

Research Paper

Perceived Effectiveness of a Positive Thinking Training Course on Professional Identity: Reconciliation of Bipolar English as a Foreign Language Teachers With Positive Thinking



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: About 5% of the world's population suffer from bipolar disorder. These people, in general, and teachers in particular, have many personal, social, and working problems. Different approaches, such as positive thinking, have been suggested to cope with such issues. Moreover, professional identity, similar to general identity, has been applied in various ways in teacher and instructor training. Using a basic interpretive design, we explored perceptions of English foreign language (EFL) teachers with bipolar disorder and the effectiveness of a training course on positive thinking on their professional identity.

Methods: The participants consisted of 25 (16 males and 9 females) bipolar EFL teachers who were purposefully selected from EFL teachers teaching in private language institutes in Kerman City, Iran. A bipolar spectrum diagnostic scale and a semi-structured interview were used to collect the study data. Also, a positive thinking training course was developed to be administered in ten 60-minute sessions.

Results: Regarding the effectiveness of the positive thinking training course on professional identity, the output of a thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with bipolar EFL teachers were as follows: Improvement in communicative and motivational skills, enhancement of willingness to reach professional development and classroom management skills, working on English language proficiency, seeking the best teaching methods, attention to students' needs, enhancement of verbal skills, and reducing teaching fear.

Discussion: The research results help people participate in bipolar tests and psychological studies and strive for their mental health. It will also create a spirit of hope in patients. The findings have some implications for EFL teacher education administrators and bipolar EFL teachers. Training on positive thinking skills can contribute to positive changes and orientations in EFL bipolar teachers, reconstructing their professional identity.

Keywords:

Bipolar EFL teacher, Positive psychology, Positive thinking, Professional identity, Training course, Teachers' perceptions

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Highlights

- Training on positive thinking skills can contribute to positive changes and orientations in English foreign language (EFL) bipolar teachers and reconstructing their professional identity.
- The concept of forming bipolar EFL teachers' professional identity can direct them to the right goals.
- Professional identity is not a fixed and static construct. Instead, it is reconstructed in the light of instructional and training programs.

Plain Language Summary

This study is about the effect of a positive thinking training course on the professional identity of EFL teachers with bipolar disorders in different aspects such as their classroom management, communication, teaching methods, and teaching fear. Professional identity has an essential role in teachers' career development.

Introduction

About 5% of the world's population suffer from bipolar disorder. From the beginning of 1970 to three decades later, there were reports [1-4] of an increased rate of the diagnosis of schizophrenia compared to bipolar disorder in black people in various healthcare centers in the United States [5]. Bipolar disorder has a huge impact on social costs, public health, and the health care system [6]. Bipolar disorder, which is also called manic-depressive disease, is a mental illness that leads to strange changes in mental states, routine activities, level of concentration, and vitality [7]. Despite medical therapy, the recurrence rate of bipolar disorder is high [8]. Unfortunately, bipolar people face many personal, professional, and social problems in their lives, which need extra non-pharmacological therapy alongside pharmacological therapy. One approach is positive thinking training, which is a part of positive psychology [9].

Positive psychology is a relatively new discipline that acts as a complement to traditional psychology. Instead of eliminating symptoms, it focuses on improving performance [10]. Positive thinking is a cognitive process that finds ways to deal with problems, creates enjoyable images, increases optimism in people, and provides a pleasant outlook on life. However, positivity does not ignore realism. It considers all the negative and positive aspects of situations and events and then guides the person towards accurate and positive analyses [11]. People's view of life is formed by their thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. An essential principle to change a negative attitude to a positive one is recognizing and differentiating one's feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. An optimistic atti-

tude helps people to take on the responsibilities of living a happy life and flourish [12]. However, from their point of view, excessive positivity also has negative points; people may think about positive results for a long time that will never happen in the future, causing disappointment unless people have an utterly optimistic personality. In this case, their bad events surprise them; however, they are entirely normal from their point of view.

Moreover, the notion of professional identity, similar to general identity, has been applied in various ways in teaching and instructor training. Teachers' professional identity is essential for their professional life. It gives educators a structure to build their thoughts on how to be, conduct, and comprehend their work and position in the public arena. Essentially, teacher identity is not predetermined nor forced; rather, it is haggled through experience and the feeling of that experience [13]. To fully understand their teaching self, teachers should comprehend their values, beliefs, and professional identities [14]. It shows a deep relationship between the role of teachers in teaching and their professional identity. The topics of recent research about effective teaching have changed from emphasizing the competencies and behaviors of teachers to the teacher's self-cognition, beliefs, and professional identity that determine their behavior in the classroom [15]. In recent years, the teacher's skills, characteristics, and behaviors are essential to effective teaching. The teacher's professional identity is also one of these characteristics.

In recent years, teachers' professional identity development has gained much importance in comprehending what teachers want and what they find in the truth. Moreover, although within the past 15 years, an increase

has occurred in both diagnoses and attention from the scientific community to bipolarity disorder, there have been few studies that examine the impact of empowering treatments on the professional life of English foreign language (EFL) teachers with bipolarity disorder. More particularly, no study was found in the literature on the effect of positive thinking training on bipolar EFL teachers' professional identity. Hence, this study was an attempt to fill this gap.

Related literature

Several studies have been conducted on positive thinking training and professional development in recent years. Regarding the former, Moradi et al. [16] investigated the notion of academic achievement as affected by positive thinking skills and confirmed the impact of positive thinking skills on people's educational achievement. Salehi et al. [17] examined the effectiveness of positive thinking skills on the communicative skills of adults. They reported remarkable improvements in the communicative ability of those trained in positive thinking skills. In the study by Hamidi et al. [9], increased levels of self-assertion due to exposure to positive thinking training were reported. In the study by Pourdavarani et al. [10], the impact of positive thinking training on the anxiety and motivation level of older people was probed, and the positive effect of training on positive thinking on anxiety reduction and motivation increase was supported. Kianpour Barjoe et al. [11] did a study to see the changes in professional development, job fear, and commitment under positive thinking training. They saw that those people exposed to positive thinking training experienced high levels of professional development, reduced fear, and higher commitment to their jobs.

On the latter, Nazari and Molana [18] investigated the teacher's professional identity in the 1st year of teaching. The results show that various factors, including policymakers, students and their parents, colleagues, and teachers, play a role in forming the teacher's identity. Parsi and Ashraf [19] investigated the relationship between English teachers' educational experience, critical thinking, and professional identity. Their research shows that critical thinking, professional identity, and English teacher teaching experience are significantly related. Nazari and Seyri [20] researched teachers' professional identity differences between face-to-face and online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were then analyzed based on which alterations in the identities of the teachers were characterized by six elements: Emotional adjustment, instructional differences related to subjects, promoted reflectivity, pressures like

insufficient professional readiness, low agency and more responsibilities, conceptual transformations in becoming enthusiastic teachers about new technology and inconsistencies in identity expansion. In general, no research has been done on the effectiveness of positive thinking training on teachers' professional identity. Therefore, the present research was conducted based on some objectives, such as exploring the specifications of a training course on positive thinking for bipolar EFL teachers and Investigating the bipolar EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of a training course on positive thinking and their professional identity. Also, the present study proposed the following research questions to achieve its goals:

1. What are the specifications of a training course on positive thinking for bipolar EFL teachers?
2. What are bipolar EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of a training course on positive thinking on their professional identity?

Materials and Methods

Study design

This study used A basic interpretive design since this approach is the best for exploring people's perceptions. In the basic interpretive design, the researcher seeks to understand the meaning constructed for a phenomenon or situation by the people involved [21].

Study participants

The original participants of this study consisted of 250 male and female EFL teachers who were selected through convenience sampling from private language institutes in Kerman City, Iran. However, just those who were recognized as bipolar (through the bipolar spectrum diagnostic scale) remained in the study through purposive sampling. They were 25 (16 males and 9 females) in number. They were diverse in terms of teaching experience and age because these variables were not among the main concerns of the present study. They held BA, MA, or PhD degrees in different branches of the English language. Since the probability of gaining a large sample size with bipolar disorder was low, the presence of a control group in the study was impossible. As a part of research morality, the teachers' consent was taken to participate in the study. Moreover, anonymity and confidentiality issues were taken into account by keeping the personal identity of the participants confidential. However, the teachers who were recognized as bipolar were

Table 1. Some questions of the bipolar spectrum diagnostic scale [22]

1	Some individuals realize that their mood and or energy levels change significantly occasionally.
2	These individuals notice that, at times, they are moody and or their energy level is very low, and at other times, very high.
3	They often put on weight during these periods.
4	During their low phases, these individuals often feel "blue," sad all the time, or depressed.
5	Typically, the low phases last for a few weeks, but sometimes only a few days.

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not informed of this matter since it could weaken their morale and, consequently, the quality of their cooperation with the researcher. The inclusion criterion was all bipolar EFL teachers of Kerman English institutes. The exclusion criteria comprised bipolar persons who were not teachers, bipolar teachers of other teaching fields, school EFL teachers with bipolar disease, those with other health problems, and also pregnant women.

Study instruments

The study data were collected through the following instruments. Pies developed the bipolar spectrum diagnostic scale in 2005. It was used to diagnose bipolar teachers [22]. The scale is a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (This story does not describe me at all) to 4 (This story fits me very well) in 19 items. The minimum and maximum scores were 19 and 76, respectively. As proved by the developer, the scale has high reliability and validity [25]. In this study, the Cronbach α reliability of the scale was calculated at 0.90. Two psychiatrists also checked the validity of the scale. The electronic version of the scale was used in [WhatsApp](#) to observe practical issues. Some items of the scale are presented in the [Table 1](#).

Semi-structured interview

The interview allows the researcher to obtain the desired data in depth by observing the emotions and motivations of the participants. Also, the researcher can establish more communication and trust with the participant, which is effective in the validity and quality of the data. So, through consultation with three university professors who had expertise in the subject, a semi-structured interview was conducted to explore bipolar EFL teachers' perceptions of the effect of a training course on positive thinking on their professional identity. It consisted of 4 open-ended questions in English, designed in consultation with the previous studies with similar objectives to those of the present study. To hold the interview sessions, the researcher benefited from the virtual space (i.e. [WhatsApp](#)) and kept the audio records of the

interviews. To increase the trustworthiness of the interview data, some direct quotations from the interviewee were presented along with the extracted themes to document the themes objectively. Another technique was inter-rater reliability, which was followed in the present study. To pilot the interview, 4 interviewees from the participants were randomly interviewed to see whether the subjects with the lowest amount of ambiguity easily comprehended the interview questions.

Data collection and analysis

At the outset of the study, the researcher, in cooperation with three psychiatrists and through consulting previous similar studies, designed a positive thinking training course in ten 60-minute sessions. This course aimed to strengthen and enhance bipolar EFL teachers' positive thinking. The theoretical underpinning of this course was positive psychology. To develop this course, the researcher reviewed state-of-the-art papers on positive psychology and positive thinking. Then, the teachers were called to participate in the ten positive thinking training sessions in a group that the researcher built on [WhatsApp](#). The sessions were held once a week and managed by the researcher. Following the end of the positive thinking training course, a semi-structured interview was conducted to identify the perceptions of bipolar EFL teachers about the effect of this training course on their professional identity. The gathered data from interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the researcher identified the themes and subthemes using an exploratory theme-based approach. To conduct thematic analysis, the researcher used a six-step process: Familiarization, coding, generating, reviewing, defining, and naming themes, then writing them.

Results

To answer the 1st research question, "What are the specifications of a training course on positive thinking for bipolar EFL teachers?" The researcher developed a

Table 2. Specifications of the training course on positive thinking

Session	Positive Thinking Training
1	Positive psychology's main theories and uses were explained; positive thinking was defined; the merits of positive thinking were explained.
2	The contribution of positive thinking to happiness and well-being was explained; the main skills of optimism were enumerated.
3	The main habits of happy people were enumerated and explained; skills of using supportive expressions, self-confidence enhancement, emotional regulation, and problem-solving were explained.
4	The trainees were trained to excel in their careers by reducing the feelings of burnout, stress, anger, anxiety, and overwhelm.
5	The trainees were trained to make their work process effortless by applying the principles of simplicity, goal selection, mindfulness, and loving presence.
6	The trainees were trained to improve their social skills by helping others reduce stress, showing them support and respect, compromising damaged relationships, and forgiving.
7	The trainees were trained to remain authentic, self-aware, and self-accepted without being perceived as weak or emotionally depleted; they were trained to talk about their pleasure and pain with others and show mutual empathy, responsibility, and humor in their interactions.
8	The trainees were trained to replace the suffering rooted in grief, disconnect, and hopelessness with joy, hope, courage, joint act, positive vision, rationality, and self-discovery.
9	The trainees were coached to understand loneliness and social anxiety to help them reduce such feelings by learning how to build deep, intimate, and lasting connections with others and adapt to new situations.
10	The principles trained in the previous sessions were reviewed.

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training course on positive thinking in cooperation with three psychiatrists and through consulting previous similar studies. The specifications of the course are shown in [Table 2](#).

To answer the 2nd research question, "What are bipolar EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of a training course on positive thinking on their professional identity?" The following perceptions were obtained from the thematic analysis of the interview data. All perceptions are shown in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. The bipolar EFL teachers' perceptions

1	Improvement in Communicative Skills
2	Improvement in motivational skills
3	Enhancement of willingness to reach professional development
4	Enhancement of classroom management skills
5	Working on English language proficiency
6	Seeking the best teaching methods
7	Attention to students' needs
8	Enhancement of verbal skills
9	Reducing teaching fear

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Improvement in communicative skills

Participants believed that positive thinking training affected their relationship with the students. They experienced a perfect atmosphere in the classroom.

"After this training course, I try to establish a good relationship with my students and give them positive energy and increase their self-esteem" (Teacher No. 7 [T7]).

“It is clear that this training helped me use positive feedback to let my students know that I love them. I use negotiation strategies to have a good relationship with them” (T12).

Improvement in motivational skills

The training course increased teachers' motivation to teach and encouraged their students.

“This course helped me become motivated to encourage my students with every possible strategy. I give them rewards in any form. My motivation to teach has also been enhanced” (T19).

“The effect of this course on me is that I sometimes put the best students head of their groups; moreover, I usually encourage them by assigning additional marks for their activities” (T10).

Enhancement of willingness to reach professional development

Teachers decided to strive for their professional growth. They wanted to update their teaching information.

“Under the effect of this positive thinking training, I decided to improve professionally. I decided to work towards professional improvement as a pre-requisite to successful teaching” (T9).

“Training on positive thinking encouraged me to be professionally developed. I learned to reflect regularly on my teaching, recognize my problems, and my points of strength and weakness to be professionally developed. I understood that professional development should be attained via different means” (T1).

Enhancement of classroom management skills

Some participants mentioned that the training course has improved their teaching ability. They try to find a suitable method for each teaching subject.

“I noticed I'm trying new classroom management techniques after taking a positive thinking course. I was not very careful about this teaching aspect before. I was just concerned with teaching the content of the instructional materials” (T7).

“Positive thinking skills empowered me to manage the classroom better. I was wrongly taught that classroom management is not a complex task and does not need much effort. I didn't have much energy to put into class-

room management. But now I'm practicing new strategies to manage the class best” (T11).

Working on English language proficiency

As a result of the course, most participants spoke about their interest in developing their language proficiency by working on their learning skills.

“A positive influence of this course has energized me to upgrade my general English proficiency. I'm watching English films to improve my speaking and listening skills. I think it is a big advantage for a teacher” (T3).

“Positive thinking course had many advantages. It taught me the importance of working on my abilities to feel progressed and capable. Accordingly, I'm working hard to increase my English proficiency” (T23).

Seeking the best teaching methods

Some participants explained that after this course, they became hardworking because they searched for the best theories and strategies for their teaching.

“Having found extra energy from this training, I now search for the best teaching method by consulting relevant resources, my colleagues, etc. I understood that when you do something, you should do it in the best way” (T17).

“After training on positive thinking, I experienced a positive change, and that is a tendency to use the most appropriate teaching method among diverse methods. I want to be an excellent teacher” (T10).

Attention to students' needs

According to the results of the interviews, one of the best findings of this study was paying attention to students' condition and personalities by teachers.

“I got to know that students' needs are different. For example, I recognized that students with special needs should be educated in different conditions because they should 1st be adapted to the general life process” (T4).

“Thinking positively had big merits for me. I became attentive to the fact that the curriculum and materials should be planned according to students' needs. Teachers need to pay attention to students' needs” (T17).

Enhancement of verbal skills

The present study's findings showed that after participating in a positive thinking training course, the participants' verbal communication improved with people around them.

"The training course held motivated me to enhance my verbal ability. I recognized the power of verbal ability in absorbing friends and building long-run relations" (T22).

"Verbalization and power of expression play important roles in the quality of interactions. I ignored this before. Positive psychology opened my eyes to this point. I'm using different ways to increase my verbal skills" (T10).

Reducing teaching fear

Lack of self-esteem and self-confidence is one of the reasons for anxiety in teaching. Based on the study results, positive thinking training courses decrease the bipolar EFL teachers' fear of teaching.

"A great achievement of the positive thinking course for me as a teacher was that it could considerably help me put my fears in teaching aside. A fear which was annoying me a lot was losing class control. Unfortunately, such fears have been reduced in me after this course" (T20).

"A strange and unknown kind of fear I had has vanished to a large extent. I don't know why going to the classroom was frightening for me. This course of training has helped me get rid of this fear" (T11).

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate the specification of a positive thinking training course for bipolar EFL teachers in Kerman City, Iran. Also, we wanted to explore the effectiveness of this course on their professional identity. Generally, a training course was developed to be administered in ten 60-minute sessions. Briefly, the 1st session dealt with positive psychology's main theories and uses. In the 2nd session, the contribution of positive thinking to happiness and well-being was explained. The 3rd session was devoted to explaining the main habits of happy people. Within the 4th session, the participants were trained to excel in their careers by reducing the feelings of burnout, stress, and overwhelm. The mission of the 5th session was to instruct the participants to make their work process effortless by applying the principles of simplicity, mindfulness, and loving presence. In the 6th session,

the main focus was on the participants' improving their social skills by helping their colleagues reduce stress. The 7th session concerned helping the trainees remain authentic without being perceived as weak or emotionally depleted. In the 8th session, the trainees were taught to replace the suffering rooted in grief, disconnect, and hopelessness with joy, hope, and self-discovery. During the 9th session, the participants were instructed to understand loneliness and social anxiety to help them reduce such feelings by learning how to build deep, intimate, and lasting connections with others. Finally, the principles trained in the previous sessions were reviewed in the 10th session.

This training course aligns with the principles and theories of positive psychology, emphasizing enhancing happiness, self-acceptance, well-being, life quality, optimism, creating pleasant images, avoiding anxiety and stress, creating connection, showing empathy, and so on [24]. Furthermore, it is consistent with the dominant view in positive psychology, in which the client should be directed towards correct, precise decisions and positive analytics [25]. Moreover, this course supports the argument that the client's replacement of fears and negative feelings with joy, courage, hope, and positive emotions is an achievement that has many positive contributions to their personal, social, and professional life [26]. Another positive psychology principle observed in planning this training course is that positive thinking empowers individuals to efficiently do their best to enhance their social relations, compromise damaged relations, show responsibility, achieve their defined goals with constancy, and improve their quality of life, as direct correlates of self-assertiveness [27].

Regarding the impact of the positive thinking training course on the participants' professional identity, the following perceptions were the output of the thematic analysis: Improvement in communicative and motivational skills, enhancement of willingness to reach professional development and classroom management skills, working on English language proficiency, seeking the best teaching methods, attention to students' needs, enhancement of verbal skills, and reducing teaching fear.

This finding is in harmony with the results of the studies by Salehi et al. [17], which reported remarkable improvements in the communicative ability of those trained in positive thinking skills. Further, this finding supports the research by Kianpour Barjoe et al. [11], wherein those exposed to positive thinking training experienced high levels of professional development, reduced fear, and higher commitment levels to their job. This result

is the same as Moradi et al.'s findings [16], which confirmed the effect of positive thinking skills on people's academic achievement. This finding is similar to the conclusion by Pourdavarani et al. [10], which supports the encouraging impact of training on positive thinking on anxiety reduction and motivation increase. Last but not least, this result supports the study by Hamidi et al. [9], which reported increased levels of self-assertion due to exposure to positive thinking training.

In explaining the findings, it is worth noting that positive thinking training contributes to higher self-esteem and self-confidence and lower stress in people [23]. Accordingly, they become empowered to make verbalizations and experience higher motivation in their work. Additionally, training in positive thinking conveys a sense of empathy and mutual contact with the individuals. This outcome contributes to higher education, leading to their attempts to find the best teaching method and enhance their English proficiency. In addition, positive thinking training orients people toward setting definite goals for themselves. So they tried to achieve professional development and better manage their classroom communication skills. Besides, when people are trained in positive thinking skills, their feeling of self-efficacy is enhanced.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show the effectiveness of a training course on positive thinking on bipolar EFL teachers' professional identity in different aspects, including communicative, verbal, classroom management, motivational skills, professional development willingness, English language proficiency, teaching methods, student' needs, and coping with teaching fear. According to the results, training in positive thinking skills can contribute to positive changes and orientations in EFL bipolar teachers' reconstruction of their professional identity. Closely tied to this conclusion, professional identity is not a fixed and static construct. Instead, it is reconstructed and co-constructed in the light of instructional and training programs. The findings of this study are robust enough to be the basis for the conclusion that the professional identity construct is a dynamic construction and reconstruction of which in bipolar EFL teachers are under the impact of several personal, social, cognitive, and affective factors. They emerge as the key determinant factors of teachers' professional identity and their perception of their professional identity. This outcome implies that the concept of forming bipolar EFL teachers' professional identity is related to a collection of psychological-educational needs, difficulties, factors,

and principles that, if correctly identified and dealt with through positive thinking training, can lead them to the right goals. The formation of bipolar EFL teachers' professional identity needs the effort and participation of teachers themselves.

The findings have some implications for different groups of stakeholders. The research results help people to participate in bipolar and other psychological studies and strive for their mental health. It will also create hope in patients because they find positive psychology as a treatment method. EFL teacher education administrators are recommended to provide opportunities and activities for bipolar EFL teachers through preservice or in-service training courses on positive thinking so that this group of EFL teachers is helped in professional identity construction and reconstruction. Bipolar EFL teachers can take advantage of positive thinking self-training techniques to pass more successfully through the process of building and reconstructing their professional identity. Professional identity plays a paramount role in teaching success and effectiveness, so this can contribute to more success and effectiveness of teaching in bipolar EFL teachers. According to the findings of this study, investigating the efficacy of teaching fear in the classroom atmosphere will be a good study area for future research.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All teachers participated in the study to their satisfaction, and they signed the consent form for the research. The authors declared that the present study was not clinical.

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Authors' contributions

Conceptualization and supervision: Neda Fatehi Rad; Methodology: Mahdiah Ghalandari; Data collection: Mahdiah Ghalandari and Neda Fatehi Rad; Data analysis: Mahdiah Ghalandari and Neda Fatehi Rad; Funding acquisition and resources: Mahdiah Ghalandari, Neda Fatehi Rad, and Peyman Seifadini; Investigation and writing: All authors.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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