

Teacher identities: A study in the construction of the Teacher-self in Greece

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Abstract: Teaching, a career choice many make when they are still young, seems an easy professional solution, traditionally suited to women and affording a “convenient” lifestyle. This description of teaching reflects an antiquated idea of what being a teacher actually entails. Likewise, the identity of teachers has changed and keeps shape-shifting, so it is in constant and growing need of redefinition. Therefore, teachers seem trapped in a perpetual vicious circle in which certainties become doubts and doubts hopefully lead to more self-reflection and new certainties. This paper aims to present the findings of an ongoing research into how EFL teachers in Greece construct their own identity (what being a 21st century language teacher means to them), how the construction of this identity is related with their studies (retrospective connection), and/or their development. Finally, insights will be shared in terms of the potential changes that may need to be implemented in teacher education.

To this end, a digital research based on a questionnaire has been conducted via social media and a google form. The preliminary results revealed that EFL teachers in Greece are clearly aware of what is required to be an expert in the field, yet they hesitate to characterise themselves as such; age and years of experience are more important than teacher education in constructing their identity, and the most experienced teachers view construction of identity as highly significant in terms of their professional development, thus investing consistently in it.

Keywords: EFL Teacher, Teacher Identity, Teacher Education

“Learning to teach is learning to think like a teacher, learning to know like a teacher, learning to feel like a teacher, learning to act like a teacher.”
(Dang, 2012)

1. Introduction

1.1. Theoretical Background: The importance of the construction of the teacher-self.

Christiansen defines identity as a “composite definition of the self” which does not only interpret the present, existing self but also contains an element of possibility as we envision the person we can potentially become (Christiansen, 1999, p. 548). Motallebzadeh & Kazeni (2017) introduce the idea of time and add the characteristic of life-long reshaping (p.1). Savickas et al. (2009) call this phenomenon “*the imagination of possible selves*” (p.2) and explain that people’s careers are constructed as they make choices which are connected with their self-concept. It is easy to realize while exploring the existing literature on research in the construction of the professional identity, that we are not close to a definition of teachers’ identity that manages to satisfy all researchers (Pillen et al, 2013).

Our professional identity forms a great part of who we are, to the extent that when presenting ourselves, right after our name we give information regarding our occupation. Both our personal (broader) and our professional (narrower) identity are indicative expressions of the way we perceive ourselves, through which we form the narrative of our lives (Christiansen, 1999). In fact, Christiansen (1999) sees identity as an overarching concept that

shapes and is shaped via our relationship, interaction with others and the feedback we get from them (p. 584).

It would be difficult to find areas of our professional existence which are not linked to our identity. The way we perceive ourselves as professionals is related with our goal-setting, and therefore our career development and these are directly connected with our ability to self-motivate. The fact that these deeply personal concepts (Pillen et al., 2013) are interlinked provides coherence to our life-narrative, which explains our interest in researching the extent to which teachers perceive their careers as smooth and uninterrupted (Appendix A, Q10). A cohesive narrative and a career that has been planned show a certain kind of professional commitment and also a degree of devotion to the chosen career path. Through our self-narrative we exhibit the way in which we perceive ourselves and our accomplishments. Savickas et al (2009) explain that the *narratability* of our story helps us as individuals to better understand our own life-themes (p.7). Therefore, the way we articulate our personal narrative and the points we choose to stress also carry some considerable significance.

Sifakis (2009) sees the professional identity of teachers as a set of characteristics used to describe the different aspects of their practice (p.231). It is easily established that the way teachers perceive ELT and the role of English Language teaching will exert influence on every choice they make. The concepts that teachers carry regarding ELT are formed, much like their identity, in steps and stages. Therefore, identity is as much a process as it is a product (Pillen et al.2013, p.87). Initially, those notions are first established when teachers are students themselves and are revisited and altered during pre and in-service training. As it would be expected, those notions keep changing as teachers gain experience via their exposure to the practice of ELT in different teaching contexts. These concepts are also affected by the place where the teachers live and work, their teaching context, its culture and the way teachers have been accustomed to teaching (Sifakis 2009, p.232).

It can be easily deduced from the vast existing literature on this broad area of research that the construction of the *teacher-self* (or the crafting of the teacher's identity) is a conscious process which is carried out by *agentive individuals* (Geeta 2016, p.247) and idea also found in Abednia (2012) who opts for the term *reflective practitioners* which is contrasted to the ideas of teachers as *passive technicians* (p.706). Researchers seem to agree that particularly in learning to teach, the construction of identity constitutes a core part of learning (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Under this light teachers are seen at the helm of their careers and it would be worth exploring how people from different backgrounds, with varying experiences of school as students themselves, make such a career choice. At the same time, seeing teachers as agents of change and growth in their own career, puts forward the notion of conscious engagement (and planning) of this career (Pillen et al 2013, p.87).

What stands out is that this process of identity construction is built on dichotomies. Dang (2012) quotes Akkerman and Meijer who describe teachers' professional identity as being simultaneously *unitary and multiple, continuous and discontinuous, individual and social* (p.49). Savickas et al. (2009) see the process of identity construction as one that "*meanders through a series of recurrent mini-circles.*" (p.7). In the same vein, Geeta (2016) describes the emerging teacher identities as "*dynamic, multiple, shifting and*

evolving'' (p. 574). It is clear that professional identities need to be built on such dichotomies so that they can accommodate the 21st century paradox: the need for careers to be *fluid* (a term used to summarize the ones used by Geeta (2016) and comes as a synonym to Akkerman & Meijer's '*multiple*') but at the same time they need to be *solid* (Akkerman & Meijer call this *unitary*) to provide meaning and cohesion in the self-narrative (Savickas et al, 2009). These dichotomies lead professionals to a continuous process of negotiation in an effort to create a narrative that is both *consistent* and *coherent* (Dang, 2012). In the case of novice teachers this becomes even more demanding as they have to overcome a multitude of professional identity tensions which stem from the discrepancies between the way they viewed teaching and what is expected of them as teachers by their teachers and mentors (Pillen et al, 2013).

According to the categorization by Savickas et al. (2009), EFL teachers in Greece, fall under the category of "*peripheral employee*" (p.4) which means that they have to make frequent decisions as their career presents multiple transitions. Therefore, there is usually little linearity in their career path, which may threaten the cohesion of the self-narrative as well as their own feelings of self-worth. There is also an additional threat, as teachers tend to align themselves with the demands of the current teaching situation in which they find themselves (Sifakis 2009, p.3). A direct consequence of that is that teachers tend to hone only the skills required by that specific teaching environment and neglect other aspects of their teacher-self. If they remain in the same teaching context for a considerable period of time, they may end up being unemployable elsewhere since they have stopped seeing their CPD in its broader sense.

To make the analysis more concrete, some country-specific information needs to be presented. In Greece, teachers employed in private foreign language schools (frontisteria, FLS henceforth) often find themselves working for a few hours in many different FLS and have to subsist on a meager unemployment benefit during the three (often four) months of summer. To make matters worse, their position in the FLS where they worked is not guaranteed nor is there any system of appraisal which aims at promoting those who consistently seek to develop their professional skills, as there is no actual hierarchy. On the other hand, their colleagues who teach English in state school, seem to be considered of lower status (in comparison to teachers of other subjects) mainly because there is a predominant belief that foreign languages are better learnt in the private sector, where students can take exams that lead to L2 certification. This fact leads students and parents to view English as a subject of lesser importance compared to others (Sifakis, 2009). In both teaching contexts, it is more than understandable why teachers may not wish to invest time, money (in the case of the state school teachers their in-service training is free of charge) or both in their CPD. For those teachers who are employed in the private sector, the many ups and downs in the hours they are employed and the low salaries may even lead them to consider giving up teaching for a better-paid and more permanent job. Alternatively, teachers may have a permanent job elsewhere and teach English privately and sporadically, which may account for their blurred professional identity.

The theoretical discussion and the research in the issue of the construction of the identity of teachers can be summarized in three core questions: a) how

well ELT teachers are qualified, b) how good their knowledge of the English language is and c) what the content of their actual teaching practice is (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010). These three questions give us three broader topics for theoretical consideration.

The question regarding qualifications introduces the element of *legitimacy* (Geeta, 2016) (i.e. what gives teachers the right to call themselves teachers and which qualification is an actual one). In this topic area we can also include issues of *linguistic competence* and *confidence*, both of which are related with confidence, which is a prerequisite of any professional identity. Sifakis (2009) observes that as Greece is a country where English has no formal role (it is not an official second language), we have little knowledge of the extent to which EFL teachers in Greece (in both private and public sector) use English outside the artificial environment of their classroom. Another issue that can be added is that of the “*linguistic privilege*” of NESTS over NNESTS and how this can endanger the teachers’ feeling of being experts (Geeta 2016, p.16). The “expert” status is an irreplaceable part of the construction of professional identity, which is related with the socio-professional status the occupation affords the individual (Sifakis, 2009). To be an expert, a professional has to possess specialized knowledge. Another aspect of the “expert status” is whether the professional contribution of the teacher is acknowledged as significant by others such as students, parents of students, school owners and colleagues (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010). The opinion of colleagues is essential for teachers to feel accepted in this particular *community of practice* (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010). The “expert status” is also related with the importance of subject taught or at least the way this subject is perceived by students and their parents (Sifakis, 2009). Naturally, experts expect to see this “expert status” reflected on their salary. Unfortunately, this is not the case with ELT teachers, especially in the private sector, which effectively threatens their self-esteem and significantly limits their amount of money they are willing to spend on their CPD.

It is worth mentioning that if any one of these elements (qualifications, legitimacy, confidence, expert status) is absent, the solidity of the professional identity is threatened. This situation leads to professionals who feel less committed and thus less eager to plan their career or invest in their CPD, as they feel that this career is only a temporary stage they will soon grow out of in order to find more lucrative (and perhaps more empowering) employment. Meanwhile, those teachers, who have not really crafted their teacher-self, keep teaching thus influencing learners who shape different beliefs about what constitutes foreign language learning and teaching. Pillen et al (2013) view such cases as instances of *dissonance* (p.86) between the existing identity and the one that the professionally potentially wants to develop. Such dissonance can cause tensions which professionals may find hard to negotiate and resolve on their own (Savickas et al, 2009), especially in the case of novice teachers who carry their own preconceived views of how teaching was seen when they were students which may trigger many negative emotions as the agency of the teachers themselves is lost (Pillen et al. 2013, p.87).

1.2 Why research the development of professional identities?

Admittedly, there is a considerable body of existing research in the issues related with the construction or development of professional identity (Abednia 2014; Sifakis 2009; Sifakis 2011; Sifakis & Sougari 2007 & 2010) to mention but a few and yet there are more aspects to be considered. What we believe this research introduces (or at least aims to introduce in the fullness of time), is a wider scope of participants as it does not focus on teachers of the private or public sector. On the contrary, the questionnaire was open to all EFL teachers who work in Greece (first stage) and Europe (later stage, to be carried out in 2019). The idea of comparing the findings yielded by Greece and the rest of Europe is of additional interest.

Any kind of research can be affected by changes in the context and the socio-political situations. The recent financial crisis in Greece and the extensive lifestyle changes it brought about is one such change, along with the fact that professionals nowadays see their careers as less fixed and permanent than the professionals of the previous generation. Dang explains that research in the formation of teacher identities has yet to pinpoint the exact changes that take place and the factors that trigger them (Dang 2012,p.50).

This research sets about to explore a number of interconnected issues most of which have already been presented. First and primarily we are interested in exploring how the teachers' level of education and their studies in general, which are directly related with issues such as legitimacy and confidence, influence the formation of their professional identity. Secondly, it aims to discuss whether teachers see themselves as experts (who dictate rather than simply follow policies and curricula). Last but not least, great emphasis is placed on the idea of career planning and smooth career development. To that end, this study posits three Research questions: a) how do EFL teachers in Greece define their professional identity? b) how does teacher education affect the construction of this identity? and c) what impact does that construction of identity have on the development of the teachers' career and their career flow? Following these questions, our assumptions are that (a) EFL Teachers in Greece maintain a blurred identity entailing a low professional status;(b) those teachers' identity issues are attributed to the fact that they lack abundant teacher training regardless of holding university degrees or other qualifications; and (c) EFL Teachers' positive construction of identity leads to a cohesive career flow, whereas the opposite results in an irregular one.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

In the current study 42 Greek teachers of English participated (8 (19%) male and 34 (81%) female).36% belonged to the 31-40 age group, whereas the rest were distributed along these lines: 21% (21-30), 29% (41-50) and 14% (51+). Concerning the teachers' sector and level of employment, they were either appointed in public and private primary and secondary schools, private foreign language schools or gave private lessons. At the time of the research, 23 of them were employed in foreign language schools. As far as their teaching experience is concerned, this varied as follows: 12% of the teachers had worked for 1 to 5 years, 14% from 6 10 years, 28% from 11 to 15 years, 17% from 16 to 20 years and 29% from 21+ years. It is noteworthy mentioning that

the teachers came from different parts of Greece and various educational backgrounds (i.e. 17 held a BA, 14 held an MA, 6 were PhD holders and 5 had a Certificate of Proficiency), thus obtaining a more holistic overview of teachers' perspectives on the construction of their identity.

2.2 Materials and procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for the present study through the use of an online questionnaire as a Google form. It was disseminated via Facebook teachers' groups and the language of administration was English. Prior to its completion, the participants were given information and explanations regarding the aims of the study through an information sheet and were asked to give their consent in order to proceed. The questionnaire consisted of two basic sections: a) personal information and b) questions pertaining to teacher identity. The research instrument included mostly questions following the Likert scale and only one required that the participants provide a short answer (see Appendix A). Generally, the questionnaire (indicative of quantitative research) was selected on the grounds that it is rigorous, systematic, controlled and reliable. Also, its completion is faster and easier for the respondents, compared to other qualitative (e.g. interviews) more time-consuming methods (Dörnyei, 2007).

Finally, all the quantitative data were analysed by using descriptive statistical techniques, that is, frequencies and percentages, via the use of SPSS. Furthermore, correlation and chi-square tests were employed, so as to explore the relationships between the various variables.

3. Results and Discussion

Figures 1 and 2 show the teachers' age and gender distributions respectively.

Figure 1. Teachers' age distribution (in percentages)

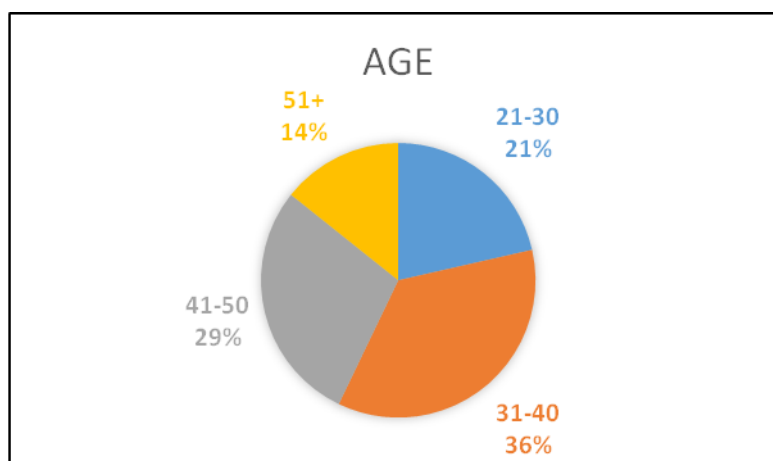
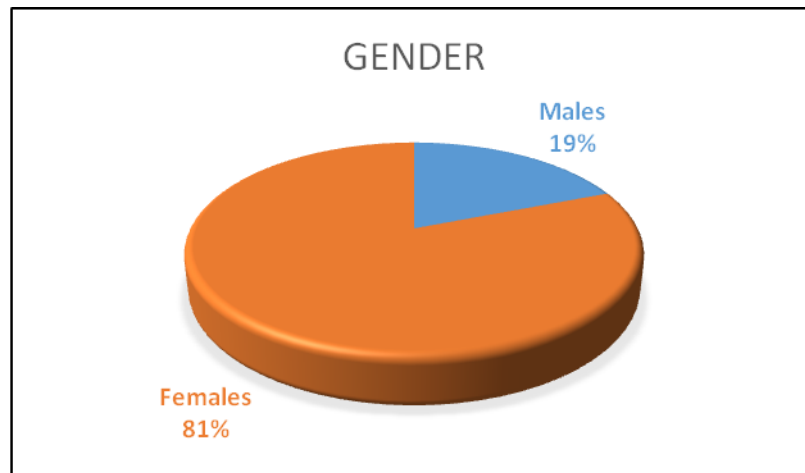


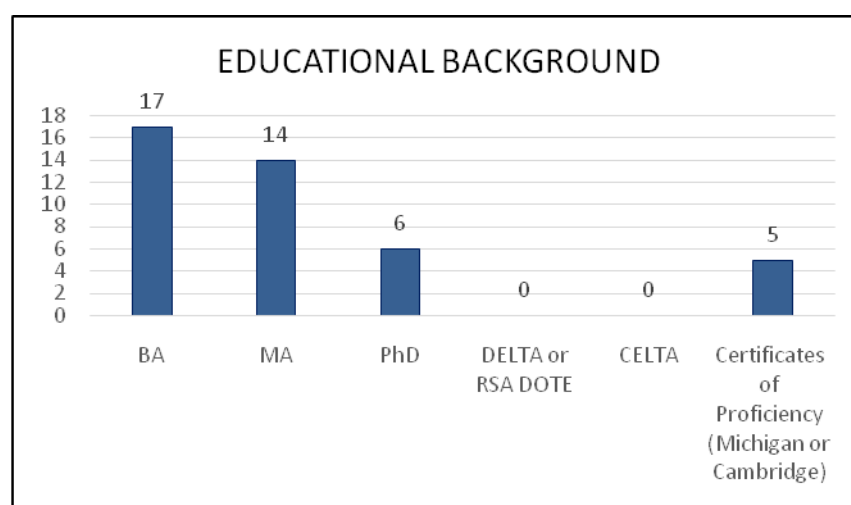
Figure 2. Teachers' gender distribution (in percentages)



With reference to the participants' age and gender distributions, it can be claimed that these are expected ones, following similar results by studies of Sugari and Sifakis (2007, 2010). As it can be seen, most people fall into the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups, which are believed to be the golden ages regarding professional development since most of the teachers are already practicing teaching and have by some means planned their career. Moreover, at these age groups they feel that they are teachers for life. In terms of gender, this profession is mostly female oriented, which is almost a universal pattern, with the exception of Nordic countries. Research has shown that occupational gender stereotypes are strongly related to the individuals' preferences and beliefs regarding the appropriateness of a job based on their sex as well as on the distribution of males and females in a specific profession (Miller & Budd, 1999; Miller, Neathey, Pollard & Hill, 2004; Rentzou, 2013).

Figure 3 presents the results regarding teachers' academic qualifications.

Figure 3. Teachers' educational background (in numbers)



Regarding the educational background of the participants, the number of degree-holders comes as no surprise, since a university degree is the necessary prerequisite for employment in the public sector (Sifakis, 2009). It

also comes as no surprise that a significant number of participants have invested in further studies in order to gain an MA or PhD. In Greece, such qualifications can ensure better employment and are highly regarded by employers. The noteworthy but also alarming issue is the lack of participants who are CELTA or DELTA holders. On the one hand, the small number of participants might account for the absence of such demographics. On the other, both CELTA and DELTA are marketed in the private sector and those who wish to participate in such courses will have to fork out a considerable amount of money which may not be reflected in their salary once they are certified. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that due to the recent financial crisis, Greek ELT teachers may have avoided such courses, as they see little practical value in them. A final point to be made is related with the wide breadth of qualifications that entitle teachers to teach English in the private sector. This poses the question whether these educators understand teaching and the construction of the teacher-self in the same way and whether they have common points of reference.

Figures 4 and 5 show Greek EFL teachers' years of teaching experience and employment sector respectively.

Figure 4. Teachers' years of teaching experience (in percentages)

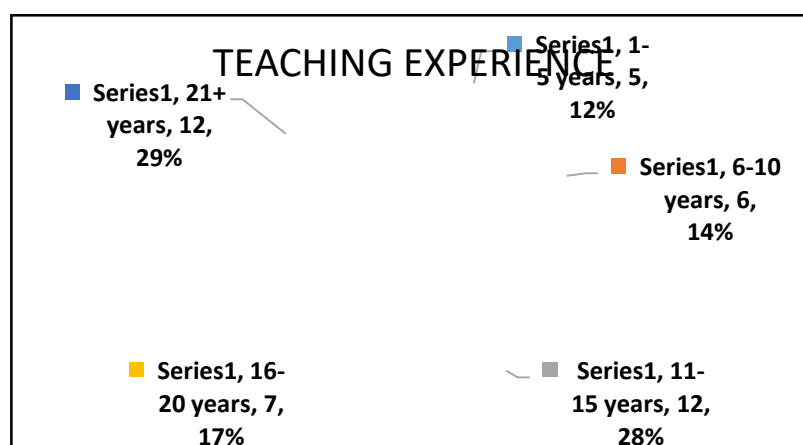
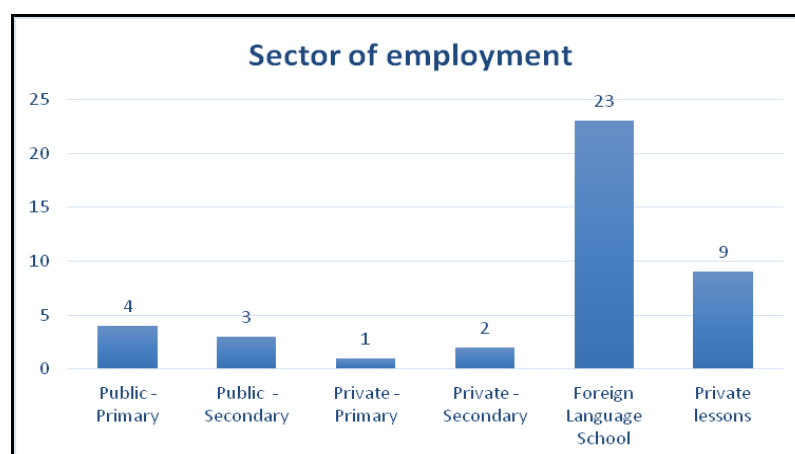


Figure 5. Teachers' sector of current employment (in numbers)



Examination of the data in Figure 4 has shown that there seems to be a clear correlation between the golden age groups referred to previously and the 11-15 and 21+ years of teaching experience. Pertaining to employment, it can be observed that most ELT teachers work in private foreign language schools or give private lessons, which is an expected outcome, at least in the context of Greece. More specifically, foreign language instruction, and especially the teaching of English, is of critical importance in the Greek educational system, which is why it has been established as “the default foreign language selected by the state for pupils” (Sifakis & Sugari, 2005, p. 471). However, due to the fact that classes at state schools often consist of a large number of students and are mixed ability ones, render “language provision in state institutions [...] to be rather devaluated” (Angouri, Mattheoudakis & Zigraka, 2010, p. 192); therefore, leading to a thriving private sector of foreign language teaching, usually in the form of FLS or private lessons, which are attended by the vast majority of learners and aim at providing them with extensive and intensive exam oriented courses (Mattheoudakis & Nicolaidis, 2005). Another possible explanation for the above situation can be related to the state system for current employment in public schools in Greece, which is rather challenging and time-consuming, thus forcing Greek teachers of English to pursue a career in the private sector. Adding to the previous reasons, the ongoing financial crisis in the country constitutes a further deterrent factor in employing more teaching personnel in state schools.

In order to explore how demographics correlate with teachers' identity in general, a composite index was created (Table 1), which comprises of questions 9-20 (excluding 17 and 18, see Appendix A) that entail critical aspects of the teacher-self construction. The analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between age and teachers' identity ($p < 0.5$).

Table 1. Teachers' identity (composite index)

| Correlation tests for Teachers' identity (composite index) | | |
|---|--------------|---------------------------------|
| | Value | Statistical significance |
| Age*Teachers' Identity | 0,353 | 0,022 |

A general overview of our analysis has shown that as teachers grow older, the more lucid, conscious and aware they become in terms of their professional identity and how they can actively contribute to its development.

With the aim of investigating in depth the research questions posed for this study as well as the relationships between the variables, correlation and chi-square tests were used. It is important to point out that each research question was addressed through a specific set of questions; therefore, RQ1 concerns questions 9-20 (not including 17 and 18), RQ2 relates to questions 7 and 8, and finally RQ3 refers to questions 7, 11 and 21-25.

Regarding the first RQ, the statistical analysis revealed interesting statistically significant differences ($p < 0.5$) between certain variables and specific questions, as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistical analysis for RQ1

| Correlation tests for RQ1 | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| | Value | Statistical significance |
| Age*Q10 | 0,286 | 0,066 |
| Age*Q14 | 0,275 | 0,078 |
| Age*Q16 | 0,368 | 0,016 |
| Age*Q19 | 0,41 | 0,007 |
| Age*Q20 | 0,252 | 0,107 |
| Education*Q16 | 0,293 | 0,06 |
| Teaching experience*Q16 | 0,351 | 0,023 |
| Teaching experience*Q19 | 0,357 | 0,02 |
| Gender*Q15 | -0,402 | 0,008 |
| Gender*Q16 | 0,291 | 0,061 |

In more detail, the statistical analysis between Age*Q10 showed that older age groups (41-50 and 51+) seem to have planned their careers more consciously compared to younger ones. In terms of Age*Q14, the results seem to suggest that all age groups feel somehow the need to be appreciated by the students' parents, maybe a characteristic of the Greek society and Greek teachers in particular as this forms an important part of their identity. Yet, the two younger age groups (21-30 and 31-40) appear to feel mostly this need and may have to do with the fact that they have adopted what Zimmerman (1998, cited in Pennington and Richards, 2016, p.7) called 'situated identity'. This is a characteristic of a traditional educational framework where the teacher is perceived mainly as the source of knowledge and there is a specific structure and hierarchy to assure smooth flow of the lesson using a form-focused approach, typical of the Greek educational system (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010). Despite the fact that Sougari and Sifakis's (2010) findings suggest such an identity to be more prevalent in older teachers compared to those of the current study, still the above beliefs seem to be generally supported by Greek EFL teachers to a higher or a lesser degree.

When it comes to Age*Q16, three age groups (i.e. 21-30, 31-40 and 41-50) think that being an expert in ELT means being able to teach all CEFR levels effectively and with ease, which could imply that teachers themselves see their careers as open entities and they feel they need to hone their skills to teach all levels. Yet, this is contrary to foreign language schools' policy that channel Greek EFL instructors to teach specific levels, thus creating specific identities, e.g. junior teachers or exam teachers. What is interesting is that teachers belonging in the 31-40 and 51+ age groups reported that being an expert in ELT means participating in extensive training too. This finding could constitute another piece of evidence that older teachers are more conscious of their professional identity and invest more in its development. This comes in contrast to what is mentioned by Sifakis and Sougari (2010) who find a that

teachers who belong in the younger demographics were more willing to sit for exams of higher certificates of English (as well as hold a BA in English Language and Literature) in contrast to their older colleagues, who felt secure with as holders of a BA. The two researchers state (p.12) that this may not be indicative of their preoccupation with the language and the culture, but just one more example of the obsession of the Greek society with certificates. Also, in Sifakis (2010) it is mentioned that pre-service teachers (therefore, the ones who belong in the younger age group) tend to have different views to those of their in-service colleagues and experienced teachers (therefore, of the older set) are not likely to hold views identical to those of their inexperienced colleagues (p.1). This shows strong connection between experience, age and the ideology of the teachers, which is an integral characteristic of their teacher-self.

The analysis of Age*Q19 revealed that an important aspect of teachers' identity is to be able to use English in different contexts. It seems that older age groups and actually 41-50 years old feel that this dimension is defining for them, which is in line with previous research (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010). Finally, with reference to Age*Q20, there is a great degree of variation within the groups but generally the respondents from all age groups view knowledge of the structural elements of English as highly significant in order to define their identity and teacher-self as knowledgeable and closer to the native speaker norms (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010).

Another important statistical difference was found between Education*Q16. In particular, most BA holders feel that being an expert in ELT means being able to teach all CEFR level effectively and easily, an opinion that is clearly related with the teachers' own linguistic competence and methodological awareness. On the contrary, MA holders feel that being an ELT expert means participating in extensive training, while those holding a PhD title were divided into these two aspects. Given these inconclusive results, it is difficult to draw solid conclusions

Further analysis on Teaching experience*Q16 showed great variation within and across groups; yet, there seems to be a tentative tendency for the more experienced groups (16-20 and 21+ years) to perceive their identity as a well-rounded and multidimensional one, as they stated that being an expert in ELT means to be able to teach all CEFR levels, participate in extensive training and care about enriching their CV every single academic year. With regard to Teaching experience*Q19, being a competent speaker and user of English appears to be a central aspect of teachers' identity and teacher-self construction. In fact, the most experienced teachers (21+ years) feel more confident in using English in different contexts (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010).

An unexpected statistically significant difference was found between Gender*Q15. The results indicate that females do not feel that their salary reflects the amount of time and effort they put in their job compared to males (14/34 women responded that they "strongly disagree" with the question; 3/8 men choose "agree" with the question). This may be due to the different contexts and ages, yet to the best of our knowledge, the Greek legislation does not favour males in terms of salaries. Finally, the analysis of Gender*Q16 reported an important difference between male and female teachers, as more women responded that being an expert in ELT means to be able to teach all CEFR levels effectively and easily and participate in extensive training. This

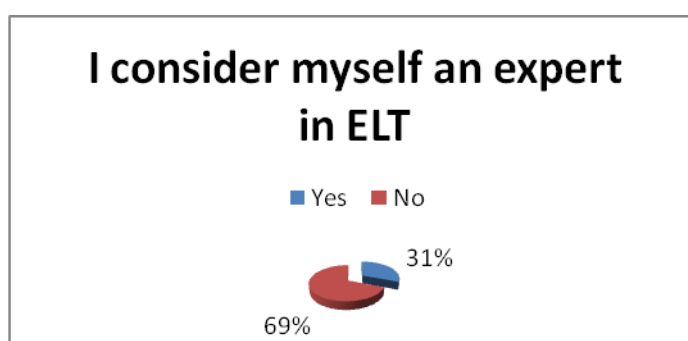
finding could bear certain implications regarding Greek female teachers' construction of professional identity as being more resourceful and trying to enrich their teaching with cultural input from various speakers and countries (Sougari & Sifakis, 2010).

Concerning the second RQ, no statistically significant differences were found between any variables and questions. Last but not least, the statistical analysis revealed interesting statistically significant differences ($p < 0.5$) between particular variables and specific questions for the third RQ, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. Statistical analysis for RQ3

| Correlation tests for RQ3 | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| | Value | Statistical significance |
| Teaching experience*Q21 | 0,289 | 0,063 |
| Teaching experience*Q22 | 0,276 | 0,077 |
| Teaching experience*Q23 | 0,293 | 0,06 |
| Place of employment*Q7 | 0,302 | 0,052 |
| Place of employment*Q23 | -0,296 | 0,057 |
| Place of employment*Q24 | 0,524 | 0 |

Regarding Q17 (Appendix A) it is clear that ELT professionals in Greece find it hard to use the term "expert" when describing their own professional status. This can be explained either because of professional modesty or it could reflect the teachers' feeling that they have not yet reached that status.



Q18 is the only one that asks for qualitative data as participants have to explain in five words why they consider themselves an expert. This question is only open to those participants who opted for a positive reply in the previous one. Some of the words collected were "dedication", "experience", "self-

development'' and *'life-long learner'*'' *'CPD'*'' which shows that those Greek ELT teachers, who do not shy away from using the term for themselves, understand the constituent units of the identity of an expert. This kind of understanding is perhaps what guides and drives them in the planning of their own careers.

4. Concluding remarks and implications

The results of the current study pointed towards the direction that regarding RQ1 (how EFL teachers define their professional identity), a considerable amount of the participants is clear about what it takes to be an expert. They also have a clear view of who is and who is not an expert. In connection with RQ2 (how teacher education affects the construction of the identity), surprisingly enough, teacher education does not seem to be as important a factor as age and years of teaching experience, which seem to bring on more lucidity and clarity in terms of career choices and commitment. As researchers, we maintain some doubt regarding the role of teacher education due to the low number of participants. We believe that the addition of teachers from Europe and the consequent analysis will shed further light to the role of this variable. Finally, regarding RQ3 (what impact the construction of identity has on the development of the teachers' career and career flow) the preliminary findings of the first stage of this research reveal that it is actually age and the years of experience that are a factor which affects the consistency in the investment made by teachers.

5. Limitations and further research

Despite the interesting results yielded from the current study, certain limitations need to be acknowledged. The first one relates to the small number of the participants, as a larger sample would give us the opportunity to draw more robust conclusions. Another limitation concerns the unequal ratio between males and females. Although traditionally EFL teaching in Greece is mainly occupied by women, still a more balanced percentage between the two genders could explain better specific results and tendencies observed. In a similar vein, the unequal proportion of teachers employed in the public and private sectors was shown to be an important limitation, as the former group was considerably smaller than the latter. Even though this is expected, given the thriving private sector in ELT in Greece, still a more equal ratio would help in obtaining more solid results regarding this particular variable. Last but not least, it is noteworthy to mention that no participants were recorded being holders of DELTA or RSA DOTE and CELTA as is also the wide breadth of qualifications that up to the recent past enabled people to become ELT professionals. The different concepts and narratives of these professionals and the extent of their professionalism could become the springboard for more research into this broad issue.

Our findings trigger further research with reference to recruiting more Greek participants, so as to obtain an even more representative sample of EFL teachers and hence draw more robust conclusions regarding the construction of their identity. Also, it will be interesting to investigate how European EFL teachers perceive their identity and compare Greek with European data.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Questionnaire

Personal information

1. Age

21-30

31-40

41-50

51 +

2. Gender

Male

Female

3. Nationality

Specify...

4. Educational background

BA

MA

PhD

DELTA or RSA DOTE

CELTA

Certificates of Proficiency (Michigan or Cambridge) & Teaching Permit

5. Places of current employment (choose the one where you spend most of your day/week)

Public - Primary level

Public - Secondary level

Private - Primary level

Private - Secondary level

Foreign Language School

Private lessons

6. Teaching Experience (years)

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

21+

For each of the statements below, tick the response that best describes your views about each statement:

7. I have received sufficient training during my studies of the English language.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

8. Postgraduate degree holders research and reflect more on their teaching process.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

9. Teaching is a respectable profession.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

10. I have a smooth and uninterrupted teaching career.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

11. My teaching career so far has ... been planned.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always

12. My job is highly appreciated and valued by my superiors.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

13. My job is highly appreciated and valued by my students.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

14. My job is highly appreciated and valued by students' parents.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

15. My salary accurately reflects the amount of time and effort I put in my job.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

16. To be an expert in the ELT field a teacher needs to: (choose the one that reflects your opinion best):

- be able to teach all levels of the CEFR effectively and with ease.
- participate in extensive training.
- share his/her own ideas publicly (blogging / presenting/writing articles)
- care about enriching one's own CV every single academic year.

17. I consider myself an expert in ELT

YES

NO

18. If you answered YES in question 17, explain why in 5 words.

[Space for short reply provided]

19. I can use the English language in different contexts.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

20. I know the structural elements of the English language (grammar, syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation).

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

21. I participate in Continuous Professional Development seminars.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 Almost
always

22. In the last two years, I have attended ...

1-5 training sessions

6-10 training sessions

11-15 training sessions

16-20 training sessions

21+ training sessions

23. In the last two years, I have delivered training sessions or workshops.

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

21+

24. The sector I am currently employed, encourages teachers for further training.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

25. I consider ongoing training to be an integral part of my teaching career.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

THANK YOU!