

# A Teacher's Autoethnography: The impact of lifelong experiences in shaping worldviews and teacher identity

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## Abstract

*Literature has explored education and its values, highlighting the significance of experience in learning. However, a paucity of research has investigated the importance of teachers' lifelong experiences in shaping their views toward education. Employing a collaborative autoethnographic methodology, this study attempts to provide insights into the significance of teachers' lifelong experiences in shaping their views and their teacher identity. The narratives highlight the influence of the living environment and life events in shaping worldviews, along with affirmation of the individual's agency in self-regulation. A dynamic accumulation of various lifelong experiences like losing Author 1's father, war, and harassment at school shaped his teacher identity. Understanding the significance of this process helps teachers to appreciate their experiences and recognise their role in shaping students' views and identifies. In conclusion, teachers' socially constructed identity shapes their educational perspectives, reminding them of teachers' role in shaping students' experiences. This knowledge could be valuable in future teacher education programs and developing educational material for learners.*

**Keywords:** education; collaborative autoethnography; lifelong experience; worldview; teacher's identity

## **Introduction**

The notion of experience forms a significant part of John Dewey's (1925, 1934, and 1938) works and he attempted to define its meaning and significance in education. For Dewey, the experience did not culminate in knowing or reflection as it had more layers of the individual 'who acts, suffers and enjoys' (**Muhit, 2013: 10**). Dewey's holistic view on experience enables exploration of how the interaction with the environment empowers learning and education. Similarly, Lave and Wenger's (1991) study highlighted this in their theory of situated learning. The impact of situated learning stays with individuals and forms their worldviews. Harder, Nicol and Martin (2020) in a study on the value of self-reflection emphasised that individuals' personal experiences change their way of thinking.

Teachers as educators play a certain role in shaping their students' learning experiences. An individual's lifetime experiences influence their becoming and development (**Callary, 2012**). de Bruin claims that 'we teach, who we are' (**2016: 408**). Teachers' background and experiences influence their perceptions and views. It would be valuable to understand how teachers who wish to enable students in their life experiences, have formed their agency and power of determination considering their lifelong experiences. Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson (2005) highlight the significance of language teachers' identity in the socio-cultural and socio-political view of teaching. Exploring teachers' reflections on their lived experiences illuminates the impacts on shaping their professional identity and views.

Not all teachers necessarily wanted to be a teacher; teaching as a career was a decision made based on life circumstances in addition to other factors. Jarvis (2009) believes that our experiences, learnings, reflections, and engagements influence our identity. Wenger states 'gaining a competence entail becoming someone for whom the competence is a meaningful way of living in the world' (**2010: 182**). He further adds that our participation in life and experiences define who we are.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) in a study reviewed the issues with understanding an individual teachers' identity and the implications for teacher education programs. We believe, a teacher's identity is a gradual process and happens by having continuous interactions with the world. A teacher's lifelong experiences contribute to their teaching, shaping their worldviews and assisting personal and social development through social-emotional processes (**Giovanelli, 2015**). Teachers with different life experiences may have concurrently different views about teaching since their lifelong experiences partly drive them to take different attitudes towards teaching as their job (**Gloviczki, 2020; Liu & Lederman, 2007**).

Reflecting on an individual's lived experiences offers invaluable insights into a person's understanding of change and its impact on the person they become (Guérin, Arcand, & Durand-Bush, 2010). This study looks back at Author 1's life experiences as an English language teacher, to understand the significance of his experiences in shaping his worldviews in teaching. Author 1 as a teacher holds certain views. Using a critical lens, we attempt to understand the significance of his views and his professional identity as an English teacher. Discussing the significance of life experiences on his worldviews, we explored the 'process of becoming' and the impacts of life experiences in shaping views. We noticed the importance of previous experiences and how personal and social contexts are interrelated in shaping an individual's being.

### **Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE) as a Research Methodology**

According to Denzin & Lincoln 'Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them' (2000: 3). The real-life interactions between people and their environment form the explored reality in qualitative research (Freebody, 2003). Exploring the researcher's personal experiences is a form of investigation to understand real-life experiences (Reed-Danahay, 2006). Autoethnography (AE) as a research method enables the researchers to understand the various impacts of experiences on the research process (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) is a form of AE which includes more than one autoethnographer collaborating at different stages of research projects (Pheko, 2018). CAE is still focused on self-interrogation but collectively and in a cooperative manner within a team and authors can contribute at different stages (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2013).

Qualitative studies and AE appreciate the reflexivity of researchers to enhance the authenticity of their practice in research (Wiesner, 2020). The researchers in AE gauge their experiences considering theories and practices to unfold the studied phenomenon (Mcilveen, 2008). AE requires either an evocative or analytical storytelling style focusing on personal experiences. In this study, we have narrative interpretation (analytical) of the autobiographical data.

This study is a collaboration among the researchers as we are all experienced English language teachers. Authors 2 and 3 as more experienced researchers interviewed Author 1 to form an understanding of his life experiences. The nature of our collaboration was partial (see Chang et al., 2013) as authors 2 and 3 did not contribute to the pool of data but actively contributed in different stages of the process. Author 1

narrated his life story and other authors were asking probing questions to understand the implications in a wider context. 'In CAE researchers wrestle with these stories to discover the meanings of the stories in relation to their socio-cultural contexts' (Chang et al., 2013: 17). This collaboration enables the study of self, overseen with others.

In AE studies, researchers hold a critical lens to examine lived experiences (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). The selection of life events enables the researchers to reflect and see how these experiences have gradually formed their worldviews. Exploring this gradual process helps to understand shaping perceptions, beliefs, and worldviews. This study relies on Author 1 to narrate his thus far unspoken experiences and their impacts on his identity. In this study, the researcher, teacher, and student are one without any boundaries, summarised in Author 1's experiences.

Author 1 attempted to answer the following questions in his narrative:

1. What is the relationship between reading habits and social background?
2. What are the impacts of life events including, the loss of your father, the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, studying at university on your identity?
3. How witnessing others' behaviour and taking their life experiences into account can be profitable and effective to us?
4. What is the significance of education?

The data in AE is not separate from the researcher as it contains information about the researcher. Author 1, focusing on the vicissitude of his life, portrays the significance of his experiences on his career path. This puts the researcher in a vulnerable position as it needs an openness toward experiences (Custer, 2014). As Campbell states, 'autoethnography is both process and product' (2016: 96); researchers reflect on their experiences with no gap between them and what is being investigated.

The researchers analysed his narration employing Ritchie and Spencers' (1994) five-step analysis. These five steps include familiarisation, finding a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping the interpretations. In this study, we attempt to understand the influence of life experiences on identity formation and Author 1's interest in learning and teaching English. From this point forward, first-person narration is employed to portray Author 1's life experiences throughout this paper.

## **Life is the Best Teacher**

I was born in 1978 in a Kurdish heritage family in Iran, a country approaching an Islamic revolution that changed people's lives in various forms and brought about internal and external rebellions. I spent the first two years of my life in an evergreen village named Darband. A pretty village located on a wide plain surrounded by three cities namely Piranshahr, Oshnavyeh, and Naghadeh. This village had a lot of gardens and lovely slow-flowing rivers.

As my father was an Imam<sup>i</sup> and loved reading, my childhood was shaped by being surrounded by a plethora of books. Plunging into these books formed an important part of my childhood experiences. In families in which one or both parents read, it is more likely that their children's language abilities and development will be affected (**Dale, Crain-Thoreson, Notari-Syverson, & Cole, 1996**).

I was only about two years old, on September 22, 1980, when two neighbour countries, Iran and Iraq, started a protracted war by Iraq's formal declaration. The war ultimately lasted eight years and resulted in shocking numbers of around 200 thousand Iranians killed and 400 thousand sustaining injuries (**Salamati et al., 2013**). No one could predict the unendurable suffering of the Kurdish people living in different regions of Iran. This was more extreme in Piranshahr as it is located on the border of these two countries. During these years of my life, my family went through a nomadic life for seven years, moving from one village to another to escape the terrible and frightening shadow of the war.

Due to Saddam Hussain's daily air bombardments, I witnessed many families experiencing the demise of their members and other relatives and friends. Concurrently, West Asian governments believed that Kurds had become a problem and the reason was the formation of independence movements in Kurd living areas (**Tatsumura, 1980**). I remember, there was a clash between the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and the Islamic Republic of Iran in many villages and areas. They were fighting for the independence of Kurdish people seeking autonomy within a federal system. My father was a respected and reputed charismatic leader among the people of my hometown and the rural area was under high pressure from both sides of the Islamic Republic government and the PDKI. With all this local unrest, every day of my life used to begin with the sound of gunshots and the noise of Iraqi jet fighters manoeuvring in the sky.

Unlike many children in other parts of the world, my amusement was listening to war music or chasing the flying jet fighters in the sky with my frightened eyes. My father spent most of his free time reading different

books to soothe me. Research indicates that parents who are interested in reading distinctly seek particular goals, for instance, the purpose of enjoying books and soothing their children (**Audet, Evans, Williamson, & Reynolds, 2008**). These reading habits were like sweet dreams in my eventful childhood. Reviewing all those years, I strongly believe that those books affected my personality and worldview.

In March 1990, another disastrous incident beclouded my family life. My father, who had been suffering from backache for several years due to torture and hard life, and my eldest brother travelled to Urmia—the centre of West Azerbaijan province in Iran—for my father to have an operation on his back. The night before the operation, their hotel went through a fire, which could not be controlled. The dire consequence was the untimely demise of nine people, including my father who had been suffocated by the smoke. My brother had been fighting the fire for hours on the wooden staircase and inside the rooms. He was hospitalised for a week with burns to ninety percent of his body. Ultimately brother passed away without our family being able to say goodbye.

These terrible incidents brought my family into new disasters, both emotionally and financially. My mother felt that the sky was falling, dealing with the terrible sorrow of missing the pillar of her life, in my father, as well as her eldest child. For mothers who experience child raising without a father's support, there is more dispute with their children than do mothers who live with the child's father (**MacCallum & Golombok, 2004**). My younger brother used to skip some school classes sporadically and my mother was called by school authorities to handle the situation. The problems did not stop and many of our relatives recommended to my mother that she make me quit school to earn a living for the family. Being raised by a single mom, I soon became the target of others' bullying for not having enough money to buy suitable clothes and a schoolbag! The sweet part of this sad story is that the hero of my life (my mother) never listened to others who told her to stop her sons from gaining an education. Unfortunately, my sister was victimised as the community was still too narrow-minded and not many girls had the chance to have formal education. Today after almost three decades, I clearly remember the very words of my mother who asked me not to discontinue the path which my father had gone through all his life, which was to educate people and show them how to live honestly and happily. Today her big and sweet wish has been fulfilled, but for me, despite being known as a reputed English teacher in my city, it is just the beginning of the road to becoming a better teacher.

When I was twelve years old and a bit after my losses, I had to work along with continuing my education to help my mother to make ends meet. It is often argued that there is an inverse relationship between child labour and school attendance, i.e. the more hours a child works the longer they will be away from school (**Jensen & Nielsen, 1997**). In summer breaks, when most of my classmates and friends could rest for three months, I had to hunt part-time jobs and make a little money for food and clothing. It frequently happened that my mother and my sister were working all weekdays and I used to join them on weekends to do menial jobs. These jobs included working on farmlands on scorching summers days or picking fruit in the gardens on chilly days of the mid-fall seasons. In this phase of my life, I could relate to the miserable character of the novel 'Oliver Twist' that I had already read about as a child. By the age of twenty-one, I had worked in almost twenty-five different jobs. From every single person whom I worked for, I learned something and took a lesson for my life. Meeting and working with so many people unexpectedly provided me with numerous opportunities to make connections with diverse social characters in the next coming years.

An aspect of human life, in terms of success, depends on social learning that is mainly through observation and multilateral interaction(s) between an individual and others (**Rendell et al., 2010**). It was time to meet my life challenges in different ways. Reading books and learning from prominent figures' experiences taught me that not many things are lasting. I reconnected my life with reading books and tried to spend more time with them. The books soothed me and answered many of my questions without being told off for asking them. Every single word in lines of the books along with bits of advice from some sympathetic and considerate people formed parts of my identity and personality to become a bookworm and a voracious reader. I hardly ever remember a time in which reading was to be missed in my life. As Tootle (**2003**) puts it, by the time I could read on my own, I started reading to be gratified to live such a life and I never stopped.

### **An Intermixture of Two Cultures**

In 1991, the dawn of attacking Saddam Hussain by the United States and coalition forces led to the emigration of tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees seeking a place in Iran's Kurdistan. This was more prominent in border cities especially Piranshahr in which by then I had been living for almost five years. I can recall a few of those refugees in my city were interviewed in French and English by 'Reporters Without Borders' whose English impressed me. It is worth mentioning that the people of Kurdistan, as an Indo-European ethnolinguistic group in Iraq, think positively towards the



English language and they appreciate English higher than Arabic (**Sofi-Karim, 2015**).

The throng of refugees in my city was so massive that the families living in this city decided to portion them all around the city and nearby villages. When the refugees entered their new accommodations, they spread their cooking, fashions, and eating habits. To me, the top priority was their language as it was enriched with a considerable amount of English words with a similar pronunciation as in the English language. Some examples of these words were party, point, factor, secretary, bicycle, centre, company, group, propaganda, tomato, potato and so forth. When community individuals from two different cultural backgrounds interact through cultural intermixture, cultural acceptance or resistance are two likely responses to the contact (**Bochner, 2013**). The refugees who were living with the people of my city and as their new family members, spread their cultural and language features and this affected the culture and language of our people.

As a very curious teenager that had always been so interested in communicating with people of different walks of life, I was mesmerised by them, speaking the Iraqi Kurdish language while using frequent English words mentioned above. It is not so easy to speak with others and it becomes more formidable when you are worried about being underestimated or overlooked, you need to find the atmosphere friendly and relaxing (**Klippe, Klippel, & Ur, 1984**). Every single occasion that I was talking to an Iraqi, I learned something about their culture and language. Speaking with new Iraqi settlers in Kurdistan of Iran sparked my interest in the English language so much that I purchased my first Oxford Elementary English Pocket Dictionary. Extracting words from this dictionary and using them while talking with others made me feel positive about myself. Speakers who apply English words in their conversations, especially from British English, feel highly prestigious (**Rindal, 2010**). A few of my school teachers and a number of my close friends told me how good I was at using words and talking articulately. I vividly remember that I read almost all the fictional stories about Sherlock Holmes. I loved his words in terms of specific vocabulary that he had used to speak with his clients and criminals. An outstanding increase in the number of English loanwords by the Kurdish language was witnessed in the years 2005 to 2011, resulting from significant changes that the society and community of Kurdistan experienced in terms of both economy and politics (**Sedeeq, 2018**).

Back in 1998, there was only one English grammar class in my city to which I could not enrol as I could not afford it. Disappointed about not attending the private school, I talked to the teacher (who happened to be my school teacher) and asked him to let me take their final exams. Surprisingly, I got



the second top mark in the exam without even attending the classes. Students who outperform their peers or classmates, get motivated, try more and consider various tasks and activities as opportunities that provide them with more language development (**Thompson, Aizawa, Curle, & Rose, 2019**). The main reason was a pack of English exams that I had borrowed from a former student, which I had studied about fifteen times along with my school English textbooks. These books incredibly improved my English. I was impressed by this success and pushed myself one step further to study English at a university. Students may discover the best ways for themselves to learn English if they recognise their learning styles and strategies which can be profitable enough to their language learning success (**Brown, 2002**).

I have an uncle who currently lives in Canada. He moved there the same year that I took my university entrance exam. He recommended studying majors other than English convincing me to apply English as a means to pursue higher education. He believed that English was more of a means for communication that could be employed to succeed in other fields. For a myriad of non-native speakers of the English language, it is mostly a contact language that is used as a means of communication with foreign speakers of either English or other languages (**Firth, 1996**). Meanwhile, studying for the national university entrance exam, I was working in a company as a warehouseman from nine to five.

### **A Diversion in the Educational Path**

My youngest brother who was ten years younger fainted out of the blue in an alley. The doctors diagnosed it as malnutrition and due to his poor bone structure, the fall had broken his pelvis, so he had to go under a tough medical operation. This surgery was even difficult for his doctors to operate as they confessed later. The problem that worsened this tough predicament for my family was the money needed for his operation. We had to ask charity organisations to lend us the money for the medical examinations and the operation. Life had decided to challenge my family so unkindly again, and we were not ready for this unfair combat, but we had to fight for life because there was no other alternative. Finally, some altruists and philanthropists assisted to raise the needed money for his operation which took almost eight hours. We were impatiently waiting for the doctors to inform us about my brothers' post-operative conditions. At these heartbreaking moments, I remembered Karl Marx who was reading books while nursing his dying wife. I did the same and read the English signs in different parts of the hospital to learn more. I spent almost ten days in the hospital with my brother to look after him along with the doctors and nurses. During that dramatic but educational time, I read and learned more about life. After being discharged from the hospital my

brother had to stay in bed for almost a year. This incident broke my mother's spirit and drowned us in sadness, sorrow, and frustration.

No wonder, I failed to get accepted into any university to study Economics. For the next year, I had to work in a power plant located outside the city, where the weather was so windy and cold. One day on the job, cold weather inflicted me with a terrible backache alike my late father. I had to visit a specialist. I was told if my back is not operated I would be paralysed within a week. I needed to stop working hard, so again I looked for a less demanding job and worked for a gas company. Meanwhile, I started to study to take the university entrance exam, but this time I listened to my inner voice and picked English as my major which by then had become a part of my life. I got accepted at Urmia University to study English Language and Literature. Shortly after attending this university, the English language profoundly caused changes in my attitudes and thoughts. Familiarity with English as a foreign language in a formal and educational environment and meeting likeminded people brought me to brand new experiences. From day one, I took part-time jobs both in and out of university to be able to cover my living costs. My dorm was about four kilometres far from the campus and some weekdays I had to walk to save money. My other three studying years were a little easier than the past concerning my finances as I started doing translations for students of other fields. After a while, getting a part-time job at the university library assisted me to read more books. Although being a freelance translator was very time consuming and even arduous, I liked it as it was relevant to my field of study, and every new time it was giving me an in-service experience. An enormous number of English learners apply translation as a viable learning strategy to enhance both receptive and productive language skills (**Liao, 2006**). Translation for other students deepened my interest in English and I was driven by the idea of translating books, especially when I read some translated novels and found out that a few of them had a poor and partly rough translation.

Back in time from 2000 to 2003, I felt my life was smoothly being surrounded more and more by English as my identity was tangibly and effectively shaped by it. Whenever English learners are provided with chances to interact with advanced or native speakers of the English language, their social identity and social world may be affected (**Peirce, 1994**). In 2003, I graduated from Urmia University and needed to look for a job. When I went back to my city, my younger brother was doing his compulsory military service, my only sister was married, and my mother who was suffering from numerous health issues due to working hard for so many years was living with my younger brother. Just a few days later, we had to demolish our house as it was too old and cramped despite its memories and tranquillity. When all the family members were working to

renovate the house, we had to work 24/7 so that we could build it cheaper and prevent ourselves from sinking into debt. I was exhausted with work and desperate.

These days were the time that the internet started to become more popular in Iran and it was spreading among people especially among teenagers. The use of the internet is salient in terms of education so that you can leave behind the limitations of time and space and employ technology on an equal footing with the new generation who are incredibly technophile (**Dogruer, Eyyam, & Menevis, 2011**). Still, I could not afford to buy a computer to help with my English.

### **Teaching English, My Best Suited Job**

One day when I was working hard with construction workers, an interesting event happened which pushed me through a new route in my life. I had a friend named Awat from my school days that by then was doing his military service in a government office. I clearly remember the moment that he came to me at noon asking me to accompany him to visit a highly educated tourist from Norway who had come to travel to Iraq through the border of our city as he had not been able to find anyone to speak English within the city. The further opportunities a language learner is given to indicate and develop their language skills and abilities, the more motivated they will become (**Wu & Marek, 2009**). The moment was very exhilarating as it was ages since I had met any Westerner. When I met the tourist and welcomed him in English, he was so excited that he hugged me. I still remember his name 'Oley'. I spent the whole evening with him speaking English. I knew that my English was not perfect, but still, he admired my English and speaking skill. After this, I was motivated to improve my language skills and try to acquire a better command of English. It was just the next day when an old friend of mine who was a supervisor in an English language school, invited me to teach, as some of the parents had told him about my encounter with the tourist. It goes without saying how inspiring the offer was, I accepted on the spot as the job was in line with my education, profession and character, besides its financial benefits. The first week, I taught so passionately and eagerly that I was offered a few more classes. Every night, I studied the books meticulously to plan the topics for the next teaching session so that I could motivate my students and improve their English skills. Powell (**2005**) states that effective teaching is more possible when learners have a sense of belonging towards their learning environment. I was young, energetic, eager, passionate and very ambitious in my job. I was teaching about eight hours a day concurrently busy supervising my house construction. Working three shifts was exhausting, but I had no other option as my previous years had been the same. Fortunately, after seven months, we finished the house, and it was

time to allocate more energy to my English and teaching skills. The language school in which I was teaching, and the children's parents were satisfied with my teaching. That meant that I was being offered more classes and even private tutoring in students' homes.

The English language had dominated my life, changed my thoughts and lifestyle, and was tangibly giving me a new identity and a new social personality. Learning a foreign language has always assisted learners with meeting new social and cultural features which gradually bring about latent slight shifts in their life and thinking style (**Mirhosseini, Sazvar, & Rashed, 2017**). Going back in 2006, income through teaching was enough to cover a single person's life. By that time, I needed to improve my listening skill using a very old 'Sharp cassette player' inherited from my father which I could only listen to the news and English music, amalgamated with background noises from the radio. I tried to buy a computer for my study, but I needed to work harder to save up money. Within nine months I could buy one with which I spent most of my free time especially for improving my listening skill. Learning with multimedia plays a significant role in developing English language listening skills (**Khosravi, Moharami & Karimkhanlouei, 2015**). My English skills were increasingly improving every single day. Every time I taught more classes, I learned and earned more.

One day, in addition to my teaching I was offered a job as a salesperson in a jewellery shop. I accepted the job and divided my time between both teaching and working in the shop. I did both jobs for two years but being a salesperson could not make me satisfied or happy. In the same year through an election, I became the chief of the directing board of the 'Saham-e- Edalat' firm and worked there for almost two years. Even this job could not quench my insatiable desire and I quit my full-time job but kept my role for twelve years. I continued teaching English and even began teaching evening shifts to adults and business people.

In 2008, I participated in an interview for a competitive job in a governmental office named 'Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults'. I liked the new place as it had a very big library consisting of twelve thousand books for children and teenagers aged from five to nineteen. I registered to pursue my higher education in 2012 and received my Master of Arts in Teaching English at Islamic Azad University of Urmia and graduated in 2016. Since 2008, I have been working in the 'Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults' as a full-time employee mostly in the morning shifts and also have been teaching English in two consecutive afternoons and evenings.

In 2016, I founded my own English Language school 'Bayan' which became very promising in the very first year, having about two hundred language learners between ages 4 to 40 years old. At the time of writing this reflective paper, I have been teaching English to various age groups for seventeen years in a row using a variety of textbooks. Thus far, nothing in my social and working life has made me as prestigious as teaching English. Teaching English for so long nurtured my plan for the future. It has changed my values, has reshaped my personality, and has provided me with unique opportunities to review my beliefs and attitudes towards life and the world. Teaching English always has something to add to the teacher's existing values. It subtly affects their personality and identity but does not seem to change them into completely new individuals (Le Ha, 2008). Now, I think that I was born a teacher and through teaching, I make a difference for both myself and my students. I strongly believe a teacher does not merely teach a special subject but also gives the students a taste of life, humanity, love, consideration, commitment, and honour. The teachers' worldview and teaching approach considerably affect both performance and personality of their learners and help them to shape a new attitude (Ulug, Ozden, & Eryilmaz, 2011). Nobody can change and affect children and teenagers as well as a teacher, but on one condition, if they trust their teacher.

### **Discussion**

There are a few works in the literature on the significance of teachers' lifelong experiences (Callary, 2012; Harder et al., 2020; Reed-Danahy, 2006). Most of the current studies are on the importance of lifelong learning and how to develop lifelong learners without pointing to the value of experience. This study highlights the significance of lived experiences in shaping teachers' views and professional identity formation. There are key experiences described as being critical to Author 1's journey in being and becoming a teacher. In Author 1's case, reflecting on his excruciating childhood memories of loss, violence, segregation and exclusion, issues pertaining to intersections of gender and ethnic identities, the accidental becoming of a teacher, relational aspects of forming the teacher identity and accessing opportunities, the blurring of the teacher-learner boundaries, and the self and socioeconomic mobility through English language highlighted the impacts of his lifelong experiences on forming his view toward language education and his teacher identity. An Individual's identity develops through activities and membership in communities (Giovannelli, 2015). The narration illustrates being raised in a family in which reading and gaining knowledge was always praised no matter what difficulties emphasised the significance of education. Author 1 developed an interest in learning English when he was a child and grew that interest from interacting with Iraqi-Kurd immigrants in Iran. The interaction with

people and the sense of understanding cultural and linguistic differences instigated his passion for education and language learning in particular.

Ellis (2003) states English teachers' views toward their profession manifest their unique perspectives toward the language. Unlike many other teachers who formed their views about education after attending a university and taking specialised courses in education, Author 1's life experiences were synchronised with learning in every aspect as he explained about his experience in the hospital. Ates and Alsar define lifelong learning as 'the lifewide, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge' (2012: 4092) which is in line with Author 1's experiences. Giovanelli (2015) believes English language teachers becoming depends on their series of self-images as the projection of their experiences. Teachers' self-images portray an enhanced projection of personal self and professional identity.

We assessed Author 1's view of teaching and education against other authors and noticed his distinct views and due to differences in his lifelong experiences. Sze and Southcott (2019) emphasised the influence of living in a certain environment, culture, interactions with people and a sense of belonging to a community in forming views. Experience is a process that renders a mutually dependable emotion and cognition (Hohr, 2012). Regarding Dewey's view, the experience is based on the interaction between an individual as the agent and their environment. There is a dynamic relationship between undergoing (action from the environment) and doing (actions from the agent) in shaping life experiences (Muhit, 2013). The voracity for teaching English being so deeply rooted in his adolescent years has always doubled Author 1's energy for his profession. He has been emphasising that teaching and learning the English language not only is an inevitable necessity, but also a means of conveying the values of life that helps one to discover the various areas in their life which ultimately led to better-off life for him. Author 1 notices being a teacher as being a different person for the better (Lave & Wenger 1991).

This pivotal point cannot be ignored that Author 1 has been living with his lifelong experiences every single moment of his teaching time. 'Memory works as intersubjective practice' (Hunter, 2015: 1050) in which Author 1's memories shaped his view on teaching. 'The continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after' (Dewey 1938: 35, as cited in Kolb, 1984: 27). To him, teaching has a significant value that he has never ignored his students' emotions and feelings and never wants to let them drop out attending the classes due to pecuniary problems. This can be explained as his intention to not see the tragic scene of his life be replayed anew by others.

Author 1 finds sharing and retelling his life events to his students, in terms of language learning teaching forms, inspiring and motivating since he has received marvellous feedback from his English learners. The positive notes are not just in the form of comments as some of his students have picked out the English language as their field of study and have turned them into enthusiastic teachers. He believes his students who became a teacher pass on a nice blend of all amassed experiences to their students so that this process goes on and links with different layers of avid English learners. Ellis (2003) believes English teachers have a deep interest in wanting to share the subject with young people.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the impacts of experiences in teachers' formed professional identity and views. We witnessed that 'teacher identity is a profoundly individual and psychological matter' (Varghese et al., 2005: 39). The findings of this study is in line with current literature (Ellis, 2016; Skott, 2018; Varghese et al., 2005; Nichols, Schutz, Rodgers, & Bilica, 2016; Giovanelli, 2015; Beauchamp, & Thomas, 2009; Ellis, 2003) confirming that the depth, variety and diversity of teacher experiences impact on teacher views and identities. Author 1 experiences demonstrate that previous experiences are influential on his current practices and self-development. He relates to his students, and they form a team instigating a positive student and teacher relationship. This knowledge can be employed in teacher training programs. Teachers should cherish their experiences and assess theirs with students to find mutual ground in teaching. Reflecting, sharing and discovering experiences is a good way to bond with students to recognise their needs and develop their teaching methods along with their identity.

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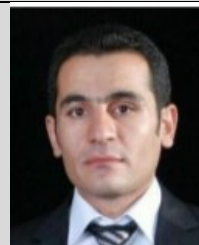




Mehdi Moharami is a recent PhD graduate from the faculty of Education at Monash University. He is an English teacher and has explored the impacts of learning English on the Iranian community. Mehdi is interested in cultural studies, TESOL, educational policy and applied linguistics.



Samran Daneshfar is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Samran holds qualifications in English literature and teaching English. He worked as a primary teacher and a secondary English teacher across schools in Iran. His PhD project investigates adult multilingual English learners' private speech. His areas of interest include second language education and Cultural-historical Theory



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**Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> The person who is a religious leader and preacher in Islam