

Constructing and Reconstructing Teachers' Professional Identity in a Professional Community of Practice: The Role of Collaborative Reflective Practice

MOHAMMAD HOSSEIN AREFIAN

Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Imam Khomeini International University, Iran

Author email: arefian.m@yahoo.com

Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 15 Aug 2023 Last revised: 5 Aug 2026 Accepted: 26 Aug 2026 Available online: 29 Aug 2026 Keywords: Collaborative reflective practice Professional identity Community of practice EFL teachers Professional development	<i>Teachers' reflections and professional identity (PI) are vital constructs for their professional development. As teachers could reflect to formulate, shape, and reshape PI, collaborative reflective practice (CRP) can add more benefits to influence teachers' PI. Therefore, this study explored how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' involvement in CRP influenced their PI development in a community of practice (CoP). Hence, 17 Iranian EFL teachers were selected conveniently to be explored through a qualitative method. The findings illustrated that CRP enhanced EFL teachers' confidence, motivation, and autonomy. Professionally, CRP enabled teachers to observe and reflect upon their practices, beliefs, and identities in a dynamic manner. Collaborative reflection within the CoP prompted novel changes and adaptations in teachers' personal and professional stances, awareness, and identity. The teachers' professional identities were gradually modified and adapted through CRP in the CoP. The result of this study can influence pre-service teacher education programs and teachers' in-service workshops to train teachers with CRP to enhance their PIs.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Reflection is a deliberate, cognitive, and dynamic process that can be efficiently used in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of routine instructional practices. Through reflective practice, educators dynamically engage with the theories and concepts attained throughout their teacher education programs. This engagement empowers them to critically examine, construct, and reconstruct their recognized beliefs, thus nurturing continuous professional development (Farrell, 2019a). Since reflective practice involves exploring one's own practices, attitudes, and values, English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers can learn to reach self-awareness (Farrell, 2019b). Therefore, EFL teachers can use reflective practices to transform abstract theories and implicit knowledge into concrete practical skills (Arefian & Meihami, 2023). On the other hand, teachers can support their observable classroom practices logically and theoretically by reflecting on their instructional knowledge. Besides reflective practices, EFL teachers can collaborate with their colleagues and peers within a supportive network,

leading to improvement of their collegiality and co-constructions of knowledge (Richards & Lockhard, 1994). Consequently, EFL teachers can move from individual reflections to social and collective reflections for deeper and more meaningful learning (Yee et al., 2022).

Collaboration enhances EFL teachers' reflection by fostering collegiality, dynamic interaction, and collective knowledge generation (Sutton & Shouse, 2016). This has encouraged a move toward collaborative reflective practice (CRP) in teacher education (Arefian et al., 2026), wherein teachers plan, act, observe, and reflect within communities of practice (CoPs) (Cole et al., 2018). CRP enables teachers to improve teaching quality, connect individual and shared experiences (Ribers et al., 2024), and develop skills, attitudes, and knowledge. It also promotes critical thinking, teacher agency, and the sharing of values and practices (Shal et al., 2024). Through such collective critical reflection, teachers reconstruct their frames of reference, thereby shaping their professional identities.

Norton (2013) pointed out that identity means the way a person recognizes his or her connection to the environment and perceives upcoming opportunities and possibilities. Identity can be transformed and formed dynamically and unpredictably over time and across contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) through negotiating, constructing, and reconstructing meaning (Barkhuizen, 2017). Hence, reflection and collaboration are perceived as sources of reformulation of teachers' professional identity (PI) (Korthagen, 2004). As Beijard et al. (2004) state, for teachers, "it is impossible to speak about the 'self' when there is no reflection." And, it becomes possible "to integrate what is socially relevant into their images of themselves as teachers" (p. 114). Although various researchers have studied the significance of reflection in creating and modifying teachers' PI, further studies are needed on how EFL teachers' involvement in CRP influences their PI development (Izadinia, 2013). Thus, this study aims to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers perceive the role of their engagement with CRP in enhancing their PI within a case study context.

Collaborative reflective practice

Reflective practice has served as a valuable professional tool across various professions, particularly in education. Through this systematic and holistic approach, teachers can develop their teaching competencies and cultivate essential professional skills (Farrell, 2019a). Dewey (1933, p. 9) presented that reflection requires "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads." In this case, the decisions made by teachers become systematic rather than intuitive. Teachers can mindfully and systematically monitor, observe, think of, and reflect on their teaching experiences, practices, and other related instructional factors to enhance students' learning and teaching quality consciously. Teachers can employ various reflective tools, including reflective journals, self-assessment, observation, peer interaction, lesson study, action research, and collaborative reflection (Arefian, 2022). Thus, reflective practitioners can draw on multiple resources to engage in this mode of inquiry, such as personal and individual cognitive frame of experiences, meanings, and interpretations and social and interpersonal relationships teachers make with others through reflective dialogues. Given the dual focus on cognition and collaboration inherent in CRPs (Arefian et al.,

2024), Wright (2010, p. 267), accordingly, stated that one aim of CRP is to engage reflective teachers in a process with socio-cognitive demands to introspect and collaborate with others, and which acknowledges previous learning and life experience as a starting point for new learning.”

EFL teachers conducting CRP in a collegial setting can plan, act, observe, and reflect collaboratively in a CoP (Cole et al., 2018). Through this process, they can identify problems and solutions collectively, observe others’ practices, share diverse perspectives, and develop strategies for collective growth. Moreover, CRP provides collective scaffolding and support, fosters awareness of beliefs and practices, and enables negotiation of meanings with others (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017; Yang et al., 2022). As meanings and concepts are shared and transformed socially, collaborative reflection can examine experiences and reconstruct existing frames of reference (Barkhuizen, 2017). This supportive environment enhances EFL teachers’ professional stance and identity by helping them understand both their own and others’ perspectives (Korthagen, 2004). Since teachers’ PI is continually informed, formed, and reformed through interaction with others (Cooper & Olson, 1996, p. 80), this study sought to explore the role of CRP in shaping and reshaping teachers’ PI in a CoP.

Professional identity

A primary aim of reflective practice is to strengthen teachers’ sense of agency and PI (Rogers, 2002). Since reflection can occur both individually and collectively, knowledge and understanding can move from the social and interpersonal domain to an intrapersonal and intrapsychological cognitive and emotional realm. Individuals’ internal thoughts, emotions, and beliefs can shape and affect their external environment (Valsiner, 1989). This cognitive structuring and restructuring resulting from internal and external factors can determine the frames of reference for identity formation. Accordingly, Norton (2013) defined identity as ‘the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future’ (as cited in Norton, 2017, p. 81). PI encompasses teachers’ self-concept and others’ perceptions of them, which can vary and be modified across time and contexts (Barkhuizen, 2017; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Varghese et al., 2005). Self-awareness, sense of agency, and reflection are intrinsically linked to PI, supported by professional relationships in a participatory environment where individuals negotiate practices, engage in professional discourse, and gain responsibility (Wenger, 1998).

Independence and autonomy in influencing social conditions are additional advantages of teachers’ agency. In CRP, individuals engage in internal conversations to make sense of experiences with greater agency, both actively and reflectively (Simpson, 2010). Self-awareness, agency, and reflection are associated with PI and are supported by professional relationships in a participatory, collaborative environment where individuals negotiate practices, engage in professional discourse, exercise professional judgment, and gain responsibility (Wenger, 1998). The shift from autobiographical self-reflection to learning from colleagues enables interactive construction and reconstruction of PI (Mann & Walsh, 2013; Rogers, 2002). This approach activates collegial work, enabling teachers to gain peer respect and be recognized

as knowledgeable and valued professionals. So, teachers can form groups and teams to interpret experiences and practices socially and co-constructively in shared, meaningful activities (Simpson, 2010). These findings highlight the need to create a collaborative reflective atmosphere in CoPs to construct and reconstruct PI (Trent, 2010).

Community of practice

The significance of reflective practice within participatory CoPs as a form of continuous professional development has been partially examined in recent years (Arefian et al., 2024). The notion of CoP illuminates the socialization of reflective practice. In a CoP, teachers are collaboratively and interactively engaged in collectively negotiating their experiences and jointly exploring new interpretations and meanings (Wenger, 1998). Identity can be affected and constructed through belonging to a social community via engagement, imagination, and alignment (Wenger, 2000). Engagement involves understanding how we cooperate with others, what we can do, and how others respond to our actions. Imagination implies self-concept and social image. Alignment refers to knowing how intra- and inter-personal activities align with contextual and external processes. In a CoP, EFL teachers are actively engaged, imaginative, and aligned to share experiences and knowledge of actions and meaning beyond practices in a broader collaborative network (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

PI concerns individuals' self-perception and how others perceive them in a professional context (Neary, 2014). This yields meanings that are cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally represented to confirm identities (Burke & Stets, 2009). These meanings, constructed experientially and socially in a CoP, can form teachers' PIs (Galliher et al., 2017). Reflection can become collaborative, cognitive, and meta-cognitive in a CoP (Esfandiari & Arefian, 2024). A CoP can offer numerous benefits for CRPs and PIs, including sharing beliefs and experiences, sharing collective responsibility for learning, collaborating for learning, reflecting and inquiring inclusively, participating openly, changing frames of reference, trusting and respecting peers, and making sense of practice, beliefs, and identity. A CoP can affect teachers' PI through reflection (McArdle & Coutts, 2003), and teachers who participate in a CoP can formulate and re-formulate their identity (Nguyen & Loughland, 2017). This study aims to investigate how EFL teachers' involvement in CRP can influence their PI in a CoP. The following research question guides the investigation.

How do Iranian EFL teachers perceive the role of their involvement in CRP on their PI within a case study context?

METHOD

Design

This study includes a qualitative case study design to explore the experiences, beliefs, and practices of Iranian EFL teachers regarding the role of CRP on EFL teachers' PI. According to Stake (1995), a case study is characterized by its focus on "a research question, a puzzlement,

a need for general understanding, and a belief that insights can be gained through the detailed examination of a specific case” (p. 3). In this context, the case study design is particularly suited to explore the complex dynamics and nuances of the participants’ experiences within their unique educational and cultural settings. By focusing on the teachers’ reflective and collaborative experiences, the study wants to investigate the nuances of how CRP enhances their PIs. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how contextual factors, including the educational environment and cultural background, shape the participants’ behavioral, mental, and attitudinal responses. The goal is to provide a rich, narrative account of these changes, aligning with Ary et al. (2010), who emphasize the importance of capturing the complexities of participants’ experiences in qualitative research.

Participants and setting

To gain enriched, saturated, contextualized, and novel data through the lens of a qualitative case study, in this study, seventeen (ten male and seven female participants) Iranian English language teachers were selected from a private language institute in Tehran, Iran. They were selected through convenience sampling, as they were accessible, approachable, and motivated to participate (Ary et al., 2010). They were aged from 22 to 48 ($M = 26$). Eight teachers were novices who had between two to five years of experience. Five teachers’ experience ranged from five to ten. Moreover, four experienced teachers had ten to twenty-five years of experience. Almost all teachers (90%) majored in English language teaching, English literature, and language translation and interpretation. Only some of them (10%) studied different majors, including engineering or medicine. They hold B.A. (60%), M.A. (35%), and Ph.D. (5%) from the public (65%) and private (35%) universities. Their level of English is examined annually by a standardized test, such as IELTS or TOEFL, and they were B2 (40%) and C1 (60%) associated with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

The institute is in a local setting and usually hires teachers from its graduated students. After completing advanced language courses, students can enroll in intensive teacher training programs, observe classes, and complete demo sessions and examinations to qualify as teachers. There are 150 teachers (one hundred male and fifty female) in the institute who work full-time (60%) and part-time (40%). Teachers start their careers by teaching young learners and elementary levels, and after gaining more experience, they can teach adults and upper levels. Similarly, there are some knowledge and language tests to pass before having a raise. Teachers must observe different classes and write a report annually to develop professionally. What is more, they have workshops, meetings, and reflective sessions during their academic year. Sometimes they have team teaching, peer coaching, and critical friendship to develop micro- and macro-skills. There are nine terms each year, and each term takes around five weeks with sixteen sessions in total (three sessions in a week). In a year, some teachers leave or are discharged, and other teachers come newly to the institute.

Data collection

First, the teachers were invited to participate voluntarily in the current study. An overview of the procedures and benefits was offered for them to decide to attend. Therefore, a consent

form was given to express the preparation and challenges, know their willingness, and respect them (Ary et al., 2010). After receiving their acceptance, the teachers were given three workshops (each for one hour) by the researcher and supervisor. The workshops were about conducting CR, forming a CoP, and understanding the significance of the teachers' PI. The processes, merits, demerits, aims, procedures, and applications were discussed extensively for three sessions, each of which took an hour. Thus, participants attended three one-hour workshops introducing CRP, CoP dynamics, and PI. Teachers then self-selected into five CoP groups (G1–G5) based on shared teaching contexts and interpersonal rapport, ensuring organic collaboration. Following the sessions, a short question-and-answer part was performed to eliminate any problems, inconsistencies, and gaps related to the implementation, procedures, and outcomes of CRP.

After that, the teachers were put into four groups (G1, G2, G3, and G4), each group including four members, and only one group (G5) was five to have both smaller and larger CoPs. The groups were based on the teachers' interests, needs, and relationships that were identified before during workshops and talking with the teachers to select their partners to work with. Since they were familiar with their colleagues, had personal and professional experience with them, did research collectively, and worked in the same environment, they were more comfortable selecting their peers and forming their groups. Each group was monitored and guided during the course by a supervisor, and each group needed to meet each other at the end of each week for three weeks for an hour and reflect collectively on the teaching taken actions, adopted roles, behavior, performed attitude, perceived identities, and given beliefs since experience, behavior, and beliefs are crucial components of PI (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). During their discussions, the supervisor hinted at and partially prompted them to induce concepts and experiences related to their PI implicitly. The prompts were related to their roles, values, self-perceptions, professional knowledge, behaviors, thoughts and ideas, cultures, attitudes, and expectations. The reflective sessions and classroom performance were video and audio-recorded. After gathering them, the researcher could listen, watch, transcribe, identify, and reflect on significant parts, meanings, and concepts.

A supervisor enhanced these sessions by means of open-ended prompts (e.g., *"How did peer feedback change your approach to classroom management this week?"*) whereas minimizing intervention to preserve authentic conversation. The whole process was a three-month cyclical course of performance, reflection, discussion, planning, performing, and observing. Only one group (G3) had not fully finished their reflective sessions and were provided with two weeks more to complete. The researcher transcribed their perceptions as was stated during reflections and observed how CRPs affect their attitude, behavior, and PI during their teaching. Every teacher was recorded twice during instruction (45–60 minutes per session). Observations concentrated on instructional alignment with reflective insights, including shifts in teacher-student collaboration or lesson design. Moreover, an unstructured interview at the end of three months was utilized for forty-five minutes to gather saturated and dense data from teachers' perceptions of the effect of experiencing CRPs in a CoP on their PI.

Data analysis

The recorded data gained from collaborative reflective sessions, observations, and interviews were listened to, observed, and reflected on to transcribe crucial parts, meanings, and concepts in detail by the researcher. A Ph.D. holder in English language teaching double-checked the transcripts to solve minor problems related to the translation. Since the result showed 90% inter-rater reliability, further actions were taken to enhance the agreement. We had an inductive thematic analysis (ITA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to analyze the data gathered through collaborations, reflections, and observations in this study. Inductive thematic analysis can be a data-driven and bottom-up way of analyzing data through thematic analysis in which themes and patterns are recognized and induced without fixed and predetermined frameworks. The thematic analysis was used to highlight the excerpts, categories, themes, and theories (Ary et al., 2010; Dornyei, 2007). Hence, the researcher read and re-read the data to find the general themes and put sub-themes under a more general category. Finally, the theory can be realized by revising themes and categories. The developing theoretical framework from this inductive thematic analysis is a situated, sociocultural model of PI formation through CRP within a CoP. This model, grounded in the data, presents that EFL teachers' PI is not a fixed, individual attribute but a dynamic, socially mediated construct that is dynamically constructed and reconstructed through collaborative reflection with peers. Particularly, the model involves four interconnected dimensions: (a) **personal-affective development** (enhanced confidence, motivation, autonomy, and reduced anxiety), (b) **professional-cognitive growth** (heightened self-awareness, noticing skills, and critical evaluation of practices), (c) **social-collaborative engagement** (collective scaffolding, shared meaning-making, and negotiation of roles through peer feedback), and (d) **adaptive identity reconstruction** (flexible adoption of new teaching roles, modification of beliefs, and alignment of personal values with professional expectations). This framework extends earlier conceptions of identity as mainly individual (e.g., Farrell, 2019a) by showing how CRP situated within a CoP, creates the conditions for identity to be co-constructed, contested, and reformulated through continuous dialogue and mutual practice (cf. Barkhuizen, 2017; Wenger, 1998). The theory thus contributes a context-sensitive understanding of how Iranian EFL teachers, working within a specific institutional culture, navigate the interplay between personal agency and collective professional discourse to shape and reshape their professional selves. An expert in coding rechecked the final product to check the quotations, categories, and themes and reach more agreement with the researcher. Further attempts were made to enhance the reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS

CRP in a supportive CoP

Reflective practice became a highly effective source of teachers' professional development. As stated: "*Reflection helped me to develop my professional, instructional, and subject-matter knowledge* (T11)." CRP has personal, mental, emotional, and professional benefits that could affect EFL teachers. Professionally, CRP enhanced reflection by enabling observation of

others' practices, learning from peers, critically evaluating one's own and colleagues' actions, and building a CoP. As stated:

CRPs made me a stronger and more professional teacher by enhancing and improving my abilities, skills, and knowledge, learning to identify and solve problems, and boosting the collegiality among us. (T7)

Teachers could possess a cognitive and social strategy to reflect on their practices individually and with others and take a critical and collective perspective, as mentioned:

Collaboration along with reflection informed how to reach a deeper level of awareness by listening to peers' perspectives, understanding diverse viewpoints, and reforming my teaching. (T5)

Additionally, they could sharpen their individualistic and collective noticing skills, make changes, evaluate and predict experiences systematically and holistically, and adapt independently and jointly, as said:

Since I could become aware of my practices, actions, and beliefs behind them, I adopted valuable and practical strategies, changed my practices, and evaluated the results to meet the needs of my class. (T15)

Furthermore, teachers could reach self-understanding and self-awareness through this mode of reflection (Arefian, 2022), since they had collective noticing, observation, and reflection on their personal, social, and cognitive factors, plan their upcoming practices, and make decisions to practice logically and wisely.

Sub-theme 1. Enhancing scaffolding and noticing

The reflective practice helped me know what my weak points and strong points are to work on them before and after my practices. CRP not only assisted individuals but also created a learning atmosphere where scaffolding can occur regularly. (T10)

Personally, teachers became more motivated, confident, and autonomous, taking risks to change their roles and practices while decreasing anxiety. T16 presented:

I could receive attention from my colleagues and peers as they listened to my suggestion. I was more motivated to change my teaching practice by trying something new and novel since I received support and guidance.

During CRP, teachers' negative emotions decreased while positive feelings increased. Since teachers experienced a supportive and collaborative professional learning environment, they freely expressed their worries and concerns, took emotional advice to regulate their emotions, and gained confidence. They increased their confidence by embracing challenges, taking risks, and developing individually and socially. Moreover, they could systematically and

interactively adapt their personal and social roles with a growth mindset, adopt different identities openly, and change their attitudes holistically and critically. This scaffolding process enhanced positive attitudes by generating a safe learning environment for experimentation, where teachers felt respected when their ideas were enacted and developed by means of collective feedback—a dynamic presented to develop motivation and self-efficacy in a CoP (Yang et al., 2022)

Sub-theme 2. Teachers with different identities

I could learn to use different methods and techniques without worrying about being unsuccessful and took more ownership of my own roles and practices. Therefore, I saw development in my personal features and roles and learned to act as a facilitator, monitor, director, feedback provider, and knowledge provider. (T1)

This mode could consolidate and reshape teachers' personal features through the socio-affective and cognitive benefits provided by this mode of inquiry. Given that the nature of CRP encompasses collaborations and reflections with others, the community was shaped to reflect, plan, and perform cyclically and constructively. Moreover, teachers' theoretical, practical, and social knowledge were developed continuously. As indicated:

The collaborative process assisted me in reconstructing my professional identity. I began perceiving myself not just as an individual teacher but as part of a CoP where we collectively shaped our instructional philosophies and classroom approaches. Furthermore, teachers' theoretical, practical, and social knowledge fostered continuously by means of this incorporated process of mutual reflection and practice. (T4)

Sources of directing and redirecting own PI

PI is defined as a professional sense of who teachers are and what they do (Norton, 2013). PI was adopted from teachers' understanding of their self-image, stance, and agency (Rogers, 2002). Different teachers illustrated that they could possess a self-directed understanding by applying CRPs since they could perform tasks and reflect on their personal, social, and cognitive processes of themselves, students, and other teachers. *"To me, knowing my emotions, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs was the most significant benefit of CRP. (T13)"* Besides, they shared their understandings, roles, and responsibilities of themselves and others with their colleagues collectively, which could adapt their perspectives regarding their identities in different settings.

Sub-theme 3. Fostering self-awareness dynamically

The process helped me develop my identity professionally by organizing my tasks, having a self-concept and self-image, reflecting on and building upon my stance, beliefs, and practices, and creating a path for personal and professional development. (T3)

Likewise, teachers reflected on practices with others, collaborated and communicated regularly with colleagues, students, and others, received feedback and directions from peers, and put personal identity into the profession (Barkhuizen, 2017; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Norton, 2017). As noticed by T7:

I could enhance my personal values and expectations of my teaching roles by becoming more aware of myself and my surroundings. This experience enabled me to engage in self-reflection during individual reflection and to consider the perspectives of others during collaborative practice, thereby fostering my alignment with the community.

The PI of teachers enjoyed a never-ending process due to various factors that were involved in their CRPs, as they could continuously observe practices and collaborate with others, gain constructive feedback and recommendations on practices, attitudes, and personality, direct and indirect their roles cooperatively, and welcome numerous risk-taking opportunities to find our best version of self.

In my opinion, PI means how my personal knowledge and practices match the professional setting, actions, and behaviors. My PI refers to my academic and occupational practices, beliefs, and emotions that shape my practices. Thus, if it is changed, the whole practice is affected because teachers' actions are the product of PI. (T6)

Experiences, attitudes, beliefs in PI

Experience, attitude, and beliefs appeared as interconnected factors vigorously influencing teachers' PI by means of CRP in a CoP. Although teachers' classroom actions made initial experiences, the collaborative reflection process renovated these experiences into meaningful professional development. As T4 described:

I could see how each decision and action I made impacted my social climate and personal feelings by implementing CRP.

This underscores how CRP generated a recursive cycle where: Experiences informed attitudes, attitudes gradually reshaped beliefs, and revised beliefs then influenced future experiences. Instead of being linear, this process was continuous and multidimensional - each element constantly informed the others through reflective practice. Significantly, participants highlighted that experience alone didn't guarantee development; it was the systematic reflection within their CoP that made experiences professionally appreciated. One teacher noted, "CRP helped me extract meaning from what would otherwise just be another classroom event" (T2), underlining how reflection changed routine experiences into identity-shaping moments.

Sub-theme 4. Reflecting on experiences, attitudes, and beliefs collaboratively

CRs with other teachers made experiences richer. Moreover, my attitude towards the learning and teaching process was influenced by the experiences, and it could change or establish my beliefs in consequence. (T9)

Detecting practices from their perspectives and others' opinions was one of the numerous advantages of implementing CRP in their practices. So, CRP made their experiences more observable, as observed in T12: *"I could notice my teaching practice, personal beliefs, and others' expectations more sharply through reflecting collaboratively."* They were able to reflect consciously and collaboratively and understand experiences that can be the source of knowledge, beliefs, and identity.

Sub-theme 5. Enhancing adaptability and flexibility through CRP

Firstly, I rigorously followed textbook activities, fearing deviation would confuse students. Yet, after observing peers in our CRP group use personalized warm-up tasks, I experimented with tailoring content to students' interests. When my first attempt failed, students were disengaged, the group helped me reflect and change. Now, I regularly adjust materials, like replacing generic examples with local cultural references, which has significantly developed participation. (T11)

This narrative indicates a critical identity shift from instructional rigidity to professional flexibility—a transformation mediated through CRP. The teacher's journey pursues a clear arc: initial fear of deviation, observational learning from peers, experimental risk-taking, collaborative reflection after failure, and eventual incorporation of adaptive practices. This progression represents Wenger's (1998) assertion that identity is constructed through engagement with others and imagination of alternative possibilities. Notably, the 'failed' attempt did not discourage the teacher; rather, the CoP's supportive scaffolding transformed failure into a learning opportunity (Yang et al., 2022). The ultimate change—replacing generic content with local cultural references—shows not simply technical adaptation but fundamental identity reconstruction, as the teacher moved from being a transmitter of prescribed materials to a responsive facilitator attuned to students' lived experiences.

Construction and reconstruction of teachers' PI

Teachers' CRPs in CoPs offered a channel of personal, educational, and professional development for teachers:

During my first practices, I acted like a novice teacher who transmits whatever I learned in teacher training courses mechanically. Nevertheless, after having CRs with other teachers, I observed and perceived different teachers' PIs, such as being a manager, facilitator, performer, and others. (T8)

Moving from basic pedagogical development to critical identity reconstruction is one of its significant contributions. Teachers became aware of their practices, who they are, what they do, why they act that way, and what can be the reason, result, and consequence of their practices.

Before experiencing CRP, I could not perceive this source of development; but when I reflect on who I am and what I do, I shape and reshape my practices. (T17)

In this way, the PI was developed consciously or unconsciously through different developmental and social processes. PI, to them, was a dynamic and ongoing process that could not happen overnight.

Sub-theme 6. Positive and constructive transformation

When I collaborated with other teachers to solve problems, learn from others, have honest feedback, and develop professionally, I realized that my attitude, personality, and in consequence, identity have continuously affected me positively. Besides, being an authoritative teacher, I became a facilitator. (T14)

Teachers' reflections and collaborations opened a window of opportunities for teachers to initiate changes in their practices, roles, and beliefs. This change was a gradual process of adopting, leaving, and making new meanings and references from previous experiences and understandings:

Like when I noticed others' comments on my academic discourse in class that were somehow sarcastic and ironic, so I just gradually changed my discourse to more caring. (T12)

All in all, CRP could bring teachers together positively in a CoP by reflecting, observing, evaluating, changing, and reforming. Additionally, PI was shaped and reshaped by constant external and internal guiding factors and continuous reflections on experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. However, it was challenging for some teachers as they had to work strenuously, focus on solving other novice teachers' problems, and give much time and energy. T8 presented that: *"I could not find time and energy to always think and reflect and work with my peers."*

DISCUSSION

The findings extend theoretical understanding of PI formation by indicating that CRP does not merely supplement individual reflection but fundamentally transforms it into a socially mediated process. Unlike traditional models that treat reflection as mainly cognitive (Farrell, 2019a), this study shows how collaborative meaning-making within a CoP creates conditions for identity work that is simultaneously personal and collective. Rather than traditional models of reflection that underscore individual introspection (Farrell, 2019a), CRP enhances mutual meaning-making, where teachers negotiate their identities by means

of peer collaboration, observational learning, and collaborative problem-solving. This supports Wenger's (1998) sociocultural perspective, which states that identity is vigorously constructed through engagement, imagination, and alignment within a CoP. A significant movement developing from the data is the shift from isolated reflection to socially rooted identity formation. Teachers reported enhanced self-awareness, confidence, and motivation, strengthening Norton's (2013) declaration that identity develops through interaction with the environment and imagined future possibilities. Yet, this process was not without challenges. Some teachers tried with the time and emotional labor needed for continuous collaboration, echoing Izadinia's (2013) observation that identity development is nonlinear and often fraught with tensions. These findings suggest that while CRP enables teachers to redefine their professional selves, institutional support—such as structured time for reflection—is critical to mitigate burnout and ensure long-term engagement.

This study extends beyond previous research in three significant ways. First, unlike cross-sectional studies exploring reflection or collaboration in isolation (Arefian, 2022a; Arefian & Meihami, 2023), this inspection captures the *processual* nature of identity development through a three-month cyclical design, indicating *how* PI shifts describe over time, not simply *whether* they occur. Second, this study offers empirical evidence of CRP's *dual function*—simultaneously developing teachers personally (confidence, motivation, autonomy) and professionally (noticing, critical evaluation, pedagogical flexibility)—while earlier work has typically highlighted one dimension over the other (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Third, the findings illustrate the *emotional scaffolding* process within CRP, documenting how collaborative reflection transforms teacher anxiety and fear into professional agency and risk-taking—an underexplored mechanism in the literature. This emotional dimension, situated within Iran's hierarchical educational environment, provides a non-Western perspective that addresses calls for more varied voices in teacher identity research (Barkhuizen, 2017; Yazan, 2018).

The study also underscores the cultural and contextual details of CRP in Iranian EFL settings, where hierarchical educational structures often restrict teacher autonomy. Regardless of this, CRP offered a subversive space for teachers to co-construct knowledge instead of passively following top-down mandates. This resonates with Yazan's (2018) research in Turkey, where peer observations and reflective discussions helped teachers reclaim professional voice and authority. Such parallels highlight CRP's potential to disturb traditional power dynamics in similar educational contexts, providing a pathway for teacher-driven professional development. Theoretically, the study links reflective practice literature (Barkhuizen, 2017; Korthagen, 2004) with sociocultural theories of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Whereas previous research highlights individual reflection as identity work, this study develops the conversation by demonstrating how collaborative scaffolding (Yang et al., 2022) nurtures cognitive and emotional shifts in PI. For example, teachers' ability to analytically adapt their practices by means of peer feedback aligns with diverse arguments that agency and identity are co-constituted through professional relationships. Practically, the findings advocate for embedding structured CRP within teacher education programs, underscoring the need for institutional support—involving protected time for collaboration and mentorship frameworks—to sustain long-term engagement. For policymakers and teacher educators,

these insights underline the significance of reimagining professional development as a collective endeavor that honors the interplay between individual growth and community belonging. By documenting both the affective mechanisms and contextual tensions of CRP in an Iranian setting, this study contributes a culturally-situated perspective that complements and extends mainly Western-based teacher identity research.

CONCLUSION

Whereas individual reflection is known to support teacher development, less research has concentrated on CRP and its role in shaping PI. This study addresses that gap by qualitatively investigating how 17 Iranian EFL teachers' participation in CRP within a CoP influenced their PI. The findings indicate that CRP helped teachers reconstruct their PI through ongoing collaboration. It empowered personal growth, such as increased confidence and autonomy, and professional development, including improved self-awareness and teaching practices. This process created a dynamic connection between individual development and a sense of community. For future research, this study could be replicated in other contexts to explore diverse perspectives. The main limitations were the use of convenient sampling and the single research site. Future studies could use more purposive sampling, include participants from different settings, or employ quantitative methods with larger samples to further examine the link between CRP and PI.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, participants were chosen through convenient sampling from a single private language institute in Tehran, Iran. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to other settings, including public schools, universities, or teachers in different geographical regions. Future research could employ purposive sampling to involve teachers from diverse institutional and cultural settings.

Second, the study did not explore or compare results based on gender. While the sample involved both male ($n = 10$) and female ($n = 7$) participants, no systematic analysis was implemented to investigate whether male and female teachers experienced CRP differently or whether their PI development followed distinct patterns. This represents a notable gap, as gender may influence collaborative dynamics, reflective practices, and identity construction in professional settings. Upcoming studies should explicitly explore gender-related differences to offer a more nuanced understanding of how CRP affects PI across diverse teacher populations.

Third, the study focused on self-reported data from reflections, observations, and interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Participants may have presented themselves in ways they perceived as promising. Future research could integrate additional data sources, including student evaluations or external classroom observations, to triangulate findings. Fourth, the duration of the study was relatively short (three months). Although this allowed for observation of initial shifts in PI, it may not capture longer-term identity changes.

Longitudinal studies would be valuable to explore how CRP sustains or transforms PI over extended periods.

Lastly, the presence of a supervisor throughout reflective sessions may have influenced the nature and depth of discussions. While the supervisor used only open-ended prompts, participants might have moderated their contributions. Future studies could explore more peer-facilitated CRP models with minimal external oversight. Addressing these limitations in future research would reinforce the evidence base for the role of CRP in teacher PI development and improve the applicability of findings across different educational contexts and teacher demographics.

THE AUTHOR

Mohammad Hossein Arefian is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics at the Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran. He has published many articles in national and international journals. His main research interests include teacher education, reflective practice, teachers' psychology, action research, and assessment.

arefian.m@yahoo.com

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