

**Teacher Educators' Professional Identity Formation in a
Challenging Context: Experience from Eritrea**

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ABSTRACT

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In Eritrea, the education sector is currently under reform pursuing to equip the teacher education to meet the country's critical need for sufficiently qualified teachers. Here, teacher educators have a critical role in defining the quality of teacher education. Earlier research suggests that examining the implications of teacher educators' professional identity formation for their professional development is crucial in developing the quality of future teachers. Yet, little is known of the identities and practices of teacher educators in Eritrea. This study thus focuses on examining the relationship between the teacher educators' professional identities and their allegedly challenging working environment, and further factors that affect their identity formation. The research data was collected at the College of Education in Eritrea by interviewing 10 local teacher educators. The data was further analyzed by using a qualitative content analysis.

The complexity of the Eritrean teacher educators' working conditions is mirrored against their professional identity formation, which further structures their work in practice. The findings bring forward external (material, programmatic and sociocultural) challenges the teacher educators face in their social context and consequently hinder their professional identity formation. They are confronted with high, even unachievable, demands on their profession without much formal training for the profession or actual possibilities to participate in the development of their own field. Yet, collegial support, knowledge-sharing, and the educators' both personal and collective motivation to contribute to the community were found to strengthen their professional identity formation and somewhat override the challenges. The findings thus suggest a more purposeful preparation of teacher educators and creation of collaborative learning communities in strengthening teacher educators' identities and filling up the gaps in knowledge for, in and of the practice of teacher educating.

Keywords: teacher educator identity; teacher educators' professional development; teacher education

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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global attention has shifted from achieving universal access to education to pursuing quality education as an integral element of the global sustainable development goals (United Nations [UN], 2015). Globally, the UN targets “By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries --” (UN, 2015; see also Moon & Wolfenden, 2012). Clearly, quality education cannot exist without quality teachers. Here, by having a notable effect on the quality of the future teachers (Izadinia, 2014), it is arguably the teacher educators who are “at the core of good teacher education” (Vloet & van Swet 2010, p. 149). Recent research suggests that examining the implications of teacher educators’ professional identity formation for their professional development is crucial in assessing and developing the quality of teacher education. However, while there is an abundance of studies on teacher’s professional development, there has been only a little research focused on teacher educators in specific (e.g. Murray & Male, 2005; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; McGee & Lawrence, 2009). Growing attention has thus been lately placed on examining the role, practices and professional development of teacher educators: Who they are, what challenges they face forming their professional identities, what type of support they receive and need in their work, and how is the transition like from school teachers to teacher educators (e.g. Loughran, 2014; Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*).

In Eritrea, the education sector is currently under reform as a part of the national five-year development plan for 2014-2018 placing teacher education development as the top priority to meet the country’s critical need for sufficiently qualified teachers. Included in the strategy of the Eritrean Ministry of Education (MoE) for education quality and relevance improvement, “improving teacher and school leader competencies through staff development, increasing the supply of trained instructors, and re-equipping of existing training institutions” are emphasized as the key elements in achieving higher standards of quality in education (MoE, 2013, p. xi). Yet, as one of the youngest and most alienated countries in the world (UNDP, 2016), the quality of teacher education in Eritrea is challenged by inadequate infrastructure, resources and facilities, low status of the teaching profession, insufficient of pedagogical training, and

therefore, a wide gap between theory and practice, among others (Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; cf. Vavrus, Thomas & Bartlett, 2011).

As a response to the country's need for developing the quality of teacher education, a bilateral Eritrea Learning for All (ELFA) through Higher Education Institutional Cooperation programme was established between the Finnish and Eritrean teacher education institutions in 2015. The core aim of programme is the "advanced professional development of the academic teaching staff at the associate institutions" focusing specifically on developing the professional capacity of the staff involved in teacher education (University of Jyväskylä [JyU] & The College of Education [CoE], 2015). This is supported by research claiming that "professional development of teacher educators should be purposefully conceptualized, thoughtfully implemented, and meaningfully employed" (Loughran, 2014, p. 280) in developing the quality of teacher education. The teacher educators' profession is shaped by the expectations, practice and values inherent in the culture of teacher education and the academic world of higher education creating a special context to their work (e.g. Ben-Peretz, Kleeman, Reichenberg, & Shimoni, 2010; Korhonen & Törmä, 2011; Loughran, 2014). Moreover, they work not only as teachers but also as instructors, tutors and researchers but are expected to play these several roles flexibly. Considering their professional responsibilities, roles and accompanying expectations in the higher education institutions, teacher educators comprise a rather unique professional group with distinctive professional knowledge and skills, engagement in research, and social and professional responsibility to the field of education. (Loughran, 2014.) Yet, research also implicates that their value is also often overlooked and undermined.

I spent two months in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, in the fall 2016 as an intern of the ELFA programme, cooperating and working with the project participants and partners at the Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT), and the associate institutions, and simultaneously, collecting the data for my study. The initial aim for my research was to study the professional development of the ELFA project participants, that is, the teacher educators as a part of the internal evaluation of ELFA. However, after the data collection and tentative analysis of the data, the teacher educators' professional identity formation, how they perceive themselves in their profession, what factors contribute to these perceptions and how it all affects their professional development became to form the core of my study. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) emphasize that professional identity serves as the basis for teachers educators' professional

development as it affects their conceptions of their competences, ability to adapt to changes and motivation to develop themselves as professional educators (see also Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006). As Loughran (2014) continues, teacher educators' self-perceptions, values and beliefs drive their professional learning and development by having the potential to create a better alignment of their teaching intents and actions (see also Keskinen, Lepistö & Keskinen, 2005). Here, professional identity formation has been further highlighted due to a close connection between identity and practice (e.g. Nevgi & Toom, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Teacher educators form their identities "in context, in practice and over time" (Dinkelman, 2011, p. 314) and thus, professional identity can be seen as constructed through the negotiations between communal sociocultural contexts, personal identities and individual life experiences (e.g. Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; McKeon & Harrison, 2010). Thereby, professional identity is a part of individual's unity where the working life, community and sociocultural context build the frames and opportunities for action (e.g. Havnes & Semby, 2014).

Considering the both globally and nationally changing demands and reforms in teacher education at regular intervals, both teachers and teacher educators are constantly required to develop professionally, adapt their professional roles, and remodify their professional identities in between dynamic contexts and high standards (e.g. Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; Vloet & van Swet, 2010; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Steyn, 2010). In regard to the ongoing reform in Eritrea, the teacher educators are seemingly entrusted with the responsibility of realizing the ideals of the reform pursuing to pave a new path for the future teachers and as a result, future generation. They are thereby challenged to mold their professional identities via negotiations of their personal motivations and satisfying the requirements of the society for reforming the education (cf. Samuel & Stephens, 2000.) Notably, the ideas education reform and professional development thus entail notable elements of power and social control (e.g. Little, 1993) which is why understanding the teacher educators' identity formation and the space for them to develop themselves is vital to affecting the development within the changes in the field (Robinson & McMillan, 2006).

Critical to note, particularly teacher educators' identity as well as Eritrea as a research context in general seem to be widely under-researched. Moreover, both the research and concepts of teacher educators, their identity formation and professional development are highly dominated by the Global North. In fact, North America, Europe and Australia are the main contributors in examining teacher educators' professional

identity, and only a few studies have been conducted in Asia or Africa. Therefore, solutions and progressions applicable in the Global North may not be appropriate to the Global South, which leads to question why identity research has not been recognized in the Global South. (Izadinia, 2014.) Eritrea thereby serves as a unique context for this study given the shortage of earlier research on the area as well as the ongoing reform and Finnish-Eritrean cooperation.

This qualitative study addresses a gap in previous research on the identities and practices of teacher educators in Eritrea in specific. The need to gain greater insight into teacher educators' identity formation in the Global South settings in general and, through that, stimulate the discussion around the topic and contribute to designing future research on teacher educators' work is evident. The overall purpose of this study is thus to map out the conceptual landscape on which Eritrean teacher educators live and work, and further focus on the teacher educators' professional identity formation in relation to their allegedly challenging working environment. By interpreting and explaining the Eritrean teacher educators' professional identity formation, this study provides crucial implications for their professional development as the core agents in the national pursue of quality teacher education.

2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1 Eritrea Pursuing Quality Education for All

Arguably, education is a key element in achieving sustainable development, as it is fundamental for human, social and economic development and a powerful tool in developing individual and collective well-being. Ideally, it should be a continuous, lifelong process interwoven to the changing needs and conceptions of knowledge within societies. (Rena, 2007.) Alongside the development of globalization, the education sector has increasingly been driven by free global markets leading to global competitiveness and accountability across schools, districts and even countries (Rizvi, 2007; cf. Havnes & Semby, 2014). It is heavily influenced by a recurring demand for reformation and change that stems from the public interest in terms of, for example, international initiatives, national policies, needs of the labor market, communal priorities, and re-conceptualizing teaching and learning theories generally over time

(e.g. Havnes & Semby, 2014; Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; Robinson & McMillan, 2006). The contexts of higher education and teacher education have been further emphasized in relation to an emergent concern over employability, keeping up with the global economy progress and the need for lifelong learning in sustaining employability across working lives (e.g. Moon & Wolfenden, 2012; Havnes & Semby, 2014; World Bank, 2000). Here, teacher educators, teachers and teacher education systems as a whole are faced with dynamic demands and expectations regarding their professional development, competence and role such as high standards, curriculum frameworks, and new approaches to pedagogy and assessment aligned to those standards in diverse work environments (e.g. Garet et al., 2001; Steyn, 2010; Robinson & McMillan, 2006).

Looking at the global endeavor of improving the education quality and learning in the sub-Saharan African context, research indicates that students' learning achievement has been reported be very low and to vary across countries. To tackle the issue and narrow the learning gaps, a critical need for the “deployment of sufficient well-qualified, motivated, and supported teachers in all schools” has been recognized. (Vavrus et al., 2011, p. 5; see also Moon & Wolfenden, 2012). The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (African Union Headquarters, 2016) equally places teacher training, qualified teachers and promoting their continuous professional development as the first strategic objective in ensuring quality and relevance at all levels of education.

The Government of the State of Eritrea regards education as “the cornerstone of national development efforts, particularly in human resources development, economic growth and poverty alleviation” (MoE, 2013, p. viii). The education system aims at supporting private sector schooling, equal access for all groups, for instance, preventing gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, and class discrimination, and contributing to lifelong learning through formal and informal systems (Rena, 2007). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has reported considerable efforts towards increasing the school enrolment levels in recent years especially concerning girls and children living in hard-to-reach areas in Eritrea. Moreover, among many other African countries (Vavrus et al., 2011), Eritrea has relatively recently (2003) revised its traditionally teacher-centered curriculum towards promoting learned-centered and interactive teaching methods (MoE, 2013).

Situated in the Horn of Africa by the Red Sea, Eritrea is one of the youngest and most alienated states in the world. Currently, Eritrean population is estimated to be around 3-5 million, consisting of several tribes. There are nine different languages used in Eritrea of which Tigrinya, Arabic and English are used as the most common ones. Having endured years under the Italian colonial rule as well as the British and lastly the Ethiopian powers, among others, and having fought for over 30 years against Ethiopia for liberation, Eritrea celebrated its independence in 1991. Yet, remaining tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia resulted in a border war in 1998-2000 which still remains as a frozen conflict between the two nations today. Eritrea's relations to its other neighboring countries Sudan and Djibouti are also reported to be tense. (e.g. Riggan, 2016; UNDP, 2014; BBC, April 11, 2017.)

The imprints of the post-liberation period are embedded in the Eritrean society as social discourses on nationalism as well as a strong culture of self-reliance in structuring the national identity (e.g. Riggan, 2016; Rich Dorman, 2005). An independent country for only a bit over two decades, Eritrea's constitution was established already in 1997 but it has never been fully enforced and thus, Eritrea has remained as a one-party state. According to the information the UN (2016) has received from the delegation of Eritrea, national elections will not be held until "the threats to national security and sovereignty have been eliminated" regarding the situation especially between Eritrea and Ethiopia. For example, the state of Eritrea is known to pursue a strong independence from external development aid and trying find local answers to national challenges. In their attempt to build a strong, proud nation, the state's National Service programme was developed to create a trained reserve army that would integrate the liberation-war generation (Riggan, 2016). Yet, the latest human rights reports have shown it to take advantage of the conscripts as forced labor for a prolonged and often indefinite time. The UN has further accused the Eritrean government of crimes against human rights such as arbitrary detentions and limited freedom of expression. The tense political atmosphere alongside with severe drought, notable shortage of infrastructure and high levels of unemployment continue to challenge the economic and social development of the state. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Eritreans have fled the country in recent years. (Riggan, 2016; UN, 2016; BBC, April 11, 2017.) Currently, Eritrea situates in the place of 179 out of 188 countries in the human development index (UNDP, 2016).

As Riggan states "Education embodies the hopes (and fears) for the future of the nation itself" (2016, p. 124). On a national policy level, education is given a high emphasis especially as a part of the nation-building process of Eritrea. It has been argued that the education system in Eritrea is embedded in the institution of the military, too. The final year of high school is completed in the National Service training center and accessing to university is not possible until having been officially released from the military service. Learning to be a member of the society thus implicitly entails an idea of learning to be a fighter of the state. (e.g. Riggan, 2016.) Here, it is crucial to take into consideration the state's long struggle for freedom and also the colonial history of Eritrea. Even though educational policies, the content of the curriculum and access to schooling have been notably revised since the colonial era, as Vavrus et al. (2011) argue, resemblances to the colonial powers often still remain in the structures of the school system possibly hindering the former colonies' development. According to Rena (2007), there are numerous practical barriers to education in Eritrea including school fees for registration and materials, segregation of children with disabilities, poor teaching facilities and resources, teacher-centered and rote-learning as the most common teaching methods and perhaps most importantly, lack of professional teachers (see also Vavrus et al., 2011; Moon & Wolfenden, 2012). Since the country's independence, basic education and technical and vocational training have been exceptionally limited in terms of access, infrastructure, and quality (e.g. Riggan, 2016).

To answer the needs of the education sector, the Eritrean Ministry of National Development recently established a national Five Year Development Plan (2014-2018) that aims at reforming the education system with emphasis on quality, access, equity and relevance, among others (MoE, 2013; JyU & CoE, 2015). Human resource development, that is, promoting teacher education and development and satisfying the critical need for sufficiently qualified teachers across the education sector (from kindergarten to higher education) have been placed as the top-priority needs by the Eritrean Ministry of Education (2013) in developing the quality and relevance of education. Another key focus is put on the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy at all levels of education which has also been underlined already in the latest National Core Curriculum for Education in 2003 (MoE, 2013). This strive towards learner-centered pedagogy in the context of still highly teacher-dominated classrooms and demands set by the current reform challenge the teacher educators to process their professional identities and practices (cf. Vavrus et al., 2011).

The need to develop the quality of education in Eritrea was expressed by the Eritrean authorities leading to the initiation of collaboration between Eritrean and Finnish higher education institutions in 2014. Currently there are around five ongoing Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument (HEI ICI) programmes in Eritrea funded by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Out of the bilateral programmes, Eritrea Learning for All through Higher Education Institutional Cooperation programme cooperates with the Faculty of Education of the University of Jyväskylä, the Eritrean teacher education institutions: the College of Education (CoE) that operates under the Eritrean Institute of Technology and Asmara Community College of Education (ACCE), and the Eritrean Ministry of Education. Alongside ELFA, the Teachers without Borders of the Finn Church Aid are working in contact with the Eritrean teacher education institutions and higher education officials. The programme was launched in the fall 2015 and lasts for two years until the end of 2017, if not being granted a funding from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for continuation. I spent two months in Asmara, Eritrea, in the fall 2016 as an intern of the ELFA programme, cooperating and working with the project participants and partners at the EIT, and simultaneously, collecting the data for my study.

The core aim of ELFA is the “advanced professional development of the academic teaching staff at the associate institutions” focusing specifically on developing the professional capacity of the staff involved in teacher education, that is, the teacher educators (JyU & CoE, 2015) who evidently bear a great responsibility in developing the quality of the teacher education via educating the future teachers. The endeavor of capacity development by ELFA is implemented through training modules that have been jointly planned and organized between the Eritrean and Finnish teacher education professionals and pursue to target to the diverse educational needs of Eritrea. In total, there are five separate modules aiming at developing the knowledge and skills of the participants in research methodology (Module 1), teacher education and pedagogy (Module 2), educational leadership and management (Module 3), use of ICT in education (Module 4), and literacy and numeracy learning with a focus on learning difficulties and special education (Module 5). In parallel, assessment tools, pedagogical programmes and learning materials applied to the Eritrean context have also been designed in collaboration. (JyU & CoE, 2015.) The idea behind is that the shared expertise and new ideas and practices will trickle down from the teacher educators to the teachers and so forth to the practices in schools. Notably, the context is crucial in

identifying the most effective teaching and learning practices in the certain contexts, such as in Eritrea, and train teachers to use these practices.

2.2 Teacher Education in Eritrea

Teacher educators have a critical role in defining the quality of teacher education as it is a fact that motivated and competent teachers are the prerequisite for quality learning. There are two teacher education institutions in Eritrea. EIT is the largest higher education provider in Eritrea as a whole, and its CoE is responsible for the teacher education providing Diploma and Bachelor's degree programmes in education. ACCE, on the other hand, trains elementary and middle school teachers. Elementary-level teachers go through only a one year Certificate Programme. Upgrading the qualification depends on performance and mainly grade achievement. The best scoring teacher students are selected to continue into a two-year Diploma Programme, the graduates of which will be qualified to teach on elementary and middle school level. Again, the best scoring students are accepted into four-year Bachelor's degree -level studies that will qualify the students to teach the upper secondary school level. Here, there are slight variations across subject specialization in overall requirements. Both Diploma and Degree -level teacher students have a one-month school teaching experience at the end of their studies. (K. Idris, personal communication, December 2, 2016; Mustaparta, November 29, 2016.)

A huge challenge for the teacher education in Eritrea has for long been the low status of the teaching profession and the governmental custom to funnel the lowest scoring high school students to the teacher education without having a possibility to affect the decision themselves. Moreover, some youngsters are assigned to be 'volunteer teachers' as a part of their National Service without no teacher training, and often without their consent, or due to the lack of teachers especially in the rural areas, the Certificate and Diploma -graduates are sent to teaching positions by the Ministry of Education anywhere in the country. Thus, the motivation among teachers is generally and also understandably low heavily affecting the teacher education sector and the quality of education in the field. Yet, at least the teacher education selection process is currently undergoing a reformation that includes entrance exams and interviews in selecting the teacher students attempting to attract students with a genuine interest in teacher education and good basic studying skills. However, low motivation towards the

teaching profession and inadequate pedagogical studies and teaching trainings are still one of the major issues to tackle in the teacher education sector. (Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; Elo, February 28, 2017; Mustaparta, November 29, 2016.) Moreover, the language of instruction in schools is English from the middle schools onwards placing a need for teachers to master English language skills (cf. Vavrus et al., 2011).

Moreover, teacher education is regarded as higher education but a doctorate among the teacher educators is a rare exception due to the non-existent PhD -level studies available in Eritrea. There are no particular standards for recruiting the teacher educators but the guidelines of the National Commission of Higher Education state that anyone with MA/PhD background in related fields of education should be recruited. In reality, the lack of qualified faculty (PhDs) is one of the main constraints in the teacher education sector, according to the Dean of the College of Education. (K. Idris, personal communication, December 2, 2016.) Teacher educators with a Master's degree are also relatively few due to a limited access to Master's -level studies. Crucial to note, there has not been any Master's programmes related to education in the country available but the Government has offered scholarships for Master's programmes abroad, most often in China or South-Africa, for example.

Earlier notes from the field also remark the teacher educators face multiple challenges in their work such as limited resources and teaching materials, large class sizes, extensive teaching duties, under-resourced teacher capacity, inadequate access to latest literature on the field, and insufficient content and pedagogical training. These challenges hinder the implementations of quality teacher education. (Posti-Ahokas, January 21, 2016; Elo, February 28, 2017.) Yet, Master's programmes in Educational Leadership, Educational Psychology and Language Education are currently being developed and planned to be launched at the EIT this year 2017. In cooperation with the Finn Church Aid, the CoE has also recently established a Unit of Research and Development that is responsible for supporting and fostering culture of research, and expected to support staff development trainings at the College. (K. Idris, personal communication, December 2, 2016.)

Given the ongoing education reform, it is necessary for the teacher educators and consequently, for the teachers, too, to be appropriately equipped to meet the evolving societal needs. Thus, although the latest government documents show that Eritrea is investing to the development of teacher education and the higher education

sector as a whole, there is an urgent need for upgrading teacher education and supporting especially the teacher educators' professional development.

3 PROFESSIONALLY DEVELOPING AS A TEACHER EDUCATOR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

This study specifically examines the perspective of professional identity as the catalyst for professional development and the implications of the sociocultural approach to professional identity formation. Identifying elements that affect professional identity formation and conceptualizing the profession of a teacher educator arguably illustrate the type of support needed for their professional development as well (e.g. Coldron & Smith, 1999). The concept of professional identity will be next further elaborated, intertwined with the sociocultural perspective integral in it. I am also presenting Wenger's (1998) division for identity in practice that makes a contribution to building a broader view on professional identity. Teacher educators' profession, their multiple roles, agency and social values embedded in the profession will be further discussed in relation to educational changes and their identity formation. This is relevant in the context of the ongoing education reform in Eritrea as well as to the social demand on quality teacher education. The theoretical framework closes with summarizing the implications of supporting teacher educators' identity formation for their professional development.

3.1 Sociocultural Formation of Professional Identity

3.1.1 Professional Identity – Interplay between the Self and the Context

The concept of professional identity lies at the center of this study as it is identified as the catalyst for professional development (e.g. Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2000; Wenger, 1998; Stenström, 1993; Nevgi & Toom, 2009). In the domain of teaching and teacher education, the concept of professional identity has been defined in various ways. Yet, it has been argued to be integral specifically for professions that require creativity and personal interactional relations such as the

profession of a teacher (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006) and further affect the quality of their teaching and professional development (e.g. Nias, 2002). Similarly, Beijaard et al. (2000) emphasize that professional identity serves as the basis for teacher educators' professional development as it affects their conceptions of their competences, ability to adapt to changes and motivation to develop themselves as professional educators. Here, it is crucial to note that teachers' professional identity has been a separate research area only since the 1990's and particularly research on teacher *educators'* identity still seems to be in its infancy (Izadinia, 2014; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010). Regardless of the differences in defining the work of teachers and teacher educators, in this study, professional identity formation of both teachers and teacher educators is examined in an overlapping manner due to the close relationship of the two professions.

The recent, narrative approach to professional identity acknowledges person's self-perception as the core element of professional identity (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006). It ties together the view of how one perceives themselves and their profession in relation to others, grounded in the individual's life history and experiences. In one's working persona, professional and human are interwoven – personal self and professional self become a spiral process (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006). It thus covers the individual's relationship to their work, their identification with their profession, their personal values and goals in relation to their profession, in short, a question of “Who am I, where do I belong to and what do I pursue in my work and profession?” (Collin, 2014; cf. Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005.) As Loughran (2014, p. 276) puts it, professional identity is “an interplay between needs, images, beliefs, and practice”. Accordingly, teacher educators' values and beliefs drive their professional learning and development by having the potential to create a better alignment of their teaching intents and actions. (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005.)

Stenström (1993) has argued the development of professional identity begins with the choice of a profession and continues as so called occupational socialization amid the training for the profession. Yet, as she proceeds, it is only the transition to working life and practicing one's profession that provides the possibility for finding one's role as a professional and settling in the profession. Often the process of professional identity development has to be undergone more than once in a lifetime due to, for instance, unemployment or new career choices (Hyvönen, 2008). It is thus not a stable concept but dynamic and changing according to the current situation, for example, age or life changes. A person might have diverse occupational orientations

during their career and their importance might change along with the changes in one's life. According to Heusala's (as cited in Hyvönen, 2008, p. 16) findings, when changing a profession, the old professional identity might be integrated with new identity or even replaced with a completely new identity. The formation of new professional identity might thus include challenges such as insecurity in orientating to the new profession or post, that is arguably present in the shift from a teacher into a teacher educator, for example (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014). Moreover, socializing into a profession and having motivation towards the work arguably necessitate endeavor to identify with the norms and ethics of one's own occupational group. For instance, Keskinen et al. (2005) found that university teachers' relationship to their own work crucially defined both their action and identity as a teacher (see also Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink & Hofman, 2012). The more motivated the person was by their work and the more realistic picture they had of themselves and of their work, the more committed they were to their profession and the stronger sense of competence and agency they had (Keskinen et al., 2005). Vloet and van Swet (2010) also list, for example, job motivation, self-perception and task-feeling as integral components of professional identity.

Yet, the concept of professional identity entails two key relationships: one within the individual between self and identity, and another between the cultural context and professional environment where the individual resides. Allegedly, these relationships ought to be in dialogue with each other. (Samuel & Stephens, 2000; cf. Wenger, 1998.) Argued by Wenger (1998), identity, whether personal or professional, is lived – it fundamentally entails both the self and the surrounding context, and thus, it is more complex than a mere personal trait or role. As learning, professional identity formation is a byproduct of social interaction happening in diverse and dynamic, both informal and formal workplace contexts (cf. Paavola, Lipponen & Hakkarainen, 2004; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991). That is, a person's professional identity, values and behavior cannot be understood independently of the context but it is developed in the relationship between the personal and social (e.g. Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Nias (2002) differentiates an 'inner' self from a more 'external', that is, professional sense of self. While the inner self has its own aims to pursue, the outward circumstances create the practical boundaries and opportunities for the external self to act within the circumstances. (Nias, 2002.) Similarly, Havnes and Semby (2014) emphasize professional identity as a part of individual's unity where the working life

and community build the frames. Here, the education sector from the top authorities' regulations for education in general to individual schools and their working cultures play a part in teachers' professional learning and development. (e.g. Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005.)

To elaborate, in their study on South African teacher students, Samuel and Stephens (2000) found three differing contextual factors in the transition from a teacher student into a teacher and the making of their tentative teacher identities. These factors were named as inertial forces, programmatic forces and contextual forces. *Inertial forces* were based on the students' individual experiences concerning teaching and learning in relation to their home and educational background. This could be seen either as a positive 'heritage' or as a negative 'baggage' depending on the nature of the individual's experiences. These experiences go back to, for instance, the individual's socioeconomic background that evidently shapes their opportunities for schooling and education. *Programmatic forces*, further, originated from the content of the teacher education institutions, their curriculum, practices, material resources available, funding and teaching culture (cf. Coldron & Smith, 1999). Finally, there were *contextual forces*, that is, the macro-educational environment of changing educational policy, including, for example, the value given to education and the standards for the teaching profession from the top, and the micro-educational environment of a school culture that might vary greatly depending on the autonomy and demands given to individual schools from the top national policy-level. The teacher students' professional identity formation processes were thus not only framed by the direct daily working context but the professional environment as a whole that is shaped through these different forces by both constraining and enabling a person to define their profession within the context (e.g. Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2004). The findings of Samuel and Stephens (2000) allegedly apply to examining the development of the identities of in-service teachers and teacher educators, too.

Many studies indeed emphasize the significance of community support and collegial relationships in developing teachers and teacher educators' identities. For example, evaluations from and attributions of colleagues affect the individual's self-perception and consequently, the way one acts. Creating and maintaining a professional relationship with other members of the work community has been shown to facilitate the formation of professional identity through enhanced sense of belonging and commitment to the community (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Canrinus et

al., 2012). This is supported by the study by Canrinus et al. (2012) who found teachers' satisfaction to their work and collegial relationships to correlate with their self-efficacy, motivation and commitment to their work, which were all identified as indicators for professional identity. Ben-Peretz et al. (2010), among others, further concur setting up interactive learning communities of practice form the core for professional identities through social support, co-creation of professional knowledge, and development of richer perspectives and new ideas.

Professional identity thus entails a perspective of the individual's relationship with the society and the dominant distribution of work; how the individual experiences their place, status and participation in the surrounding society (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006). As Havnes and Semby (2014) continue, deepening perception of self as a professional through finding one's own role in the professional community and internalizing the profession is further linked with developing the individual's preparedness and willingness to possible changes personally and in the professional context, and to impact the culture of the work community. However, assimilation of the norms and practices of the work community should not happen automatically, and especially newcomers may also begin to recognize and question taken-for-granted aspects and methods within the community, and further act as a reformative force in it. Yet, this may happen on condition that reformation and critical reflection are enabled within the context. (e.g. Murray & Male, 2005.) Open discussion and critical reflection of not only the individual but of the present conditions, too, ought to be allowed encouraged in the work community so that development can happen (cf. Mezirow, 1995; see also (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006). Here, Ben-Peretz et al. (2010) underline reflection of individual's identity and values in relation to the context as the core process for self-and-action improvement and therefore an essential tool for teacher educators' professional development and the development of the work community as a whole (see also Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Therefore, crucial in the sociocultural formation of professional identity is not only belonging but also participation. Arguably, socialization and becoming part of the knowledge, practices and values of the work community cannot happen without being allowed to participate in it. In this way, the formation of professional identity, such as teacher identity, results from communal involvement and learning. (e.g. Korhonen & Törmä, 2011; Wenger, 1998; Izadinia, 2014; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi 2013.) As Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, learning and identity become

indivisible through social participation. Through participating in the socioculturally determined work community, the individual simultaneously constructs knowledge and structures their professional identity. Professional identity is thus determined through interpreting the experiences of involvement that further shape the roles and position of the individual in their work community. (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eteläpelto et al., 2013.)

3.1.2 Wenger's Dimensions of Identity in Practice

Wenger and Lave (1991) argue developing practice necessitates communities of practice, that is, deliberate or unintended formation of communities whose members are able to engage with collegial interaction and support, share and co-create knowledge, and acknowledge each other as equal participants of the community. Often these groups of people are further noted to share a profession and further a collective concern or goal for what they do and (want to) learn. Consequently, each individual member of the community negotiate implicitly or explicitly ways of being a member in that specific context. As Wenger (1998) continues, these negotiations happen through their engagement in action with each other and via their relations and sense of belonging in relation to the other members. Accordingly, engagement in social contexts involves a dual process of meaning making. On one hand, engagement in participation in social life is direct, such as in conversations and activities. Yet, on the other hand, participation is indirect through reification of artefacts like words, concepts, methods and tools that reflect the experiences and organize the participation process. Inevitably, human identity and practice are thus profoundly interwoven – complex set of practices entails complex negotiations of identities.

Wenger (1998) further developed five dimensions of identity in practice illustrating the parallels between practice and identity. They are presented as mirror images of each other depicting their rich and complex relationship. These dimensions observe identity as negotiated experiences, community membership, learning trajectories, a nexus of multiple memberships, and a relation between the local and the global.

Identity as Negotiated Experiences. The first dimension entails the idea of negotiation of meaning in terms of participation and consequently, negotiations of experience of self – the ways a person constantly negotiates their identity through their

social experiences. Identity is thus reified in the social discourses and meaning-making of self, through categorization and roles afforded in the context, and further produced as participative experiences and their social interpretation in specific communities.

Identity as Community Membership. Secondly, Wenger (1998) observes identity as community membership where the notion of membership shapes identity by the reified categories of membership within a specific community and the forms of competence it entails. Here, being a full member of a community necessitates competence to act and work within the demands of the community. This includes being recognized as competent by self and the others, mutual engagement, understanding the forms of accountability to being part of the community, and sharing resources and utilizing the mutual repertoire for practice. The other way round, when encountering new practices, the individual is faced with a lack of competence in new settings and thus, is required to redefine oneself accordingly. In short, identity is manifested through competence in relation to the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Identity as Learning Trajectory. The third dimension refers to ongoing, dynamic and temporal nature of identity – it is not fixed but constantly renegotiated in interaction of multiple trajectories, that is, continuous motion and contexts. Identity is thus defined by where we have been and where we are going. Havnes and Semby (2014) further highlighted the notion of learning trajectories to be essential to workplace learning where professional competence is developed not only over time but also in multiple and diverse contexts as a part of formal and informal learning situations. The conception therefore highly concurs with the demand on lifelong learning, too.

Identity as Nexus of Multi-membership. Arguably, all people belong to multiple communities of practice: some past, some present, some as full members, some more fickle, some more meaningful than others. Yet, all these numerous forms of participation affect to a varying extent to the individual's identity formation. The notion of multi-membership arguably equals multiple learning trajectories interwoven to each other. These trajectories may entail conflicting ideas and tension between which the individual is challenged to balance and find resolutions. Here, the individual is thus to reconcile these various forms of their identity into one, finding ways to make the diverse memberships coexist (cf. Beijaard et al., 2004).

Identity as a Relation between the Local and the Global. Finally, the fifth dimension emphasizes that, like practice, even though formed in specific communities, identity is not just local to those communities. Instead, the negotiation of individual's

identity occurs amidst the interplay between local ways of belonging and participating, and broader, global discourses. For example, Hökkä, Eteläpelto and Rasku-Puttonen (2012) agree teacher educators' locally manifested notions of professional agency are embedded in the more global contexts and discourses concerning their field, further shaping their professional identities.

Ben-Peretz et al. (2010; see also Izadinia, 2014) concur Wenger's dimensions of identity are highly applicable to the concept of professional identity and truly relevant for re-conceptualizing the professional identity of teachers and teacher educators. Developing the practice of the education professionals is closely interwoven to their professional identities. They further highlight especially pertaining to 'identity as negotiated experiences', as 'community membership' and as 'learning trajectory' to be in the core of the teacher educators' professional identity formation and further professional development. (Ben-Peretz et al., 2010.) Havnes and Semby (2014) continue collegial learning communities, such as teacher teams, ought to be deliberately created to cultivate collaboration and professional development among the teaching profession that is too often characterized as a solitary work. Ben-Peretz et al. (2010) further commend the formation of learning communities to be regarded as the best method for the development of teacher educators' professional identities. But who exactly are the teachers who educate the future teachers? This will be discussed next in detail.

3.2 Teachers Who Educate Teachers: Who Are They and Why Are They Unique?

3.2.1 Teacher Educators' Multiple Roles – Multiple Identities

Answering to the question of 'How is the profession of a teacher educator defined?' has raised a notable amount of discussion among researchers in recent years (e.g. Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Loughran, 2014; Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*). According to the current view, identity fluctuates depending on the context and role, and so does professional identity. It is thus rarely consistent but dynamic and complex. (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; Wenger, 1998.) According to Dinkelman (2011, p. 314), teacher educators form their identities "in context, in practice and over time" (see also e.g. Nevgi & Toom, 2009). Professional identity is thus not fixed attribute of a

person but a relational phenomenon defined differently in different contexts and consequently, might entail multiple identities at the same time (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004; Wenger, 1998).

Agreed by most researchers, teacher educators constitute a group of teachers with a special role in the education enterprise: they prepare, instruct and provide support to future teachers, and thus, make a notable contribution to the development of the field (e.g. Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Koster, Brekelmans, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2005; Loughran, 2014). As Ben-Peretz et al. (2010) emphasize, the professional demands on teacher educators are varied. In most countries, in order to enter the teacher education domain, the teacher educators gained higher academic education. Yet, they possess diverse backgrounds and career paths in becoming teacher educators, consequently forming a highly heterogeneous group made of professionals from different fields and with different specializations (cf. Korhonen & Törmä, 2011). Moreover, both inexperienced novice teachers and senior professors educate the teacher students. Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg (2005) have argued main factors directing the path of becoming a teacher educator would be, first, having a good experience as being a school teacher, and second, being an expert in a specific area of study.

However, simply having been working as a teacher does not necessarily make a good teacher educator (Korthagen et al., 2005). It has been claimed that the significance of induction for the beginning teacher educators is often neglected and rather unclear. It is thus often more dependent on the collegial support, time and effort of the senior teacher educators than carried out in a formal training for the job. (van Velzen, van der Klink, Swennen & Yaffe, 2010.) The induction from a school teacher into the position of a teacher educator evidently demands not only new kind of professional development but also redefining one's professional identity (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005; McKeon & Harrison, 2010; Swennen, Shagrir & Cooper, 2009). Notably, teaching by itself already requires not only having control over the content of the subject taught and knowing how to apply it but also mastering the pedagogics of how to teach the future teachers according to the different levels they will be teaching in the future (cf. Havnes & Semby, 2014). It has also been widely argued educating teachers necessitates specific set of professional knowledge and skills in order to function effectively within the profession (Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005). For instance, the educators are required to respond to the dynamic teaching contexts the teacher students may confront in their work in the future

and thus, they are called for having the competence of integrating the theory of teaching and learning with practical experiences accordingly (e.g. Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; McKeon & Harrison, 2010). Furthermore, their work is characterized by the duality of managing different teaching strategies appropriate both for adult learners, that is the teacher students, and for young learners, that is the future pupils of the teacher students, and further being able to distinguish between the two. (Korthagen et al., 2005; Koster et al., 2005; McGee & Lawrence, 2009; cf. Keskinen et al., 2005.) The educators also partly act as role models for the prospective teachers via modeling the role of a teacher (Korthagen et al., 2005). The interaction between individual self-perceptions, personal theories of teaching and learning as well as the sociocultural context and relations thereby heavily modify the process of forming one's educator identity (Kreber, 2010).

Developing as a teacher educator is inseparably interwoven with expectations of knowledge and practice inherent in the businesses of teacher education and the academic world of higher education, and further shaped by the nature of one's professional identity. Their profession is defined by aspects and values related to academic work and culture creating a special context to their work (e.g. Loughran, 2014; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2005; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005 cf. Korhonen & Törmä, 2011; Korthagen et al., 2005; Dinkelman, 2011.) Alongside with teaching and acting as mentors for the teacher students, the teacher educators are usually expected to work also as academic scholars and researchers. In addition, Cochran-Smith (2005), a teacher educator herself, added here roles of a practitioner, a policy analyst, an editor, a commentator, and a critic, for example. She further highlights the blurring space of theory and practice embedded in the profession when functioning simultaneously as both researchers and practitioners. Teacher educators' work includes not only supporting the future teachers' learning process of learning to teach but also generating new knowledge concerning their own work and more broadly, the field of education through systematic research and examination of their own practice. Furthermore, they are simultaneously to analyze the public sphere and policies affecting their work and field from in order to promote the larger enterprise of teacher education. This complex but generative relationship between bringing about fresh contextual knowledge of practice, transforming it into accessible and adaptable public knowledge, and in parallel developing one's own work is arguably one of the distinctive elements of the profession of a teacher educator. (Cochran-Smith, 2005; see also Goodwin et al., 2014.)

Moreover, considering their professional responsibilities, multiple roles and accompanying expectations from their field, teacher educators comprise a professional group that presumably has a stronger control and autonomy over their work than teachers per se (Loughran, 2014). Looking further at the social context and the working environment, the educators act within presumably hierarchical, nested higher education systems that are highly influenced not only by their workforce but by different departments, commissions and the government, too (cf. Havnes & Semby, 2014). Especially as a novice, when the building of professional identity is only beginning, socializing into the work community is emphasized due to the still unsure position in the community and thus, the lack of power to affect it (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; see also Murray & Male, 2005). The chances for interaction between the newcomers and the old-timers in particular have been shown to influence heavily in the novices' professional identity formation through learning from the others' experiences, and being acknowledged as the new members of the professional community (Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014; cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, the teacher educator's profession is a public position and thus, under open discussion and evaluation affecting their role, behavior and expectations for the profession. Here, Swennen et al. (2009) argue that the complex contexts where teacher educators do their work entail many actors that have their own agendas and possess diverse levels of power making their working environment even more complex. Teacher educators are thus positioned to negotiate their professional identities in the midst of the multiple discourses stemming from the sociocultural and academic contexts of their work (Hökkä et al., 2012).

Crucial to note, Izadinia (2014) highlights contextual factors may build practical limitations for enforcing the different roles and thus, challenge the educators' professional identity formation. Depending on the context, some teacher educators may receive inadequate resources and access to practicing conducting research, and further teach research due to, for instance, the absence of high quality induction or in-service programmes for the teacher educators (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Hökkä et al., 2012; Goodwin et al., 2014.) This lack of exposure and experience may result in difficulties in acquiring an identity as researcher and establishing academic credibility, self-perception of being deskilled, and thus, a compromised and negative teacher educator identity (e.g. Hökkä et al., 2012; Khan, 2011; Murray & Male, 2005). To illustrate, Hökkä et al. (2012) found similar results of teacher educators having subjugated and complex researcher

identities because of lack of resources to practice that role of their work. The demands determining the work of the teacher educators can thus be seen as partly conflicting, and as creating tensions in the formation of their professional identities, and consequently, affecting their work and the teacher education system as a whole.

Nevgi and Toom (2009) state that the strength of teacher's role among the other roles as an academic education professional and the motivation for professional development as an educator affect the strength of their teacher identity. Interestingly, in the study by Ben-Peretz et al., (2010), they found out that theory on the field sees teacher educators first and foremost as teachers emphasizing the pragmatic view of their profession as integrating learned theory, their field experiences and critical evaluation of their own practice into new implementation of new practices necessitating especially updating their pedagogical knowledge. Yet, on the contrary, Cochran-Smith (2005) emphasizes a shift towards redefining teacher educators' professional identities with a growing influence of the researcher identity.

The teacher educators' roles are thus multiple and diverse, and more notably, they are expected to play these several roles flexibly: they are experts in a specific field, enabling forces in the learning process of prospective teachers, tutors and mentors for their trainees in their career path, and are engaged researchers and developers of their field by themselves (e.g. Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Goodwin et al., 2014). Arguably, these special roles are a basis for formulating distinct professional identities, too, and further affect both explicitly and implicitly to the functioning their work communities and culture (e.g. Hotarinen, 2006).

As discussed earlier, professional identity can be observed as an individual's development process and alternatively, from the perspective of how the work community and culture socializes its members and enables their development (e.g. Korhonen & Törmä, 2011). At the core of the identity project is *the process of becoming something* where the question lies in finding balance of one's agency amid the expectations from the self and the environment. The educators may simultaneously have multiple social roles depending on the task required, their self-perception as well as the space to perform these roles, that is, agency.

3.2.2 The Nexus of Educational Change and Professional Identity

As discussed previously, not only are the educators expected to develop professionally themselves but they are expected to actively develop their field, too. However,

transformations in teachers' identities are slow to achieve (Vähäsantanen, 2015). Thus, especially within a changing policy environment, understanding the teacher educators' identity formation is vital (Robinson & McMillan, 2006). In relation to this, the conception of agency has been seen as a fundamental factor in redefining and supporting professional identity (Hökkä et al., 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015).

In short, professional agency entails the question of to what extent professionals like teacher educators have power to act, influence, make decisions and take stances concerning their professional field and identities (e.g. Vähäsantanen, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Hökkä et al., 2012). As professional identity, professional agency is a continuing phenomenon, depended on the sociocultural context and the embedded power relations shaping the possibilities or, on the contrary, limitations for the realization of an individual's agency. This forms a tension between the personal dimension of agency and the social structure surrounding it. In aiming to comprehend the remaking of professional identities and practices, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) further emphasize the significance of integrating the individual and the social influences defining professional agency. The conception of agency has been related to an idea of social empowerment, which arguably is one of the core values behind education as well supporting people to develop their competence for autonomous action (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

There is a notable nexus between professional agency and professional identity especially amidst changes in the professional context through the need to redefine one's professional identity which in turn is reflected to one's practices in the changing environment (e.g. Vähäsantanen, 2015; Beijaard et al., 2004). Moreover, in their study, Samuel and Stephens (2000) described the development of the teacher students' tentative teacher identities being heavily influenced and also burdened by the common social image of teachers as *agents of change* – a future-oriented teacher role identity. The path towards their future profession was pictured by Samuel & Stephens (2000, p. 478) as:

-- walking a tightrope in both developing a personal teacher identity which sits comfortably with their own sense of self and maintaining a balance between satisfying the requirements of state and society and providing the source and impetus for change.

This evidently applies to the profession of the teacher educator, too, who are being pushed to balance between the high external expectations and internal needs and motivations. Locating the teacher educators within the specific context of the

incorporation of colleges of education into the national policy framework for higher education, in a way, teacher educators are entrusted with the responsibility of realizing the ideals of educational reforms pursuing to pave a new path for the future teachers and as a result, future generation. They are thus challenged to develop their professional identities via balancing between their personal sense of self and anticipating and satisfying the changes that are going on in education and in the society in order to reform their field (Samuel & Stephens, 2000; see also Vloet & van Swet, 2010.) This necessitates being alert and prepared for a change of roles and consequently, changes in their professional identities.

As argued earlier, the key relationship between the individual identity and societal context where the individual resides ought to be in dialogue with each other (Samuel & Stephens, 2000). Robinson and McMillan (2006) further claim educational changes such as restructuring the teacher education arguably will have little effectiveness unless taking into consideration the motivations and the knowledge of the teacher educators themselves, that is, their professional identities. Re-conceptualizations of the old and the new need to interweave the teacher educators' existing identities and therefore, provide them with the agency of having power to influence in the changes related to their profession. (Robinson & McMillan, 2006.) A study by Welmond (2002) on teachers in Benin amid a changing educational policy depicted the juxtaposition between the diverse visions of the roles and expectations of teacher educators and the educators own preferences and motivations in the process of change. He further argues the teacher educators' self-perceptions versus the views of the other actors in the field to have serious implications for sustainable implementation of educational change emphasizing the significance of acknowledging the social conceptions of educator's identity and agency. (Welmond, 2002.)

Yet, research implicates that even though teacher educators clearly form a unique professional group with distinctive professional knowledge and skills, engagement in research, and social and professional responsibility to the field of education, their value is also often overlooked and undermined. Sadly, despite the symbolic view of teachers and teacher educators as the agents of change in the society, it seems that in many countries, reforms and changes in the field of education are designed and implemented in a top-down model without engaging the actors on the ground in designing the change (Vähäsantanen, 2015). Inadequate and limited possibilities for active participation and influencing in the reforms undoubtedly

compromise the professional agency of teachers and teacher educators, for example, by reducing the teachers' commitment and motivation to the changes. (e.g. Hökkä et al., 2012.)

According to Little (1993), considerations on the capacity of teacher education or in-service training to equip both teacher educators and teachers individually and collectively to act as shapers and well-informed critics of reforms are thus essential. As Loughran (2014) further claims, teacher education should be regarded as an ongoing process of development in the middle of educational changes in curriculum, policy and practice where the central players are the teacher educators. This requires an understanding of the need for teacher educators, and teachers, too, to be "well-informed participants in, and leaders of, change" in transforming education (Loughran, 2014, p. 273; see also Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Little, 1993.) Havnes and Semby (2014) also underline the significance of addressing teachers and teacher educators' commitment especially in professional development policy, practice and research. Furthermore, as Little (1993) presents, professional development is ought to provide the teachers with meaningful intellectual, social and emotional engagement with ideas, materials and colleagues, to include the different contexts of teaching and the previous experience of teachers, to support alternative thinking, to provide teachers with a means of seeing the purposes and practices of schooling as the big picture, and finally, to prepare teachers to generate knowledge and assess it. (Little, 1993; see also Garet et al., 2001; Robinson & McMillan, 2006, Samuel & Stephens, 2000, Loughran, 2014.)

In short, in striving for understanding the negotiations of professional identities, manifestations of professional agency are essential to acknowledge at individual and social levels (Vähäsantanen, 2015). Developing one's professional identity towards active participation, effective change and complete sense of being a professional is thus underlined by multiple dimensions from the social definition of knowledge, professional self-perception, socioemotional experiences of practice, personal commitment, power relations, questions of subject positions to sociocultural issues, among others (e.g. Eteläpelto et al., 2013, Vähäsantanen, 2015; cf. Wenger, 1998). A symbolic conception of teachers as developmental agents with high sense of devotion to their profession has long been at the core of educational thinking (e.g. Vähäsantanen, 2015) which arguably is emphasized amid changes in the field. Here, the common idea of vocation being peculiar to the education profession may act as a strengthening or hindering resource.

3.2.3 Educator's Profession as a Vocation

Notably, the education system is one of the major managers of social values in society, and therefore a powerful instrument of the state (Riggan, 2016). Both personal and communal values, beliefs, norms, practices and roles affect both explicitly and implicitly to the members and their actions within the education system (e.g. Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Grenham, 2012). These values and beliefs have a strong influence on the way a person observes their professional context and respond to the experiences, and thus, are critical in defining one's professional identity and practice. Each work community further creates models that guide the behavior of its members and further characterize the community. Values and beliefs are thus central both in the process of socialization and in changing the predominant culture. (e.g. Loughran, 2014) However, if not acknowledged, questioned and critically reflected, they can also guide to misrepresentations of reality (e.g. Loughran, 2014; Keskinen et al., 2005; Grenham, 2012).

As argued earlier, the profession of a teacher, and arguably a teacher educator, too, is dominated by the value of vocational commitment that entails a symbolic image of teachers as having an intrinsic care for their learners and further being the developmental agents in the society (e.g. Vähäsantanen, 2015; Samuel & Stephens, 2000, cf. Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Yet, this intrinsic commitment to their profession and caring for the growth and learning processes of their students are illustrated to form a pertinent, particular teacher identity (e.g. Nias, 2002; Robinson & McMillan; 2006). In other words, devotion and caring are seen as the interchangeable heart of the teaching profession and thus there is also a risk of this ideal becoming a burden in the profession.

Robinson and McMillan (2006) discussed the vocational commitment is manifested as a 'pastoral' relationship between the educators and their students. In their study, many teacher educators reflected their image of a 'good' educator' being nurturing, caring and responsible not only for the academic achievement of their students but also for their socioemotional well-being – a common notion of a teacher. (Robinson & McMillan, 2006; cf. Grenham, 2012.) In the case of teacher educators, Ben-Peretz et al. (2010) further argued their profession entails a social and arguably hidden requirement for a double commitment meaning the educators not only ought to be devoted to their present students, that is, the prospective teachers, but also to the

future pupils of their students. Arguably, this double commitment plays a crucial part in the negotiations of professional identities and professional development. An idea of being true to one's profession seems thus to be embedded with values, ethics and empathy peculiar to the profession.

Additionally, Robinson and McMillan (2006) further presented a link the pastoral relationship to the pedagogical discourses around their profession. The value of being a model pedagogue contrasted by the diverse approaches to teaching and learning underline the profession of the teacher educator. Here, Robinson and McMillan (2006) found that the teacher educators who participated in their study rather conflictingly emphasized both the 'cultural transmission' model – teaching and learning through the model of the teacher relating to the teacher-centered approach – and the learner-centered perspective – calling for learning by doing and active participation in the knowledge production – as the basis of their view on teaching and learning. These theoretical views on teaching methods reflect the values and personal experiences of the teacher educators (cf. Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Arguably, if not involved in the policy level discourses and decision-making concerning different approaches to education, the commitment of the teachers is risked to be compromised and may further create contradictions in the implementation at the classroom level.

In the process of professional identity formation it is yet crucial to become aware of the intrinsic values and beliefs, and to be able to critically evaluate their origin and justification in order to create genuinely open possibilities for personal and further communal development (e.g. Loughran, 2014; cf. Mezirow, 1995). A space needs to be created for understanding the processes of recognizing and confronting one's values and beliefs behind their commitment to their work, and how this commitment is transformed into reality and practices in the profession. As argued earlier, active redefining of professional identity necessitates not only self-evaluation but also evaluation of the community through critical reflection (cf. Mezirow, 1995; Ruohotie, 2006; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Grenham, 2012). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) further suggest supporting professional growth through core reflection that places a special focus on bringing educators' affective aspects, such as sense of mission and values, to the surface and consequently, becoming aware of individual strengths and abilities to participate in the community. Alongside making research and monitoring their own work, the teacher educators are therefore required to deeply examine and reflect the impact of their values and motivations to their practice in order to better align their intents with their actions.

(e.g. Loughran, 2014). Arguably, depending on the communal involvement and possibilities for active, open participation, this may become either a reserve of strength or a burden by unachievable expectations for the individual educator.

3.3 Supporting the Teacher Educator Identity Formation

Vloet and van Swet (2010, p. 149) incisively address to professional identity as “stories professionals tell about themselves at a specific moment in a specific context” illustrating the dynamic, socially constructed, cognitive-emotional, and dialogical nature of this complex concept. Personal values, motivations and the surrounding environment create a context inside which the employee evaluates themselves, their orientation, resources, limits and practices. (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006.) Teacher educators evidently form a unique professional group that entails professionals with diverse backgrounds, roles and identities. They define their professional identities within the negotiations between the individual and their sociocultural framework and conditions of their working context (Figure 1). It makes it therefore more meaningful to discuss professional identity as a dialogue between the personal and the social.

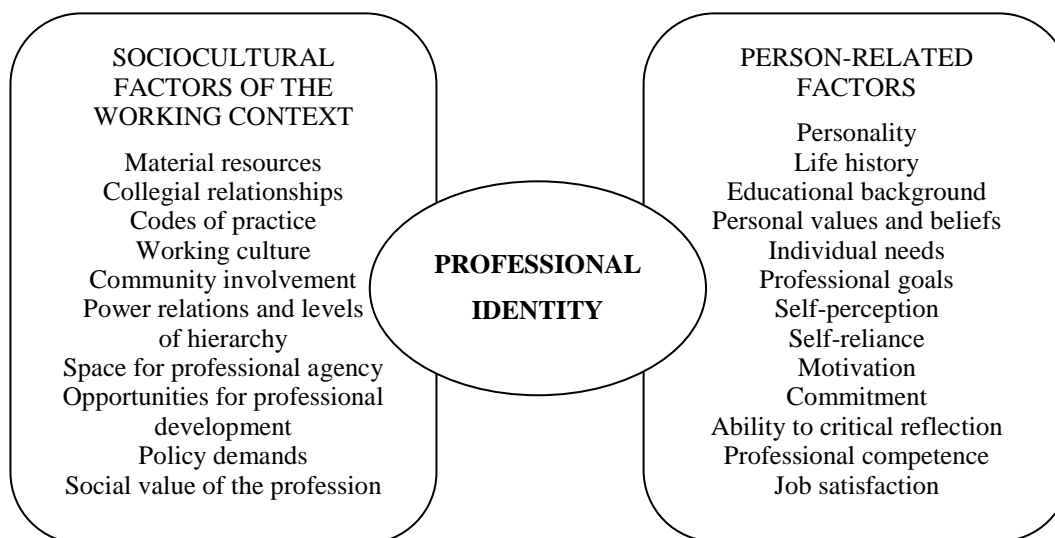


FIGURE 1 Professional Identity Formation within the Sociocultural Framework

Re-conceptualizing one’s professional identity is integral in professional development – while developing professionally, the individual also grows as a human being which in turn further affects the individual’s work in practice (Ruohotie, 2006). In order to support the formation of the teacher educator identities, and further their professional

development, the wider context of the workplace, the character of work and external relations need to be acknowledged in relation to the individual motivations, commitment, needs and self-perceptions (e.g. Havnes & Semby, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014). Therefore, the need for purposeful and thoughtful conceptualization and implementation of professional development for teacher educators seems evident. Professional development and identity formation is thus not to be taken for granted.

Steyn (2010) identified key aspects for effective and long lasting realization of professional development for teachers applicable to teacher educators as well: acknowledging the teachers' needs and motivations central to their professional development; ensuring open collaboration and active participation between the different actors in the field, for instance, the policy makers, educational leaders and teachers; providing opportunities to engage in research and in the development of their own work; and offering space and tools for critical reflection and discussions across the field. Izadinia (2014) in turn divided the implementation of teacher educators' identity development into two different activity groups: self-support and community support. Self-support activities entail the core idea of reflection: the individual sense-making of one's professional identity and practices (cf. Mezirow, 1995; Sachs, 2001). In addition to reflective activities, this can happen through self-study research or learning from daily experiences, for instance. In a similar manner, Posti-Ahokas, Idris and Hassan (*forthcoming*) call for more formalized and specifically self-driven professional development activities in supporting the formation of strong teacher educator identities and creating new paths for professional upgrading. Moreover, Cochran-Smith (2005) emphasized the need for more research about teacher education conducted by the teacher educators themselves for discovering appropriate methods of support.

Yet, in combining individuals' life stories and perceptions, and further cultivating professional identity, community support plays a major role (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Wenger, 1998; Goodwin et al., 2014). As discussed Wenger's (1998) notion of identity in practice, the formation of learning communities and communities of practice offers opportunities for knowledge-sharing, collaborative planning, social interaction across the community, sense of belonging and membership, more positive working culture, enhanced job-satisfaction, and overall stronger commitment to creating better learning possibilities for learners (see also Izadinia, 2014; Vavrus et al., 2011). Steyn (2010) further concurs that a collegial culture contributes to more effective teaching and ownership of teachers' own professional development. However, for that to happen, the

teacher educators need to be afforded agency in the vision of their active professional development and identity formation. (e.g. Loughran, 2014; Vähäsantanen, 2015.) Opportunities for active participation, involvement and critical discussion should be opened and made available for the crucial agents in the field, that is, the teacher educators and the teachers, in order to create reciprocal, open dialogue across the field and sustainable, collective action.

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

4.1 Research Objective

The overall purpose of the study is to map out the conceptual landscape on which Eritrean teacher educators live and work. The study is qualitative by nature aiming at interpreting and explaining individual experiences and personal meanings given to them (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). As the basis of the research lies an interest in examining the relationship between the teacher educators' individual senses of education professionals and their allegedly challenging and changing working environment. By challenging context, I refer to the problematic of the Eritrean teacher education that is being challenged by inadequate infrastructure, resources and facilities, low status of the teaching profession, insufficient of pedagogical training, and therefore, a wide gap between theory and practice among others. Thus, the context of the College of Education in Eritrea and the ELFA programme are highly interwoven with the research. The initial aim for my research was to study the professional development of the ELFA project participants as a part of the internal evaluation of ELFA. However, after the data collection and tentative analysis of the data while in Eritrea, the teacher educators' conceptions of their professional identities, that is, how they perceive themselves in their profession, and what factors contribute to these perceptions became to form the core of my study. Therefore, the following research questions were re-modified and formulated:

1. How are the Eritrean teacher educators' professional identities formed in a challenging context?
2. Which factors affect the teacher educators' professional identity formation?

3. What kind of implications do the teacher educators' professional identities have for their professional development?

4.2 Qualitative Research

As my focal research interest is in examining the personal experiences and conceptions of the Eritrean teacher educators, qualitative research seemed most appropriate for the study. At the core of qualitative research is an interpretative approach aiming at building an understanding of a social problem or phenomenon in relation to the individual meanings people ascribe to them (e.g. Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). As emphasized by Creswell (2013), qualitative research is situated within the specific, natural and socio-cultural context of the research participants where they experience the issue under examination. Consequently, the primary purpose is to create a holistic picture of the issue under study by identifying the complex interactions of factors involved in the issue in question (Creswell, 2013). It thus embodies a subjectivist approach by bringing not only the voices of the research participants to the front but interweaving the reflexivity of the researcher close to the research process (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). As Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) further concur, qualitative research is highly empirical and the emphasis at stake is how the researcher can examine the data as well as form argumentations with the help of empirical analysis.

My research touches upon the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach where experience and meanings given to them are the two core tools for interpreting the information at hand. According to the approach, human experience is understood widely as a person's empirical relationship to their own reality, to the world where they live in. Thus, an individual's experience is always unique and formed according to the personal understandings and significance given to it. Therefore, the same issue may create different experiences to different people depending on the individual meaning given to it. (e.g. Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009; Laine, 2010.) In order to reach this uniqueness, the researcher needs to grasp the individual's experience. Concurrently, in my study, I strive for interpretation of individual experiences rather than quantification. On the other hand, the phenomenological perspective also highlights the influence of the community and the sociocultural context as the basis of the meanings given to individual experiences. Therefore, studying individual experiences always reveals

something communal. (Laine, 2010.) Naturally, accordances are thus to be found from my research data as well.

As, for instance, Creswell (2013) underlines, the researcher positions themselves in the qualitative study meaning that the researcher's social, cultural and historical background inevitably conveys their interpretation of the data in question (see also Patton, 2002; Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Arguably, a notable benefit for me here was that I had the opportunity to travel to Eritrea and experience the context myself as an intern of the ELFA programme situating me better with the research topic. Yet, it is essential for the researcher to openly acknowledge and reflect their possible bias and presumptions of the research problem, and further to be able to be sensitive and critical towards themselves in terms of the research matter. In short, recognizing the unavoidable subjectivity of the research creates the possibility for objectivity. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998.) In the course of my research, I have aspired to observe my own preconceptions of my research problem. Even though I did not have much knowledge on teacher educators' work or professional identities in general, and even less on the context of Eritrea for the matter, I assumed their professional development would be challenging and opportunities for that few due to the challenging environment.

4.3 Data Collection

The research problem and questions primarily define the data collection method appropriate for the study, as emphasized by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008). As my research aims at grasping the individual teacher educators' voices, experiences and conceptions on the ground, I chose to utilize interviews as the primary method for the data collection. Notably, qualitative research relies on the researcher as a key instrument in the data collection. That is, evidently, an interview does not guarantee a direct access to the experiences of the informant, and the extent to which the research participant is able to express themselves during the interview is highly dependent on the researcher considering, for example, the design of the interview questions. (e.g. Creswell, 2013.) Consequently, the data gathered in the interview situation can be seen to result from the nature of the interaction established between the researcher and the informant (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008; Patton, 2002).

The participant selection for my study entailed meeting two criteria: currently educating the future teachers at the CoE, EIT, and having participated in at least one of

the five training modules provided by the ELFA programme. As suggested by the purposive sampling technique, the reasoning behind the selection was that these participants would presumably offer relevant and purposeful information concerning my research topic (e.g. Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013). Arguably, this sets certain limitations for the generalizability of the findings as the technique entails a predetermined interest of the researcher in a certain sample type and consequently, increased bias the influence of which needs to be acknowledged. (Patton, 2002; Curtis, Murphy & Shields, 2014.) I began to identify the target participants for my study shortly after arriving in Asmara in September 2016. Yet, I took some time to first familiarize myself with the ELFA programme context and create rapport between myself and the educators participating in ELFA. I then contacted the programme participants individually concerning their will to be interviewed and participate in my research. Eventually, a total of 10 teacher educators participated in the research as informants. Peculiar to qualitative research, the sample size was relatively small but I still considered it to be suitable for the purpose of my research. Notably, a smaller sample size has suggestions for only indicative presentation of the findings, not representative. However, eventually it is the rigorous inquiry of the data that defines what is meaningful. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998; Patton, 2002; Curtis et al., 2014.) The rough demographic characteristics of the research participants are presented below (Table 1).

TABLE 1 The Demographic of the Research Participants

Participant	Number of ELFA Modules Participated	Educational Background	Teaching Experience	Experience as a Teacher Educator
Educator 1	One	Master's degree	Over 10 years	More than 5 years
Educator 2	One	Bachelor's degree	Around 10 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 3	Two	Bachelor's degree	More than 5 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 4	One	Bachelor's degree*	More than 5 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 5	One	Bachelor's degree	Less than 5 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 6	Two	Master's degree	More than 5 years	More than 5 years

TABLE 1 The Demographic of the Research Participants

Participant	Number of ELFA Modules Participated	Educational Background	Teaching Experience	Experience as a Teacher Educator
Educator 7	One	Bachelor's degree*	More than 5 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 8	One	Bachelor's degree	Around 10 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 9	One	Master's degree	Around 10 years	Less than 5 years
Educator 10	One	Bachelor's degree*	More than 5 years	Less than 5 years

To elaborate, the research participants represent versatile educational and professional backgrounds. All of them have participated in at least one of the five ELFA training modules. They all give different courses to the future teachers and work within different departments at the EIT. Most of them refer to their work as being a 'teacher', a 'lecturer', an 'instructor' and/or an 'advisor'. A half (5/10) are 'junior' teacher educators with less than two years of teacher educator experience. All 10 participants hold at least a Bachelor's degree on different subjects varying from natural sciences to linguistics. Less than a half (3/10) have a Master's degree. The rest are either currently studying in a Master's programme at the EIT alongside their work at the CoE (marked with *) or hoping to begin Master's studies in the near future. Of 10 participants, nine have worked earlier in schools as subject teachers from elementary to high school level for a varying length of time from around seven to over 10 years. A few participants have worked on a higher administrative level, too. Of 10 participants, only one is female.

I identified a framework of theoretical themes relevant for my research problem based on prior studying of the theory around the research topic before the data collection. Thus, I chose to implement the interviews as semi-structured theme interviews. In a semi-structured theme interview, predetermined themes shape the interview structure and are further divided into more detailed interview questions. Yet, the sequence and form of the interview questions may vary in each interview, which happened in my case, too (e.g. Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008; Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Moreover, dividing the interview into different theory-directed themes also seemed

useful for the data analysis afterwards even though I assumed new themes would arise from the data, too. The themes for my interview questions were: *1) professional identity and value given for their profession as the basis of an individual's professional development, 2) personal engagement and motivation as requirements for adult professional development, 3) professional learning and expertise as goals for professional development, and 4) context as the modifier of professional development and factors affecting the teacher educators' work in Eritrea.*

To sum, the interview structure and questions aimed at demonstrating the possible professional development of the teacher educators, factors affecting it and the specific context of Eritrea and ELFA as the modifiers (Appendix 1). I also asked the interviewees to offer recommendations for the national policy makers in the field of teacher education. The interview questions were formed to be open-ended providing the interviewees with more freedom to think deeper, to elaborate their thoughts and to get as profound information as possible (e.g. Patton, 2002; Ruusuvuori, Nikander & Hyvärinen, 2010). Consequently, a high amount of responses were obtained that were valuable for the further analysis.

Notably, the interviews were held in the middle of the ELFA programme timeline after the programme had been operating for a year and all of the informants were currently participating in one or two of the modules. Crucial to note, the interviews conducted were not utilized only as data for this research but also as feedback for the ELFA programme managers in terms of the stakeholders' perspective on the realization and effectiveness of the training modules participated. The dual aim of the interviews thus inevitably influenced on the formulation of the interview structure as well. The interview thus also entailed questions about the participants' general experiences with the training module(s) they attended to, about their expectations for the module and how these expectations were met, and about possible challenges hindering their participation in the module, among others.

The interviews were conducted at the CoE campus in Asmara, Eritrea, alongside my internship with ELFA. All the interviews were held in English as individual, face-to-face interviews in a calm place chosen by the participant. The length of the interviews varied from 23 minutes to 90 minutes, with an average duration being around 50 minutes. All the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees. After the completion of all the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings word for word with the help of the SoundScriber dictation machine for

further data analysis. The 10 interview recordings transformed into a total of 146 sheets of transcripts with font size 12 and line spacing 1,5.

4.4 Data Analysis

As described earlier, the research data was composed of 10 Eritrean teacher educators. Prior to conducting the interviews, I regarded qualitative content analysis as a possibly suitable analysis method for my data as there were specific themes already guiding my interview structure. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) underline, it is beneficial to consider appropriate data analysis method already while collecting the research data as it therefore supports the design of the interview and transcription processes.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009), content analysis, in short, is analysis of text with an aim to get a general and condensed description of the issue under study. The objective of the analysis could be, for example, to search for similarities or concurrent themes from the data but also to acknowledge the differences found. Yet, as Ruusuvuori et al. (2010) emphasize, a simple categorization of the research data is not equivalent to an analysis. As Patton adds, content analysis can refer to “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (2002, p. 453). The research problem and questions often guide the search of relevant information but it must be noted that the research questions may be altered by the data over the analysis process (e.g. Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). As expected, this happened in my study, too, as the data came to shape both my research questions and the theory. Here, the researcher’s position is again to be acknowledged in deciding and outlining the issues to focus on in the analysis process from the substantial amount of information collected (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009).

I noted already in the interview phase that the interviewees had convergent experiences and conceptions in terms of their self-perception, profession and professional development. Similarly, when transcribing the data, there were some recurring ideas that caught my mind. This is peculiar to qualitative research as analyzing the data is interwoven with each phase of the study (e.g. Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009; Ruusuvuori et al., 2010). Yet, I began to look into the data more thoroughly after transcribing all the interviews. I first familiarized myself with the transcripts by reading all of them without making any notes or such. I then reread them and simultaneously,

made underlines and brief, general notes on issues that struck me as relevant considering my research questions and the interview themes. The issues that I spotted to appear repeatedly were, for example, challenges the context sets for the teacher educators' work in practice but also the both personal and collective values embedded in their profession that support them despite the challenges. These notes came to form some tentative, general categories for the organization of the data.

I then decided to utilize Atlas.ti -data analysis software in order to code and break down the data in a more detailed and systematic manner. Meanwhile rereading the transcripts, I categorized the data into general codes on the basis of my prior notes. Sequentially, I created multiple, more specific sub-codes within the existing ones and new, more detailed categories that I derived by combining the sub-codes. At this point, I also began to notice a need to redefine and refocus my research questions via the reflections from the data. The data gathered began to direct my focus on especially the meaning of the educators' self-perceptions, agency and roles structuring their action and work in practice. The focus of my research thus shifted from studying the overall professional development of the teacher educators to aiming to understand the factors that formulate their professional identities and the implications for their professional development. Here, a review of research literature on teacher educators' identity by Mahsa Izadinia (2014) and her division of 'external challenges and internal tensions experienced by teacher educators' further inspired me in the data organization and categorization, and helped me to examine the relationships between the codes and sub-codes from a different perspective. Yet, I consciously endeavored to keep my mind open for the unexpected cases, avoiding over-analyzing the responses and take into consideration any significant differences between even the individual interviewees. I thus returned to reread the transcribed data repeatedly during the analysis process.

Finally, I used summative combining of the categories in establishing relevant concepts, relationships and affinity with the main and sub-categories alongside the deviations (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). I also eliminated some sub-codes that became irrelevant in terms of my research focus. Therefore, the factors affecting the Eritrean teacher educators' identity formation were identified and concluded under two main categories, namely, 'External Challenges and Internal Tensions' and 'Strengthening Factors' with concurring sub-categories that notably overlap.

4.5 Reliability

The most central tool for ensuring the reliability of qualitative study is the researcher herself. Here Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) emphasize the meaning of the researcher as the creator and the interpreter of the research frame. Thus, when discussing the reliability of the qualitative research, questions of truth and objectivity naturally occur. It is the researcher's responsibility to elaborate the whole research process as openly as possible, and to aim at explaining the decisions made and the reasons behind them from the perspective of the research question. For this purpose, I defined my own presuppositions right from the outset and aimed at being aware of them throughout the research process in order to increase the objectivity of my research, in general (e.g. Patton, 2002).

Moreover, unlike in quantitative research, the results of a qualitative study are based on the uniqueness of individuals and, thus, do not aim at generalizations (e.g. Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). Nonetheless, as Patton (2002) remarks, qualitative findings still entail a certain degree of transferability to congruent research contexts and can be used to extrapolate potential applications to future research. The target group of prospective participants for my research were selected carefully and appropriately after meeting with the participants. The interviewees were also from generally similar backgrounds considering their experience as a teacher educator and former teaching experience increasing the reliability. I thus consider the sample size and the data collected to be extensive enough for the purpose of my research.

Pietilä (2010) further emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the possible challenges that may appear when conducting interviews in a foreign language and in a foreign culture. Linguistically, there is an increased likelihood of misunderstandings in interpreting the meaning and relevance of the responses. In addition, there are culture-related challenges as cultural expressions, idioms and nuances might be difficult to convey to a foreigner. Moreover, the researcher is challenged to acknowledge their position of an 'outsider' and its limitations for their knowledge, and what this further means to the reliability of the research. (e.g. Pietilä, 2010.) Considering my study, there were linguistic challenges as English is not the first language of either the interviewer or the interviewees, which may bring a certain degree of ambivalence into the research. Yet, this was taken into account already in selecting the research participants as all the ELFA programme participants are required to sufficient fluency in English in order to

be able to participate in the training modules. During the interviews, I also asked elaborating questions if confusion occurred. I noted few unclarities later in the transcription phase which I marked accordingly. Unfortunately, there was no possibility for elaborations later due to difficulties to contact the interviewees as being in another country and the insufficient access to Internet in Eritrea. However, there were relatively few unclarities so I did not regard them to affect the reliability of the data analysis as a whole. I presented authentic quotations from the participants in the research report to enhance its reliability (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008).

Pietilä (2010) further argues that in a transnational interview situation between two individuals from different countries, the discussion is more likely to be directed towards comparing the living conditions and economic factors of the two countries than in a situation where both the interviewer and the interviewee would be from the same country due to the differences in cultural knowledge. To some extent, this might work as an asset and provide more profound information on the research context. However, given the tense political situation in Eritrea, for example, sometimes this positioning might also lead to avoiding, defending or ‘sugar-coating’ difficult or controversial issues within the research context. (cf. Honan, Hamid, Alhamdan, Phommalangsy & Lingard, 2013.) Considering further the public nature of the teacher educators’ work and the social expectations related to it, the participants might be cautious with their opinions. It is also critical to note my position here as an intern of the ELFA programme and thus, their Finnish representative which might cause the participants to answer me in a socially accepted way. These aforementioned factors can create overly tolerant responses and hinder the reliability of the data. Consequently, the researcher has again a critical role here in creating rapport and a feeling of safety in the interview situation as well as being alert to these issues throughout the data collection (e.g Patton, 2002). I could say I generally felt like the interviewees were able to be quite open to me, and their responses seemed to depict also the somewhat contradictory issues related to their sociocultural context.

Moreover, it is significant to note the fact that I had the opportunity to spend two months in Eritrea as an intern of the ELFA programme and thus, gain first-hand experience and knowledge on the research context not only through interviews but also via personal observations, discussions and interaction with the local and international people and ELFA staff members. I aimed at making accurate field notes on a weekly basis of my observations and discussions with the locals and ELFA staff member

especially in the beginning of my sojourn in Asmara in order to form a picture of the context. I also took photos, when allowed, to increase the reliability of the data. For me, this meant having more holistic observations I could reflect later on my findings, and consequently, practical understanding of the issue researched. However, critical to note, in the end, I considered the notes to be insufficient to be utilized for anything else than depicting the context. Furthermore, questions for clarifications concerning the teacher education system in Eritrea, in specific, were sent by email to the Dean of the College of Education to create a more detailed view of the teacher educators' working context. I further familiarized myself with the context by reading about it from multiple sources before, while and after my stay in Eritrea. Most importantly, I was deliberately conscious of my position as a foreigner trying to look into a very different context than where I come from and further, aimed at being aware of and respecting that throughout the research process (cf. Curtis et al., 2014).

4.6 Ethical Considerations

In any research concerning people, ethical considerations and respecting the dignity of each research participant should be one of the guiding principles of the research process. The multifaceted nature of ethical questions is present especially when utilizing interviews as the data collection method. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008.) Here, more important than the research itself is the realization of the rights of each participant which again places the researcher in a key position in assuring this. In practice, the research participants need to be fully informed about the aims, methods, confidentiality and possible risks of the study prior their participation, and that their participation is truly voluntary. (e.g. Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2003; Curtis et al., 2014.) Therefore, before the interviews, I informed both the CoE management as a central partner in the ELFA programme and the possible research participants about the aims and confidentiality of my study face-to-face. I then asked their consent to participate in the research on a written research consent (Appendix 2) that included the aforementioned elaborations of the research arrangements and my contact details if a need for further questions.

In designing the data collection, ethical considerations were made from the beginning by carefully considering phrasing the interview questions in as neutral and open-ended way as possible in order not to be leading the interviewees to any direction whatsoever. The possible ambiguity of the concepts used was also forethought in

deciding the questions (Patton, 2002). The interviews were organized in calm, comfortable settings on the college campus and the participants were once more informed of their right not to answer a question if they do not want to and further terminate the interview any time if feeling so. In order to gain reliability and to support the data analysis, I recorded all the interviews with the permission of the interviewees. As agreed already in the research consent, any names of individuals or specific details of them were not be mentioned in the research report but I refer to the participants by utilizing pseudonyms in order to confirm the interviewees to stay unidentified and anonymous (e.g. Patton, 2002; Curtis et al., 2014). Moreover, the recordings of the interviews will be destroyed after the research report is written.

Finally, the interview situation always entails ethically contrasting positioning between the researcher and the interviewees (e.g. Pietilä, 2010; Patton, 2002). In cross-cultural research, in specific, this positioning and unavoidable tensions need to be acknowledged (Honan et al., 2013). In my case, it is critical to note my dual positioning in the research context not only as a researcher from another country but also as a representative of the ELFA programme staff and ‘outsider, Finnish expertise’. Firstly, given the high contrast between the researcher and the participants’ backgrounds, it is crucial to be aware of the possibility of the foreign researchers’ normative assumptions and biased knowledge affecting the research (e.g. Curtis et al., 2014). Secondly, in further discussing education and North-South cooperation, one must take a critical and reflective stand on the different dimensions of the research context. This specific context where my research and ELFA function entails multiple, critical, socio-cultural aspects relating to the colonial history of Eritrea, the nation’s long struggle for freedom and the current political context within the country that is working against Western idea of democracy. Thus, considering the complex context, questions of Western power to conduct research in a developing country and further postcolonial implications for the locatedness of knowledge are arguably present and may affect the research process if not critically evaluated. (e.g. Honan et al., 2013; see also Rizvi, 2007.)

5 FINDINGS

The findings of the data collected are presented in this chapter. The overall purpose of the data gathering was to map out the conceptual landscape on which Eritrean teacher

educators live and work, and to elaborate the elements shaping the teacher educators' professional identities at the College of Education, Eritrean Institute of Technology. Being a qualitative study, a high emphasis is placed on grasping the individual voices and personal experiences on the ground, and yet, simultaneously aiming at building a picture of the collective context. Any significant differences between the teacher educators interviewed are taken into consideration and presented in the findings.

Factors affecting the Eritrean teacher educators' identity formation were identified and categorized, namely 'External Challenges and Internal Tensions' experienced by the teacher educators and 'Strengthening Factors' supporting their identity formation (cf. Izadinia, 2014). Sub-categories for the 'Challenges and Tensions' were defined as 'Material', 'Programmatic', and 'Sociocultural Challenges' and for the 'Strengthening Factors' the sub-categories were classified as 'Community-Driven Factors and 'Individual-Driven Factors'.

5.1 External Challenges and Internal Tensions Experienced by the Eritrean Teacher Educators

Emotional, internal tensions rise from external, practical challenges the teacher educators face in their social context and consequently, affect the formation of their professional identity. The informants' answers illustrate how the teacher educators' professional identities and realizing one's own purposes are constrained and shaped by the outside circumstance. The findings concerning the external challenges and the consequent internal tensions faced by teacher educators at the College of Education, Eritrea Institute of Technology are summarized below (Table 2).

TABLE 2 The External Challenges and Internal Tensions Experienced by the Eritrean Teacher Educators (Adapted from Izadinia, 2014, p. 430)

	External challenges	Internal tensions
1. Material challenges	1.1 Lack of materials, resources and technical facilities; poor Internet connection; old books; inadequate access to up-to-date knowledge	1.1 Feeling incompetent, de-skilled, excluded from the global discussions
	1.2 Teaching load; busy schedules; long days; distance from home; poor salary	1.2 Considerable fatigue, not having enough time to study and develop oneself

TABLE 2 The External Challenges and Internal Tensions Experienced by the Eritrean Teacher Educators (Adapted from Izadinia, 2014, p. 430)

	External challenges	Internal tensions
2. Programmatic challenges	2.1 Not having research skills and/or exposure and resources to engage in research; limited access to Master or PhD-level studies	2.1 Difficulty in acquiring an identity as researcher, failure in establishing academic credibility, frustration, disappointment
	2.2 Changing role from a teacher into a teacher educator (junior teacher educators)	2.2 Feeling uncertain within themselves, self-doubt, more negative self-perception as a professional
	2.3 Expectations on learner-centered pedagogy; conflicting with the reality; lack of pedagogical training and inadequate in-service training to meet the requirements of the reform	2.3 Difficulty in implementing 'the ideal', insecurity, questioning oneself and the system, insufficient pedagogical skills, compromised know-how
	2.4 Unmotivated and educationally 'poor' teacher students (forced to join the College of Education)	2.4 Struggle to motivate the students, taking a lot of effort to focus on that and not the actual teaching process
3. Sociocultural challenges	3.1 Lack of societal respect and support for teachers; contradictory demands on quality teachers	3.1 Feeling of swimming against the current
	3.2 Information not shared from the educational policy makers to the institution and its staff (e.g. current education reform); top-down model and rigid hierarchy	3.2 Uncertainty, feeling marginalized, hindered professional agency

The material challenges touch upon the teacher educators' immediate working resources and the limitations it posits for their personal and professional lives. The programmatic, on the other hand, challenges reflect the everyday practices and routines at the College of Education, and the space or the lack of it for the teacher educators to work, fulfill their professional roles and competencies, and shape their identities. The sociocultural challenges in turn illustrate the macro-level social value given to the teacher education and the organization of educational policies in relation to the teacher educators' practice and self-perceptions. Many of the challenges and tensions clearly overlap. Yet, it is critical to note the aim here is not to argue the challenges and tension depicted in this study would have causal relationships but to demonstrate the interwoven nature of teacher educators' identity, practice and the sociocultural context of Eritrea. The

division of factors into external challenges and internal tensions was adapted from the findings of Izadinia (2014) who analyzed research papers to elaborate the teacher educator identity via challenges and tensions that influence the development of their professional identity. These findings support the findings of this study well, too. Some parts were left out due to some differences in the focus of the study, for instance, considering the teacher educators' induction phase as this study does not have sufficient data on the matter. The challenges and the concurring tensions summarized above will be next discussed separately and in more detail.

5.1.1 Material Challenges

Inadequate Infrastructure and Hindered Access to Up-to-Date Knowledge

Very practical problems that cover the whole nation such as inadequate infrastructure, daily power cuts, lack of technical facilities, very poor Internet connection, old books and consequently, inadequate access to up-to-date knowledge are linked to high tensions of being incompetent, insufficient and marginalized with their knowledge as professionals expressed by the interviewees. At least half of the interviewees reported these practical issues being one of the most substantial hindrances for their professional development. As an interviewee (Educator 2) stated, the present global era of information and the consequent changing complexities in societies presume continuous development and individual's will to develop. However, in the Eritrean context, as one of the seniors put it, the material and technical limitations exclude the professionals from the current global discussions and latest developments,

-- due to many, uh, these technological limitations, that we don't have this, we're not conversant with the current debates, with the current developments in that field in pedagogical issues and curriculum issues, and technological issues related to teaching, professionalism also, becoming teacher -- (Educator 9)

Moreover, the contrast in material development is not only clear in comparing Eritrea globally but also within the country. An interviewee brought to the front the high differences and exposure in technical knowledge between the urban *Asmarinos* and people coming from the rural areas,

-- there is a gap between rural and urban areas, the gap is, uh, when I taught in 2010 in the village through these mountains, it is 3,5 hours [walk to the village school] on foot. -- So in that time it was hard for us [village teachers] -- but in that place [rural areas] there is no electricity, there is no transport, I know, but I think it is far from technology, they don't know even what computer is, they don't know even its name, not only the computer, they don't know even ... so there is a gap, so as I came to the city [Asmara], here we're like, uh, animals, they [rural people] don't know

anything, what is, what is something like that, so, uh, I need to reconcile this even, I want to do more on this, we should do more -- (Educator 10)

Furthermore, the ongoing global digital development versus the technical limitations and hindered access to the digital or even printed knowledge in Eritrea challenges the teachers' professional competence leaving a feeling of uncertainty towards one's own work as expressed by three informants,

-- everything nowadays is digital or knowledge is just ... you're being sharing [not clear 15:32] so how far we are just exposed or do we have exposure to that extent? That is also one bad [thing], because our background doesn't allow us to be like that because most people who are here are coming from, maybe low [lands] or from village -- if you're not well [good at] on this kind of knowledge, then you're not competent. Or you cannot also deliver quality of education at the same time. Sometimes our students they go ahead of us -- Still we are at the bottom, there is, so ... to be [a] contemporary teacher, so you need this much stuff -- (Educator 7)

We don't have lot of books, we have to read [the] most. If you're not the master of your study, then, if you're not the master of your subject and lesson, then you're still a student, and how can you teach a student ... you're student in that area, in that [those] subject, as long as you don't update yourself [according] to the latest developments in that [those] subjects. (Educator 2)

-- you should also have the resource, even I, even me I don't have the laptop, I use my brother's laptop, I don't have my own desktop, if light [electricity] goes [off], we can't do anything -- (Educator 10)

Here, one of the interviewees interestingly compared their situation in Eritrea to the Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He argued that as long as the basic needs and facilities of the teacher educators are not fulfilled, they cannot develop themselves professionally,

We know from psychology, there is a good saying, our colleague Abraham Maslow he said 'hierarchy of needs', basic needs, something like that, eh, the basic needs are ... I think there is [are] no basic needs here, there are some kind of, uh, the basic needs are you know food, water, air, something -- Even the Internet is not and we know it's not good, so we suffer, so I myself, I want, if I am going [to be] professionally developed, if I say to be myself [that I am] a professionally developed person, I need to have this, so after that I can do my best, yeah. (Educator 10)

Another participant concurred the contextual issues material-wise challenge his professional contribution: "Had I been in other context maybe I would've performed a lot and contributed a lot instead of sorting out and finding solutions to minor things in life" (Educator 6). Furthermore, one informant saw the lack of 'modern' facilities and resources emphasizing the role of the teacher educator as the primary knowledge-provider and supporter of the students thus, growing their responsibilities and challenging them as professionals. As stated,

You will not get, you'll not also get a very modern and, uh, library, and modern books such kind of shortages, Internet and facilities so in general what such kind of things it is a problem all the time. The students also, they simply, because of this problem, the students they simply wait

everything from you, you are everything, OK, just for the students. You cannot give them some kind of, uh, many activities, because of this lack of facilities, that's a very big challenge at here in EIT, yeah. Such kind of thing it should be improved. (Educator 1)

Teaching Loads and Fatigue

In addition, some informants also emphasized high teaching load, busy schedules, long days and distance from home to hinder the time and energy for professional development (cf. Goodwin et al, 2014). Loaded working days arguably contribute to wasting valuable personal resources and energy that could be used for studying or other professional development activities. As emphasized by an interviewee,

It [the College] is too far, especially from my home, [it] is too far. We have to, uh, come at least -- is it 50 or 45 [minutes ride], I don't know, but it's too long. It's too long and uh, especially when we do have class in the morning nine o'clock, we just come early in the morning and ... coming here and we directly enter into the class and it's very tiresome. (Educator 2)

The aforementioned issues concur with the sociocultural challenges by reflecting the low status of the teaching profession that in practice shows as disproportional low compensation, for example, salary-wise, to the high teaching load of the teacher educators and teachers in general, too.

5.1.2 Programmatic Challenges

Compromised Identity as a Researcher

Concerning the programmatic challenges, most of the teacher educators stated to have a limited exposure and access to engage in research activities in their working context. Consequently, this has resulted in difficulties in acquiring an identity as researcher and establishing academic credibility. Moreover, the teacher educators interviewed expressed disappointment in not receiving the resources or opportunities to practice their agency as researchers. Yet, the guidelines of the National Commission of the Higher Education clearly imply expectations for the teacher educators to have a Master's degree or PhD in related fields of education and thus, to act as academic scholars, too, even though so far there has not been Master's programmes in education in Eritrea. Even in general entry to Master's -level studies is limited and opportunities for doing doctoral studies are practically non-existent nationwide. The challenge for getting a chance to upgrade one's degree was described as one of the senior teacher educators,

-- the challenge is, you see, especially from degree [BA] to Master's, it's a bit challenging, it's very few that get [the] chance -- the challenge comes when we start from Master's to PhD that's very challenging, yeah, very few get that chance so far. (Educator 9)

However, the Eritrean Government gives scholarships to a limited number of students and with certain requirements for doing their Master's degree or PhD abroad. Yet, one senior educator described the overall process and difficulties in getting the scholarship as challenging especially due to his age but has hope for another kind of opportunities such as distance learning programmes,

-- some countries that they [the Government] give scholarship [abroad], there is age limit so for Master's it should be below 35, I think, for PhD it should be below 45 so my age is about 45 so (laughs) I feel that, I don't think that, uh, especially those scholarships with that Governmental scholarship it might be a bit challenging but still I feel that there could be many options because to my understanding, especially, uh, after Master's level, I think, what you learn is through your experience, what you need is guidance and support from the advisor so if the chance is great, I think there could be, if there is possibility like distance learning or some sort of sandwich programme maybe ... (Educator 9)

One informant also noted the lack of PhD holders at the College of Education who could work as their advisors and help the inexperienced educators in their research work (Educator 7). The lack of qualified faculty (PhD) was pointed out by the Dean of the College of Education as the main constraint for establishing Master's programmes in education, too. Here, the informants with a Master's degree expressed disappointment in having a very low chance to pursue their doctoral studies in Eritrea,

I'm happy to serve in EIT, it is good in every aspects but the motivation to continue to pursue for further education (PhD), the chance is very low, that's a little bit, it gives me some kind of, uh, disappointment. (Educator 1)

Many informants still expressed a will to pursue an upgrading degree such as Master's or PhD. A higher degree or qualification seemed to be regarded as a measure for the educators' professionalism and professional development by many informants. A senior educator mirrored getting his PhD as gaining expertise and developing professionally and thus, being more able to contribute to his country,

Yeah, I have to do my PhD. Now I have identified so many research areas, so many gaps in the institution, especially in teaching and learning, uh, so, you need somebody to fill this gap, to do that you have to be trained, you have to be trained at different levels, then for me, I have to do ... what is expected of me at Master's level, I believe I have done everything and I have to do my PhD, then after doing my PhD I'll be back and fill all the gaps which I believe were left, were left, uh, before or after some day, after I completed my studies, so I will say that I have to do my PhD or do a research so that I develop myself and exhaust particular field so that I'll be an expert in certain [field], I help people here in my country so that they will be also trained professionally, that is my, what I want. (Educator 6)

Another senior teacher educator (Educator 9) pointed out doing research as his weakness as despite his interest in doing research he still has not experience on that. Some informants (4/10) expressed having a vague theoretical picture of conducting research but lacking the practical know-how. They similarly argued that the practical implementation is the greatest difficulty in doing research nationwide. As expressed,

-- we [Eritreans] don't know anything about how to make research. Even [though] we know maybe what is research methodology we can define it, we know, but practically, the practicality is lost [missing]. (Educator 10)

We [Eritreans] have a weakness on doing the research, OK? Especially the formal writing, the formal, uh, data collection and what we have to do in all processes and steps is not well known and clearly known by we people -- (Educator 3)

-- you can carry out a research but problem comes in the implementation, I know what to do, uh, I can recommend but we're not implementers, we don't implement here, that's the, you ask then ages pass until things are implemented, that is the problem. (Educator 6)

An inability to develop research skills seemed to result in inner conflicts in teacher educators such as doubt about their identity as an academic (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014). To illustrate, only of the senior teacher educators referred to himself as “somehow a researcher” (Teacher educator 6) and still, notably including a dismissing adverb ‘somehow’. The aforementioned issues imply difficulties for the teacher educators to classify themselves as academics while acknowledging it should be a permanent part of their work and further hindering their professional development as teacher educators.

Changing Role from a Teacher into a Teacher Educator

Regarding the induction of the new teacher educators to the College of Education, the more inexperienced, junior teacher educators perceived themselves and their abilities as professionals more negatively than the senior, more experienced teacher educators. Accordingly, entering a new context and the transformation from a school teacher into a new, substantially different role as a higher education -level teacher educator generates feelings of uncertainty about oneself and one's capabilities as a professional. (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014.) One teacher educator referred to the difference between teaching in a school and teaching in the College of Education as a change in one's role and in the purpose of the profession as being a model for the future teaching professionals,

We are teachers but we are also producing professionals. This is a difficult profession. Yeah, it's good to teach in schools, it's different, that I told you earlier, but in this college you are producing or you're preparing teachers ... so, uh, how do you prepare them is ... uh, [the] question. Because you're going to be a model for them, what you teach to them, they ... are going to apply it in the schools. Therefore, it's [a] sensitive job. (Educator 4)

Furthermore, many junior educators depicted themselves as 'not being complete' or 'not knowing enough' and had difficulties in defining their professional strengths. When asked about his professional strengths, an interviewee demonstrated his 'incompleteness',

I'm not, uh, still I am not, uh, complete or still I am not full. Uh, I do have so many gaps to be completed so I do have so many holes that I'm waiting to be filled by, by some ... it could be trained [training] or could be face-to-face learning or education or any else (Educator 7)

Some juniors also referred to the seniors as their mentors and being able to develop themselves with the help of the seniors. As expressed by a junior teacher educator,

I believe being here or being a graduate assistant or being among the scholars, this is like a big sea then the fish are the scholars over here, so being part of the sea and being member of this big sea -- [it is] a grace for me, I believe or I strongly, you know, think, I will grow to, actually, I could say I'm a better person now and the best has yet to come but engaging with these professionals [the senior teacher educators] and personal development very surely [will come], so I could say I'm very grateful to all of them [the scholars] -- I'm student with them [the senior professors], I am, I am a teacher to my students and I'm a student to my [senior colleagues], you know. (Educator 5)

Visible in the preceding quote, they also seemed to downplay themselves against the seniors, not really considering themselves as professionals but regarding the seniors as the ones with knowledge. This was pinpointed by another junior: "-- if I want to educate, I need to meet with seniors also, with the, uh, ones which are more than me" (Educator 4). Arguably, these findings mirror the organization of the induction into the new profession as a teacher educator at the College of Education being highly dependent on the senior teacher educators.

Limited Access to Pedagogical Training

What also hinders the teacher educators' identity formation is the limited access to in-service pedagogical training by being linked to questioning not only oneself but also the system. Considering the expectations and, more importantly, the need for learner-centered pedagogy established as a part of the latest national Core Curriculum for Education in 2003, the teacher educators are challenged to adapt and adopt a new teaching style themselves, too. However, it is indicated that there has not been adequate quality training to support the transformation from the traditional teacher-centered

pedagogy to the learner-centered. This has further resulted in ‘sticking to what one knows’, that is, most of the teacher educators still teach the way they were taught in school and replicate the teacher-centered teaching methods in teacher education. (see also Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; Goodwin et al., 2014; Vavrus et al., 2011.) As some of the interviewees explain, there is a notable gap between the theoretical policy goals and practice,

Because we teach how we are learned or how we were learned [taught]. Because we have, uh, learned in the traditional way of teaching which is teachers’ [teacher-centered] approach but now we’re trying to implement the new [National Core Curriculum from 2003 which emphasizes learner-centered approach to teaching] policy but there is a clash here now. (Educator 8)

-- as I said before the student-centered [pedagogy] we say in rural area ‘How? How it can be?’ Even in the urban areas ‘How?’ Uh, teacher should be motivated, satisfied with his work, with his salary, so he can do more. So student-centered learning, student-centered, mm, we need to have discussions, we need to give more time to the students but how? (Educator 10)

--if you want to, you know, to have a fish from the sea then you need to know certain, you know, techniques of this fishing. (Educator 5)

As a result, some of the informants consider the learner-centered methods to be too idealistic, putting more responsibilities on the teachers and not taking into consideration the practical barriers on the ground, such as the large class sizes and low motivation among the teacher students, and thus, question the realization of the policy in their own work. This was brought up as,

-- there are certain things that are very idealistic ... that are idealistic, kind of, policies [referring to the new curriculum and its demand on learner-centered pedagogy] ... is good but like, umm, copying and trying to paste them in your country from other context is not good. It’s good to see from other contexts and from other systems but trying to paste them in your country without looking into the context is, uh, very far from ... very far from reality. (Educator 2)

-- this student-centered approach gives you more responsibilities than the previous ones ... the teacher must be always with the students, he has to guide and shape every individual student in the class, but this is very impossible with the motivation that we had [have], maybe from today onwards it may change, uh, we don’t know. (Educator 3)

Another pedagogical issue was raised with the demand on culturally responsive pedagogy as both teachers and teacher educators in Eritrea have a highly diverse student population coming from different tribes, language groups, and also socio-economic backgrounds. Even though the national education policies have set the frame for working in integrated schools, either the teachers or the teacher educators are not trained to meet the diverse needs of their students. Moreover, research lacks evidence from the field on how the teachers or teacher educators are working with these realities. Teacher educators participating in ELFA Module 2: Pedagogy in Teacher Education received

material related to culturally responsive pedagogy revealing an alarming gap in the participants' knowledge on the matter. Some interviewees further expressed doubts towards the approach but also their realization of their own weakness in mastering the pedagogy needed,

First when I heard or I read this, uh, article, I don't know, how to ... there is no any culturally responsive pedagogy in here. 'A teacher must be culturally responsive' – What does this mean? -- how I'm going to apply it in my class, am I only culturally responsive, or? Students must be also culturally responsive. I have a doubt also and this one I wrote in my, my assignment also, I couldn't understand this, it's new for us. It's also difficult to ... practice this concept in the class. (Educator 4)

-- how are you going to manage that kind of class [with students of culturally different backgrounds] because before I came here I had such experience because through different ethnic groups my, my students were, uh, from two different ethnic groups, then as I read that module [literature] I realized that what I was using was a failure. (Educator 8)

Unmotivated Teacher Students

As discussed earlier, the College of Education does not appeal to many students as a career option and even though the system is currently being developed, it is the lowest achievers who are funneled into the college regardless of their own will and motivation towards the profession. Consequently, not only have many teacher students a low motivation but this affects the motivation of the teacher educators, too. The unmotivated and educationally poor teacher students challenge the teacher educators' motivation to support their students and to overcome the negative perception of becoming a teacher. As one teacher educator summarized, the general and even contradicting atmosphere in Eritrea related to becoming a teacher has resulted in self-doubt concerning their own work,

-- the students are not motivated to become teachers. Mm, how do we change this, uh, kind of motivation or how do we, uh ... like, before they came to this college, do [did] they come by themselves [by their own choice], or? I don't know. The lowest achievers come here, therefore, how do we make them teachers? I don't know. There is, uh, a debate in this, uh, context ... every, uh, student would like to have a good teacher, also at the same time their parents need, uh, good teachers for their kids but parents do not want to become, uh, do not want their kids to become a teacher. (Educator 4)

The low motivation to become a teacher is highly interwoven to the following sociocultural challenges entailing a low social value of the education profession in Eritrea as a whole.

5.1.3 Sociocultural Challenges

Low Status of the Teaching Profession

On a sociocultural level, the profession of a teacher is publicly considered a low status job that is not respected and further sufficiently supported, for example, salary-wise, in Eritrea contributing negatively to the teacher educators' professional identity and their work. As discussed above, the teacher education at a college level, too, suffers from a low status and does not attract students (Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; see also Goodwin et al., 2014). Due to this, most of the informants stated many teachers do not necessarily even regard teaching as a profession and have a negative perspective towards their work,

But the worst thing what I see is, uh, the teachers' perspective towards teaching ... this has to be changed. -- The perception should be strengthened. -- generally, it is society [that lacks respect for teacher's profession], but the teachers themselves also, they do have the negative perception of their profession, even the teachers. (Educator 8)

-- being a teacher is not rewarding, uh, not rewarding [concerning salary and status] at this time, especially in the previous 10 or 15 years, therefore, people come to hate or dislike the job. (Educator 3)

To tackle the issue, one interviewee called for professionalizing the teacher education and profession. He further argued the problematic being the fact that the most teachers or teacher educators have a degree in something else than education-related area resulting in compromised self-perception as a professional,

-- we do not professionalize this teacher education, we have most likely clear cut, you know, this [these] clear cut explanations of what this teaching, uh, professional, teaching profession is or how can we say, you know, nowadays, you know, if you see in our context, teachers, you know, or people who engage in these teaching and learning activities are not those who graduated from College of Education, the one who graduated from, from engineering science and health science and they all participated in this teaching, teaching-learning processes, so they do not consider themselves as professionals, uh, after all they ask you 'What is this teacher? What is the teaching profession?', they do not consider teaching as a profession, if they not consider their teaching as a profession, they never see themselves as professionals, this is the many [common] case so ... the devotion [15:52 not clear] is, you know, we need to professionalize this teacher education or teaching and learning process so that we can, we can get individuals who are proud of their profession, who can confidently stand in front of many people 'I am a teacher, I do this and that.' (Educator 5)

Moreover, there is a contradiction between the social opinion of the profession and the practicality as one interviewee raised a paradox for teachers in Eritrea, "every parent wants their children to have good teachers, but not their children to become teachers" (Educator 4). Yet, the value of the profession is diminished by the public according to which "All people can teach" leaving a self-doubt on one of the interviewees,

I always said it's [the profession] difficult. I don't know, there is some angle why I define this, this profession is difficult. Some people may say 'easy' because there is a slogan: 'All people can teach, all people also can learn', there is a slogan in this country. But how, how all people can teach? Everybody can teach? No, I don't know, for me ... that's why, I don't know, I'm struggling still to become a professional teacher. (Educator 4)

The lack of societal respect and support therefore challenges the teacher educators as a high tension of swimming against the current in negotiating their professional identities, thus, notably hindering their professional identity formation.

Exclusion from Information Sharing and Policy-Making

As described earlier in the context chapter, the Eritrean society and institutions are built on rigid hierarchy and, as my observations and discussions with the CoE and ELFA staff indicate, information and policies made from the top do not necessarily reach the lower levels. Thereby, the interview entailed questions about the recommendations the educators would like to give to the Eritrean educational policy makers and how the ongoing education reform will affect their own work. What is truly alarming is that *none* of the 10 teacher educators interviewed were aware or knew about the ongoing education reform that clearly will impact on their work. Here, many informants expressed frustration in the way the educational policy makers do not include the teachers from the ground in the policy making. Arguably, the top-down model and the exclusion of the policy implementers, in other words, the teachers and the teacher educators, endangers their agency as the members of the social community as well as their professional development (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Vähäsantanen, 2015). As one interviewee argued, the issue is similar with being exposed to research – the small amount of research made in the country does not reach the teacher educators on the ground. As argued by an educator,

-- in our context, there are many areas that need some ... to be investigated or to be studied. And the schools or in our daily classroom activity, so ... and we cannot see the people, maybe there are people who are doing research but it's not, uh, exposed or we cannot get, uh, it's not reaching to our hand -- (Educator 7)

There is thus a conflict between not being as well-informed as they should be to develop professionally and, yet, being confronted with high demands from the top and struggling to identify themselves with the members of the professional community. The interviewees highly claimed for renewed down-top -model in the educational policy making as well as improved interaction and inclusion of the teacher educators, the teachers and the students, too, in the information sharing,

Teachers must participate [in] it [the policy making], uh, because they know the problems with the teachers, with the students, with the ground and so on with the system, they know it. I also know something, not all, but ... I have things, uh, to reform it. Therefore, I need to have some, uh, role, uh, to change or to reform the [education] system in some kind. (Educator 4)

-- there should be some kind of interaction starting from the down, the down means the students' level even, students know their problems, teachers know their problems, uh, there should be some kind of interaction between the high authorities and the ... some kind of simple [ordinary] persons like individuals who are teachers or students in the school. -- maybe someone says 'Fire is not good, fire, [42:51-53 some words not clear] it will make you some kind of this or that' but after you touch it you know it, yeah, so maybe we are in some kind of good place, you [the authorities] don't know any kind of the pain of the lower people so you should have interaction. -- there should be down to top and it will be good for everything so the curriculum could be designed well, it could be developed well, instruction then after that will be good and everything will be settled, yeah. (Educator 10)

I believe, an art in the absence of the artist is not art, it is useless. Now, in policy-making, the implementers of education are teachers, and teachers should be involved or consulted before the implementation or before the policy is implemented, [to see] what is on the ground. (Educator 6)

Seemingly, there is a high need for acknowledging the knowledge of the 'artists', that is, the teaching staff at the grassroots level and consulting them in developing more appropriate educational policies as emphasized as a part of the programmatic challenges, too.

5.2 Strengthening Factors Supporting the Teacher Educator Identities

Despite the external constraints and practical barriers that challenge the teacher educators' identity formation and further professional development, factors that strengthen their professional identities and facilitate the realization of their personal purposes in the social context were identified. The strengthening factors were divided into separate subcategories of 'Community-Driven Factors' and 'Self-Driven Factors'. These subcategories were found to contribute to one another and together support the teacher educators' identity formation as depicted below (Figure 2).

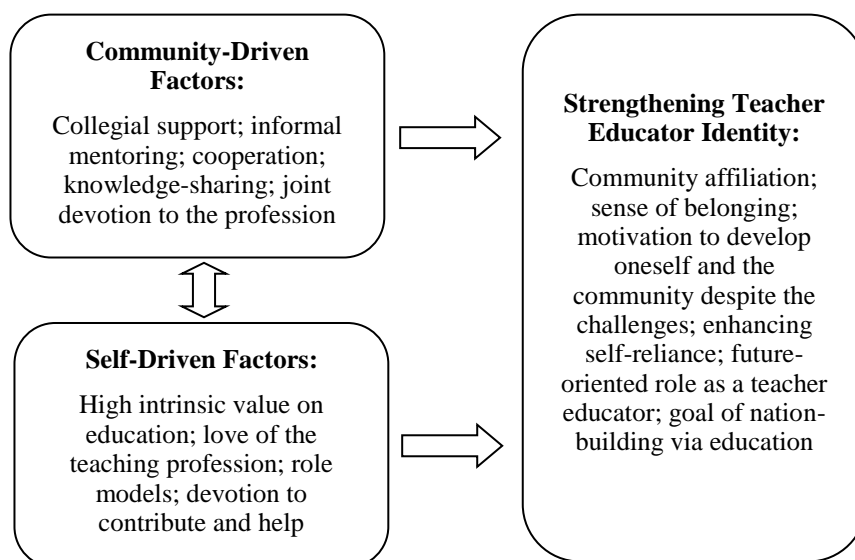


FIGURE 2 Factors Strengthening the Teacher Educator Identity Formation

In short, the community-driven factors stem from the supportive practices and motivations among the colleagues within the teacher educators' work community in the College of Education. Those in conjunction with the self-driven factors, such as high appreciation of education expressed by many individuals, clarify and strengthen the teacher educator identity. The factors will be next elaborated separately keeping in mind their overlapping nature.

5.2.1 Community-Driven Factors

Cooperation among colleagues, sharing experiences and knowledge, and supportive relationships within the College were acknowledged as the most important factors supporting the educators' work and identity formation. Collegial support further seemed to play a significant role in building a sense of belonging to the teacher education community and forming the teacher educators' professional identities (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014; cf. Wenger, 1998). Moreover, many educators interviewed perceived their professionalism and professional development through their experience of participation and being included in their work community (e.g. Wenger, 1998). In other words, professional development and identity formation were conceptualized as processes that should integrate with the community.

The necessity of cooperation and sharing ideas was further emphasized due to the challenging nature of the job as a teacher educator. As stated by two interviewees,

-- we do the job in cooperation with the other teachers in here. We are not going to do the job lonely [alone], because we ... as I told you before, the job is not easy. -- you need to have, uh, help, or, uh, cooperate. (Educator 4)

-- you should have some kind of contact, and you should also contribute what you have also with others, you share such kind of things, sharing ideas, knowledge also, this is what professional development means overall. (Educator 1)

Similarly, an interviewee underlined sharing knowledge especially between the junior and senior teacher educators in order to fill in the gaps with the newly arriving ideas and concepts in their work such as the learner-centered pedagogy that currently challenges the teacher educators to redefine their profession. As expressed,

I need to incorporate the old teaching with this new teaching, there is a gap between it. That's why I always ask people, and at the same time ask my friends how to define it, profession like this. It is a new concept for us, for example, this learner-centered pedagogy but it's difficult to apply it. We need to define it, different experts define this, uh, concept in different ways -- (Educator 4)

To contrast, ELFA's greatest benefit was also expressed to be the increased collegial discussions not only between the teacher educators from the EIT but also with participants from different institutions and backgrounds, that is, ACCE and MoE. The participants further praised over the new international cooperation with the Finnish education experts, sharing knowledge with people from a different context and consequently, widening one's perspectives and professionalism,

Whatever I have, there are experts who got different experience, different exposure, uh ... then you come together and share the experiences so that you learn from one another, and that is one thing. Other thing is maybe I'm ... I might be, I might think that I know something but I'm locked in this room and my wall it may not be very wide if there are people who have got exposure or new innovations coming to, to the professional development, these people can come and they can share new insights to me or to my professional world so that I can learn and realize 'Oh yeah, something is going on' so that I will add up to my professionalism. (Educator 6)

-- because you are observing, you are listening different experts, uh, ideas, knowledge, examples, this and that, and it makes [it] simple [simpler]. And ... I dare to just go through it, it makes, it gives me some ... it empowers me also. (Educator 7)

The people of the work community were generally highly valued: "-- that's the plus side of, uh, working here, people here" (Educator 6). Furthermore, some teacher educators regarded the members of their work community to share a high commitment to work together amidst the ambiguity and challenges they face in their context, which seemingly positioned higher group affiliation and more value on being part of a devoted community,

-- we have good colleagues all of them, they are cooperative, mm, they work hard all of them ... they want to contribute something to the nation and to the learners, and the environment it is OK, we have a good environment, working environment, cooperative -- (Educator 1)

-- this is the environment where many scholars [refers to the seniors], where people I could say are far-sighted people or the people who have like very illusive and transparent life missions. (Educator 5)

Moreover, for the junior teacher educators, collegial discussions with senior faculty members were highly valued (e.g. Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; Goodwin et al., 2014). Support from the seniors appeared to influence on the juniors' perception of their place in the new teacher educator community and assist their professional development and further motivation to learn more (e.g. Izadinia, 2014). This is expressed below,

-- I'm constantly, you know, meeting them [colleagues and other seniors], facing them, asking them this and that, uh, I believe it, it will help me one day ... you know, they are doctors I believe they passed a long journey to reach this status and then, by, by talking to them, by sharing ideas with them, can, actually not can, uh, help me to, to develop my profession and to become feature expert, not only expert, some expert who can contribute a lot, you know, for the range of the different research activities in my country. (Educator 5)

-- as a graduate assistant, we need the help of the ... experts, or the seniors. -- you need to have, uh, help, or, uh, cooperate. That is, mentor, for example. That's why, there are also the ... seniors are also devoted for the job, for this profession. That's why when we ask them to give the different materials or articles to read for how to ... develop the profession and so on how to, uh, teach the topics or courses also, they are devoted to help us, that's why I like it. (Educator 4)

In addition, some informants also noted the importance of creating good relationships with and among the teacher students and building a supportive learning community for all through the inclusion of the students, too. Co-construction of knowledge is one of the core ideas behind the learner-centered pedagogy, too (Vavrus et al., 2011). Arguably, the students are or should be at the center of the teacher educators' profession. As one of the teacher educators stated,

-- this, uh, profession is, I think, for them [the students], not for you. -- it's good to share things not only with the experts, also with your students, in order to have a good idea among this profession. We are teachers but we are also producing professionals. (Educator 4)

Yet, it is crucial to note, the contradiction in the latest research on the CoE conducted by Posti-Ahokas, Idris and Hassan (*forthcoming*) shows the working culture is still rather individualistic and many teacher educators work long days alone. Individualistic features of the working culture and the uncertainties experienced in the work might distance the teacher educators from their path towards professional development especially in the beginning of their career (Korhonen & Törmä, 2011). A truly collaborative work community requires possibilities for reflection and criticism, too, which do not still seem to be at least common practices at the CoE (cf. Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; cf. Wenger, 1998).

5.2.2 Self-Driven Factors

High intrinsic value for education and personal respect for the profession of a teacher was noted to largely support the teacher educators' identity formation and professional development despite the challenges faced on the ground. Many informants expressed a high devotion to contribute to their people and nation thereby expanding their self-perception to being a part of a greater mission beyond their work environment, too. Notably, these findings overlap with the aforementioned discussion of the appreciation and support for the profession among the colleagues. As expressed below,

-- we [teacher educators] have a lot of responsibilities, not only here [CoE] but, uh, in our home, uh, you know, in our hometown we have also [responsibilities], we're part of the family, part of the society, we have responsibilities there and we have also responsibilities here, therefore, we're trying to connect this, all the responsibilities in the same -- there are a lot of things to be improved -- it [development] starts from the individual person. (Educator 3)

To continue, for many interviewees, education seemed to act as an instrument for bringing change and development and believe strongly that teachers can support their country to tackle the contextual challenges. Through education one can become a productive member of one's community that is also in the core of the national development policies striving for a self-reliant nation. (e.g. Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Mukami & Westman, 2011.) As stated,

-- when you're educated, you are going to participate in your own community, in order to change the community, there are many misconceptions and so and so in the community -- but when you, uh, reach something [in terms of education], you go to your area [community] and you need to change your, uh, people around there. (Educator 4)

The teacher educators considered themselves having a central role in ensuring the quality of the future teachers that will be the shapers of the future. A statement from one of the interviewees sums it up perfectly: "I am here as ... a man of change" (Educator 6). Their role and the value placed on their profession were thus highly future-oriented (e.g. Samuel & Stephens, 2000). As expressed by two educators,

-- the quality of this, uh, the would-be-teachers [future teachers] that we are teaching in this College depends on the quality of the lectures or the teacher educators here -- I really appreciate one proverb from the Finnish experts, uh, 'I teach means I touch the future' or something, I think this is a proverb in Finland, I think, I took that from the, uh, workshop we were having -- teachers are given the highest responsibility to shape the future -- So we're in some way slowing the future improvements if we don't give the correct and the exact commitment to improving the teachers' quality in many aspects. (Educator 9)

I need to have a great role in this[as a teacher educator], at the same time to change the minds of the ... the students or the prospective [future] teachers. (Educator 4)

Considering professional development, most participants of ELFA expressed a high intrinsic, self-directed motivation to learn and develop themselves as professionals even without the help or support from others (e.g. Goodwin et al, 2014). They also acknowledged the need for continuous development and the fact it begins from the individual especially in the shortage of in-service trainings they face in their context (cf. Izadinia, 2014). As discussed earlier, many teacher educators expressed a will to pursue either their Master's or PhD studies to develop professionally. The need for professional development was pinpointed well by three interviewees,

-- you need to create [the opportunities for PD] yourself. You don't need to, uh, experts from, expect from some others, or the Ministry, or from the Government or from the other abroad Ministries and so on from the College. -- I don't want to wait for some courses. I always read and I always ask people. If I got a chance also to attend some courses, I always attend it. (Educator 4)

-- so actually when I see it in these two years [working in the EIT CoE], I think I feel that I have returned back to learning ... because to teach you need to learn. So I need to read books, I need to refer to, maybe the Internet some articles, also the sharing between the, those teaching the same course, also will learn through that discussions – (Educator 9)

-- you know, unless you try to do something beyond what you have mastered before, I believe you will never ever grow. (Educator 6)

Yet, many participants experienced their personal professional development to be not only for themselves but also for the benefit of their people. As expressed, "-- if I don't add an increase [develop professionally], if I stop with [developing] these, my professional strengths, I cannot contribute" (Educator 1). One of the main purposes for an individual's professional development was seen as an improved ability to contribute to their community. Arguably, their mission 'to help and contribute' was based on their belief that, as stated,

-- I have to do my PhD or do research so that I develop myself and exhaust particular field so that I'll be an expert in certain [field], I will help people here in my country so that they will be also trained professionally, that is my, what I want. (Educator 6)

-- I tried all my best to update myself to latest developments ... uh, I just, I want to know new things in life, new things and new developments in life and, uh, to contribute more -- to know more is not only selfishness but to know more is to help more. (Educator 2)

This relates highly to the already discussed elements of the teaching profession as a devotion and the value-based reasons behind engaging in the profession. Despite the afore-argued compromised know-how related to their profession, the majority of the interviewees stated to love teaching (e.g. Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*).

Over a half of them also told it had been a long-term dream for them to become a teacher. As described by two educators,

For me, it gives me satisfaction to update my knowledge and to promote, transfer [it] to the learners [teacher students] also, it gives a high satisfaction for me so because of that, just, I would like to be a teacher, that motivates me, so that is updating myself so I've contemporary knowledge and at the same time to contribute to the learners, just this gives to me some kind of satisfaction. This is what it keeps me motivated. (Educator 1)

-- after that eight years [of teaching on a zoba-level], within this eight years, I know, I have got more a lot of experience on how to cope with behavior of people, yeah, I know many things, uh, about how people, how to interact [with] each other, how to, how to get contact with some kind of arrogant people, how to get contact with some kind of polite people, how can you reconcile them ... everything, I got many experiences, here, uh, there at that time, this experience helped me even the last year and also this year [at the EIT], it helps me more on how to cope, this gives me confidence, motivation -- (Educator 10)

To continue, teacher educators at the CoE had relatively clear visions of where they want to develop (Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*). These visions entailed methodological and technical skills such as developing their research skills, pedagogical know-how and also content-based knowledge. Yet, to greater extent even, they entailed more humane and personal skills like being ethical, supportive, friendly, collaborative and 'visionary' that seemed to reflect their personal values with what they would like to identify themselves. Some informants also referred to having role models, such as their parent or a teacher from school that had shaped their vision of becoming a teacher and respectful view of the profession, and attributes they would like to pursue in their work.

Moreover, the intrinsic high value on the teaching profession seemed to impact on the way the teacher educators respond to their experiences on teacher education as a whole. High personal appreciation arguably contributes to building a more positive self-perception and further overriding one's dissatisfaction with poor working conditions (e.g. Canrinus, 2012). Consequently, the outside challenges were perceived worth overcoming and their mission worth fighting for. As expressed by some of the teacher educators,

If you see challenges as problems, then they will be problems, but if you see challenges as opportunities, they will be opportunities for you to pursue ... your vision, or your ... purpose in life. (Educator 2)

-- if you have vision, for sure, you're motivated, if you're motivated you make a difference, so it is the motivation and the purpose backed vision from my family and from my upbringing and from my own, I'm a good reader, uh, no matter what I believe that whatever I do should be ... [16:26 word not clear], wherever I go it doesn't matter where I am, today I'm here, so the legacy that I leave behind should be one-of-a-kind where people will recall 'Oh yeah, when Mussie [the interviewee] was there something has been done'. So that is my motto – Keep on moving. (Educator 6)

In contrast, here, it is essential to note the comment made by the only female interviewee who argued her gender to be one of the notable challenges in the male-dominated context. Yet, her personal willpower seemingly overrides the challenge,

... and being a female ... it's hardship by itself. Nature will fight you ... people, umm, they will all fight ... but the right way is just to fight life through and say at the end 'I am victory', yes.

Additionally, in order to overcome the challenges on the ground, self-reliance was noted again (see also Mukami & Westman, 2011). A mindset for context-based solutions and self-reliant efforts was given, for instance,

-- there are so many things to be improved, yeah, because, uh, we should not have to stay in a very specific and very grounded environment but we have to change a lot and it means our effort and our energy -- we should not have also to go the mind of others, we have to create our own mind for the successfulness of this EIT, unless we put our own energy, we should not have to blame the other people. (Educator 2)

To summarize, the individual teacher educators share a symbolic view of the teacher educator as an agent of human resource development in the country (e.g. Samuel & Stephens, 2000). The teacher educators' devotion for their profession and mission of shaping the future reflect the interwoven relationship between themselves and their community, and their negotiations with the sociocultural context. Their professional identities are thus inseparable from their practical work, their community as well as the personal and the social meaning placed on their profession (e.g. Wenger, 1998).

6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to map out the conceptual landscape on which Eritrean teacher educators live and work by interpreting their professional identity formation in relation to their working context. It aimed at answering to the following research questions: 1) How are the Eritrean teacher educators' professional identities formed in a challenging context? 2) Which factors affect the teacher educators' professional identity formation? 3) What kind of implications do the teacher educators' professional identities have for their professional development? The data collected from the Eritrean teacher educators at the College of Education, Eritrean Institute of Technology, was consequently examined with a reference to the external challenges and internal tensions the educators confront in their work, factors that strengthen their teacher educator

identities and their affect to their work and professional development. In the discussion, both the challenging and strengthening factors are mirrored against the embedded social and personal values given to the teaching profession and linked with discussions of the space afforded to the educators to be the agents of change in the development of their own field. This implicates suggestions of the need for creating collaborative learning communities among the teacher education institutions and institutionalizing professional development activities for the teacher educators. Finally, I will discuss the limitations for my study and provide suggestions for future research on this highly topical and essential field.

6.1 Examination of the Findings

The findings of this study reflect the professional identity formation of the Eritrean teacher educators in relation to their sociocultural context. The educators negotiate their professional identities between their personal motivations and their social, cultural and institutional contexts. Concurring with the earlier research, the Eritrean teacher educators form a unique group whose work entails expectations for multiple roles, diverse professional skills and embedded social values (e.g. Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005; Robinson & McMillan, 2006). The teacher educators are expected to work not only as teachers but also as mentors for their colleagues, academic researchers and role models for the future teachers. Their profession is thus highly practical, filled with authentic encounters with their students and colleague and shaped by their own life histories. Moreover, their work is influenced by the sociocultural values and public opinion of the teaching profession, and the current national education reform, among others. Their professional identities are thus like a glue that ties the pieces of self – needs, motivation, skills, knowledge, experiences, emotions, values – and the social other together.

As presented in this study, Eritrea as a context is evidently challenging. There are overlapping external challenges and interrelated internal tensions that impede the Eritrean teacher educators' everyday practices and consequently, notably hinder their professional identity formation. These factors were identified as 'External Challenges and Internal Tensions', and further divided into subcategories of 'Material', 'Programmatic', and 'Sociocultural Challenges'. At the same time, 'Community-Driven' and 'Self-Driven Factors' that strengthen the teacher educators' identities and

together seem to somewhat override the challenging elements were found as well. These findings resonate with Wenger's (1998) view on the interwoven nature of human identity and practice – complex set of practices entails complex negotiations of identities embedded in a specific context. As he claims, an individual's work, community and the personal meaning placed on one's profession are highly interwoven, and cannot be separated from their professional identity. The personal meanings given to the individual's professional self-perceptions, motivations and roles structure their action and work in practice, but are also shaped and constrained by the external circumstance.

The material challenges for the Eritrean teacher educators arise from the inadequate working resources and infrastructure such as lack of technical facilities, daily power cuts, poor Internet connection and old books. In addition to this, the educators were found to be struggling with high teaching loads, long workdays and inadequate compensation salary-wise. Consequently, they set practical limitations to the educators' daily practices and professional development, for example, by hindering their access to up-to-date knowledge. These challenges were found to be linked with the teacher educators' identity formation as feelings of professional incompetence, insufficiency and being excluded from the current global developments within the field of teacher education (e.g. Goodwin et al, 2014). Arguably, especially these type of challenges highlight the challenging aspects of Eritrea as a whole as being one of the youngest and poorest countries in the world (UNDP, 2016).

The programmatic challenges in turn entail the institutional context of the College, its practical working environment, routines, norms and spaces created for realizing the teacher educator profession. Here, a compromised role as a researcher, an insecure induction from a teacher into a teacher educator, limited pedagogical and in-service trainings, and unmotivated teacher students challenge the teacher educators' identity formation and professional development. The findings showed that especially the compromised identity as an academic researcher formed one of the greatest challenges for the Eritrean teacher educators' identity formation. As earlier research (e.g. Loughran, 2014; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2005; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005) states, the teacher educators' work is highly related to expectations of being simultaneously an academic researcher, developer of one's own profession and a critical commentator of their field. Most of the interviewees acknowledged the expectations for their role as researchers

and the need for developing skills to conduct research. Yet, except for one senior interviewee, the educators did not identify themselves as researchers due to limited possibilities to access Master or PhD -level studies and inadequate exposure to engage in research. These issues are evidently interwoven with the material challenges, that is, the resources unavailable for conducting research. In line with previous studies, the hindered possibilities to realize the role of a researcher were reflected as difficulties in recognizing self as an academic and self-perception of being a deskilled teacher educator among the research participants (e.g. Hökkä et al., 2012; Khan, 2011; Murray & Male, 2005; Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014). Luckily, the EIT is aiming at launching three Master's programmes in Educational Leadership, Psychology and Language Education this year that are expected to boost the professional development of teachers as well as enhance educational research at the College of Education and in Eritrea, in general. In addition, the Finnish-Eritrean higher education cooperation is currently partially answering to this need, yet, it is clear the scope of a single project cannot reach the needs in the field of teacher education in Eritrea. Clearly, the outcomes will not be sustainable unless further activities are institutionalized as a permanent part of the teacher educators' practice within the College of Education.

Furthermore, the findings indicate the transformation from a teacher into a teacher educator is unsure and challenging to the junior teacher educators' identity formation (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014; Murray & Male, 2005; McKeon & Harrison, 2010). Here, the junior educators are faced with demands on new orientation by, for instance, the duality of managing teaching strategies not only for their adult teacher students but also for school-level pupils that their students will teach in the future. (Korthagen et al., 2005; Koster et al., 2005; McGee & Lawrence, 2009.) In addition, as discussed, they ought to adopt new roles as not only practitioners of teacher education but also as researchers, too. In line with previous research (Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014) the junior teacher educators at the College were found to have somewhat negative self-perceptions manifested as feelings of insecurity and 'incompleteness' as professionals. As a response, need for cooperation and collegial knowledge-sharing were emphasized especially by the junior educators. These answers reflect leaning on the senior educators' effort and support to the beginners as the form of induction utilized instead of having a formal programme designed for the junior educators (e.g. van Velzen et al., 2010).

Related to the preceding findings, the teacher educators' identities were found to be challenged by limited access to pedagogical training, especially, amid the curricular-wise established need for change from the traditional teacher-centered approach towards the learner-centered pedagogy. Insufficient pedagogical skills and difficulties in implementing 'the ideal' were expressed as compromised know-how as a teacher and as a result, questioning oneself and the practical realization of the ideals of the educational policies. A recent study by Posti-Ahokas, Idris and Hassan (*forthcoming*) raised the same issue amid the teacher educators at the CoE who, despite acknowledging the need to change their methods, still rather teach the teacher-centered way they were taught in school (see also Vavrus et al., 2011). I would argue this relates not only to the lack of pedagogical training but also to the unmotivated teacher student population that were found to be one of the programmatic challenges for the teacher educators at the College of Education, too. As claimed by the educators, in trying to cope with the unmotivated future teachers, developing their own teaching methods might be forgotten in the process. Yet, learner-centered methods have been revealed to enhance student motivation (e.g. Vavrus et al., 2011) and thus, would supposedly improve the motivation of the teacher students, too, when taught in a more activating way. Not only could this result in more motivated and active teacher students but also provide a necessary model of learner-centered methods for the future teachers.

The sociocultural challenges again conclude the low social status and public support teaching as a profession in Eritrea entails as a whole. Consequently, career as a teacher or in teacher education does not appeal to many relating to the aforementioned low motivation among the teacher students. Concurring with the findings of Posti-Ahokas, Idris and Hassan (*forthcoming*), this hinders the teacher educators' identity formation and work in the education profession by having to 'swimming against the current'. However, there seems to be a paradox of socially acknowledged need for quality teachers as the main goal of the ongoing education reform in Eritrea and yet, the diminished value of the profession by the public attitude, which leaves to question whether education is truly the cornerstone of the national development agenda as claimed.

Moreover, in Eritrea, rigid hierarchy, a top-down model in policy-making and problematic information sharing exclude the implementers, that is, the teacher educators and the teachers from being able to socially participate in their professional field and further endanger their professional agency. In relation to the ongoing education reform,

Vähäsantanen (2015) and Beijaard et al. (2004), too, argue educational changes and reflections of one's agency necessitate redefinitions of one's professional roles and identity in balancing between external expectations and internal needs. One of the most striking findings of this study was that none of the teacher educators interviewed were aware of the ongoing national education reform even though it will affect their work. Furthermore, lacking the exposure and resources to conduct research in their field equally hinders the educators' participation in critically discussing and developing their own field. The teacher educators are thus challenged to negotiate their professional identities and practice within a complex and controversial sociopolitical arena of teacher education in Eritrea, yet, are not fully included in these discussions themselves. As put one of the teacher educators (6): "-- an art in the absence of the artist is not art, it is useless" – that is, not being granted the possibilities for active participation, the idea of social empowerment embedded in the core of education is arguably endangered (cf. Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

However, despite the challenges discussed, community- and self-driven factors that facilitate the realization of the educators' personal and professional purposes, motivations and values, and consequently, support their professional identities were identified. In contrast to the expressed low social value of the teaching profession, among the research participants, a symbolic view of the teacher as one who will be an agent of human resource development in the country was found to be one of the most outstanding both self- and community-driven factors strengthening their identity formation (e.g. Samuel & Stephens, 2000). The teacher educators individually and collectively had a notably positive attitude, hope and intrinsic motivation towards their work. A quote from an educator (6): "I'm here ... as a man of change" perfectly summarizes the committed mindset of the teacher educators to their profession that seems to result in collective will to contribute to their people and the community despite the challenges. In their mission of shaping the future, it is clear that the educators' identities are highly future-oriented and interwoven with belonging to the community (cf. Grenham, 2012; Wenger, 1998).

Moreover, collegial cooperation and supportive relationships were perceived as one of the most important factors strengthening the teacher educators' group affiliation, community involvement and thus, professional identities at the College of Education. Concurring with earlier research (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014; Wenger, 1998), collective, community-driven factors contributed significantly to the Eritrean

teacher educators' sense of belonging to the community and motivation to the profession, and consequently, professional identity formation. Implications for the need of supportive learning communities were also evident in the educators' speech. Yet, some practical boundaries seem to hinder the creation the learning communities at the College. As the latest research on the teacher educators at the College of Education (Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*) shows, the working culture there is still rather individualistic and many teacher educators work long days alone. Individualistic features of the working culture and the uncertainties experienced in the work might distance the teacher educators from their path towards professional development especially in the beginning of their career (Korhonen & Törmä, 2011). Moreover, a truly collaborative work community requires possibilities for critical reflection (Mezirow, 1995), too, which do not still seem to be at least common practices at the CoE and neither in the higher level discourses, as discussed earlier (Posti-Ahokas, Idris & Hassan, *forthcoming*; cf. Wenger, 1998).

As a whole, these contextual challenges elaborate how the teacher educators' sociocultural surroundings reflect the social atmosphere among the field of teacher education, their roles, resources and routines at the College, and further their individual needs, motivations and professional identities. On one hand, the findings of this study illustrate the macro-educational environment in Eritrea including the educational policies, current national reform, the value given to education and teachers as well as the top-down structure of the society that arguably hinders the teacher educators' identity formation amid educational changes. On the other hand, the results expose the micro-educational environment of the CoE, EIT, the community of professionals, its culture, values, and operation that is highly dependent on the factors related to the macro context. (cf. Samuel & Stephens, 2000.)

Notably, the education system is one of the major managers of social values in society, and therefore a powerful instrument of the state (Riggan, 2016). With their high value on education, the teacher educators can be seen as the pioneers on the barricades educating a new generation of teachers. The educators collectively saw themselves as enablers in supporting their country to tackle the contextual challenges indicating education as an instrument for bringing change and development (e.g. Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Mukami & Westman, 2011; cf. Grenham, 2012). Arguably, these findings strongly reflect the post-liberation era of Eritrea and the high value on nation-building and self-reliance embedded in the field of education, too – through education

one can become a productive member of one's community. Accordingly, the quality of education reflects the future of the nation and the ability to develop, and the responsibility of the educated is to contribute to their nation and people, further promote self-reliant Eritrea. (e.g. Riggan, 2016; Rich Dorman, 2005.) In the Eritrean context, the sociopolitical agenda of the ruling authorities and their influence on the identity formation of the teacher educators on the ground are thus important aspects to acknowledge and question. It is interesting to note the contradiction between the hindered professional agency via exclusion of the teacher educators from the higher authority level decision-making and information sharing, and the teacher educators' high sense of contributing to their community. For active professional identity formation, the teacher educators need to be afforded agency in the goal of developing their profession and field. (e.g. Loughran, 2014; Vähäsantanen, 2015.) In this, conducting research and critical reflection are essential tools in the professional development of teacher educators to be able to integrate their field and the complex sociocultural circumstances of their work.

The complexity of the teacher educators' work is mirrored against their professional identities. The data implies the Eritrean teacher educators' identity formation and practice are paradoxically overburdened by expectations, unachievable by practice, barely manageable. They need to be everything at the same time and their failure would mean transferring deficiencies to newer generations, which is why the profession becomes to seem like a depository of good wills and expectations in delivering the quality of teacher education. Their identity formation is thus facing a transformation to a 'devotion' filled with abundant and complex meanings that in reality seem to defy the actual processes. Clearly, if not offered the resources and space to practice the diverse roles expected from the teacher educators' work, the educators might end up having subjugated and complex professional identities further impeding their professional development.

Concurring with Wenger (1998), the teacher educators (re)negotiate their professional identities in the interplay of multiple, ongoing learning trajectories in diverse, both formal and non-formal settings (see also Havnes & Semby, 2014). Here, the sociocultural nature of professional identity formation and the embedded social practices, ideologies and power relations affecting the individual become clear. Yet, despite the clearly distinctive professional knowledge and skills, social and professional responsibility required in the profession of a teacher educator, their value seems to be

neglected and overlooked. Considering the purpose of the national reform to promote teacher education and the quality of Eritrean teachers, there is an explicit conflict of imposing high demands from the top and yet, not providing the implementers of education with the resources, information, and agency they would need in order to develop their professions (cf. Vähäsantanen, 2015). Regardless of the collective strive for change, the findings of this study imply inadequate preparation and space for the teacher educators to act as shapers and well-informed actors within their field.

As a response, many studies emphasize the significance of community support and collegial relationships in cultivating teachers and teacher educators' identities (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Wenger, 1998; Goodwin et al., 2014). Evidently, the lack of a professional identity for the teacher educator is the lack of a group, not the individual. If there is no common horizon shared by the colleagues, there are no group processes that support the individual to have self-reflection or self-realization at all. Thus, collegial support in developing teaching, sharing success and failures, sharing knowledge, good practices and methods, a space to stop among the hectic daily routines and reflect are needed to enhance a culture of learning together and forming learning communities. Creating and maintaining a professional relationship with other members of the work community has been shown to facilitate the formation of professional identity through enhanced motivation to develop, sense of belonging and commitment to the work (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012). As discussed Wenger's (1998) notion of identity in practice, the formation of learning communities and communities of practice offers opportunities for knowledge-sharing, collaborative planning, social interaction across the community, sense of belonging and membership, more positive working culture, enhanced job-satisfaction, and overall stronger commitment to creating better learning possibilities for learners (see also Izadinia, 2014; Vavrus et al., 2011). Steyn (2010) further concurs that a collegial culture contributes to more effective teaching and ownership of teachers' own professional development.

Equally, as new teacher educators enter higher education, they need to be formally guided in the induction to the new roles and demands of the profession, and provided with agency in doing educational research and further reflecting their field (e.g. Goodwin et al., 2014). Here, Wenger's (1998) dimension of identity as a community membership becomes evident as the individual is faced with new demands on competence to act and work within the community: the individual's membership is arguably compromised if not being able to develop the new skills expected by the

community. Opportunities for active participation, involvement and critical membership should be opened and made available for the key actors on the ground, that is, the teacher educators and the teachers, to create reciprocal dialogue across the field and sustainable, collective action for the renewal of educational programmes (e.g. Vähäsantanen, 2015, cf. Wenger, 1998).

Amid the both global and local agenda for aspiring at developing the quality of education, increasing demands, expectations and requirements have been raised concerning the nature of teacher education. Obviously, developing the quality of teacher education is highly dependent on the quality of the teacher educators. The findings thus support the previous calls for a purposeful preparation and support for teacher educators in filling up the gaps in knowledge for, in and of the practice of teacher educating (e.g. Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Goodwin et al., 2014; Vavrus et al., 2011) and strengthening their professional identities. Moreover, processes of change in the teacher education and educational reforms thus ought to take into considerations the knowledge, motivations, needs and views of teacher educators themselves. Here a space for the teacher educators to form their professional identities, develop their own work and participate in the discussions in their field through research, reflective practices and collaborative learning communities are necessary. Only then, the teacher educators can realize their full, much needed potential of being the agents of change in their field.

6.2 Limitations for the Study

To evaluate the reliability of my study, limitations regarding the data selected and the methodology applied need to be acknowledged and discussed. First and foremost, one must keep in mind the fact that the findings based on interviews of 10 teacher educators cannot be generalized to represent all Eritrean teacher educators or Eritreans in general, but concern conceptions of a small sample of individuals. The factors affecting the teacher educators' professional identities and their professional development depicted in this study are highly nuanced and seemingly interwoven but cannot be stated as causal relationships, and thereby require more research on the area. Yet, I still argue the research questions were answered to a sufficient extent to provide a crucial glimpse at the phenomenon under study, that is, the educators' professional landscape and factors affecting their professional identity formation. Thus, a certain degree of transferability

to extrapolate applications to future research within congruent research contexts was established (Patton, 2002).

A notable limitation for the study is that the research concerning teacher education in Eritrea is highly scant, difficult to access and seems to be mostly conducted by foreigners. More importantly, research on teacher educators' professional identity and development is still relatively low in many countries and also highly dominated by the West. Only a few studies on teacher educators have been conducted in Asia or Africa. It is thus crucial to note that solutions and progressions applicable in the Global North may not be appropriate to the Global South and further question why identity research has not been recognized in the Global South. The aforementioned issues thus place a question on the applicability of the literature used to support this study to such a context as Eritrea. Yet, the findings of this study were supported by the literature and could thus be applied to this study.

Another problematic aspect of this study is the notably male-dominated nature of the teacher education in Eritrea as a whole and similarly, the ELFA participants. Thus, gender-wise, I ended up having only one female participant in my research who emphasized her gender to be "a hardship by itself" in her working context. Presumably, having more than one female interviewee could have brought interesting comparison to the study in relation to whether males and females have notably differing self-conceptions, for example. However, for example, experience as a teacher and as a teacher educator seemed to end up being more influential factors than age or gender in analyzing the findings of this study.

Qualitative research always entails a subjective approach by interweaving not only the voices of the research participants but also the researcher's interpretations into the research process (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Eskola & Suoranta, 1998; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). Thereby, especially in cross-cultural research, the reliability and ethicality of the research require to acknowledge the researcher's position and the interrelated, unavoidable tensions. As discussed, my dual position as both a foreigner research and a representative of the ELFA staff in conducting the research might mean biased and normative assumptions and knowledge of the context, which is crucial to be aware of through every step of the research process (e.g. Curtis et al., 2014; Pietilä, 2010). Simultaneously, being a representative of ELFA might pose limitations for the study by possibly affecting the research participants' openness in their responses. As stated earlier, a first-hand contact to the context through my two-month internship in

Eritrea is a valuable resource here and I attempted to be alert of my positioning throughout the research process.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Earlier research suggests that examining the implications of teacher educators' professional identity formation for their professional development is crucial in assessing and developing the quality of future teachers. However, little is known of the identities and practices of teacher educators in Eritrea. Eritrea as a research context in general is widely under-researched and demands more attention. Therefore, this study is highly topical given the aforementioned gap in earlier research on teacher educators' identity formation, the need for developing the quality of teacher education in Eritrea and the current national education reform. The findings of this study thereby invoke several perspectives for further research.

As a field of study, teacher educator identity and their professional development entails still many ambiguities. Here, the dynamic, complex and contextualized nature of professional identity formation cannot be emphasized enough. These concepts are thus highly difficult to grasp and depict fully. Many research concerning professional identity therefore utilize narratives, self-study or action research as effective methods in creating a more holistic pictures of self (e.g. Izadinia, 2014). Long-term self-study methodologies and reflective activities on the teacher educators' own practice and professional identity are needed to identify the critical points of teacher educator identity. As this study was limited to only ten teacher educators at the CoE, further research could, for instance, focus on the induction process of the junior teacher educators at the CoE and the transformation process from a teacher into a teacher educator. Implications for ways to support this change of professional roles and development of the competencies as a teacher educator ought to be further studied. Moreover, a longitudinal study implemented as, for instance, self-evaluation survey before, in the middle and after the ELFA module could be beneficial in further studying this area and collecting evidence of professional development for analysis.

Implications for the role and significance of communities of learning in supporting and enhancing professional identity formation and consequently, professional development were touched upon this study. Strategies for interactive learning communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) should thus be further

researched and enhanced in developing richer perspectives and ideas in the field of teacher education and education professionals' development (e.g. Izadinia, 2014; Ben-Peretz et al., 2010; Sachs, 2001). Yet, future research is needed to investigate in more detail the creation and features of learning communities and what kind of abilities they necessitate from their participants, especially in the Global South contexts. The teacher educators' practical capabilities as well as motivations and reflections for future development ought to be studied in more detail in order to create more purposeful activities for professional development and open new paths for professional upgrading (e.g. Posti-Ahokas, Idriss & Hassan, *forthcoming*).

Understanding identities that teacher educators construct for themselves and their ability to influence their surroundings is central to effecting innovation within a changing policy environment (e.g. Robinson & McMillan, 2006). I argue that larger scale research on teacher educators should form part of the agenda of policy-makers and research funding bodies in Eritrea. Considering the earlier discussed interplay of educational change and professional agency, the capability approach by Amartya Sen (2001) would presumably be useful in examining the opportunities and abilities of a person to participate in their economic, social and political context. He utilizes the concept of agency in assessing the individual's capabilities against their personal and social circumstances. It would make a truly interesting perspective for research and specifically in the Eritrean context where practical, social and political barriers clearly hinder the teacher educators' identity formation and social participation.

Moreover, analyzing the significance and realization of higher education cooperation between Finland and Eritrea, or Global North-South cooperation, requires more attention. It should be critically studied further through, for example, the lenses of the post-colonial approach to education. From the postcolonial perspective, the current global migration, including the ongoing massive migration of the Eritrean people, advocates a postcolonial reminder of the age of Euro-American imperialism (Smith, 2006) where the North now tries to answer through North-South cooperation and development aid, among others. As for educational reforms, designed and implemented by the state but nowadays increasingly developed by an outsider expertise, they entail both technical and ideological elements of the locatedness of knowledge and value of education that are not always visible (Little, 1993). In discussing Western, outsider expertise within developing countries, is it eventually a question of idealistic ideas with vested interests and production for outsider's profits, not for insider's needs? It is clear

that development cannot be imported. Thus, highly linked to post-colonial education, caution and further research are needed in estimating the intentions and goals of international educational cooperation and partnership. (e.g. Rizvi, 2007.)

In the end, it is evident that examining the teacher educators' identity formation and their professional development demands more attention. This study contributes valuable insights into the practices, motivations and conceptions of Eritrean teacher educators in relation to their working context. It brings an important perspective to the professional identity formation and development of the teacher educators in Eritrea, and further implications for ELFA and other education developments in the field of teacher education. I thereby hope my research will stimulate future research on this area and further in the Global South context. I conclude with a statement from one of the teacher educators that encompasses this potential,

And if you see as, the challenges as opportunities then you will try all your best, to, to find beauty from them, to use them as an opportunity to achieve your goal. (Educator 2)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 The Interview Structure

1. Describing oneself (general)

- a. Would you tell a little bit about your work?
- b. Could you describe your educational and professional background?
- c. How long have you been a teacher in EIT?
- d. Which modules you have attended with ELFA?

2. Individual beliefs of one's profession and professional identity as the basis of professional development

- a. How did you become a teacher educator? What has kept you in this profession? How does it appeal to you?
- b. How would you describe your work at the EIT?
- c. Could you tell me about your working environment? (Eritrea/EIT/CoE)
- d. What is your field of expertise?
- e. What does being a professional mean to you?
- f. What does professional development mean to you?
- g. What are your professional strengths? How about how do you want to develop yourself professionally? What kind of a professional/teacher you would like to be?
- h. What opportunities have you had for professional development in your home country Eritrea?

3. Personal engagement as requirement for adult learning and professional development

- a. Could you tell me about your experiences in this training module? (Has it been useful for you? etc.)
- b. Why did you apply for this specific training module?
- c. What did you expect to gain from the module?
- d. How have you found the module so far? Has it matched to your expectations?
- e. Have you had any challenges in participating the module(s)? e.g. Due to heavy workload, ...

4. Professional learning and expertise as a goal

- a. What did you expect to learn from this module(s)?
- b. What have you learned during the module?
- c. What things that you have learned during the module you will be able to apply in practice?
- d. How has your thinking changed during the module?
- e. How would you like to develop your expertise further? What is there still to learn?

5. Context as the modifier of professional development: The new national educational reform in Eritrea affecting individual teachers acting within an educational organization?

- a. What are your expectations in the face of the new national educational reform as a professional?
- b. How does the reform show in your work?
- c. If you could decide, what kind of recommendations you would like to give to policy makers in the field of education in your country?

Appendix 2 Research Content

I am collecting data for my Master's thesis research through interviews. The interviewees will be participants of **Eritrea Learning for All (ELFA)** programme. The focus of my research is on professional development and learning experienced by ELFA programme participants. The objectives of my research are **1)** to describe ELFA participants' conceptions of their professional development in the Eritrean context in general, **2)** to find the reasons behind the participant's engagement in the ELFA programme and in a specific training module as well as **3)** to illustrate the possible change of their impressions on professional identity and expertise via their experiences in participating in ELFA.

Participation to the interview is **voluntary**. The interview will take around 1 hour. The interviewee has the right to terminate the interview at any time or to decline to answer any question. The interview will be audio recorded and further transcribed into a text file. During transcription, the name of the interviewee will be removed or replaced by pseudonyms. Place names and other names will also be removed or altered in order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewee. The data collected will be used for research purposes only and will be treated in private. The interview recordings and transcriptions will be deleted after the research is completed. The complete research report can be sent to the interviewee via email if wanted.

The data collected will be not only highly important for my research but also useful for the ELFA programme in demonstrating the effectiveness of the project. For further details, you can contact me or my thesis supervisors as listed below.

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I have received detailed information about the purpose of the interview and the use of the data collected. I will participate in the interview and agree that the information that I give can be used in the research described above. I am interested in receiving the research report ___ YES / ___ NO. E-mail: _____

Interviewee's name and signature

Date and place