Professional Identity Construction of Three Teachers Based in Community of Practice in a University in Vietnam

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Abstract- The present study tries to explore three aspects concerning teacher professional identity construction and answer these questions: 1.How do university EFL teachers in Vietnam understand their professional identity? 2. How do university EFL teachers in Vietnam construct their professional identity in community of practice? The university EFL teachers who participate in the present study are from a university in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam. They are divided into three groups and are categorized as beginner teachers, teacher development and experienced teachers. According to the survey, the academic identity, teacher identity and institutional identity make up the professional identity of EFL teachers of the university, in which the community organizes where teachers work together and the teaching community. Teaching involves interaction between teachers and students of great significance in building EFL teachers' career identities. Furthermore, the results show that the collaborative and caring community helps raise awareness about the development of new teachers and emotional motivation and supports resources from organizations, colleagues and positive feedback. Extreme teachers help teachers a lot in developing integrated professional identity. Finally, some suggestions are given for university teachers, teacher educators and organizational leaders.

Index Terms- university EFL teacher in Vietnam; professional identity; community of practice; narrative inquiry

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, teachers' professional identity was under a wide attention. Miller (2011) compared some definitions of teachers' professional identity, she wrote that "identity is ... relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transforming, and transitional."

Fang and Mao (2008) did an investigation in 441 university teachers of China, and they found that the degree of professional identity is related with teacher's educational background, titles and years of teaching.

Xu and Fan (2009) discussed the dual identities of university EFL teachers and proposed that teachers' professional boundaries come from the lower social respect and university administrative culture.

Some scholars interested in how personal university EFL teacher constructed professional identity (Tsui, 2007), to explore teachers' identity formation as a process of person and institutional construction, reification and negotiation of meanings. While some researches tried to compare a group of university EFL teachers' stories who are in the same career stage in order to conclude the path of forming teachers' professional identity. For instance, Liu (2011) studied six university EFL teachers and described the trajectories of their professional identities development. He pointed out that professional identity constructed in institutional community, teacher-students community, non-college English institutional community and imagined community. And in his book, he pointed out that college English teacher have the dilemma of being a teaching-oriented craftsman or being research-oriented teacher and have the lowering ability and power in negotiation.

Based on Wenger's Community of Practice, the qualitative study explored three Vietnamese university EFL teachers' professional identity.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

Wenger (2006) defined Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. A CoP is distinguished by the presence of three dimensions: a domain that focuses identity and action; a community comprised of members, their relationships, and the trust, belonging, and reciprocity that characterize their interactions; and a practice, a repertoire of tools, methods, and skills that evolve through members' learning, use, and innovation. Wenger proposed the concept of dualities to examine the forces that create and sustain a CoP in 1998, namely, participation-reification duality, local-global duality, designed-emergent duality and identification-negotiability duality. Identification explains how individuals take ownership of collective meaning and shapes that meaning through negotiation and the power to influence action toward community goals. It is a process of building "membership" through an investment of the self, providing experiences and materials, in relations of association and differentiation. Negotiability is the degree of controlling over meaning we are invested. Identification is made possible through three modes of belonging in Wenger's

Community of Practice: engagement, imagination and alignment. But all three modes of belonging are not necessary in an individual's identification in a community. Later, Wenger (1998: 154-155) proposed five types of trajectories of learning in community of practice: peripheral trajectories, inbound trajectories, insider trajectories, boundary trajectories, outbound trajectories.

In this study, the author chose Wenger's theory for 3 reasons. First, Wenger's theory concerns about what happened on the person and how the person connected self with other things and other persons, it can explain their behavior, and shed light on person's inner world. So with Wenger's theory, we can find out how university EFL teachers identify themselves. Second, the process of identification is dynamic and shifting, Wenger provided a perfect and logical basis to explain how teachers make meaning of their experience and themselves in the negotiation with changing outside context. Moreover, the trajectories of learning proposed by Wenger also can be used to describe the path of university EFL teachers' professional development, so their path of professional identity construction also will be clear.

III.   RESEARCH METHIDOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

1.   How do the three university EFL teachers in Vietnam understand their professional identity?
2.   How do the three university EFL teachers in Vietnam construct their professional identity in community of practice?

■   *3.2 Research subjects*

The institution under investigation is a university belonging Thai Nguyen university.

The three female teachers as the research subjects all come from there, they studied in this university as undergraduate students of English major when they were young, and they chose to be an EFL teacher in this university after graduation.

In this paper, Linh was in the fifth years of teaching, the author labeled her as the novice teacher in this paper; Trang has 10 years working experience and she was marked as an experiencing teacher; and Loan has over 20 years working experience and she was recognized as an experienced teacher.

TABLE 1. BASIC INFORMATION OF THREE TEACHERS

Name	Age	Gender	Title	Degree(when interviewed)	Working Years	Times of interviews
Linh	30	Female	Lecture	Master of English major	5 years	1
Trang	35	Female	Lecture	Master of English major	10years	1
Loan	Approximately 50	Female	Lecture	Master of English major	Above 20 years	1

3.3 Methods and instruments

Case study and narrative inquiry are the methods used in this study. A case study is an intensive analysis of an individual unit (e.g., a person, group, or event) stressing developmental factors in relation to context (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The aim of the narrative is "understanding and making meaning of experience, and understand how people think and act in the situated contexts in which they live through their stories Narrative is the best way to think about experience"(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:80). In the researches of identity, case study and narrative inquiry are of great significance.

The author used two basic ways to collect the data: interview and observation. In consideration of different experience the teachers have, the author chose semi-structured interview. The author would like to explore the university EFL teacher's identity by questions which mainly from the perspective of personal family background, educational background, views on teacher-students relationship, on the Assessment System and teacher training programmes. Observation offers the author an opportunity to get close to the interviewees and observe their behavior in natural situation, and it can ensure the data's validity and authenticity.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The author interviewed the three teachers respectively and interviews were recorded by a telephone with recording function. Then the author went into their classrooms for observation, and the interviews to their students were finished in classroom. The author chose method of Thematic Analysis to exam and analyze the collected data. First, the author translates the interviews and observation notes which were originally conducted in Vietnamese into English. Then, the author find out some codes and incidents which of significant to the three teachers. At last, the author combined vertical and horizontal analysis in exploring the construction of university EFL teachers' professional identity. Vertical analysis helped in explaining one university EFL teacher's professional identity based on her experience as a student, as a teacher. While horizontal analysis focused on the comparative analysis between three cases.

IV. NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THREE VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY EFL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONALIDENTITY

- *4.1 Story of Linh*
- *4.1.1 Linh's Biography*

Linh has worked in this university for 5 years. Comparatively, she was the youngest member of the community, for the School has not recruit new university EFL teacher in recent years. She was teaching English to non-English major students in this semester, and she has taught English two.

Linh was an introvert person, but in her class, she "likes to show her extrovert side to communicate with students openly and unconstrainedly". According to her students, Linh was "hardworking", "responsible" and "easygoing". Linh described herself as "passionate" and her not-explicit passion mainly presented in the careful preparation of lessons, her gentleness for the students and tireless of teaching rather than an energetic voice in her class.

■ *4.1.2 Linh's Life as a University EFL Teacher*

- *The Development of the Consciousness of a University Teacher*

Linh never thought about to be a teacher when she was an undergraduate student. When she studied for her Master Degree in another Normal University, she taught college English to the freshmen and tutored some high school students. It was that time some people said that she is suitable to be a teacher and the idea of being a teacher planted in her mind. And the teaching experience helped her build the confidence of being a teacher.

Linh experienced an adjustment stage when she began to work in this university. She adapted to her teacher identity gradually in teaching practice. When she was a student, she thought that teachers are professional and formal. Although she has some teaching practice when she was a student, she felt that she was just "a worker" who works for others. When she became a real teacher, she realized that university teacher is not as simple and easy as she saw.

- *A Responsible Teacher*

Linh was a tolerant "elder sister" for students at the beginning, but gradually, she found that it is no enough to be a "sister" for students. She think she is a friend of students, so she always be tolerant, but some of her students told her that she should be more strict to students, for her gentleness in classroom cannot made all students follow her orders, then she realized that keep authority is important.

Although preparing lessons took lots of time, Linh always find some time on reading. The interviewer felt that Linh has a strong awareness of academic research. She already published several papers and led two academic research projects. For her, a qualified university EFL teacher should have disciplinary knowledge, management ability and competence of academic research. Linh's understanding of qualified EFL teachers matches the current requirement for university teachers and shows that she absorbed the new thoughts in teachers training program.

- *4.1.3 Summary*

Linh was in a stable stage. She mentioned the family's support was very important to her. Her husband who worked in the same university can understand and support her. Linh has no child but has the plan of baby, and she showed her worry about future.

"I am not sure about the future, and the uncertainty of future makes me worried. I am facing many pressures, from work, from college, and even from family. Family pressure mainly comes from my gender, especially in consider the new family member's coming. Female teacher always shouldered more burden than male. In a family, women need to take care of housework, children as well as her own work." (Linh, interview, 28 Oct. 2012)

Linh has advantages in age and strong awareness of academic research. She became a university EFL teacher when College English Teaching Reform has launched for some years, she has been well trained and accepted the newest ideas of Teaching Reform. So for her, she internalized the outside requirements and prepared herself as a teacher as well as a researcher. In finding her professional identify, she experience a lot change in finding the "feeling of being a teacher" which reified in her views on teacher-student relationship.

- *4.2 Story of Trang:*
- *4.2.1 Trang's Biography*

When Trang graduated from this university, she stayed and taught College English to senior class of non-English major students, 3 years later, she began to teach students of English major courses like Comprehensive English, English Listening. She has won the first title in teaching contest in university level and her capacity of teaching has been recognized by her colleagues and leaders. Her students described her as "good temper", "interesting", and "thoughtful". Trang gave her students lot of autonomy, and she paid much attention on students' doing and spared more time for students do the presentation on class.

When talked about the reason why Trang chose to be a teacher, she said that "I want to be a teacher since I was in junior high school. I was the English course leader at that time, I helped my teacher to arrange the class, leaded my classmate to read text we have learned, which made me feel a kind of honor. So I thought it is good to be a teacher in the future." And she became an English teacher after graduated.

■ *4.2.2 Trang's Life as a University EFL Teacher*

■ *A "Beginner" and "Practioner"*

Trang used "beginner" to describe herself, and stressed on keeping study: "I am a beginner. There are so many challenges and I feel the need of studying. It seems that everything just begin to me. Although I learned something from what I have experienced, I feel that there are more things need to learn." Trang also

described herself as a "practioner" who knows some theories and willing put theories into practice. It seemed that Trang accepted the Teaching Reform and realized there are more challenge will be confronted.

■ *Self-identification in Teaching and Research Practice*

Trang found her identity mainly in teaching and research practice. Trang has her own idea of relationship between teacher and students, she preferred to keep a few distance to protect her privacy as well as approved of an equal and friendly relationship. Trang explained that she is a person with a strong sense of being teacher. She tried to be mature and be decent in front of students, so she can have the authority. "I think more about how to help students to learn, so I will use less time on talking current news or jokes."

When Trang entered into this institution, the School involved in College English Teaching Reform, the Department of College English developed College English as a distinctive course which became one of National-level Quality Courses later. Trang was a part of it, and she was the teacher of Oral English and Speech course. Some methods such as "Task-based Teaching method, Communicative Teaching method" presented and teachers were asked to put these into practice to foster students' learning autonomy, Trang accepted them naturally. She said that she has an open mind and she has been trained and familiar with these new teaching methods in her Teaching Methods class as a graduate student, and she is familiar with computer, she like new things and adapt them quickly.

Trang said that she has a passion of change. Such passion of making change showed not only in her class teaching but also in academic research. Yet this academic research interesting did not appear at the beginning, she has been pushed by the Assessment System to write academic papers, but later something unknown enhanced her understanding of academic research. This "something unknown" may be self-requirement of professional developing. But for her heavily workload of teaching, Trang shared 80% of time in teaching, while the rest 20% went to academic research.

■ *An Active Member in the Institution*

Trang was an active member in the institution, which not only presented in her willingness to be part of collective activities such as sport meeting, new year party or teaching competition, but also showed in her willingness to communicate with the senior members. When Trang entered the SFL, she also benefit from the Tutorial System, an elder teacher was assigned to help her get familiar with textbook, the processes of teaching in the first year. So she can get familiar with conditions quickly. Yet the tutor in academic research failed her at the first time, she expressed herself "has no idea on what to do" at that time, but she kept on asking help from other senior and experienced teachers.

In this semester, Trang has some administrative works to do, she was in charge of postgraduates who gave English classes to non-English major students, and she needed to spare her time to teach them. In the third interview which made in this winter vacation, Trang could have the time of rest, but she still work as an editor of English textbook, she said that although she want to take a break, things on hand cannot make her stop.

■ *4.2.3 Summary*

Trang felt happy to be a teacher for this job brings her "a fulfilling life, contacting with cultured people and respect from the whole society." And she has a high level of job satisfaction. According to Trang, reflection on herself in time made her see herself clearly. Trang was a thinker rather than a follower. Being a part of College English Teaching Reform and doing the administrative work enhanced her sense of belonging, Trang become accountable to the community of practice and could think more about the outer context and environment. She has her own thought on many things and she was in her way of becoming important in the community.

■ *4.3 Story of Loan: An Energetic Leader*

■ *4.3.1 Loan's Biography*

Loan was busy but "fulfilling" in this semester. Her students described her as "knowledgeable", "vigorous", "strict" and "meticulous". Her students said that Loan was energetic in classroom, her infectious enthusiasm can affect the students. At the same time, she was a disciplinarian who strict to students on learning. Students also said that Loan is an easygoing person after class.

Loan said that she was very simple at the beginning of her career, what she want was to be a good and simply teacher who imparting knowledge and never thought about making money, also she described that she has not ambitions in career at that time. The first class she taught was Listening, she has no feelings like confusion or lost, she just accepted her identity as a teacher smoothly.

■ *4.3.2 Loan's Life as a University EFL Teacher*

■ *A "Guider" for Students*

Loan has a high reputation in students, she explained that because she has her unique understanding of being a university EFL teacher and she has her belief of teaching in classroom. In Loan's mind, teacher should be a "guider" rather than other figures. And she paid attention on educating students as "whole person", and stressed their emotional experience through classroom.

"A teacher's role is helping students' learning. Teachers are richer in knowledge and experience than students, then teacher should be a guider. I don't think that we are friends. We do have friendship, but teacher should give other things more than friendship.

■ *A Reflective Practioner*

Loan said that "outlines" and the "records" helped her to summarize her teaching practice in time. Through reflection, Loan summarized some good experience and imperfect places need to be improved in teaching.

"Having taught English for so many years, I refined some experience. In the end of each semester, I always write down something to summarize the lessons I learned from my students, then I can improve myself in the next semester. So I will retain the right thing I have done. When I open a course, I will put forward of an outline, which including teaching aim, teaching content learning outcome and my requirements. This outline will not present to the college, I do it voluntarily and I am the one who read it. In the first of class in a new semester, I will tell students my way of teaching, the expectation to them, learning methods and assessment methods. Usually the students in my class will think that I'm tough in the first time, because I often say rule No. 1, rule No. 2 and so on. But these rules work. These teaching experiences are accumulated up slowly." (Loan, interview, 26 Oct. 2018)

Now her enthusiasm for scientific research was rising. She realized the both teaching and scientific researchers are important and scientific research can facilitate teaching. In the past six months, Loan already finished six articles. She stresses on combination of teaching and scientific researches for many times.

■   *A Leader in the Community*

In the interview, Loan pointed out a fact that young teachers do not want to go out for a long-term study when in consideration of the family, especially the female teachers, who have to take efforts to balance their family and career. She said that "so did I when my son was little", for her husband worked far from home and she has to spare more time on taking care of her son. But now the situation is much better, her son grown up to a self-sufficient age in her teens, with the supportive husband, she can focus on her work and studying. As the leader of her teaching and research section and the main instructor of National Teacher Training Programmes, Loan showed her confidence in these activities. She has no worries about heavy work might impact on her family and she enjoyed in this busy but fulfilling life.

■   *4.3.4 Summary*

Loan's case illustrated her identity shifting experience as a middle-aged female teacher, she was more family-focus, subsequently crossed the boundary and got a more meaningful life which required by the institution. Now she found herself as a liberal person. Where there is reform, there will be changes and conflicts in thoughts. Loan was one followed the wave of reform, and she learn the newest things continuously, and now she was an active participator who plays the leading role in the reform.

V.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

■   *5.1 Result of Research Question 1: How do the three university EFL teachers in Viet Nam understand their professional identity?*

Teachers' professional identity never be a single conception, according to the narrative stories of the three teachers, their integrated professional identity can be generally demonstrated 3 interactive aspects: academic identity, teacher identity and institutional identity, and the 3 aspects are intertwined in the teachers work and life. Their understanding of professional identity reified in their thoughts and translated into teaching and working practice. The interviewer felt that they were stressed on their teacher identity, then their academic identity, while their institutional identity rather implicit in their narrative. They all mentioned the most important work as a teacher should be imparting knowledge and educating students.

a)   *Academic Identity*

Taylor (1999) believed that the "academic identity" including three levels: the workplace, the discipline and the universal notion of what it means to be an academic. Here the academic identity in the thesis is related with discipline and academic research. University EFL teachers' academic identity comes with discipline specific and disciplinary academic research, and they are professional for their scholarship. The specializing of disciplines distinguishes them from other discipline, and their academic work constructs their recognized image in academic fields. The academic identity corresponds to the formulation of research- oriented teacher.

All three teachers showed the willing to be a research- oriented teacher. Linh has the awareness of academic research as the youngest teacher. Trang called herself "a participator" in academic research. Loan stressed her academic identity through doing researches actively.

b)   *Teacher Identity*

University EFL teachers' teacher identity was produced in the interaction with students in English classes. Teacher identity generated with teachers' understanding of this occupation and their responsibility. The approvals from students in teaching community enhance the awareness of this identity, and those approvals reified as students' willing contact with teachers, their greeting, text message as festival bless. And it mainly reified in teacher's view on teacher-students relationship and their teaching beliefs.

Linh has been a "tolerant elder sister", and later she tried to keep authority in front of students and be a "responsible" teacher. Trang described herself as "a friend who keeps distance from students". Loan defined herself as a "guider" to her students.

c)   *Institutional Identity*

University EFL teachers belong to a teaching institutional community where they worked together, they involved in some institutional activities, and they served the institution as common members, office directors, programme leaders and so on. Institutional identity related to the work place and it is the membership in the teaching institution.

Linh was not an active member and she felt that she is in the outside of the institutional community, without much right of speaking. Trang was an active member of the institution and did some administrative work, which was both challenge and opportunity, and it was reified the recognition of her capabilities. Loan was a leader in the institutional community.

■   *5.2 Result of Research Question 2: How do university EFL teachers construct their professional identity in community of practice?*

Here we discussed their professional identity, so some meaningful communities they were or are in should be mentioned: institutional community, teaching community, other learning community (refers to the community formed in teacher training programs, part-time jobs, oversea visit study and so on other learning\teaching practice unconnected with the institution). Temporary other learning\teaching community may help a lot in getting the newest pedagogic knowledge and improving teaching ability, but institutional community and teaching community played the most important roles in the process of teachers' professional identification.

Teaching community which involves the teacher and the students plays an important role in the construction of teacher identity and academic identity. Students' feedback affect teachers' sense of achievement and sense of being a teacher, for example. Linh confirmed herself as a teacher in students' supportive words and benign teacher-students relationship. At the same time, university EFL teachers teaching beliefs and philosophy were putted into practice in the classroom, for teachers who combined the teaching and academic research, their research results reified in their teaching practice. University EFL teachers' professional

identity grows in the interaction between teacher and the students and substantiates in classroom.

Based on three teachers' stories, the author summarized three important factors that influence the construction of teachers' identification in the institutional community. Emotional motivation involves in the development of teachers' sense of belonging which is the basic and important emotional motivation to develop a university EFL teachers' professional identity especially for a new member. Group activities strengthen the members' sense of cohesion and pride. Another motivation is the Assessment and Award Mechanism, which is tied to the Professional Titles Assessment System and Employment System for university teachers; it is motivation as well as pressure.

Resources support includes political, financial, material and chances support in the construction of teachers' professional identity. All three teachers confirmed the situation that many favorable policies in the institution aim to accelerate the development of teachers. Beside the multimedia in English class, the well-equipped office in new teaching building.

Colleagues' and institution leaders' positive feedback is also an important factor in the identification, especially for younger teachers. For instance, the institution hold regular demonstration lessons and ask younger teachers involved in to improve their teaching ability they all benefit a lot from that suggestions of future improvement and grown up through those communication of instructional experience.

VI.   CONCLUSION

Teacher education involves both personal and professional, the point of teacher training programs is not only a matter of improving teachers' teaching skills, research methods or knowing newest pedagogic information, but also a matter embracing humanity, including cultivate their awareness of professional development, enhance their sense of responsibility, repel the job burnout and so on. From the three cases, we can see that university EFL teachers have different concerns in different stages. For example, younger teachers always face the problems such as lacking belongings and confidence. So the training programs, workshop, seminar should come into play in solving those problems that teachers are facing with or will confront.

The study also shed light on teachers' professional development. First, teachers' professional development should be self-initiated. Second, reflect the context as well as oneself in time can help a teacher do better in professional development. Reflection is a process of teachers' recalling, thinking and evaluating their past teaching experience, which give meaning to the decision they made, the thing they done, and it is also a process of identification. People are socially connected beings, how we see ourselves affected by the shared meanings and rules of the community, and we negotiated in the interaction with others and changing outside world. Understanding the context can help us explain our behavior and make a right decision, and is as vital to become a good teacher as understanding ourselves in reflection.

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