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Turkish English Teachers' Professional Teacher Self as One of the Possible Selves

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Abstract

This study reports the results of a study exploring Turkish English teachers' professional self in relation to teacher education. The study also examines the relationship between the participants' educational background, teaching experience and their professional self. The study was carried out in Ankara, Turkey. The participants of the study were English language instructors of Hacettepe University, School of Foreign Languages. A total of 43 English instructors (females: 36 and males: 7) voluntarily participated in the study, responding to a questionnaire composed of 40 items regarding teacher professional self. The results of the Professional Self Questionnaire revealed that the rate of Turkish English teachers' professional self was very high (81%, $M=4.09$). Also, there was a significant difference in participants' professional self depending on their educational background. The results indicated that the participants' professional self did not differ significantly in relation to their teaching experience.

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1. Introduction

Professional teacher self is a relatively new concept in the field foreign language learning and teaching and it needs to be investigated in-depth. It takes its roots from the possible selves theory which has been widely researched in the literature of psychology and it started to be exploited in the field of foreign language learning and teaching in

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the latter half of the 2000s (Kubanyiova 2007, 2009). Kubanyiova introduced 'possible language teacher selves' as a construct through which she attempted to explore the development of language teachers. In this article, teacher professional self will be discussed from a perspective of teachers' own views about their possible L2 self and their professional qualities.

2. Review of relevant literature

In the teacher development, possible teacher selves play an important role. Kubanyiova (2006, 2009) comes up with a classification and underlines the existence of three main teacher selves, namely ideal teacher self, ought to language teacher self, and feared teacher language self. Ideal teacher self is represented by the teachers who should have the feeling of the identity. This possible self constitutes future images of identity goals and aspirations of the language teacher: s/he is motivated to invest effort in reducing the discrepancy between her actual and ideal teaching selves. The ideal teacher and his/her own self - image are in harmony and ideal in all respects. According to Medgyes (2001), "the ideal non-native English speaking teacher is someone who has achieved near-native proficiency in English" (p. 440).

Ought-to language teacher self is associated with the language teachers' representation of their responsibilities and obligations with regard to their work (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Kubanyiova, 2009). Unlike the ideal self, the ought self, which is mostly, based on someone else's view of their duties, obligations, and responsibilities, refers to the mental and experiential representation of the traits one believes one should, or ought to, possess (Higgins, 1987). In ought-to self, the locus of control is not totally in our hands. It is based on extrinsic expectations driven from the surrounding people, administration, inspection, institutions, and professional ethics. This is actually something like of a difference between what the fellow teachers "ought- to be doing" instead of what they are actually doing in foreign language teaching. This type of self is also related with the fact that, as Machida (2011) explains non-native language teachers tend to compare their language proficiency with native speakers' and often feel stressed if their perceived language proficiency does not seem to meet their target level. The ought-to language teacher self is based on extrinsic expectations driven from the surrounding people, administration, inspection, institutions, and professional ethics.

The fear of foreign languages in general is called 'xenoglossophobia' or 'xenolinguaphobia' (Demirezen, 2015). Feared language teacher self, which points to lack of professional foreign language self-efficacy, denotes that perceived obligations and responsibilities in relation to ideal teacher self and ought-to language teacher self are not lived up to because of inadequate vocational education and training experiences. Feared teacher self has its roots in foreign language teaching anxiety, stemming from a fear of failure. This is a self-type that is undesired in the field of foreign language learning and teaching because the teacher has inwardly a high degree of foreign language anxiety, apprehension, worry and dread and outwardly speaking in the foreign language classroom. In this self type, fossilized pronunciation and intonation are great impediments over the course of their teaching career, which make the non-native teachers appear unprofessional to the students. They suffer under the fear of negative evaluation and its many adverse effects on foreign language teachers' performance. Such teachers should undertake self-regulatory efforts for development. According to Ogilvie (1987), the feared self serves as a negative future reference in the profession, representing the unwanted facets of the self in the future. Horwitz (1996) claimed that anxiety and inferiority complexes in foreign language teachers are caused by the pursuit of an idealized level of proficiency set by a hard-to-attain native-speaker model. Feared teacher self, which is an anomaly, must be converted to professional teacher self, which can be managed via self-regulatory mechanisms.

Professional teacher self, which is proposed here as a new term, is a possible L2 self. It is related with advanced L2 acquisition and performance abilities and the necessary engagement to maintain them (Byrnes, 2012). Language teaching and learning is a life-long process and foreign language teachers are, within a dual role, both learners and teachers at the same time. Therefore, foreign language teachers are often considered as one of the best examples of successful committed advanced learners. Their identified sufficient oral proficiency, standard accent, clear and fluent pronunciation and intonation while speaking flawlessly in front of the class, and good grammar knowledge and intercultural communicative competence as indispensable characteristics of a good language teacher expected

by the students (Brown, 2014; Banno, 2003; Harmer, 1998; Hadley & Yoshioka-Hadley, 1996; Sercu, 2005; Shimizu, 1995). Professional teacher self is built up throughout the entirety of teachers' teaching career. Since foreign language teaching is one of the most complicated jobs today, and the merits of teachers with professional self, who have pivotal role in the process of education, are specifically made up of amalgamation of hundreds of qualities that allow them do their job effectively. Professional language teacher self entails ideal language teacher self and ought-to language teacher self, but not the feared language teacher self. Two main traits of them are being knowledgeable and confident. Professional teacher self necessitates at least near native-like efficiency in English with accurate, intelligible, and fluent pronunciation and intonation. Theoretically, no non-native teacher of English will ever become totally ideal and perfect. With all these professional qualities required, it is no wonder that it is hard to find great teachers possessing these features related with ought self. Professional self must be the primary drive in such teachers.

3. Methodology

3. 1. Setting and participants

The study was carried out in October 2015 in a major state university of Turkey, in Ankara. The participants of the study were English language instructors of Hacettepe University, School of Foreign Languages. A total of 43 English instructors (females: 36 and males: 7) voluntarily participated in the study, responding to a questionnaire composed of 40 items regarding teacher professional self. The majority of participants had either Bachelor of Arts or Master of Arts degrees (BA graduates: 19 and MA graduates: 20). Only 4 of them had their Doctor of Philosophy degrees. The teaching experience of the participants varied from 0-3 years to 10 and more years. While the majority of the participants had teaching experience of at least 10 or over years, the minority had 0-3-year, 3-6-year or 6-10-year of teaching experience.

3. 2. Research Design

This study was conducted with quantitative research design using a survey methodology to collect data about the participants' professional self. For a cross-sectional study conducted at one point in time, this design is useful to employ when researchers try to gather information quickly and economically (Creswell, 2012). The data about participants' educational background and teaching experience were also gathered in the first section of the questionnaire.

3. 3. Research Questions

In order to explore the rate of Turkish EFL teachers' professional self, their opinions about professional self and to find out whether there is a relationship between their professional self and their teaching experience and educational background, four research questions were formulated:

1. What is the rate of Turkish English teachers' professional self?
2. What are the opinions of Turkish English teachers about "professional self" in terms of
 - teacher preparedness in terms of knowledgeability
 - personal and professional development
 - applicability of already obtained knowledge
 - assessment and feedback?
3. Do Turkish English teachers' views of their professional self change depending on their educational background?
4. Does the teaching experience have an impact on Turkish English teachers' views of their professional self?

3. 2. Research Instruments

The present study employed Professional Teacher Self Questionnaire to search teacher professional self as one of the possible selves. The researchers followed 4 steps while constructing the questionnaire:

- First, the researcher and the supervisor of the study did brief research about the self-concept in the literature. Then they created a working definition of “teacher professional self”.
- They constituted four domains of teacher professional self: teacher preparedness in terms of knowledgeability, personal and professional development, applicability of already obtained knowledge and assessment and feedback.
- Following this step, the researcher and the supervisor benefitted from TESOL Code of Ethics (Dickey, 2006), the TESOL Decrees (Dickey, 2006) and Cambridge Framework of Teacher competencies and composed the items regarding teacher professional self.
- Before the pilot study, three experts in the field checked the items in the proposed questionnaire and changed some of them in line with the principles of questionnaire design. A native speaker from the field also did a proofreading of the questionnaire and made some changes in the questionnaire to make it sound natural.

Between October 21 and 24, 2015, a pilot study was carried out with 20 English teachers from different universities in Turkey. The participants of the study answered Professional Teacher Self Questionnaire composed of 40 items. In these items, a five-point Likert scale with values ranging from “1= strongly disagree” to “5= strongly agree” was used. The statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22, a comprehensive computer program used to help researchers perform statistical analysis quickly and accurately. The items in the questionnaire were examined for reliability and the Cronbach’s alpha of reliability was measured at .86. This result showed that Teacher Professional Self Questionnaire was highly reliable because conventionally it is interpreted that if the Cronbach’s alpha is between the scales below, the instrument is labelled as follows:

If the Alpha (α) is between

- $0.00 \leq \alpha < 0.40$, the instrument is not reliable.
- $0.40 \leq \alpha < 0.60$, the instrument has a low reliability.
- $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$, the instrument is reliable.
- $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$, the instrument is highly reliable. (Kalaycı, 2005, p.405)

On October 27, 2015, the study was carried out with 43 English instructors from School of Foreign Languages, Hacettepe University.

4. Results

The present study sought to investigate the rate of Turkish EFL teachers’ professional self, their opinions about professional self and to find out whether there is a relationship between their professional self and teaching experience, and educational background. This section presents the results of the study in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive analyses, one-way between groups analyses (ANOVA), Post-Hoc comparisons, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and Independent samples T-tests were performed.

4.1. RQ 1. What is the rate of Turkish English teachers’ professional self?

Initially, the percentage analyses of the teacher professional self were done for the first research question. The results revealed that the rate of Turkish English teachers was 81 %. The rates of four different domains were also calculated. The results are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. The overall professional self rate of Turkish English teachers.

| Self rate | N | Percent |
|---|----|---------|
| Turkish English teachers' professional self | 43 | 81 % |
| Preparedness in terms of knowledgeability | 43 | 78 % |
| Personal and professional development | 43 | 83 % |
| Applicability of already obtained knowledge | 43 | 82 % |
| Assessment and feedback | 43 | 82 % |

4.2. RQ 2. What are the opinions of Turkish English teachers about "professional self" in terms of

- *teacher preparedness in terms of knowledgeability*
- *personal and professional development*
- *applicability of already obtained knowledge*
- *assessment and feedback?*

In order to answer the second research question, overall and categorical means for factors of teacher professional self were calculated. The findings are revealed in Table 2:

Table 2. The overall and categorical means for factors of teacher professional self.

| Factors | N | Mean | SD |
|---|----|-------|------|
| Preparedness in terms of k knowledgeability | 8 | 3.918 | .618 |
| Personal and professional development | 9 | 4.149 | .512 |
| Applicability of already obtained knowledge | 13 | 4.146 | .451 |
| Assessment and feedback | 10 | 4.100 | .501 |
| TOTAL | 40 | 4.091 | .435 |

Table 2 illustrates the opinions of Turkish English teachers about their 'professional self' in general and with regard to four different domains. As it can be inferred from this table, Turkish English teachers have a positive opinion about their 'professional self' ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .43$). The mean scores indicate that personal and professional development factor has the highest mean score ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .51$). In other words, Turkish English teachers see themselves proficient in terms of their personal and professional development. The second highest mean score was found for the applicability of already obtained knowledge, which means that the teachers find themselves good at applying what they have already obtained in terms of their knowledge in the classroom ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .45$). The responses of the teachers to the items in assessment and feedback showed that the participants have positive opinions about the way they use assessment and feedback in the language learning and teaching processes ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .50$). Lastly, the mean score of the teacher preparedness in terms of knowledgeability factor revealed that the participants find themselves sufficient in their linguistic knowledge although the obtained mean score for this domain is relatively lower than the other domains of professional teacher self questionnaire ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .61$).

4.3. RQ 3. Do Turkish English teachers' views of their professional self rate change depending on their educational background?

In order to find the participants' views of their professional self depending on their educational background, the mean values and standard deviations were calculated. When the participants' views of their professional self were analyzed depending on the three educational background groups, the results in the Table 3 were found.

Table 3. The means of Turkish English teachers’ professional self depending on their educational background.

| Educational Background | N | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------------|----|-------|------|
| Bachelor of Arts | 19 | 3.939 | .397 |
| Master of Arts | 20 | 4.137 | .407 |
| Doctor of Philosophy Degree | 4 | 4.581 | .418 |
| TOTAL | 40 | 4.091 | .435 |

The participants with Doctor of Philosophy Degree had the highest mean score with a mean value of 4.58. It can be suggested that the participants with Doctor of Philosophy Degree background find themselves very proficient in their profession. The second highest mean score was found for the participants with Master of Arts, which means that they also find themselves sufficient in their profession ($M = 4.13, SD = .40$). These findings revealed that the lowest mean score was of the participants with Bachelor of Arts, which means the participants with BA degree do not have high professional self if compared to two other background groups ($M = 3.93, SD = .39$).

A one-way between groups analysis (ANOVA) test was conducted to find out if there was a significant difference in participants’ professional self depending on their educational background. The results of the ANOVA test indicated a statistically significant difference between three educational groups participants in relation to their professional self $F(2, 40) = 4.41, p = .018, p < .05$.

Table 4. Results of the ANOVA test

Dependent variable: Professional self

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Between Groups | 1.441 | 2 | .720 | 4.418 | 0.18 |
| Within Groups | 6.523 | 40 | .163 | | |
| TOTAL | 7.964 | 42 | | | |

Post-Hoc comparisons using Fisher LSD test revealed that the participants with Doctor of Philosophy Degree showed a significantly higher professional self than those with Bachelor of Arts degree, but they did not differ significantly from those with Master of Arts degree in terms of their professional self.

4. 4. RQ 4. Does the teaching experience have an impact on Turkish English teachers’ views of their professional self?

In order to answer the fourth research question investigating the relationship between Turkish English teachers’ professional self and their teaching experience, the mean values and standard deviations were calculated. The results revealed that the participant with 3-6 years of teaching experience had the highest mean score ($M = 4.77$). The second highest mean score was found for the participants whose teaching experience was between 6 and 10 years’ interval ($M = 4.58, SD = .19$). As for the participants with 0-3 years, the mean score was 4.22 ($SD = .07$). The lowest mean score was found for the participants with 10 years and more teaching experience ($M = 4.04, SD = .42$). Below is the table of their views of professional self depending on their teaching experience.

Table 5. The means of professional self depending on Turkish English teachers’ teaching experience

| Teaching Experience | N | Mean | SD |
|---------------------|---|-------|------|
| 0-3 years | 2 | 4.225 | .070 |

| | | | |
|------------|---|-------|------|
| 3-6 years | 1 | 4.775 | - |
| 6-10 years | 2 | 4.587 | .194 |

A one-way between groups analysis (ANOVA) was run to determine whether the participants' professional self differed significantly in relation to their teaching experience. The findings revealed no significant difference, $F(25, 5) = .480, p > .05$

Table 6. Results of the ANOVA test

| Dependent variable: Professional self | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 1.095 | 3 | .365 | 2.073 | .120 |
| Within Groups | 6.868 | 39 | .176 | | |
| TOTAL | 7.964 | 42 | | | |

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study confirmed the definition of teacher professional self. The findings of this research proved that professional self as a possible L2 self is in existence (81 %). As Byrnes (2012) states professional self has strong ties with advanced L2 knowledge and skills and it requires commitment to maintain them. In line with Byrnes' (2012) claim, Turkish English teachers are aware of their dual roles, being both teachers and learners of a foreign language, and they see value in personal and professional development with the highest mean score ($M = 4.14, SD = .51$).

Conducting research in their professional area, reflecting critically on their teaching practice, appreciation of all types of observation, collaboration with colleagues and being aware of social, moral and professional responsibilities have been accepted as important parts of teacher professional self by the participants of the present study. The findings of this study have showed that there is a high correlation between the applicability of already obtained knowledge and teacher professional self, which signals the existence of a concept like professional self. As the results have proven, the applicability of already obtained knowledge produce a significant impact on teacher professional self. The more Turkish English teachers pay attention to applying the existing foreign language teaching approaches, theories, methods and techniques, creating a constructive learning environment, delivering integrated lessons, increasing and sustaining learning motivation, considering the cognitive needs of students, the higher they felt their professional self.

Although the findings of this study showed that Turkish English teacher has a considerably high professional self (81 %), there is a need to improve their preparedness in terms of knowledgeability ($M = 3.91, SD = .61$). Because professional teacher self demands at least near native-like efficiency in English with accurate, intelligible, and fluent pronunciation and intonation, Turkish English teachers need to put more effort in developing their preparedness in terms of their knowledgeability. Another conclusion that can be arrived from this study is that the education background plays a role in Turkish English teachers' professional self. The importance of lifelong professional learning and professional development comes to the stage. In fact, the existence of professional self is not enough in this world of life-long learning process. Foreign language teachers with professional self should continuously publish their research articles in international journals and should write books, book reviews, criticisms etc. in the internal arena, which signals to the existence of international teacher self and international identity. In conclusion, it is apparent that the results point to the existence of a professional self as a term, which entails ideal self and ought-to self, rejecting the feared teacher self. The percentage of teacher self-concept in this research has come up as 81 %, yet this is not enough. There must be a term like **international teacher self** that requires another separate research.

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