



Bahraini School English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Professionalism under New Educational Reforms in Bahrain: An Interpretive Perspective

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Abstract: This study sought to explore Bahraini teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning as they related to their daily work and their interactions with the contexts in which they worked and lived so as to construct a deeper understanding of their professionalism. It particularly investigated the effects of contextual factors, in light of the recent educational reform initiatives in Bahrain, on the professional lives of practicing Bahraini school English language teachers who completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC) between 2008 and 2012. Research data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve teachers in the primary, intermediate and secondary schools, whose experiences ranged between four to ten years at the time of the interviews.

The research revealed that the teachers' professional lives were influenced by three main contextual factors: intensification of teachers' work, marginality of teachers and control in education. These factors were found to be complex as they were not only influenced by the educational system and the environment in which the teachers worked and lived but also by personality issues. Hence, although these factors significantly impacted upon the teachers' professional autonomy and commitment, created moral dilemmas for them, and brought with them the question of what it means to be a teacher under increasing scrutiny, the findings showed that the consequences of these factors on the teachers' professionalism varied from teacher to teacher and from context to context, emphasising that this impact was largely mediated by the teachers' values and sense of professional identity.

The study highlights the situated nature of teachers' beliefs and the importance of considering teachers' professional identities, values and moral purposes in any educational reform attempts that aim to improve teacher practice. This study also has implications for teacher beliefs and knowledge, teacher professionalism, and teacher education.

Keywords: Teachers' Beliefs, Professionalism, Teacher Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching today takes place in a world that is characterised by speed, rapid change, compression of time, complexity, instability and uncertainty (Hargreaves, 1994; Day, 1999). In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, change for teachers does not seem to be optional as today's global society 'requires political, organizational, economic, social and personal flexibility and responsiveness' (Day, 1999: 8). This situation can pose great problems and even 'threats' to teachers as it creates 'accelerated change, innovation overload and intensification in teachers' work' (Hargreaves, 1994: 9). Within this context, teachers today are grappling with many issues in their profession within school environments that are increasingly demanding and more

bureaucratically controlled (Day, 1999). Pressures have been mounted on teachers to change in order to meet the new demands of the contemporary world. Educational reforms have been initiated by governments in many countries around the world with the intension of improving standards of teaching and learning and raising the competency levels of teachers and students to enable them to cope with the unsettling political, economic, social, and personal circumstances of today's society (Day and Smethem, 2009).

These societal changes seem to have influenced life within the Kingdom of Bahrain, where this study takes place, as the Bahraini government launched a comprehensive economic project, formally called Bahrain Vision 2030, to develop economy and society



over the period between the years 2008 and 2030. Central to this enterprise are English teaching and English language teachers. There is consequently increasing demand in Bahrain for competent English teachers and for more effective approaches to their preparation and professional development. Following the recent trends in language teacher education, which began to shift towards sociocultural epistemologies (Johnson, 2009), language teacher education programmes in Bahrain, which are exclusively offered by the recently opened Bahrain Teachers' College (BTC), have pledged to give emphasis on the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual development of teachers to prepare them to take up productive roles in furthering Bahrain society through the education of its young people (PGDE Concept Paper, 2013).

This study looks into Bahraini teachers' beliefs regarding the effects of these reform mandates in education in Bahrain, and the context in which they are supposed to be implemented, on the teachers' lives and professionalism. In particular, the study focused on the Bahraini, government school, practicing, English language teachers who completed a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) course between the years 2008 and 2012 at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC). It posed two questions:

- 1) What are the beliefs of Bahraini English language teachers who completed a PGDE course at the BTC between 2008 and 2012 regarding the impact of new educational reforms on their lives and their professionalism?
- 2) How do these beliefs impact upon the teachers' professionalism?

The reason why these teachers were specifically chosen for this study was that the PGDE course they did was part of wider educational reform initiatives in Bahrain, i.e. Bahrain Vision 2030, that aims to reenergize and redirect teachers' practice in the country. Therefore, studying the context in which these reforms are being implemented and their impact upon the teachers, through the eyes of the teachers' themselves, might enable us to see how the recent reforms in Bahrain aligned with the teachers' subsequent experiences in schools and what might be needed for a more effective implementation of these reforms. The next section will provide an overview of the two main constructs in my research questions above, namely, teachers' beliefs and professionalism, by discussing and defining them, and reviewing key studies relevant to each one of them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The constructs of teachers' beliefs and professionalism have recently emerged as important strands in the research on second language teacher

education (SLTE). As we shall see in the following two sub-sections, the increased interest in teachers' beliefs and professionalism in SLTE is largely due to the changes in understanding the nature of L2 teacher learning, as well as the expanded need for competent language teachers as a response to the global spread of the English language (Richards, 2008; Burns and Richards, 2009).

A. Teachers' Beliefs

Although the interest in what teachers think, believe and know (or teacher cognition, Borg, 2006) has long been established in the context of general education (Barnard and Burns, 2012), it was not until the mid-1990s that the topic of teachers' beliefs and knowledge took central stage in L2 education research (Borg, 2012). The increased interest in L2 teachers' beliefs and knowledge is largely due to the shifts in the understanding of the nature of teacher learning from structural to functional, to a cognitivist SLA (second language acquisition), to socially situated (Johnson, 2009). It has become something of a truism for many researchers in the field of L2 teacher cognition (see, for example, Barnard and Burns, 2012 & Borg, 2006) that teaching is not simply the application of knowledge and skills. Rather, it is viewed as a much more complex process affected by physical, temporal, cognitive, social and cultural factors that can facilitate or constrain teaching and learning (Borg, 2006; Richards, 2008; Barnard and Burns, 2012).

The underlying value in exploring teachers' beliefs and knowledge is 'teacher change', be it in their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes or practices, which is exactly the same principle that also informs mandated educational reforms (Richards et al, 2001). However, the nature and need of that change as well as how it might happen may differ. For example, much research on L2 teachers' beliefs and knowledge (see Borg, 2006) adopts a bottom up model of change where teachers' agency has a central role in their development and change. It also posits that teachers are not technicians enacting practices and using materials provided by others from outside the classroom, but ones who are able to operate under conditions of relative autonomy (Johnston, 2003). Therefore, such research, as Johnston (2003) points out, aims to react to the issue of power relations in many top down traditional models of innovation in education where 'expert knowledge', represented in teacher education programmes and educational policies, is usually produced for 'consumption' for teachers.

Day (2005: 108–109) claims that 'teachers' voices are [still] an... under-represented part of macro debate which focuses on whether educational reforms [around the world] are resulting in the "deprofessionalization" or "technicization" of teachers' work or whether they result



in “reprofessionalization”. Hence, it is essential to explore what L2 teachers know and believe about the impact of external educational reforms on their professional lives (Richards, 1998; Borg, 2006). Barnard and Burns (2012: 2) argue that without understanding teachers’ beliefs, and without realizing that teachers are ‘the executive decision-makers of the curriculum’, efforts to reform education will lead to failure to realize the intended curriculum.

What are Teachers’ Beliefs?

Despite the fact that the term *belief* has been used widely in research focusing on L2 teacher cognition, it still lacks clear definition. M. Borg (2001) argues that the term may become clearer if it is compared with its parallel term *knowledge*. Knowledge is commonly defined as ‘justified true belief’ (Fenstermacher, 1994) and it must be ‘true’ in some external sense (M. Borg, 2001). A belief, on the other hand, is defined as ‘a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others’ (M. Borg, 2001: 186). My specific interest here is in the teachers’ stated ‘core beliefs’ about teaching and learning – ‘propositions about all aspects of their work which teachers hold to be true or false’ (Phipps and Borg, 2009: 381) – in the context of educational reforms. These beliefs may be ‘consciously or unconsciously held’ by teachers; and are ‘imbued with emotive commitment’; further, they can provide insights into teachers’ thought and behaviour (M. Borg, 2001: 186).

B. Teacher Professionalism

In the wake of globalization and the emergence of English as a global language, there has been an explosion for the demand for English around the world. Leaving aside the question of imperialism in the spread of English (see, for example, Pennycook, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Phillipson, 1992, for a critical review on this issue), the explosion of English worldwide has many implications for L2 teaching and teachers, such as the growing professionalism in the field with external pressures resulting from the need for competent language teachers as well as the need for acceptance of standards (Richards, 2008). But, because teachers, unlike doctors and lawyers, for example, are thought to lack rigorous knowledge (Tsui, 2003) and do not usually have control over their professional standards (Day, 1999), teaching has been regarded as a ‘semi-profession’ or a ‘minor profession’. In TESOL, the topic of whether or not L2 teaching is a profession is still a subject of scholarly debate. In recent years, there have been attempts to professionalize L2 teaching and teachers (Richards, 2008). For example, Tsui’s works (2003; 2009) focused on language teacher expertise in order to

raise the status of the teaching profession by demonstrating to the general public that teachers do in fact have a solid knowledge base which is no less sophisticated than experts in other fields.

Although these attempts to professionalize L2 teaching are undeniably desirable to raise the status of the teaching profession, Johnston (2003: 84) believes that the professionalization movement in ELT can be ‘partly unproductive and partly useful’. First of all, he thinks that it is unrealistic to seek the same professional status that is given to established occupations such as medicine and the law. He claims that teaching is of a different nature in that ‘unlike doctors and lawyers, as teachers we hand over the knowledge and skills we have to our learners... the teacher-student relation lies at the heart of education, whereas one could argue that the lawyer-client relation, for instance, is less moral and more instrumental in character’ (p. 85). In addition, Johnston claims that the discussion of teacher professionalism in L2 contexts usually ignores the ‘dangers’ that the call for professionalization can bring to teachers, such as increased accountabilities, work overload and increased monitoring of teachers’ practice, which can ironically lead to the ‘de-professionalization’ (Day, 2005) of teachers.

However, Johnston (2003) argues that the study of L2 teacher professionalism will be useful if it focuses on the values underlying teachers’ work and the contradictions in their identities. This idea is also echoed by Strike and Ternasky (1993 in Campbell, 2003: 3) as they believe that ‘[teaching] may seek the respect it deserves not by comparing itself to other vocations, but by focusing on the role and importance of teachers’ moral and intellectual commitments in the lives of students and in society’. Hence, what seems to be suggested here is that we should shift our attention from seeking to acquire the same professional status of established professions to examining the thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, practices, personal goals, emotions, and commitment of professionals themselves (Borg, 2012; Day, 2011; Richards and Lockhart, 2007).

What is Teacher Professionalism

The concept of professionalism has been a contestable issue in education. There is no universal meaning of the term as it is contextually, culturally, geographically, politically and socially constructed (Helsby, 1995). In second language teacher education, Leung (2009) proposes two different dimensions to professionalism: (1) sponsored professionalism and (2) independent professionalism. First of all, sponsored professionalism ‘represents the views of ministries of education, teaching organizations, regulatory bodies, school principals and so on that specify what teachers are expected to know and what quality teaching practices



consist of' (Richards, 2010: 119). On the other hand, independent professionalism refers to 'teachers' own views of teaching and the processes by which teachers engage in reflection on their own values, beliefs, and practices' (Richards, 2010: 119). As Leung (2009: 53) puts it, it is 'a commitment to careful and critical examination of the assumptions and practices embedded in sponsored professionalism with reference to discipline-based knowledge and wider social values, and to take action to effect change where appropriate.' This intrinsic view of professionalism portrays teachers as conscious decision-makers and intellectual practitioners (Borg, 2003; Pennycook, 1994) with a high sense of commitment, responsibility and moral purpose (Day, 1999). The moral commitment and responsibility that teachers embody here are not only governed by a specific type of professional code (i.e. sponsored professionalism), but also informed by their 'professional consciousness' (Leung, 2009: 55) that is shaped by their past and present experiences as well as their daily interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents (Campbell, 2003).

Johnston (2003) believes that each teacher has a moral duty to examine his or her values and beliefs about what is good and right for his or her learners in order to reconcile his or her identity of being a professional with the realities in his or her own context of teaching. In this paper, my interest in the question of professionalism is therefore to examine the beliefs and values underlying teachers' work and the contradictions in their professional identities in the context of professionalization. It is an attempt to provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their values and beliefs about what is good and right for their learners so as to understand how they reconcile their identities of being professionals with the realities in their own context of teaching. The next section will discuss briefly empirical studies that addressed teachers' beliefs about their identity –professionalism– to show how these beliefs are shaped by context.

C. Empirical Studies on Teachers' Beliefs and Professionalism

Because of word limitation, a comprehensive review of studies on teachers' beliefs and professionalism is not possible. However, many of the studies on teachers' lives, both in mainstream and TESOL, show that teachers' beliefs and professional identity –professionalism– are mediated and shaped by context (e.g. Day, 2011; Day, et al, 2005; Johnston, 1997; Johnston et al, 2005). For example, Day et al (2005), emphasise, in their interview study on 21 teachers at primary and secondary levels in Australia and England, the role of professional identity in sustaining commitment in a period of reform and standardisation. The results of the study suggest that

'commitment may be better understood as a nested phenomena (*sic*) at the centre of which is a set of core, relatively permanent values based upon personal beliefs, images of self, role and identity which are subject to challenge by change which is socio-politically constructed' (p. 563). Similar findings were also reported by Johnson (1997) and Johnston et al (2005) in the context of TESOL where commitment and sense of vocation were influenced by the wider context.

However, my review of studies on teachers' beliefs in the context of TESOL, (e.g. Richards and Pennington, 1998a, Underwood, 2012, Nishino, 2009, Kim, 2011), indicates that the general direction of these studies address teachers' beliefs from a technical perspective (i.e. in terms of teachers' subject matter knowledge and ability to tackle technical tasks in the classroom) rather than view them through the teachers' core values and beliefs that are linked to the wider historical, political, and cultural contexts in which teachers work and live. The studies show a lack of focus on other important issues that concern 'the hidden side of teaching' (Borg, 2006), the most important of which is the notion of teacher identity. It is only recently that the topic of identity in relation to teachers' beliefs and professionalism has begun to interest researchers in language education (Borg, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to focus on the topic of identity and its effect on teachers' beliefs, change and development, particularly within the wider sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of teaching. This study aims to redress this gap in the literature. It is motivated by Kirk's (2012) and Johnston et al.'s (2005) unaddressed call for urgent research on how contexts impact upon the beliefs and values of in-service teachers who have enrolled in educational programmes, particularly in relation to the contested notion of professionalism and the teacher's identity as a professional.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted the interpretivist paradigm to understand the teachers' work and lives, because interpretivism locates an individual's beliefs and knowledge in their daily interactions with the wider social life. Knowledge (epistemology) in this perspective is socially constructed and emerges from the social practices that people (or teachers) engage in. Reality (ontology) is fluid and open to negotiation (Cooper and White, 2012), and people construct it when they talk to each other and interact with the world around them (Burr, 1995). When the interpretivist perspective is used as a lens through which to look at teachers' beliefs as related to their work and lives, the central question, as Johnson (2009) argues, might be: How do teachers participate in and constitute their professional world? According to Johnson (2009), the interest of the interpretivist



researcher should be focused on what teachers know, honours what they know, and helps to clarify and resolve the dilemmas they face within the context in which they teach, which is one goal I aim to achieve in this research.

A. *Qualitative Research*

Because research on language teachers' beliefs and knowledge draws largely on constructivist epistemologies (Borg, 2006), it has emphasised the situated nature of teachers' beliefs (Underwood, 2012), which in a sense requires more in-depth qualitative approaches to investigate, taking the form of words rather than numbers and seeking to understand rather than just explain. As my research was interpretive and exploratory in nature, a qualitative approach was chosen as a methodology for the study to generate a depth of understanding and interpretation of the teachers' stories and distinct professional experiences in the specific context of the study.

B. *Research Participants*

Twelve Bahraini practicing English language teachers at government schools in Bahrain, seven females and five males, took part in the study. Their teaching experiences ranged between four to ten years at the time of conducting the research in May and June, 2013. All of the participants started teaching in the Ministry of Education (MOE) without having any initial formal teacher training qualifications. Later on in their careers, they attended a one-year in-service post graduate diploma in education (PGDE) programme at Bahrain Teachers College (BTC). The selection criteria of the participants were that they should be practicing Bahraini EFL teachers and have completed the PGDE course to fulfil the part of my rationale which argues that there is a dearth of studies on how educational programmes and reforms impact upon the professionalism of practicing EFL teachers, particularly in the case of Bahrain (Kirk, 2012).

C. *Data Collection and Analysis*

This research used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the sole method to explore the teachers' beliefs. Each participant attended two interviews, except two female participants who only managed to do one interview because of personal issues. The first interview set the ground for the next one by providing the contextual background from the teachers' life histories. The teachers were asked to reconstruct their lives before and after they took the PGDE programme and what their plans for professional development in the future were to see if there was a vocational purpose in their stories (Johnston, 1997). The second interview sought to explore the contemporary experiences of the teachers by eliciting extensive details about what they actually did in their

work, what their experience of life in their teaching context was like, and what meaning they made out of their work and experiences (See Appendix, A, for Interview Protocol).

All of the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the mother tongue of both the participants and the researcher. This is because I was interested in the meaning that the teachers attached to their experiences and I thought that the teachers would be in a better position to describe these experiences in their first language. The interviews were then transcribed and only the excerpts that were used in the research were translated into English by the researcher. Following Hahn (2008), I organized and focused the mounds of the data I had using the 2003 Microsoft Word and Access Software programmes to exemplify codes, categories, and themes. A code is a word or a short phrase that summarizes a portion of an interview transcription; a category, on the other hand, is a group of codes, while a theme 'is an *outcome* of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection' (Saldaña, 2009: 13). The study produced around 247 Initial codes, 43 Categories, and just 3 Themes (see Results and Discussion Section below).

D. *Ethics*

In my research, I followed the ethical protocol of the University of Exeter for undertaking research and I acquired the ethical approval from the university to carry out this research (See Appendix B, for ethical approval). The participants were requested to read and sign a consent form (Appendix, C, for consent form). They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were reassured that all the information provided in the interviews and the follow-up emails and phone calls would be used for my doctoral dissertation as well as for other publication purposes, such as journal papers. A copy of the signed consent form was given to each participant. To protect their identities, I did not report the private data identifying the participants, and used pseudonyms instead of their real names.

E. *Limitation*

In this paper it is acknowledged that one weakness in my research is the use of one method to collect the data from the participants as these data were not verified through other sources, such as classroom observation or lesson plans, and reports from other stakeholders, such as students, colleagues, parents and administrators. However, it is not uncommon, as Borg's (2006 & 2012) reviews show, that research on teachers' beliefs uses interviews 'exclusively' (see for example, Cowie, 2011; Trent, 2011; Griva and Chostelidou, 2011; Johnston et al. 2005; Johnston 1997; Reinders and Lazaro, 2011; Warford and Reeves, 2003, which were all interview-



based studies that addressed teachers' beliefs). Hence, despite the fact that my employment of interviews as the only data source in my research is a clear limitation to the applicability of my findings, it is situated in a 'research tradition' that is established in the field.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed that the contextual factors that the teachers believed influenced, to a varying extent, their work, lives and professionalism were: (1) the intensification of teachers' work (2) marginality of teachers, and (3) control in education. Many of the teachers' responses about their working lives in this research raised important issues associated with teacher professional identity and provided insights into how they felt they were professionals and how professionally they were treated. It was clear that there was a tension between how the teachers viewed themselves and how they believed other stakeholders, such as policy makers, administrators, parents, and students, viewed them. The tension between the teachers' viewpoints and the viewpoints of others that were reported by the teachers will be discussed here in light of the literature to understand how the aforementioned contextual factors impacted upon the teachers' sense of professional identity, which is considered as a key component of their professionalism (Day, 2002). In my report on the data below, I will refer to the participants by their pseudonyms followed by the number of interviews in which the data were taken (e.g. Osama, 2).

A. Influences of Intensification on Teachers' Identities

The first area of influence on the teachers' professional identities, and consequently on their professionalism, was *intensification of teachers' work*. Intensification in this research was reflected in the teachers' beliefs about the increased expectations of teachers, such as the increased demands on teachers to use modern technology as a result of the changing nature of teaching and the increased workloads, which determined what it means to be a 'good' teacher, what teachers should know and how they should do their job (Day, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Leung, 2009). These expectations that the teachers reported did not necessarily coincide with the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and hence created tensions and conflicts in their working lives as well as increased the pressures on them to change.

According to the teachers, smart phones, for example, became central in the lives of their students. They explained that the students utilized these smart sets to text-chat with each other using a special language characterized by symbols. This new kind of discourse, which Fatima, a secondary school teacher, described as

'obscure', had its new vocabulary, rules of spelling and grammar. Fatima (whose case will be discussed extensively here as an obvious example of how external expectations impacted the teachers' identities) recounted that the new genre impinged on the writings of her students as they began to include the electronic chat symbols in their English writing productions in class, which she thought made the teachers' work, especially the correction of students' writings, more difficult and intense. She grappled with understanding and dealing with the new identities of her students and the new discourses they used. This impacted upon her professional identity and left her with a feeling of 'uncertainty' and 'vulnerability to inefficacy' (Kelchtermans, 2011), because she thought that she had reached a stage of 'stability' in her development and knowledge, and that she found it difficult to cope with changes in her job ('we are above thirty, that's it – we are in the state of stability in our life – our ideas are stable. We are really not ready for change...'. Fatima, 2).

Fatima's feelings that her impact on the students in regard to the use of modern technology was limited also seems to have challenged her 'moral purpose' (Smethem, 2007) in teaching, which was 'to make a difference in the lives of students' (Fatima, 2). This moral purpose might require a commitment to the continual development of her knowledge and skills to keep her close to her students' needs (Fullan, 1993: 12) and to be abreast of rapid changes in teaching. However, she thought, as her quote in the above shows, that she found it difficult to develop her knowledge and skills to meet the new arising demands of teaching, because of her age ('we are above thirty, that's it... We are really not ready for change') as well as excessive workload ('The problem is that you have a full load so when they tell you to attend a course you become pessimistic because when you go to the course and come back, the work will pile up... it will be difficult for me to catch up' Fatima, 1).

In addition to this, Fatima also implied that excessive workload, which seemed to be exacerbated by her illness ('I suffer from a health problem'), negatively impacted upon her practice as a teacher. She explained that this made her unable to function normally in the period after the mid-term when work, as she put it, 'got to its climax' ('in that period I cannot talk, I cannot look at people, I cannot smell certain things, and I cannot eat everything – I am in a continuous boiling state and tiredness' Fatima, 2). This seemed to have impacted upon her emotions and professional identity as well, because she admitted that she became 'careless at times' and was ready to 'fight' with administrators, even if this led to undesirable consequences.

Because of her beliefs about the increased expectations of teachers to use modern technology and excessive workload, as well as other reasons, such her



attitude towards teaching, which showed that she was not fond of teaching even before she became a teacher ('entering the world of teaching was not a choice... but because it was the only option available, I took it' Fatima, 1), Fatima did not envisage herself teaching for many more years ('although I am new... I would retire tomorrow if I could'). Hence, she was emotionally vulnerable and at risk of leaving the profession because she seemed to be unable to manage the changes and pressures in her work. According to Kelchtermans (2011):

The experience of vulnerability includes feelings of powerlessness... i.e. of an inability to create the workplace conditions one considers necessary for good job performance and job satisfaction (p. 77).

In the literature that addressed teachers' work and lives, there is abundant evidence of the detrimental impact of the intensification of teachers' work on teachers' professional identity, moral purpose, and desire to remain in teaching (e.g. Hargreaves, 1992 and 1994; Merson, 2000; Penrice, 2011; Wotherspoon, 2008; Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Smethem, 2007). Although my research offers some support to these findings, as the discussion of the results in the above shows, there also seems to be some differences. For example, intensification in my research was not only attributed to external demands and expectations, as many of the studies in the literature suggest, but it was also self-imposed in that some of the teachers accepted the 'open-endedness' nature of their job (Hargreaves, 1994). For example, Ali, a secondary school teacher, explained that his lesson planning was an open-ended task that took between 'twenty minutes' to even 'ten hours' and that 'development' for him meant working 'for 24 hours'. Hence, he seemed to suggest that intensification was an important feature of his work, identity and moral purpose.

In addition to this, the impact of intensification was not entirely direct (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009). For instance, what Fatima perceived as a threat ('you feel as if you are going to die before the paperwork that we do... finishes' Fatima, 2), others, such as Hameeda, a secondary school teacher, viewed as enjoyable: ('...I enjoy doing the preparation work and paperwork'). However, some teachers also implied that this kind of commitment and effort from teachers could legitimize intensification (Hargreaves, 1994). For example, Ahmed, an intermediate teacher, said: 'if they [i.e. administrators] really care (i.e. by compensating teachers) about whether you do extra work or not, they should at least spare one hour each day for us at school to do that'. This, therefore, makes the concept of intensification complex, which might require researchers to look at it in a different way.

B. Influences of Marginality on Teachers' Identities

The second area of influence on the teachers' professional identities and professionalism that my research recognized was *marginality of teachers*. Marginality was associated with the teachers' beliefs about the low status of teaching and the lack of recognition, as well as the teachers' self-marginalization. One issue that the teachers thought influenced their lives and work in my research was related to the teachers' payment and compensation, which seemed to result, as we shall see below, in financial worries, job dissatisfaction and disenchantment.

Many of the teachers' responses in this research suggested a low status of teaching in Bahrain, which they thought impacted upon their professional and personal lives. Yasser, a primary teacher, for example, mentioned that he was 'repaying three loans' and could not get by with his life normally without doing two jobs. His working day did not end with the ringing of the bell in his school as he had to do another job somewhere else. This meant that he had to spend long hours away from his family, which he thought made him feel 'stressed' and affected the quality of his relationship with his children at home. Similarly, Osama, an intermediate teacher, implied that the teaching salary was just barely enough to keep food on the table. The inflation, he suggested, left teachers vulnerable to economic pressures, which also seems to be common in the wider context in the Bahraini society (Kirk, 2012).

While better payment for teachers and compensation are desirable to improve the image of teaching (Johnston, 1997), Sockett (1993) warns against considering the pay as the primary goal for teaching. He said:

The most obvious common danger is that status (better salary, for example) will become a goal to which practical improvement is subservient, rather than the other way around, and that leads to a poor public image of a profession (p. 10).

In this quotation, Sockett presents teaching as a moral activity the goal of which is the improvement of society through education. Although the issues of status are important to teachers, practice, as can be understood from Sockett's words, is what seems to be the key for this improved status. Hence, Sockett implies that when teachers value their profession (i.e. by improving their practice), others might follow suit.

Despite the fact that many of the teachers in this research seemed to believe that the satisfaction and pleasure, or 'psychic rewards' (Lortie 1975 in L. Hargreaves, 2009: 217), resulted from their positive relationships with students were the principles that characterised their professionalism rather than just improved salaries and compensations, they also suggested that the wider policy of the Ministry of Education undermined teachers and teaching, which



made it difficult for them to foster a good image about teaching. For example, Hameeda claimed that: 'many teachers say: 'we will not work hard enough because we will not get any promotion'. Similarly, Fatima believed that the lack of incentives made many teachers feel demotivated: 'You do not feel that if the teachers give an extra effort, they will get any reward, at least a symbolic one, which motivates them to do more'.

These responses, then, suggest that some teachers, consciously or unconsciously, preferred not to claim a professional identity or act as professionals, perhaps as a way of protesting against what they thought was the lack of recognition. On the other hand, some participants thought that teachers could empower themselves and foster a positive image of a professional within the minds of others by possessing certain attitudes and doing certain actions. For example, Ali thought that his initiative and concern about helping his colleagues helped him to raise his status in teaching and become likable by others: 'I always take the initiative to help... I acquired the reputation as someone who always gives help to teachers'. Hence, it seems that the teachers' feelings of being valued or devalued within their profession were also mediated by their sense of professional identity rather than just external factors, and this in turn affected upon their professionalism and commitment to teaching. In the literature looking at teachers' professional lives and work, the concept of marginality, which includes themes like underpayment and overwork, lack of job security or benefits, and the lack of recognition from authorities (Johnston, 2003), was recurrent (see e.g. Johnston et al, 2005; Edstam, 2001; Johnston, 1997, 1999; Popkewitz, 1994; Pennington, 1992). Many of these studies discussed how marginality affected teachers' professional identity, motivation, and commitment (Popkewitz, 1994). While the findings of this research add some support to these studies, they also offer new insights into the concept of marginality.

First of all, marginality, like intensification, did not seem to be influenced by the educational system alone but it was also mediated by the teachers' sense of professional identity. In other words, the teachers who appeared to have a strong sense of identity seemed to feel empowered (Giroux, 1988), while those who did not appear to consider teaching to be their life-long careers felt marginalized and diminished in their role (Edstam, 2001). For example, Ali seemed to look at marginality as a challenge that could trigger him to do something ('I cannot work in a place where there is something wrong and I do nothing' Ali, 2). He seems to have found ways to combat marginality by sympathizing with his colleagues and helping them to share their knowledge. He said: 'We have teachers in the school who are much, much, much better than me but their voices are unheard and they do not show their knowledge. I connected these

in the club (a social network on the internet) to listen to them and show their knowledge to the world' (Ali, 2).

On the other hand, Ahmed's narrations of his life before he became a teacher ('I resisted the very idea of becoming a teacher for three years after my graduation') and after he became a teacher ('I don't do school work at home because I am not paid for it') appear to suggest that teaching was 'just a job' for him. This made him vulnerable to feelings of inefficacy ('I don't feel I am suitable for teaching... because I don't like it') and was probably at risk of leaving the profession, because he was ready to replace teaching with any job had he not had family and financial obligations: 'If I were single, it wouldn't be so much of a problem for me to do a low ranking job'. Hence, it appears that marginality was not only a position that was enforced by social inequality but also by personality issues.

C. Influences of Control on Teachers' Identities

The third and last factor that seemed to impact upon the teachers' identities and professionalism in this research was *control in education*. This theme was related to the teachers' beliefs about the increased monitoring of their collaborative culture and classroom practices as well as the imposition of certain teaching strategies, which they thought restricted their autonomy. Many of the teachers in this research suggested that their working relationships were bureaucratically imposed. This seemed to fit with what Hargreaves (1994) describes as 'contrived collegiality', which he defines as a form of collaboration that is 'controlled, regulated and predictable in its outcomes, and is frequently used to implement system initiatives or the principal's preferred programs' (p. 135). He contrasted it with 'collaborative cultures', where teachers' working relationships are more spontaneous, informal and less controlled by administrators.

The teachers' responses in this research implied that their collegiality was contrived in at least two ways: the teachers' professional development meetings and peer observations. The teachers suggested that what was important for their administrators was that the teachers went through the motions of 'collaborative' activities, rather than perhaps focus on the 'real' intended purpose behind these activities, which was, as they thought, to provide opportunities for learning ('When you turn a good thing (i.e. peer observation) into a rule, it loses its purpose, which is to motivate teachers to love learning' Fatima, 2). They seemed to believe that the peer visits and development meetings were mainly conducted to satisfy bureaucratic demands that sought predictable outcomes ('they put a lot of pressure on teachers such as you must have differentiation in your lesson plan every lesson' Hameed2). Therefore, they implied that their autonomy and the space to make collaborative decisions



for themselves were lost or at least hidden within what they appeared to describe as a culture of managed compliance.

In his critique to contrived collegiality, Cooper (1988: 47 in Hargreaves, 1992: 82) wondered:

Whose culture is it anyway? If teachers are told what to be professional about, how, where and with whom to collaborate, and what blueprint of professional conduct to follow, then the culture that evolves will be foreign to the setting. They will once again have “received” a culture.

Because many of the teachers believed that their collaborative activities were not always spontaneous and voluntary, and did not take into account the time and excessive workload of the teachers, they thought that the outcomes of these activities were sometimes perverse. The teachers seemed to develop their resistive strategies by appearing to conform with administrative demands while in fact they were not. For example, Fatima admitted that she ‘forged’ classroom visits that she claimed were required by the administration during busy times in the semester. Contrived collegiality, therefore, impacted upon the teachers’ identity and how they went about doing their daily business in school.

Another facet of control in education that some teachers discussed in this research, which also seemed to impact upon their professional identity and autonomy, was linked to what the teachers described as an imbalanced relationship with administrators, educational supervisors and quality assurance specialists. The teachers seemed to suggest that this relationship was judgemental in nature because they thought that the supervisors focused on the teachers’ productivity and performance (e.g. ‘they just criticize and leave, Hanan 1’... ‘they just try to catch you, Ahmed 2’... ‘[they tell you] ‘the teaching strategy that you are using is not useful for you in teaching’, Yasser 2’). Bullough (2011: 16) argues that:

When “valued for their productivity alone” authentic social relations... are replaced by “judgemental relations”... Judgemental relations enhance vulnerability and undermine trust by encouraging deceit.

Indeed, in this research the teachers reported a noticeable erosion of trust between them and the administrators. For example, one teacher described one of the specialists who visited his class as someone who ‘doesn’t know chalk from cheese’ as a way of protesting against what he thought was ‘deterministic’ feedback on his lesson. In addition, the ‘judgemental relation’ that the teachers reported seemed to have encouraged ‘fabrications’ and ‘deceit’ (Bullough: 2011: 16) in that some teachers acted in the way that they thought the administrators wanted when the latter visited their classes but went back to what they normally did once the administrators walked out of the classroom.

In the literature dealing with the impact of control in education on teachers’ professional lives (particularly the kind of control which is motivated by reforms), many studies generally suggest that control has negatively impacted upon teachers’ professional identity and curbed their autonomy, increasing teacher stress, contributing to the decline of teacher morale, and affecting their health and well-being (e.g. Moss, 2004; Wilkins, 2011). As shown in this section, the findings of the current study resonate with the findings from the literature in that the teachers in this research reported that control in education jeopardized their autonomy, agency, commitment, job satisfaction, sense of self-efficacy and vulnerability, emotions, and well-being.

However, the findings in this research also seem to offer some new insight into the concept of control in education. For example, they seem to oppose the widespread notion of control as solely bad, drawing attention that control can both be bad and good for autonomy and professional identity, which might enable us to focus on power as a force for change. On the one hand, many teachers thought that the control exerted over their collaborative culture and classroom practices reduced their autonomy, which seemed to have impacted negatively upon their commitment and professionalism. On the other hand, however, some teachers thought that control could trigger teachers to do something that enhances their autonomy and helps them to initiate change. For example, Ali said: ‘... whenever I face a roadblock, I try to remove it and experiment something else... Some of the things I experiment succeed and some fail but in both cases I am the winner’ (Ali, 2).

In addition to this, control in education seemed to have different styles. Some types of control seemed to be ‘coercive’ but others seemed to be ‘persuasive’ (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2007). The impact of the former seemed to be sometimes destructive while the latter seemed to be more productive. This was obvious in the case of Zakia, a secondary teacher. She quit teaching for one year because of what she described as ‘great pressures’ on teachers. However, she considered the kind of ‘pressures’ which allowed some space of freedom for teachers to be beneficial to encourage teachers to work collaboratively in teams:

...this year things changed... because of the efforts of the principal – she put pressure on us to work [and] made us feel that the department has to produce something... So with our collective efforts we were like ‘let’s be different this year’ and thank God we succeeded to be different (Zakia, 2).

Therefore, control in Zakia’s case here, which used a leadership style that depended on bottom-up strategies with top-down ones (Hargreaves, 1994), seemed to have been motivating for teachers and useful for their



collective identity (Helgøy, Homme and Gewirtz, 2007) as well. This finding might open up a space to deeply discuss the value of balancing control and autonomy for teacher professionalism rather than viewing them in a traditional, normative way which favours one over the other (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2007).

All in all, the responses of the teachers above show that the intensification of teachers' work, marginality of teachers and control in education had serious consequences on the teachers' professionalism. However, the findings also indicate that the impact of these contextual factors varied from teacher to teacher and from context to context, emphasising that this impact was largely mediated by the teachers' values and sense of professional identity.

5. CONCLUSION

These findings of this research suggest that the conflicts between the values the teachers held and their thoughts about the values and expectations of others in the specific contexts of teaching in Bahrain can lead to unpredictable consequences on the teachers' professionalism. The implication of this is that issues such as teachers' values, commitment, and professional identity 'must be forever re-established and negotiated' in teacher training and development as the definitions of these can 'change at various times according to contextual and individual factors and exigencies' (Sachs, 1999: 5 in Lopes, 2009: 265). It becomes the responsibility of second language teacher education to make L2 teachers aware of contextual factors, such as curricular mandates and educational reforms, that can shape teachers' beliefs, if the teachers are expected to work with and against the consequences that these contextual factors may have on their professional identities and professionalism, and, in turn, on students' opportunities to learn L2 (Johnson, 2009).

The challenge for educational reforms and teacher education in Bahrain is, therefore, how to form, maintain and build upon the teachers' professional identities, moral purposes, goals and values within the context of educational reform and rapid change in teaching. The findings of this study generally suggest that the implementation of the recent educational reform changes in Bahrain, which endeavoured to reenergize and redirect teachers' practice, have, in many instances in this research, been challenged by contextual factors, which impacted upon the teachers' sense of professional identity and restricted their professionalism to prescribed performances that seemed to intensify their work, contribute to their marginality, and increase control over their practice.

The tensions in the teachers' lives resulted from the introduction of these reforms, which pulled the teachers in different directions, and the importance of the topic of

identity in their professionalism, commitment, professional growth and change might enable us to see what is needed for a more successful implementation of reforms in Bahrain. A holistic and long-term study of what happens to reform and its consequences on the teachers' professionalism, particularly in light of their identity, is, therefore, required. Such kind of in-depth qualitative and interpretivist research would require the involvement of all stakeholders in education as well as the use of multiple data collection techniques such as classroom observation, field notes, policy documents, journal writing, and stimulated recall (Borg, 2006) to capture the complexities and dynamics of the teachers' identities.

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