbers and into parentheses.

- (1) I completely agree      (2) I mostly agree.      (3) I partly agree  
(4). I mostly disagree      (5) I completely disagree

1. The most ideal occupation is teaching for me.
2. I can teach during lifetime.
3. It does not give me any pleasure to do activities related to my occupation.
4. The teaching is a passion for me.
5. According to me, teaching has not any attractive side.
6. I believe that I will more connect to this occupation as my increasing experience in teaching profession.

7. I believe that this profession will bring most of things to me.
8. I do not change anything, I am going to receive spiritual satisfaction from teaching.
9. Nobody can detain me from doing this occupation.
10. I do not think teaching is a suitable profession for my personality.
11. I choose this profession knowingly and willingly.
12. I believe that my pleasure in teaching will cause to forget all the difficulties in this profession.
13. I do not love teaching profession.
14. I choose this occupation because I like to teach something to people.
15. If I am asked to choose a new occupation from me, I will choose teaching undoubtedly.
16. I do not think I will always be excited about learning and teaching in this profession.
17. I work hard to be successful in this profession in the future.
18. I do not think the teaching profession neither financially nor spiritually satisfies to me.
19. I believe that I will do the teaching profession thoroughly.
20. Because of I am tired of lessons and teachers, the teaching is the last of the professions I will do.
21. The teaching is a profession that requires skills as well as knowledge.
22. The teaching is a profession where sharing is most intense.
23. I can think of doing this profession if I remain in a very difficult situation.
24. I am unhappy when I think I will be a teacher.
25. As I learn this profession, I understand better its seriousness.
26. If I find a better occupation, I will not do that for a moment.
27. The teaching is a profession that wants self abnegation.
28. The teaching is an honourable profession.
29. I am afraid to start a suffering profession as a teacher.
30. The teaching profession is like a drug that will save sick societies.
31. The idea of self renewal makes me think about doing this occupation.
32. The teaching profession that is so worn and it cannot be corrected again.
33. The teaching is one of the profession whose conscientious dimension is important.
34. Being in a continuous class irritates to me.
35. The teaching is a profession that requires a lot of patience.

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