Investigation of language teacher's identity experiences in adopting the 'participatory' approach through active learning spaces in undergraduate education writing classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore how two English Language Teachers (ELT) adapt their identity to face the new institutional reform of participatory approach classrooms at a University in the UAE. Using a post-structural framework, it examines the dynamics between teacher identity, agency, and structure to understand how these affect the professional experiences of teachers in the face of an institutional reform. The study adopted the qualitative approach; the data of the study was collected through an interview with two ELT teachers who volunteered to teach in the Active Learning Spaces and were simultaneously teaching in the traditional lecture rooms during the same semester. Both teachers were female and had taught the language to students in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context for more than 5 years. The findings of the study indicate that despite having similar contexts of reform, teachers' 'selves' were affected by the change and dealt with them in multiple ways. The findings of this study provide insights into the dichotomy of two different pedagogies that exist in one workplace. Such disparities exist in many educational institutes around the world due to rapid globalization and open-border policies practiced in higher education. This study provides insight into how institutional reforms can present obstacles for instructors and therefore need to be addressed.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in recognizing the importance of teacher identity and shows how it interacts with institutional reforms that mandates teachers to follow classroom policies and use new methods of teaching like the participatory approach which belongs to Active learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Critical Analysis

With rapid industrialization and globalization in the Arab region, educational transformations have also taken place in higher learning institutions. Due to the growing importance placed on Western practices and ideologies; and the majority of teachers in ELT consisting of imported foreigners rather than nationals (Syed, 2003) higher learning institutions in the region have been increasingly subject to educational reforms that are rooted in predominantly western pedagogy. The recent implementation of liberal teaching practices in many institutes of higher learning in the UAE, has led to a phase of 'crossing over' from traditional approaches of teaching towards a more liberal and

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participatory approach to education. Researchers in the region note that there has been an increasing 'commodification' of higher education, perhaps reflecting global trends. As such in many local institutions' instructors find themselves having to adapt to innovative teaching approaches using new tools and methodologies (Liu & Xu, 2011). This phenomenon of pedagogical reforms in higher learning institutions and language teachers having to adapt to them, have been known to create "a new work order" (Gee & Lankshear, 1995) for language teachers in the workplace. Liu and Xu (2011) argue how such a situation has caused global concerns from language teachers in different nations such as Malaysia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

The situation of "one community, two systems" whereby language teachers need to deal with the phasing out of traditional teaching practices for the newer approaches required by institutions themselves or governments, contributes to new challenges, highlighting the crucial role teacher's play in the successful implementation of the reforms (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). In order to understand how teachers adapt and face the challenges of the new reforms, Liu and Xu (2011) argue that we need to examine how they form a sense of themselves; their identities; in relation to the roles, positions and reforms being implemented in their classrooms. Recent research has begun to recognize the importance of teacher and teacher's professional identity in the successful implementation of reforms (Lasky, 2005; Veen, Sleegers, & Van De Ven, 2005). In lieu of this, I was interested on the recent introduction of the Active Learning Classrooms for writing students in my institution. This transition which required teachers in the Department to teach in a new learning environment presented an opportunity for me to research the impact of this change or pedagogical reform on teacher identity.

1.2. Background Information

The study was conducted in American University of Sharjah, an institution of higher learning, an institution that is culturally diverse with a multilingual student body, hailing from over 87 different countries. As part of the undergraduate program at the American University of Sharjah, students are required to complete composition courses during their first year at the University. The faculty, who teach all three levels of writing courses, customize their content and foci according to the writing courses. Most of the writing curriculum taught is based on the traditional approaches to teaching which includes a textbook based on the requirements of each writing course, lecture notes that teachers develop as well as methods of assessment including writing assignments, quizzes, exams etc. Recently the writing studies department in tandem with the 'world turn' (Liu & Xu, 2011) in teaching approaches, began instituting reforms in the teaching foci and methodology of the instructors. Teachers were encouraged to start applying a more participatory approach in their writing class, whereby instructors emphasized student participation through online learning platforms using tools such as Blackboard and Active Learning Spaces. Through blogs and forums students were able to comment and respond to each other's work, as well as expand on ideas instructors introduced in class. Students become the center of each writing class, actively engaging with the lesson, the instructor and each other, through a variety of tools that promoted student centered learning, rather than using traditional teacher fronted methods of pedagogy.

Changes also began appearing in the assessment practices of writing classes, with instructors opting for a standard electronic rubric to grade written assignments as opposed to traditional methods of grading. Teachers switched over to online quizzes and exams using the Blackboard, allowing students to see their grades instantaneously, and also receive feedback electronically. These changes were noted in the conversations amongst teachers during Department meetings and presentations. Instructors were now implementing several participatory approaches, like small group discussion, blog postings and peer reviews of student writing using tools like Blackboard, Team Quizzes amongst others to stimulate student engagement in their writing classes.

These inclusive and participatory practices brought about a positive change in students' attitude who now seemed more motivated and enjoyed the writing class. The Writing Department introduced the Active Learning Spaces in the Fall semester of the academic year. One such classroom was installed in the Department of Writing studies for

teachers to use. This classroom utilized state of the art technology with a widescreen touch television for teachers to use, as well as a number of smaller screens for students to use in the class. The touch screen television enabled teachers to project work on a wide screen for students to see and also allowed teachers to make changes to the work being displayed using a laser pen. The changes made could then be saved and used later. The classroom was also equipped with mobile furniture which included chairs that had wheels on them as well as rectangular tables also equipped with wheels. This was so that students would be encouraged to move around during the class in groups to engage in learning writing in an active way. The Active Learning Spaces were specifically designed in a way to encourage small group discussion, promote student's responses and interaction on each other's work and extend and develop dialogues in the writing classroom.

Through the small screens that students could work in groups around, they were able to display each group member's work for comments and suggestions from their peers easily, the instructor was also able to walk around and add to the ongoing discussion and all of the feedback would automatically saved on said display screen for students to refer to post lesson. The Active Learning Spaces utilized technology and flexibility to promote dialogue, engagement and interactive learning in the classroom.

Instructors volunteered for training sessions that taught them how to use the active learning spaces (named as "Active Learning Classrooms" (ACL) to distinguish them from traditional, teacher fronted lecture rooms). From the Fall semester, faculty who attended the training sessions aimed at equipping faculty with the knowledge of how to use the active learning space, were allocated one writing section in the ACL classroom, but had to continue to teach three other writing sections in the traditional lecture rooms. The University's management indicated that slowly all traditional lecture halls would be phased out to be replaced by the active learning classrooms in future, and therefore a reform that instructors were encouraged to embrace. Similar to other studies, the situation in this institution was a significant reform in writing pedagogy that teachers were encouraged to implement and I was interested to explore how the teachers in the Department adapted to this 'new work order'.

1.3. Context of Study

A point to be noted in the implementation of the new active learning classrooms was the pedagogical approach which these classrooms promoted. The Active Learning Classrooms were based on the participatory based method of language pedagogy, emphasizing active participation in the writing class, student centeredness, interactivity and autonomy. Whilst the language teachers volunteered to teach in the new classrooms, they were also expected to continue to teach writing classes in the traditional lecture rooms simultaneously. The new classrooms operated parallel with the transmission-based classrooms that required the traditional teacher fronted method of teaching. Thus the situation in the Department has caused the "one community, two systems" phenomenon contributing to new challenges for the language teachers (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Xu & Liu, 2009). Informed by the poststructuralist theory of language and linguistics communities whereby "the practices of societies are sites of struggle, and that linguistic communities are heterogeneous arenas characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power" (Norton, 2000). This study uses a sociocultural perspective and is located within an interpretive, exploratory framework. This study looks at structure; agency and identity to understand how institutionally mandated reforms shape teachers experiences and professional identity. Despite being a rather small-scale study, it is hoped that the findings will contribute towards an area in teacher education that is increasingly becoming a common issue in the Arab region, and is notably under researched.

1.4. Study Objectives: Purpose of Study

The study aimed to explore how two ELT teachers adapt their identity to face the new institutional reforms of adopting a participatory approach to teaching writing though the Active Learning Classrooms being implemented in a Writing Studies Department at a University in the UAE.

1.5. Research Questions

Specifically, the study aims to address the following three research questions:

1. RQ1: What motivated language teachers to volunteer in the writing reform taking place to promote participatory pedagogy through the new active learning classrooms?
2. RQ2: How do teachers feel about the reform of teaching in the new active learning classrooms that are geared at promoting participatory approaches?
3. RQ3: How has the reform of teaching in the new participatory learning classrooms affected the identity of teachers?

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

2.1. Participatory Pedagogy

Murphey and Falout (2010) state that in order to minimize the marginalization of learners views in second language acquisition (SLA), students need to participate in classrooms, through such participation based on a mutual process of understandings between teachers and learners we can work towards improving education as a whole. It is premised that teachers especially in ELT should adopt a participatory pedagogy, that is based on the practice of democracy in the classroom (Auerbach, 1993). This approach does not exclude the knowledge of learners; rather it empowers learners by centering pedagogy on the learner's experiences and knowledge (Auerbach, 1993). Through this, students participate in the active process of making their learning experiences an enriching and liberating one. The approach is one that I feel very strongly relates to my teaching practices. Through the collective dialogue, mutual learning and democratic decisions related to the educational process, students and teachers can work together in creating language learning practices that change conditions of powerlessness in the classroom.

Proponents of participatory action research as well as cooperative inquiry assert that in order to improve credibility in research and education instructors need to engage their students in participative research that investigates how teaching and learning can be implemented in a more collaborative way (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001). This collaboration is based on the frameworks of Freire (1970) and Deweyan (2004) that emphasize students' participation, and revolve around exploring, analyzing, acting and noticing the changes and then "beginning a new cycle of investigation" (Murphey & Falout, 2010). Amato (2003) states that in order to develop collaborative agency and participatory pedagogy in the classroom, teachers need to emphasize dialectic practices and asymmetrical power relationships in the classroom. Students are not ignorant and should not be considered less important than the teacher. In the researchers' previous experience of teaching composition to undergraduate students, it was noticed that teachers often assume that students are disadvantaged, because they need to learn writing. Some teachers even associate the placement of students into lower level and remedial writing classes as a result of their non-native status in the language and display supremacy due to being native speakers of the language in the classroom. However, such asymmetrical power relations often lead to non-conducive writing classes, whereby the student is demotivated to write and even attend the classes.

Murphey and Falout (2010) published a study based on Critical Participatory Looping, which aimed to include participant's understandings in an iterative feedback loop that generated enriched data interpretation. In their research, they relied on emerging interpretations from participants and prioritized collaboration with participants. Through processes that engaged students in discussions regarding their education, Murphey and Falout (2010) also found that students became more active, motivated and developed a critical capacity to reflect and act.

By recognizing that the classroom is a part of society and a reflection of the students' perceptions, values and beliefs, teachers can implement pedagogical reform that recognizes that "language learning is not simply a means of expression or communication, rather it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories and their possibilities for the future" (Norton & Toohey, 2004). Collaborative learning is based on a participatory approach to education that aims to develop the

knowledge of participants through dialogue and sharing (Auerbach, 1993). The teacher and students are involved in catalytic processes that reflect on the lives and experiences of students in a dialogical and dialectic process. Bolling (1994) explains that collaborative learning is advantageous as it increases the confidence of students in themselves, improves student voice, reinforces critical thinking abilities and engages students in active process of teaching and learning.

2.2. The Changing Nature of Professionalism: Teacher Identity

Teacher agency is part of a complex dynamic that is shaped and re-shaped by the structural, cultural features of society and institutes of learning (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehen, 2002). According to Bourdieu (1977), a person's habitus can be understood as the socialized norms or practice that influence the behavior of individuals. Bourdieu posits that habitus is created through a social process, that shifts according to context and time. Navarro (2006) explains that habitus is not fixed but evolves, and rather than being determined by structures it is formed through an interchange between agency and structure. Bourdieu (1986) explanation on capitol includes assets that extend beyond material objects to include assets that may be social, cultural or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). These theories have been the basis for studies explaining social asymmetries and unequal structures and the effect of these conformities on agents.

2.3. Language Teacher Identity

Walkington (2005) defines teacher identity as being central to their cultural beliefs, values and practices within and outside of the classroom context. Gee (1990) explains further that a teachers' professional identity is often associated with their professional status as a teacher, their status in society, interactions with others in society and their experiences. While there are multiple interpretations of teacher identity in literature (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010) many of the studies concur that; a) rather than being a fixed entity, teacher identity is shaped and reshaped by their experiences within and outside the classroom (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004) arises from personal knowledge and other negotiated experiences within a particular community (Wenger, 1998) it involves human agency, a way of interpreting the experiences to themselves (Beijaard et al., 2004) and finally that it consists of sub-identities that later form a harmonious whole (Beijaard et al., 2004). Although research on teacher identity has becoming increasingly popular in recent years, most of the literature focuses on the identity formation of pre-service teachers and how their experiences contribute to professional identity formation (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Sutherland et al., 2010). Research on language teacher identity in the field of ELT is limited, creating a gap of research in this area.

Based on a poststructuralist view of teacher identity, a review of literature in this area revealed that many of the studies explored how teachers 'shaped and reshaped' their identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) how teachers explain themselves through narratives (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) the discourses language teachers participated in and produced (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) and the range of contextual as well as external factors influencing teachers and teacher practices (Flores & Day, 2006). An important arch of research in this area explores the relationship between the language teachers' linguistic self and their professional identity (Li, 2007; Liu, 2004). Specifically, research has focused on the impact of the native-speaker (NS) versus non-native-speaker (NNS) dichotomy on language teacher's professional identity (Liu & Xu, 2011).

Research has implied that teacher identity is often influenced by personal, social and cognitive responses (Flores & Day, 2006). In this line, a number of studies exploring teacher feelings and vulnerability have highlighted the importance of teacher emotion in the formation of their professional identities. Kelchtermans (1996) in his study of Belgian teachers focused on the teachers' feelings of vulnerability, which surfaced as a result of policy changes, questions from parents, inspectors, superiors or colleagues in the light of their inability to help their student achieve higher standards in language learning. The teachers in the study reported that such a situation made them feel

exposed and they felt that it affected their professional identity as language teachers significantly. Lasky (2005) in her study conducted across ten schools in Canada, used "a socio-cultural theoretical lens, incorporating mediated agency to understand the interplay among structure, identity and agency as they shape teachers experiences of professional vulnerability". The study investigated how four teachers experienced and adapted to the tools of reforms being implemented on a large scale in Canadian schools. The study found that teacher's professional identity and vulnerability were affected by the reform tools which increased difficulty levels in maintaining an open rapport with their students and creating effective learning environments.

2.4. The Impact of Reforms on Language Teacher Identities

Lasky (2005) examines an area in teacher education that is becoming increasingly popular in recent years; that of the impact of reforms on language teachers experiences and professional identities (Clarke, 2009; Liu & Xu, 2011). Based in developing countries, these studies explore the effect of development and globalization, and the implementation of liberal, often technologically innovative pedagogical approaches in teaching language. As a direct result of the reform being implemented from a "top down" approach in many such contexts, researchers have focused on the simultaneous existence of two pedagogies in the community, leading to a situation of "one community, two systems" (Liu & Xu, 2011). In an attempt to understand the complexity of teacher identity in the context of reform whereby "teachers are forced to reconcile conflicting selves in order to contend with a workplace in which liberal and traditional pedagogies coexist".

Liu and Xu (2011) use narrative enquiry to explore how an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher negotiates her professional identity in order to adapt to the dual system of pedagogies in her workplace. The study found that the based on a premise of inclusion versus exclusion, the new work order had significant effect in shaping teacher's professional identity. Most of the literature surveyed concur that teacher identity is dynamic, open, negotiated and shifting. Additionally studies indicate that based on Wenger (1998) community of practice theory occurs within an intrinsic and complex relationship of space, time and context (1998). Studies centered on reforms and teacher identity concur that teachers need to reconstruct their identities to adapt to the continues and changing challenges that they are faced with in the work place community (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). This study investigates the experiences of two writing instructors as they negotiate their identities to adapt to this new learning space initiated as a reform by the institution. It aims to highlight the challenges that these teachers face under these new reforms and how these reforms affect their professional 'selves'.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The study used the qualitative approach based on the results of interview data from two ELT teachers who volunteered to teach through Active Learning method; while simultaneously teaching the traditional method as well during the same semester. The implementation of the new Active Learning Classrooms in writing studies created a situation whereby instructors needed to adapt to a "new work order", a pedagogical reform previously researched by the likes of Gee and Lankshear (1995) and Holland and Lachicotte (2007) amongst others. This study specifically examined the dynamics between teacher identity, agency, and structure to understand how these affected the professional experiences of teachers. This study aimed to illuminate the complexities of teacher identity in the context of an institutional reform taking place in a higher learning institution in the Middle East, whereby teachers are challenged by a new approach to teaching whilst contending with traditional methods of pedagogy at the same time.

This study was also framed within an interpretive approach that sought to "yield insight and understanding of people's behavior" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), hence this research was also an exploratory study. Exploratory studies provide an opportunity to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or acquire new insight into it in order to better understand the occurrence of certain phenomenon. On the other hand Nisbet and Watt (1984)

summarize some of the weaknesses of this approach as having difficulty in the generalizability of the study; not being open to cross-checking, causing the results generated to be selective, biased, personal, subjective; and finally, subject to problems associated with observer's bias. Despite such weaknesses, the exploratory approach can offer significant insights into particular situations and is often used in social research. The limitations of this approach can somewhat be minimized by applying a thick description, reflexivity and reporting a range of data (Cohen et al., 2011).

3.2. Participants

The participants of the interview consisted of two English language teachers between the ages of 30-40 years. Both teachers were female and had taught the language to students in an ESL context for more than 5 years. They had experience teaching in a number of countries, including the Gulf region as well as the U.S. Both participants were American nationals, however, had relocated to the UAE for employment purposes and taught writing to freshman students. When the active learning classrooms were initiated within their Department, both teachers volunteered to teach in these technologically advanced classrooms that required language teachers to deliver writing classes based on the student centered, participatory approach to education (Auerbach, 1993), being implemented in many institutions in the Gulf region (Clarke, 2009). However due to the initial phase, these active learning classrooms were initiated only in 4 classrooms, and the teachers were expected to continue to teach in the traditional classrooms as well. Thus, the teachers taught one writing class in the new active learning classroom and the remaining three writing classes in traditional classrooms. It was this reform that created the dual system explored in other studies (Liu & Xu, 2011).

3.3. Collecting Data of the Study

Data was collected through unstructured interviews that allow participants "to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their point of view." Cohen et al. (2011) Despite interviews being a powerful tool for researchers, it is also important to note that interviews are specifically planned, constructed and often susceptible to interview bias (Dyer, 1995). Kerlinger suggests that when used in conjunction with other methods of data collection, interviews would then be useful in gathering more in-depth data from the results that ensued, to go "deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do" (as cited in Cohen et al. (2011)).

The unstructured interviews of the two teachers were conducted with the intention of moving from description to explanation and finally theory generation. The groups of data were analyzed by sorting them together. By applying the 'progressive focusing' method developed by Parlett and Hamilton (1976), whereby funneling of information is applied to raw data, salient features of the situation (themes) were discussed, in relation to the research questions. During the study precaution was taken to minimize the occurrence of personal bias, and to avoid the subjective interpretations of the researcher's views while using the unstructured interview data. The data was analyzed using exploratory content analysis (Troudi, Coombe, & Al-Hamly, 2009). Emerging themes were categorized and codified. Categories were ascribed to emergent themes in the data and codified, repeated comparisons were made to the whole set of data by reading and rereading the participants' responses, before being analyzed (Troudi et al., 2009). The analysis revealed recurrent themes, categories, and in some instances, unique occurrences. However, to analyze all of the data was beyond the scope of this study.

4. DISCUSSIONS

A total of three themes were identified in relation to each of the three research questions of the study which included writing reforms in ELT pedagogy; reality versus reforms in the workplace community; and teacher identity in the context of reform.

4.1. Writing Reforms in ELT Pedagogy

The first theme emerged in relation to Research Question 1; *What motivated language teachers to participate in the writing reform taking place through the new active learning classrooms?* During the course of the semester, the participants of this study taught one writing course in the Active Learning Classroom and three in the traditional classroom. The preparatory seminars which they had taken in the previous semester had educated them on the use of the technological advanced active learning classrooms that promoted a liberal and participatory approach to pedagogy. It was also helpful in preparing them to adapt to the new equipment and teaching tools available to them in the classroom. Each teacher customized her writing instruction according to the facilities available in the active learning classroom and centered their teaching on a participatory model of language teaching and learning (Liu & Xu, 2011).

Although the new active learning classrooms were not mandated by the administration, the call to volunteer teaching in them is considered as an administrative reform that instructors were called on to adapt to. Therefore, the current context of the institution the study took place in the manner explained by Wenger (1998) related to ELT reform community of practice. Teachers in the community were expected to embrace and implement liberal, participatory pedagogy through the active learning spaces in teaching their writing courses. They were transformed into liberal practitioners through engaging in social practices that included participatory teaching, student centeredness and autonomy in the writing class. The fact that the teachers were expected to teach simultaneously in the new active learning classrooms (ALC) as well as the traditional classrooms during the transitional period in the Department contributed to the 'one community, two systems' found in similar studies (Liu & Xu, 2011). Despite teaching in the ALCs, teachers were instigated from a top-down approach, whereby they were requested to volunteer to teach in traditional classes as well by the Department head. It is therefore important to recognize that the initiative was not (as yet) mandated on the teachers.

One of the researchers (R1) of the study explored what motivated teachers to volunteer to teach in these 'new' learning spaces, and how they felt about the new reform being implemented through these learning spaces.

R1: What are some of the factors that led you to sign up for teaching in the Active Learning Classrooms this semester?

Teacher A: I was excited about the opportunity to teach in a classroom that had all the latest technological updates. I wanted to be a part of the movement that took students out of the traditional classroom (teacher talks/students take notes with pen & paper) into a more interactive space that allowed students to utilize the technology they are so familiar with at home and among their friends. I also wanted to "update" my skills as an educator and learn how to teach effectively in such a technologically driven classroom.

Teacher B: (1) I try to keep myself up-to-date on the latest teaching trends/technologies.

(2) In my teaching experiences, I've noticed that students respond well to technology.

(3) I like to learn new things/challenge myself to become a more innovative educator.

In analyzing the response given by both teachers it can be assumed that they volunteered for teaching in the active learning spaces as they recognized the reform as an opportunity to "be more interactive, innovative and updated". Teacher A, explains how she was excited and yet at the same time, felt an unspoken pressure to volunteer for these classes as she felt this was where the Department was moving towards and she did not want to be 'left behind'. During the unstructured interview session when asked to explain more about her reasons for volunteering to teach in the ALC she explains further;

RI: So, can you explain why you decided to volunteer to teach in the ALC this semester?

Teacher A: Yeah….well…ha…you'd think that it was all about being motivated and excited….and yeah…but I was also of course…but it was also…like I thought this is where we need to show we're proactive….like these classrooms are going to be the future…and I wanted to be a part of it…like - Not left behind and you know how nowadays everyone's talking about the new approaches to teaching, participation and all…..

In terms of the new reform, this teacher seemed anxious to volunteer to show her active participation as a community member. She indicates that she does not want to be marginalized within her workplace community and volunteers to participate in the reform in order to 'fit in' socially. Furthermore, the teacher explains that together with all these anxious feelings, she was honestly interested and motivated to learn about these 'high tech' classrooms, in order to connect better with the technologically savvy generation of students she teaches. She wants to be able to create 'comfortable classrooms' for her students and this is yet another aspect in line with participatory pedagogy (Auerbach, 1993). This shows that teacher A was sensitive to the needs of her students, who she recognized as being motivated by technology and wanted to improve herself in order to be able to create innovative classes for her students. Here it was evident that Teacher A was committed to her job not only at the professional level but also wanted to improve herself personally to be able to connect better with her students.

Similarly, Teacher B also mentions that based on her previous teaching experience she "noticed that students respond well to technology" and thus signs up to teach in the ALC classrooms to create an engaging learning environment for her students. Both of these responses indicate how the teachers combined a professional reform as an opportunity to further themselves on a personal level so that they would be able to create comfortable, innovative learning environments for their students. The concern exhibited by the teachers is twofold; they wanted to be active citizens of their professional community and be seen as welcoming administrative reforms and not wanting to be 'left behind'; at the same time, they were motivated by a personal concern to create comfortable learning environments for their students, and to connect with them on every level.

This concern of Teacher B regarding the new reforms translates for her as an opportunity to further herself in the workplace community. "*I like to learn new things/challenge myself to become a more innovative educator*". During the interview, teacher B stated;

Teacher B: …..Honestly … I was already teaching in a participatory way, I've shifted to rubrics, my classes are all innovative, and I use technology a lot in class. I joined these classes to see if it would make interactive teaching any easier and…anyways…I wanted to know what all the fuss was about.

The answer provided by Teacher B indicates how she perceived this reform as something that challenged her as a teacher. Teacher B exhibits enthusiasm to keep learning as a teacher and how that is important and an enjoyable experience for them. This is an indication of Teacher B's self-esteem and job satisfaction. Teacher B seems to be someone who enjoys challenges in the work place community and volunteered for the ALC classes as a way to make the work place community more pleasurable at the same time ensuring that she was a participant of innovative structures within the Department. The positivity of Teacher B can be further noted through her answers to question 8 of the questionnaire.

Question 8 of the questionnaire asked the teachers to comment on how they felt about teaching in the active learning classrooms as an approach to implementing participatory writing pedagogy. The answers provided by both teachers for question 8 were categorized as being related to the theme of writing reforms in ELT pedagogy. Therefore, the answers to question 8 were also analyzed within the first theme highlighting the responses of teachers to writing reforms within the Department.

RI: How do you feel about the new participatory approach to pedagogy that is being implemented in the active learning classrooms? (Question 8)

Teacher B comments that the reform of the active learning classroom is more 'innovative' for the students and is less 'boring' than traditional approaches and that she felt 'good' about being part of such an initiative.

Teacher B: *I feel really good about it. I think it moves away from the traditional "chalk and talk" model of teaching. I think students learn well when they take an active/proactive role in their education. Also, faculty can adjust/differentiate their teaching accordingly.*

Teacher A however, responds more practically for the same question:

Teacher A: *The participatory approach is only being implemented if teachers in the ALCs choose to implement it. Before this semester, I was told that I would receive training in how to effectively use the Active classroom, but only one class was offered in which I immediately realized that "everything we were promised" wasn't available. While students DO have easy-to-move furniture in order to discuss in groups, certain monitors (for student use) and certain features available on the huge touch-screen monitor (for teacher use) are not available. Therefore, I feel like everything I do in a non-ALC classroom (group discussions, etc.) are what I'm still doing in the ALC. Basically, nothing has changed participatory-wise.*

Teacher A's answers indicate that the ALC classrooms did not automatically create or initiate participatory approaches to teaching, it depends on the instructor. She talks about how the training provided by the management to use the ALC classes was inadequate and some of the facilities promised by the management were not available in the ALC classrooms. Due to these issues, Teacher B feels that the ALC classrooms were different from non-ALC classrooms only based on the furniture available to the students in these new learning spaces, she points out that many of the facilities and features of the ALC Classrooms promised to them during training were unavailable in reality. Teacher B also notes that due to the limitations of the ALC classrooms she felt a decrease in the pleasure and excitement of teaching in these new liberal learning spaces.

With regards to Research Question 1, *What motivated language teachers to participate in the writing reform taking place in the Department through the initiation of the new active learning classrooms?*; the data indicates that the reform occurring in the Writing Department of this institution was an administrative reform, creating an ELT reform community of practice similar to other studies (Liu & Xu, 2011; Wenger, 1985). Both teachers volunteered to be a part of the reform in order to meet the administrative expectations as an active community member of the Department. However, the teachers also cite 'engaging pedagogy' as an equally important factor that motivated them to volunteer in the writing reform taking place through the new active learning classrooms.

Though teachers were expected to adapt to the new approach and volunteer to teach in the new active learning classrooms, they exhibited mixed feelings about doing so. Teacher B appeared comfortable with the reform and administrative expectations, perceiving teaching in the ALCs as a new challenge for her which increased her excitement and job pleasure, whereas Teacher A expresses anxiety and finds that teaching in the new ALC did not receive sufficient structural support and reduced her teaching pleasure. She explains that she felt that the ALC environments did not change anything for her participatory wise. This situation has contributed to a reform in the landscape of ELT (Liu & Xu, 2011) also found in other studies, creating a community whereby reform pedagogies are structurally promoted to facilitate innovation and development. The responses of the two teachers indicate that in such contexts of reforms, teachers react and adapt to the reforms in significant yet different ways.

4.2. Reality versus Reforms in the Workplace Community

Recognizing that the ALCs were still in their transition phase within the Writing Studies Department, the questionnaire data elicited information that indicated these learning spaces did not provide everything they promised to. Many structural reforms mandated institutionally do not always function in the same way they were planned or promised to in conception (Lasky, 2005) the same dichotomy exits within this context. Initially during the preparatory seminars instructors were promised 'technologically advanced' classrooms which would somehow motivate students to learn and innovate them to write better through an infrastructural reform. However, the reality was quite different.

Teacher A describes how she finds that the ALC's were not everything they said it would be. She explains how often, the technology was either not available or took too long to load up, and sometimes the extra monitors were not even used during her writing class. She describes how the huge monitors than became encumber some and hampered the delivery of her lectures, and made the ability for her to access the white board to write down something she was discussing in class impossible. She compares the ALC to the traditional classroom and says that students could easily use their laptops/iPads even in the regular classroom. Through her responses we can deduce that Teacher A seemed disappointed with the ALC classroom and feels that the facility did not make her class more participatory

or innovative in any way. Contrarily, she felt frustrated by the some of the high tech furniture and felt constrained by them.

Teacher A: ... *I feel hindered, rather than liberated, by my ALC because the student monitors don't work. If they don't work, then students can't easily display their work to the rest of the class. While students bring their laptops or use their ipads/phones during class, they could easily do this in a non-ALC. Now I have all these useless monitors taking up space in my classroom, and the teacher's monitor is SO huge that I can't even access the whiteboard to jot down a quick thought. Yes, I could type the thought in Word and display it on the monitor, or even use the Monitor Screen Pen, but it takes up too much time to use this technology during a 50-minute class period.*

She explains further that the classrooms did not live up to their expectations, and voices her frustration at the administration for promising things about the ALC that were exaggerated and unrealistic. She explains that she feels frustrated and less 'comfortable' in these new classrooms and states her preference for the traditional classroom simply because there were fewer disappointments in the traditional context.

Teacher A: *My major challenge is dealing with the frustration of being promised a "magical" classroom that barely works. I feel more comfortable in my traditional classrooms because I understand how they operate, but mostly, because everything works!*

Teacher B echoes the technical woes in the new active learning spaces; however, seems to be more positive about adapting to the challenges;

Teacher B: *I face technical struggles. I've noticed that it takes me longer to access iLearn in the ALC (active learning classroom) classroom, so I end up saving documents/handouts to my personal "U" drive as well, which is accessible on any American University of Sharjah (AUS) computer. I also encountered a few problems with using Pen Software, but I kept asking the IT assistant for help and/or tried figuring it out on my own. Like anything else that's new to me, I only get better with practice.*

Here you can see the positivity displayed by Teacher B with regards to the new learning spaces. She does not seem to give up on the new active learning classrooms, nor feel disillusioned by their inability to deliver everything they promised to, instead she states that she sometimes asks for assistance in getting the facilities to work and seems assured that she will get better at utilizing the facilities with time.

In relation to Research Question 2; *How do teachers feel about the writing reform of teaching in the new active learning classrooms that are geared at promoting participatory approaches?* The responses from both teachers indicate that the active learning classrooms were not able to deliver the cutting-edge technology that they promised to be able to by the administration. In the case of most structural top down reforms, the reality of the reform when implemented is often different from the planning and conception stages (Lasky, 2005). It is often the case that administration or management tends to over promise during the initiation of a structural reform. This is maybe because the administration wants to put the reform forth in the best light possible so that it is received positively by members of the workplace community. Often in such transitional phases, the administration tends to over-promise and finds that in implementation the reform is not all that it initially conceived to be, often through no fault of the administration. In such situations, members of the work place community may feel disheartened or disillusioned. In such situation's teachers may become less motivated and feel de-professionalized (Lasky, 2005).

4.3. Teacher Identity in the Context of Reform

The final section of this study, in relation to Research Question 3, *How has the reform of teaching in the new participatory learning classrooms affected the identity of teachers?* revolves around the identity formation involving "a negotiation of multiple positions in relation to a teacher's self" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Teachers can face tensions and be in the process of learning (to change or adapt their teaching) which has an effect of their identity as a teacher. The complexity of teacher identity in ELT is best understood by exploring the doubts, dilemmas and uncertainties that teachers experience when faced by reforms in the workplace community (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Thus, it was an attempt to understand how the institutional reform of teaching in the new active learning classroom affected

the identity of the two teachers in the study. Teacher B explains how she was already practicing participatory pedagogy in her traditional classrooms, but she did not have to change her pedagogy much in the new learning environment of the ALC.

RI: How has teaching in the new ALC's affected you as a teacher?

Teacher B: *I don't face challenges juggling two pedagogies. I don't need a "smart" classroom to differentiate my instruction, use the "flipped classroom" model, and/or integrate formative techniques. Technology helps, of course, but it isn't fundamental to how/what I teach. I feel the ALS classroom facilitates teaching; it doesn't reinvent the wheel for me.*

However, in question 14 of the questionnaire when asked: Do you think that the transition into a new approach to writing being implemented through the active learning classrooms has changed your approach to teaching writing? Please explain, Teacher B states that:

Teacher B: *I now believe that more and more focus should be shifted to the student. I try to guide student learning more so than I ever have in the past. For example, students will begin major formal writing assignments in class. I can then walk around and individually answer questions/monitor progress. I divide up peer review as well over multiple mini-sessions so that I can consistently monitor student progress and provide feedback before a high stake, summative assessment is due.*

When asked why she changed her approach to teaching, Teacher B explains further:

Teacher B: *Sitting in a classroom for lengthy periods of time over multiple courses is quite boring. I remember this when I was a student myself. I feel it is the instructor's job to make sure that students are engaged and actively learning. The instructor is the person who sets the mood and tone of the class. Students respond well to professors who are genuinely invested in teaching and care about their students. I purposely create short PPT (power point) presentations, for example, because I feel turning off the lights creates an atmosphere where students will want to fall asleep. The professor is responsible for creating and nurturing a dynamic learning environment, which is what the participation-based model of teaching emphasizes.*

Teacher B is an example of how in the context of struggle, can lead to meta-cognitive awareness (Alsup, 2006) transformative teaching (Mezirow, 2009) and identity growth of development (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). In the case of Teacher B, we can see how through the challenge of a new reform being initiated by the Department she redefines herself as being the person to facilitate learning in the class. She acquaints care about students with teachers who are invested in the class. She refers to the active restructuring of her classroom by thinking about the needs of the students and catering to them. In addition to the new learning space, she volunteered to teach in, she voices the active and dynamic role that teachers play as part of the participation-based model of teaching. Thus, she uses the context of the reform as an opportunity to redefine herself as a caring and dynamic teacher who considers her students. When asked if the new reform had contributed to her professional development as a teacher, she explains further that;

Teacher B: *Yes; I think anything that is new and creative, whether it's teaching in an ALS classroom or something else, helps me learn and grow. Any new experience is a learning experience, whether for good or bad.*

Her response echoes that of researchers like Akkerman and Meijer (2011) and Mezirow (2009) that educational innovations in the workplace community of teachers can lead to progressive movements of the teacher's 'self'. Teacher B seems to acknowledge that even 'bad experience only contributes to the development of a teacher in her career and thus utilizes the reform to redefine her identity progressively.

On the other hand, sites of struggle in the workplace can also be internalized as regressive movements within the 'self' (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). In the case of Teacher A, we see that that the reform does not 'liberate but rather hinders' her 'self' as a teacher. Her explanations about the inability of the ALC's to perform as promised hampered her class and was disruptive as she was unable to continue with the class as planned and was forced to either wait for the equipment to work or change her lesson plan in the last minute. Her comparisons of the two learning environments, the liberal and the traditional are critical and she expresses a preference for the traditional classroom. Additionally, she expresses disillusionment and disappointment at the facility as well as the management in the context of the new reform. When asked how she felt about adapting to the new reform she explains that she feels frustrated and reports losing enthusiasm and energy in having to teach in these new learning environments.

Teacher A: Since I feel frustrated in my ALC, I find myself lacking enthusiasm, energy, and creativity when teaching my ALC students. I think there was so much undeserved "promise" regarding what these ALCs could actually do.

She compares the dot.com boom of the 90's in the U.S.A when teachers did not put much thought into the implementation of ALC's nor the administration mandated them to do. She states further that the administration fell short of providing sufficient training for the teachers and blames them for her inability to use these spaces effectively.

Teacher A: It reminds me that during the dot-com boom, businesses thought they would automatically be successful if they just created a website for their company. No one thought about the actual content on the website or how to effectively deliver that content. In the current era, easy-to-move furniture or a touch-screen monitor won't automatically improve how students learn. There needs to be more training for teachers about how to effectively use this technology—or rather, the technology that actually works in the classroom! I "thought" it would contribute to my professional development. But, since we haven't received any training so far, I don't think the classroom has helped.

For Teacher A the educational innovation was regressive and affected her teaching 'self' by making her less motivated and less enthusiastic about teaching. Teacher A, who was initially excited and motivated about the active learning classrooms as an opportunity to permeate participatory teaching, redefined her teacher position to one that was frustrated, ineffective and challenged by the facilities she was unable to use.

Thus based on the third research question for this study, the findings indicated that structural reforms that affect the 'selves' of teachers can be viewed in two ways, it can be disruptive, causing tensions in the work place community (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) leading to feelings of disappointment and de-professionalism as in the example of Teacher A; or it can be a fertile site for creativity and active learning, contributing to the growth of identity and development of the teacher.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to examine the interplay among identity, agency and professional development in the context of an institutional reform being implemented with the promotion towards participatory education through the initiation of new active learning classrooms for writing students. The study explored the experiences of two writing teachers in the context of an administrative reform taking place within the Writing department to determine how the teachers felt about the reforms, whether said reforms precipitated a new approach to teaching and finally, how the identity of the two teachers were affected in the face of 'a new work order'. Beijaard et al. (2004) noted that understanding teacher identity from a dialogic viewpoint can offer a different perspective to the idea of teacher development. They conclude that "professional identity formation is often presented as a struggle, because teachers have to make sense of varying and sometimes competitive perspectives, expectations, and roles that they have to confront and adapt to" (2004). In the case of the two teachers in this study, study findings indicate that both teachers faced challenges in the context of a new reform being implemented in their workplace community, and that their identity was redefined in relation to their perceptions of themselves as teachers, as well as the negotiation of varying positions and situations they were faced with as a result of this reform.

Although there seems to be a gap between the expectations both teachers had with regards to the new active learning classrooms they taught in and what they thought it would be like, both teachers used different positioning strategies based on their interpretations of the challenges they faced within similar contexts. The interplay between their self and the context led to a situation of "making and remaking of identity" (Liu & Xu, 2011) reinforcing the idea that teacher identities is not an end point, but a continuous process of negotiating and renegotiating themselves in a variety of scenarios and positions. The present study situated in the dynamic landscape of an institutional reform where teaching environments were redesigned to promote participation, collaboration and student centeredness, serve as a structural condition that affects teacher identity (Xu & Liu, 2009).

The new work order under the structural reform required teachers to redefine their identities and adapt to the new learning spaces. Both teachers adapted their identities to face the challenges the new learning environments

imposed on their 'selves'. Teacher B, saw the challenges as an opportunity for progressive development of herself as a teacher while Teacher A experienced a regression to her teaching self by feeling demotivated and de-professionalized as a result of the reform. The results of this study illustrate the complexities of teacher identity and how a reform in a shared context can affect teachers in multiple ways. From a hopeful enthusiastic 'self' the discourses of two teachers reflect how institutional reform affect teacher identities. The research is an attempt to deepen understanding of the role of workplace communities and reforms in the professional development of teachers. This study reflects the phenomenon of a dichotomy that exists in the workplace as a result of two different pedagogies that characterizes many educational reforms in the rapidly globalizing world. Although educational reforms cannot be ignored in any way, the results of this study illuminate the challenges of implementing institutional reforms and the taken for granted assumptions about the effectiveness of such reforms that are made.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

Some educational implications for future research on the impact of institutional reforms on teacher identity and motivation in the ELT writing classroom:

- The findings of this study serve as a window to understand the experience of two teachers and how they juggled the dichotomy of two different pedagogies that exist in one workplace. Such requirements often take place within higher educational institutions without attempts at investigating faculty experiences or even providing a platform for them to share their perspectives. This study provides in-depth insight on two teachers caught in such an institutional reform and how they managed themselves during said phase.

- There is a need for quantitative, empirical studies in assessing institutional reforms in the workplace and analyzing the impact of such practices on teacher identity, teacher development and teacher motivation.

- This study highlights that exploratory classroom research is necessary and should be carried out intermittently on all aspects of teaching and learning, but in particular on teacher identity and motivation.

- More studies that acknowledge and allow teachers to voice their opinions, perspectives, and experiences, which are easily overlooked by institutional mandates, and management are necessary for the field of teaching and learning. Research acknowledging the teaching experiences of instructors and understanding such points of view lead to effective learning environments.

- Research on how educational reforms and institutional mandates teaching and learning processes affect teachers should be an ongoing necessary part of the education process, there is a call for more of such research in this area.

- Finally, as a suggestion for future research, teachers' self-dialogues might be studied in order to understand the professional and personal changes that reforms mandated from a top-down approach might have on the identities and development of teachers. By researching the multiple and changing identities of teachers in the face of a new work order, we might be able to provide a window of understanding to other teachers and researchers about the multiple and dialogic nature of teacher identity.

7. DELIMITATIONS OF STUDY

- Subject limits: The study was limited to only the two instructors from the writing courses of first-year undergraduate students from four writing courses (WRI 001) and (WRI 101), during the Fall intake of one academic semester.

- Human limits: The study was limited to instructors from one institution in the UAE.

- Spatial limits: One university in the United Arab Emirates.

- Time limits: Fall academic semester of the academic year (2019/2020).

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