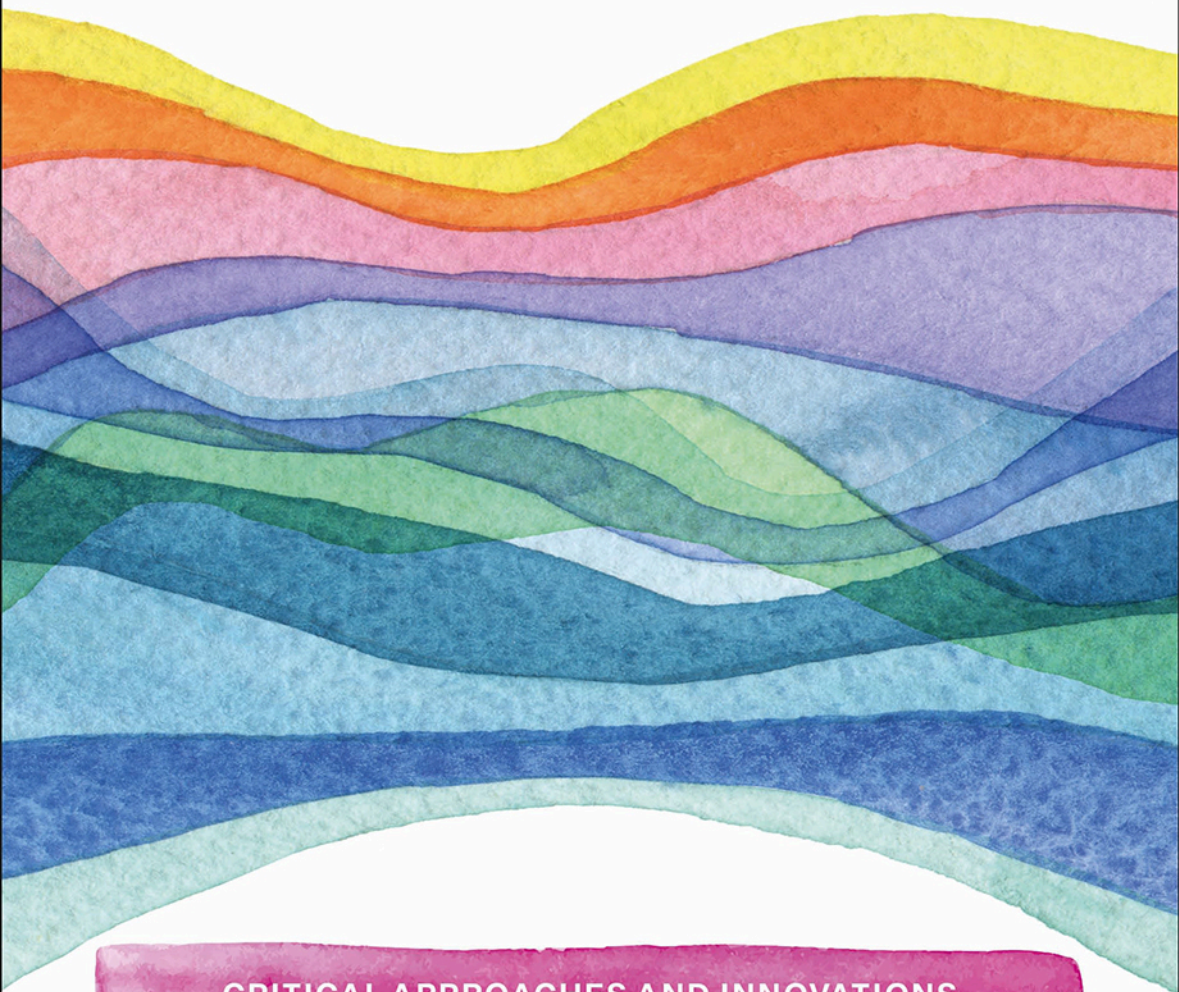
OPEN ACCESS

Language Teacher Agency

NAVIGATING COMPLEX AND DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

EDITED BY LEONARDO VELIZ, MINH HUE NGUYEN,
YVETTE SLAUGHTER, AND GARY BONAR



CRITICAL APPROACHES AND INNOVATIONS
IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

BLOOMSBURY

Language Teacher Agency

Critical Approaches and Innovations in Language Teacher Education

SERIES EDITOR: Bedrettin Yazan (University of Texas at San Antonio, USA)

The series is dedicated to advancing critical language teacher education research that can transform the dominant practices of language teaching in educational contexts around the world. Language education has become more important than ever, to facilitate the crossing of physical and ideological borders of nation-states, and to meet the needs of increasingly ethnically and linguistically diverse student populations. This series helps inform the preparation of resilient and agentive language teachers with critical social justice orientations. It presents state-of-the-art research to support the formation of teachers who identify as democratic, social agents of formal schooling, and devoted to improving learning experiences of marginalized students. The titles in this series appeal to language teachers, teacher educators, and researchers and can be used as educational materials in graduate and undergraduate studies.

ADVISORY BOARD
Darío Banegas (University of Edinburgh, UK)
Osman Barnawi (Royal Commission Colleges & Institutes, Saudi Arabia)
Yasemin Bayyurt (Bogaziçi University, Turkey)
Ester de Jong (University of Florida, USA)
Andy Xuesong Gao (University of New South Wales, Australia)
Icy Lee (Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong)
Gloria Park (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA)
Ingrid Piller (Macquarie University, New South Wales, Australia)
Richard Smith (University of Warwick, UK)
Zia Tajeddin (Tarbiat Modares University, Iran)

Forthcoming in the series:
Becoming Language Teacher Educators, Christine Montecillo Leider and Johanna M. Tigert

Humanizing Language Teaching and Teacher Education in Transnational Spaces, edited by Rashi Jain, Julian Chen, Ethan Trinh
Transcending Language Education in Japan, edited by Madoka Hammine and Nathanael Rudolph
Critical Autoethnography in Language Teacher Education, Bedrettin Yazan
Teacher Education for Global Englishes Language Teaching, Denchai Prabjandee
Social-Emotional Learning in Language Teacher Education: A Guidebook for Language Teacher Educators, Administrators and Leaders, Gilda Martínez-Alba and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera
Criticality, Agency, and Language Teacher Identities: Research and Praxis from Global Teacher Education, Hyunjin Jinna Kim and Hüseyin Uysal
English Language Teacher Education in Latin America, Raúl Alberto Mora and Luis Javier Pentón Herrera

Language Teacher Agency

Navigating Complex and Diverse Educational Contexts

Edited by Leonardo Veliz, Minh Hue Nguyen, Yvette Slaughter, and Gary Bonar

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland, 29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo
are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2025

Copyright © Leonardo Veliz, Minh Hue Nguyen, Yvette Slaughter,
Gary Bonar and contributors, 2025

Leonardo Veliz, Minh Hue Nguyen, Yvette Slaughter, Gary Bonar and contributors have
asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988,
to be identified as Authors of this work.

For legal purposes the Acknowledgments on p. xvii constitute an
extension of this copyright page.

Cover design: Grace Ridge
Cover image © rudchenko and Anastasia Shemetova via iStock

This work is published open access subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0,
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). You may re-use, distribute, and
reproduce this work in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided you give
attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher and provide a link to the Creative
Commons licence. Open access was funded by the University of New England,
Australia; University of Melbourne, Australia; and Monash University, Australia.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for,
any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given
in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher
regret any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have
ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3504-5479-8
ePDF: 978-1-3504-5480-4
eBook: 978-1-3504-5483-5

Series: Critical Approaches and Innovations in Language Teacher Education

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com.

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters.

Contents

List of Figures ix
List of Tables x
Series Foreword xi
Acknowledgments xvii

Advancing Language Teacher Agency Research: An Introduction
Minh Hue Nguyen, Gary Bonar, Yvette Slaughter, and Leonardo Veliz 1

Part 1 Language Teacher Agency and Identity

1 Vietnamese Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Agency in Negotiating the Tensions between Aspired and Experienced Identities *Minh Hue Nguyen and Xuan Minh Ngo* 17
2 A Longitudinal Study of Pre-Service and Early Career Languages Teacher Agency *Gary Bonar, Ruth Fielding, and Meihui Wang* 35
3 The Development of Collective Agency among Language Teachers in a Professional Community *Jian Tao and Xuesong (Andy) Gao* 51
4 Language Teacher Agency in a Transnational Telecollaborative Project between Türkiye and the United States *Babürhan Üzüm, Özgehan Uştuk, Bedrettin Yazan, Sultan Maviş, Serdar Şen, Sedat Akayoglu, and John Turnbull* 69
5 Understanding Linguistic Repertoire: Language, Identity and Agency in Pre-Service Language Teacher Education *Yvette Slaughter and Julie Choi* 87
6 Agentic and Less-Agentic Orientations in TESOL Student Teachers' Motivation *Mairin Hennebry-Leung* 107
7 Reshaping Agency and International Teacher Identity: Supporting EAL VCE Students via a Bilingual Immersion Model at a Sino-Australian Senior School in China *Jennifer Cutri* 129

Part 2 Language Teacher Agency amidst Structural and Cultural Constraints

8 Exercising Teacher Agency in Response to Demands of Practice: Insights from an Australian TESOL Online Placement *Thi Kim Anh Dang and Minh Hue Nguyen* 149
9 Teacher Agency of Synchronous Online One-to-One Language Teachers: An Investigation through Critical Incidents in Teaching *Chujie Dai* 171
10 Challenging Monolingual Discourses for Agentic Spaces: Constraints and Opportunities for Language Educators in the Chilean Education System *Leonardo Veliz, Yvette Slaughter, and Finex Ndhlovu* 189
11 Teacher Agency in Practice during a National Educational Reform: A Case Study of Primary English Teachers in Vietnam *Lan Anh Nguyen* 211
12 Not Another Paper about Problems We Can't Solve: EL Practitioners' Agency in Times of the Impossible *Chloe Le, Anita Dubroc, and Kim Skinner* 231

Part 3 Language Teacher Agency for Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Responsibility

13 Language Teacher Agency for Social Justice: Meaningful Experiences during Teacher Education *Priscila Leal* 251
14 The Visible Invisibility of Black Educators in ELT *Olive Nabukeera* 269
15 The Negotiation of Plurilingualism by Teachers in a Finnish Heritage Language School *Johanna M. Tigert* 285

Forging New Paths for Language Teacher Agency: Concluding Remarks *Yvette Slaughter, Leonardo Veliz, Gary Bonar, and Minh Hue Nguyen* 301

Index 306
List of Contributors 309

Figures

0.1	Ideologies in language teacher education	xiii
3.1	The collaborative relationships among the participants	61
5.1	Diah's body portrait	94
5.2	Mei's body portrait	95
5.3	Ehuang's body portrait	97
5.4	Keiko's body portrait	98
5.5	Cassie's body portrait	99
6.1	Lingqi's sociogram in interview 1	113
6.2	Lingqi's sociogram in interview 2	114
6.3	Lingqi's sociogram in interview 3	114
6.4	Ellie's sociogram in interview 1	117
6.5	Ellie's sociogram in interview 2	117
6.6	Ellie's sociogram in interview 3	118
8.1	Sameera's reflection accompanied by teaching materials in course assignment	160
8.2	Sameera's reflection notes submitted in her course assignment	162
8.3	Sameera's lesson PPT slide, using Angry Birds game	163
8.4	A framework for theorizing TESOL teacher agency in response to demands of practice	168
9.1	Screenshot of correction in Session 9	181
11.1	A life-course socio-cultural perspective of language teacher agency	215

Tables

1.1 Participants' Profile 23
3.1 Group Activities from June 2018 to December 2019 55
3.2 The Participants 55
4.1 Summary of Participant Demographics 74
4.2 Example Coding Process 76
7.1 The VCE Teachers at the Sino-Australian School 134
8.1 Codes Scheme 156
10.1 Participants' Profiles 197
11.1 Information about the Participants and their Schools 218
15.1 Teachers' Backgrounds 289
15.2 Final Codes and Themes 290

Series Foreword

Critical Approaches and Innovations in Language Teacher Education

When I was preparing the initial proposal for this book series with Bloomsbury Academic, I was asked to justify why there should be a whole separate book series on critical and innovative language teacher education (LTE). The scholarly conversation on LTE has taken place in venues that have a broader scope and occurs in fields of applied linguistics, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), modern/world language education, or general teacher education. While this interdisciplinarity gives the field of LTE both scope and depth, at times it feels scattered across these various venues of scholarship. Thus, the first aim of this series is to curate and compile volumes centered around the common topic of LTE. The second aim in the series is to highlight the need in our field to focus on critical approaches to innovating LTE due to the ways that language (and therefore, language teaching) is intertwined with cycles of privilege and marginalization and power dynamics among speakers. I feel that this need to bring together scholarship that is critical and simultaneously innovative in nature has been clear to us as members of the research communities who are interested in studying policies, pedagogies, and practices of teacher education. Therefore, the inception of this series was timely.

With the generous support of the contributing authors, editors, editorial board members, and external peer reviewers, what I seek to accomplish with this series is to instigate and maintain a conversation amongst colleagues from around the world to share their efforts in pedagogy-oriented research in LTE and extend the existing scholarly work further toward the direction of continued criticality and innovation in the interest of social justice. At the same time, practitioners and researchers of LTE can use the publications in this series, partly or fully, as resources in advancing their work.

The two significant constructs undergirding this book series are *criticality* and *innovation*, and their relationship therein. Ideally, *innovation* in LTE, or the process of engaging in continuous efforts to create new ways of supporting language teachers and teacher educators at all phases of their careers in response

to changing dynamics at their institutions and society in general should contribute to teachers', teacher educators', researchers', and administrators' increasingly critical approaches to language teaching and learning. What I mean by *criticality* here are the combined efforts to address oppressive language ideologies that inform institutions' and people's stances, decisions, and actions, thus shaping their professional practices as educators writ large. Those language ideologies are never about "language" per se; they are always intertwined with ideologies of culture, nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ableism, amongst others (see Kubota, 2020; Lin et al., 2004; Motha, 2014; Park, 2017).

Very much contextually bound and situated, language ideologies operate invisibly and impact the activities within the scope of LTE at three interlocking layers: language learning, language teaching, and language teacher education. To parse them out, at one layer, language ideologies influence how we understand the nature, acquisition, and use of language, which subsequently impacts our understanding of the identity positions hierarchically available for language users and learners (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). At another layer, we have ideologies that pertain to teaching languages and being language teachers, and the most salient of such ideologies being the monolingual fallacy, the "native" speaker fallacy, and the subtractive fallacy as discussed by Phillipson (2013). As examples, these three fallacies provide dichotomous identity positions for language teachers, reducing the nuance and complexity of teacher identity and essentializing what "good" teachers and teaching practices should be (see Selvi et al., 2024). At a third layer, we encounter ideologies about the formal preparation of language teachers, as well as what it means to become and grow as a language teacher within local educational contexts where economic and cultural globalization are variably accepted or opposed as national educational goals (Hawkins, 2011; Veliz & Chen, 2024). Those ideologies include the hierarchical positioning of certain academic content as superior to or more important than others based on or aligned with the standards or directives coming from governing bodies that manage the activities of teacher education (e.g., Higher Education Council in Türkiye, State legislative mandates on K-12 curriculum content in the United States). Such hierarchies are typically perpetuated through external high-stakes assessments which operate as gate-keeping mechanisms. Additionally, to reiterate their interconnected nature, ideologies of LTE also encompass the ideologies in circulation around language teaching which therefore also involve the ideologies around language learning and language use. Ideologically laden hierarchies, variably based on the socio-political context, define and confine what a language

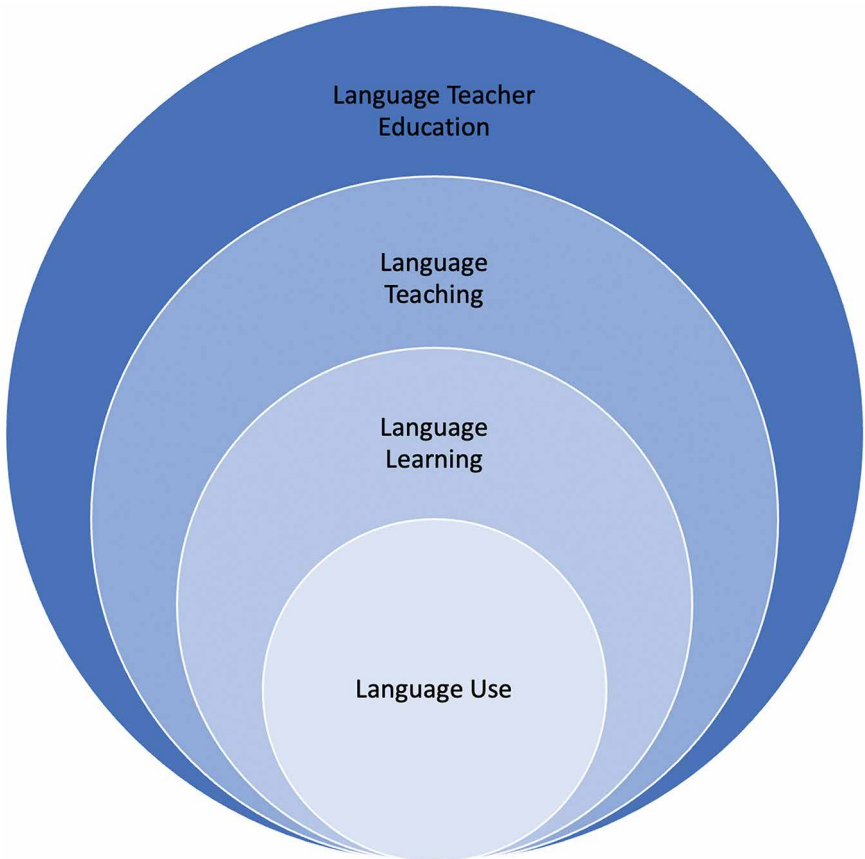


Figure 0.1 Ideologies in language teacher education.

teacher educator is allowed and supposed to be, do, and feel when preparing teachers to work with language learners (see Figure 0.1).

In the last three decades, critical scholarship in our field (e.g., Canagarajah, 2020; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2022; Varghese et al., 2016) has called for persistent pushback against dominant language ideologies and the corresponding ways in which institutions and the people ultimately maintain the asymmetrical power relations in society. As the "mission" of LTE is to prepare language teachers (who experience varying degrees of privilege and marginalization) who are going to work with language learners (who also experience varying degrees of privilege and marginalization), LTE practices have strong potential to effect change in society. It is my hope that the scholarly work published in this series will contribute to that change in various educational

contexts around the world. I suggest that we, as practitioners and researchers of LTE, keep in mind these two aspects of being critical: first, there are many ways of being critical and acting critically in our contexts and our practices, and identities that inform our criticality are situated at the intersection of personal, professional, and political dimensions of language learning, teaching, and teacher education (Rudolph, 2023). Second, being critical requires us to keep critiquing our own criticality by self-reflexively questioning, reconsidering, and innovating our practices to address oppressive forces, uneven power relations, and systemic inequities that impact our efforts as teacher educators (Yazan, 2024). Such reflexivity in which we engage and model for our students could also involve endeavors toward developing "political and ideological clarity" (Bartolomé, 2004). This clarity includes identifying, problematizing, examining, and reflecting on our orientation vis-à-vis dominant ideologies to better understand the complex ways they operate, and we construct our socio-politically situated identities as language users, learners, teachers, and teacher educators.

This book is another excellent contribution that supports the central foci of the book series, i.e., critical and innovative orientations in researching language teacher agency across the world. Four wonderful colleagues serving as co-editors, namely Leonardo Veliz, Minh Hue Nguyen, Yvette Slaughter, and Gary Bonar, curated fifteen distinct chapters from practitioners in various socio-educational contexts to explore language teacher agency. Adopting a critical approach, they situate their volume within the changing world impacted by the discourses of neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism, the migration of communities due to wars and political conflicts, and the advances of digital technologies. The studies reported in the chapters collectively draw attention to the fact that what it means to be a language teacher and what it means to exercise agency as a language teacher have immensely evolved within this changing world in the last three decades. Carefully selecting the studies to showcase in this volume, the editors paid particular attention to the diversification of approaches in theory and methodology in conceptualizing and exploring "multifaceted nature of teacher agency" (p. 5) in diverse language teaching settings and contexts. Editors organize the chapters around three themes: (1) language teacher agency and identity, (2) language teacher agency and practice, and (3) language teacher agency and social justice and showcase how language teachers "assert agency amidst the systemic pressures of complex socio-cultural and socio-political environments" (p. 5). Adding to the ongoing conversation about language teacher agency, Veliz et al.'s volume attends to teachers' advocacy for their students, pedagogical

innovations, and investment in and commitment to subverting the monolingual norms in language education and cultivating inclusive spaces for the diversity of being, knowing, learning, and teaching in language education.

With this volume, the community of language education is introduced by Veliz et al. to a much-needed volume with select illustrative examples of pre-service and in-service language teacher agency from a variety of socio-political contexts. It will become as amazing addition to critical and innovative language teacher education research to promote the ongoing dialogue about teachers' agency explored with a diverse epistemological, theoretical, and methodological orientations. I believe it will become a must-read for all scholars of language teacher education across the globe, with its high-quality content as well as authors' compelling writing.

References

Bartolomé, L. I. (2004). Critical pedagogy and teacher education: Racializing prospective teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *31*(1), 97–122.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2020). *Transnational literacy autobiographies as translingual writing*. New York: Routledge.

Hawkins, M. R. (Ed.) (2011). *Social justice language teacher education* (Vol. 84). Multilingual Matters.

Kubota, R. (2020). Confronting epistemological racism, decolonizing scholarly knowledge: Race and gender in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, *41*(5), 712–32. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amz033.

Lin, A., Grant, R., Kubota, R., Motha, S., Sachs, G. T., Vandrick, S., & Wong, S. (2004). Women faculty of color in TESOL: Theorizing our lived experiences. *TESOL Quarterly*, *38*(3), 487–504. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588350.

Motha, S. (2014). *Race, empire, and English language teaching: Creating responsible and ethical anti-racist practice*. Teachers College Press.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (Eds.) (2004). *Critical pedagogies and language learning*. Cambridge University Press.

Park, G. (2017). *Narratives of East Asian women teachers of English: Where privilege meets marginalization*. Multilingual Matters.

Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (Eds.) (2004). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Multilingual Matters.

Pennycook, A. (1999). Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, *33*(3), 329–48. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587668.

Pennycook, A. (2022). Critical applied linguistics in the 2020s. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *19*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2022.2030232

Phillipson, R. (2013). TESOL expertise in the empire of English. *TESOL in Context*, *22*(2), 5–16.

Rudolph, N. (2023). Narratives and negotiations of identity in Japan and criticality in (English) language education: (Dis)Connections and implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, *57*(2), 375–401. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3150

Selvi, A. F., Yazan, B., & Mahboob, A. (2024). Research on "native" and "non-native" English-speaking teachers: Past developments, current status, and future directions. *Language teaching*, *57*(1), 1–41. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444823000137

Varghese, M., S. Motha, J. Trent, G. Park and J. Reeves (Eds.) (2016). Language teacher identity in multilingual settings, *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(3), 545–71.

Veliz, L., & Chen, J. (2024). Challenging the monolingual mindset: Language teachers' pushback and enactment of critical multilingual language awareness in Australian schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2352161

Yazan, B. (2024). Being a transnational language teacher educator and researcher: Borderlands, ideologies, and liminal identities. In M. Gemignani, Y. Hernández-Albújar, & J. Sládková (Eds.), *Migrant scholars researching migration: Reflexivity, subjectivity, and biography in research* (pp. 121–32). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003225195-14

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of the collective efforts, insights, and dedication of many individuals who have contributed in various ways throughout its development. We are deeply grateful to the contributors whose chapters form the heart of this volume. Their research, reflections, and commitment to exploring language teacher agency in diverse contexts have been invaluable in shaping the themes and discussions presented here.

We extend our sincere appreciation to our critical friends and reviewers, whose thoughtful feedback, rigorous critique, and unwavering support have enriched the depth and clarity of this work. Their insights have challenged us to refine our ideas and strengthen our arguments, ensuring that this book makes a meaningful contribution to the field of language education and language teacher education.

We are also grateful to our colleagues and peers who have provided encouragement, shared resources, and engaged in thought-provoking conversations that have informed and inspired our work. Their collegiality and intellectual generosity have been instrumental in the development of this book.

A special thanks to the Connect Leadership Program at the University of New England, whose funding and support have been crucial in bringing this project to fruition. Their commitment to fostering leadership and research in education has provided the necessary resources and opportunities for collaboration that have made this work possible.

We thank the team at Bloomsbury Publishing for their support and assistance throughout this project.

To all who have contributed, directly or indirectly, to this book—thank you. Your support and engagement have been invaluable, and we hope this work serves as a meaningful contribution to ongoing discussions about language teacher agency and educational change.

Advancing Language Teacher Agency Research: An Introduction

Minh Hue Nguyen, Gary Bonar, Yvette Slaughter, and Leonardo Veliz

Overview

Language teachers at all career stages must navigate their way through complex social, cultural, political, and institutional environments in their work. Given that education and language education are politicized activities, (Ndhlovu & Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2024; Pennycook, 2001), and that pedagogy, along with teacher knowledge and practice, is highly situated (Cross 2010; Johnson, 2009), understanding teacher agency and its enactment or constraints is complex and multifaceted. The primary aim of this edited volume is to investigate the ways in which language teachers develop, assert, and exercise agency, or even find their agency constrained, across diverse contexts.

In the face of increasing diversity and deeply entrenched monolingual-centric ideologies and assumptions (Cross et al., 2022; Veliz & Chen, 2024; Veliz et al., 2023), it is imperative to examine the contextual, institutional, systemic, and ideological forces that shape language teacher education and, more specifically, language teacher agency. Notably, the movement of people and complex linguistic and cultural practices within and across nations challenges us as academics and educators to move beyond epistemological racism (Pennycook, 2022) or mono-epistemic understandings of language and language use (Ndhlovu, 2015). These limited perspectives isolate notions of language and identity within geographic, linguistic, or social silos, ignoring the lived experience of language teachers and learners (Heugh et al., 2021; Ndhlovu & Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2024; Ndhlovu, 2015; Veliz et al., 2025). Furthermore, while much of the recent scholarly work on language teacher agency has focused on contexts where English either is a medium of instruction or the dominant additional language, we advocate for amplifying the voices and

agentic experiences of teachers, students, and educators of languages other than English as a decolonial, social justice act.

In response to these challenges, a key focus in this volume is to broaden the scope of language teacher agency research through different theoretical and methodological lenses which contribute to a more inclusive understanding of agency for teachers of languages in diverse contexts. Additionally, this volume also seeks to address reflections from Tao and Gao (2021) around the lack of methodological diversity that has broadly underpinned language teacher agency research to date. Through the chapters in this volume, we aim to diversify the theoretical and methodological approaches to research, fostering more holistic understandings of language teacher agency.

Paying Attention to a Changing World

Much of the contemporary critical dialogue relating to issues that influence or interfere with language teachers' work has centered on the unprecedented impact of neoliberalism on political and economic forms of governance, and on societies more broadly (Pennycook, 1990, 2022). As a philosophy and ideology, neoliberalism centers economic relationships in global politics, promoting "profit, economic growth and material progress as the ultimate aims of social life" (Slaughter, 2005, p. 35). For more than thirty years, Pennycook (1990, 2022) has urged us to bring a critical perspective to applied linguistics to challenge the inequities perpetuated and amplified by "… the austerity of neoliberalism, the growth of migration, and the reemergence of nationalist and xenophobic politics …" (Pennycook, 2022, p. 4). Critically, Pennycook (2022) argues that we need to pay attention to how the world is changing—to changes in the "social, cultural, political, economic and environmental conditions" (p. 1)—as a changing world requires us to change our ways of thinking.

Education, language education, and English language education, in particular, have been deeply impacted by changes over the last thirty years (Pennycook, 2022; Themelis, 2021). As processes and practices within educational institutions are inextricably linked to broader socio-political and economic structures, teaching becomes a deeply politicized act. Language education does not occur in a vacuum, instead reflecting and reinforcing the power dynamics, cultural norms, and values of the society in which it is situated (Pennycook, 2021). Consequently, language teachers often find themselves at the forefront of these ideological battles, navigating a landscape shaped by neoliberal policies that prioritize market-driven approaches to language education over

holistic, (g)localized educational goals. In this educational landscape, marked by heightened accountability and systematic pressures (Lewis & Young, 2013; Mausethagen, 2013; Towers et al., 2022), language teachers face increasingly diverse and often conflicting demands. These range from constant policy and curriculum reforms to the rapid development of digital technology competencies. Such challenges are particularly pronounced in the post-pandemic and emergent Artificial Intelligence (AI) era (e.g., Bonar et al., 2024; De Costa & Uştuk, 2023; Edmett et al., 2023; Moser et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2022).

These changes in the global landscape have had profound implications for the field of education, particularly language education. Teachers not only have to find ways to best respond to diverse student cohorts but also work in dynamic and complex spaces (Veliz et al., 2025). For example, in addition to standard school classrooms, language teachers may be tasked with teaching majority and additional languages to immigrants and resettled language learners, to language learners in refugee camps, in conflict areas, or in countries recovering from wars to international students in host countries, or to web-based language learners around the globe (Murray, 2020; Nguyen, 2019). As people move, these learners can move in and out of school systems as well, bringing rich knowledge and experiences to classrooms, but presenting challenges for language teachers working with centralized curriculum and pedagogical advice (Veliz et al., 2023). Language teachers must adapt to these dynamic environments, fostering inclusive and equitable educational experiences that honor the multiplicity of voices within their classrooms. Pedagogical innovations have gained more prominent space to support teachers, including linguistically responsive teaching (Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Martin & Strom, 2016), multilingualism (de Jong, 2011; Gao & Yang, 2023; Veliz, 2024), and multiliteracies pedagogy (Kalantzis et al., 2016; New London Group, 2000). However, highly centralized processes, often driven by market-driven approaches to language education, continue to present challenges for teachers when they fail to keep pace with and reflect the realities of language teaching and learning (Cong-Lem, 2021; Veliz et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023).

Besides being entangled within the underlying ideological pressures imposed by neoliberal instrumentalist worldviews (Kramsch, 2019) and the opportunities and challenges in catering for the needs of diverse learners, language teachers are also confronted with dominant cultural and linguistic ideologies that perpetuate coloniality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), epistemological racism (Pennycook, 2022), and mono-epistemic (Heugh et al., 2021; Ndhlovu, 2015) approaches to knowledge and language. Such views are embodied in monolingual mindsets (Hajek & Slaughter, 2014; Ndhlovu, 2015), deficit views

of language learners/ing (García, 2009), linguistic racism and discrimination, including ethnic accent bullying and linguistic stereotyping (Dovchin, 2020; Oldani & Truan, 2022), subjugation of minority languages (May, 2013), and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006), among other manifestations. These complex conditions, while fostering racialization and social injustice, also present opportunities for language teachers to take agentic actions, developing new positionings that give them the "capacity to effect real change" (Maclellan, 2017, p. 253) in their educational practices. This change occurs through critical responses to problematic situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). Given these contextual, socio-political constraints, teachers are pulled in different directions, shaped by and imbued with a variety of competing and conflicting tensions (Tajeddin & Yazan, 2024a, 2024b). In this context, language teacher agency becomes paramount.

Language Teacher Agency

Teacher agency has been examined through various theoretical lenses, including social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), ecological perspectives (Priestley et al., 2015), post-structural perspectives (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019), and sociocultural perspectives (Edwards, 2005). The literature already offers various definitions, conceptualizations, and framings of agency (e.g., Ahearn, 2001; Biesta & Tedder, 2006, 2007; Chisholm et al., 2019; Cong-Lem, 2021; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Li & De Costa, 2019). Given this rich existing body of work, this volume does not aim to engage in new theorizing of the concept. Instead, the overarching motivation of this collection of chapters is to build upon the existing rich body of work with a view to further identify and problematize the complex ways in which language teachers develop, assert, and exercise their agency in diverse contexts.

Drawing on the various conceptualizations of teacher agency, across the chapters in this volume, language teacher agency is explored through its affordances and constraints, mediated by the various resources, relationships, and structures. Language teacher agency is viewed as a developmental process that intersects with other language teachers' professional learning processes such as identity development and emotional experiences. Furthermore, rather than viewing language teacher agency as an individual trait or something that an individual possesses, it is broadly theorized from an ecological perspective, where an individual or collective endeavor to act, driven or constrained by the contingencies of the environment within which such action takes place (Priestley

et al., 2015). Agency, in this sense, refers to teachers' capacity to act purposefully and constructively. It involves making informed decisions that reflect their professional expertise and ethical commitments. Furthermore, it entails navigating and negotiating external constraints while creating meaningful and impactful learning experiences for students.

This volume, therefore, examines the complexities of language teacher agency. It explores how teachers and educators assert agency amidst the systemic pressures of complex socio-cultural and socio-political environments. Various theoretical frameworks and empirical research are drawn on across the chapters to illuminate the multifaceted nature of teacher agency. These highlight stories of language teachers who seek to be agentic in their practice, demonstrating how they navigate the tensions between accountability and autonomy, standardization and creativity, and policy mandates and classroom realities. This approach provides a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the factors that enable and constrain teacher agency, offering practical insights for empowering educators to thrive in their roles. In an age where the neoliberal-capitalist agenda often prioritizes efficiency and quantifiable outcomes over holistic and humanistic education, reaffirming the importance of teacher agency is a vital endeavor. It is through recognizing and supporting the agency of language teachers that we can foster educational environments that are responsive to the diverse needs of students while promoting the professional growth and well-being of educators.

Overview of Chapters

This volume is structured around three interconnected themes: language teacher agency and identity, language teacher agency and practice, and language teacher agency and social justice. These themes offer a multifaceted exploration of how language teachers navigate their professional landscapes, maneuver the various competing demands, discourses, and practices that mediate agency, and how they exercise it across diverse contexts.

Language Teacher Agency and Identity

The first theme in this volume addresses the intersection between agency and identity. Chapters in this section present a dynamic imagining of teacher agency

against a backdrop of institutional demands, cultural norms, and personal histories and future aspirations.

In the first chapter in this section, Minh Hue Nguyen and Xuan Minh investigate the agency of Vietnamese pre-service teachers as they negotiate identity tensions while learning to become English teachers. Grounded in an ecological perspective of language teacher agency and integrating the concepts of aspired and experienced identities, the authors examine how these tensions motivate agentive responses in which teachers leverage constraints as opportunities for growth. The findings underscore the importance of addressing identity tensions in teacher education programs by providing purposeful resources and support structures to facilitate agency development. By focusing on individual strategies and contextual factors, this chapter offers insights into the critical role of identity tensions in shaping teacher agency and identity.

Building upon this exploration, Gary Bonar, Ruth Fielding, and Meihui Wang (Chapter 2) present a case study from a longitudinal study of pre-service and early career language teachers in Australia. Focusing on the trajectory of agency development and enactment, the narrative of Claire's journey from a novice language learner to an aspiring teacher of German underscores the importance of reflexivity and anticipatory agency. The study also emphasizes the temporally embedded nature of agency, wherein past experiences inform present actions and future aspirations. As with the previous chapter, it highlights the importance of providing ongoing support and professional learning opportunities for language teachers, particularly in contexts where an English monolingual mindset marginalizes the learning of other languages in schools and society.

Jian Tao and Xuesong (Andy) Gao (Chapter 3) utilize community of practice theory and an ecological perspective of agency to explore the emergence of collective agency among teachers of diverse languages within a Chinese university. As members of a research group focused on multilingual and intercultural research, the participants in this study demonstrate how collective agency begins with individual agency and is facilitated by a sense of community and mutual engagement. By highlighting different forms of collaboration and co-regulation, the authors underscore the importance of fostering supportive communities of practice to enhance both individual and collective agency.

Following this, Baburhan Uzum, Özgehan Uştuk, Bedrettin Yazan, Sultan Maviş, Serdar Şen, Sedat Akayoglu, and John Turnbull (Chapter 4) bring a transnational perspective by exploring the emergent agency of teacher candidates participating in a telecollaborative project between Türkiye and the

United States. Using an ecological perspective, the authors examine how teacher candidates integrated iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative dimensions of agency through their participation. This study highlights the interconnected nature of identity, agency, and emotions, revealing how past learner identities and emerging teacher identities inform agency.

In Chapter 5, Yvette Slaughter and Julie Choi employ innovative autobiographical and visual methodologies with pre-service language teachers to critically examine their linguistic repertoires and to develop an understanding of their professional identities and the factors that influence their agency. The body portrait and biographical activities enabled the pre-service language teachers to construct narratives around their language learning experiences, exploring how socio-political and socio-cultural events have shaped the understanding of languages and language use. Through this process, it becomes evident how socio-cultural contexts and individual histories shape linguistic repertoires, emphasizing the potential of autobiographical practices to foster critical language awareness and agency.

Continuing the exploration of identity and motivation, Mairin Hennebry-Leung (Chapter 6) investigates the development of agentic and less-agentic possible teacher selves among TESOL student teachers in Hong Kong. By examining the complex interplay between personal, cultural, and professional influences, this chapter provides valuable insights into supporting the development of agentic orientations among future language teachers. As argued in this chapter, possible self-trajectories are rooted in personal histories and social dynamics that extend beyond the immediate context of the teacher education program. Recognizing and understanding this allows teacher educators to explore these influences with student teachers and adopt strategies that internalize motivations for teaching, fostering a sense of ownership of their teaching aspirations.

The final chapter in this section (Chapter 7), by Jennifer Cutri, examines how a curriculum innovation in a Sino-Australian senior school reshaped the professional identity and agency of senior secondary school teachers. By critiquing the Western-centric views typically embedded in international education, the study highlights the benefits of cross-cultural collaboration and the integration of local pedagogical knowledge. It also emphasizes the value of an ecological perspective in understanding the complex interplay of individual agency, cultural nuances, and institutional contexts. Additionally, this chapter demonstrates how practical adaptations of teaching methods to local contexts can enhance teacher agency and contribute to more effective and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Language Teacher Agency amidst Structural and Cultural Constraints

The second theme in this volume investigates the practical dimensions of language teacher agency, focusing on how educators exercise their agency in reshaping their teaching practices in contexts of structural and cultural constraints. These chapters offer diverse, in-depth insights into how teachers enact agency in practice and how various factors, and often challenges, influence this process.

This section begins with Thi Kim Anh Dang and Minh Hue Nguyen's study (Chapter 8) of how a teacher in an Australian Master of TESOL program exercised agency during an online placement. Faced with the challenges of teaching a young beginner learner from a different L1 background and engaging students in an online classroom, the teacher made pedagogical decisions, developed suitable teaching materials, and mobilized resources to address these demands. This case study, grounded in a Vygotskian cultural-historical perspective, reveals the complexities of navigating online placements and underscores the importance of fostering teacher agency in such settings. The chapter also illustrates specific strategies teachers employ to adapt and innovate when facing practical challenges in online teaching environments.

Next, staying within the online teaching space, Chujie Dai (Chapter 9) investigates the agency of three novice Chinese language teachers in synchronous one-to-one online settings. Using an ecological lens, the study explores how these teachers exercised agency during critical teaching incidents. Notably, the study highlights the bidirectional nature of agency, where teachers' decisions and actions are shaped by, and in turn reshape, their teaching contexts. By focusing on critical incidents, Chujie provides an insightful understanding of the dynamic interplay between teacher agency and the online teaching environment, drawing connections to the challenges and adaptations discussed in the previous chapter.

Leonardo Veliz, Yvette Slaughter, and Finex Ndhlovu (Chapter 10) shift the focus to the Chilean education system to understand how English language teachers perceive the contextual, material, and socio-political opportunities and constraints on their autonomy and agency. Language teachers in this context grapple with constraints imposed by mono-epistemic imperatives and monolingual discourses while striving to create agentic spaces in multilingual classrooms. Through qualitative interviews with twelve ELT teachers, the authors uncover how societal ideologies, education policies, and institutional

systems impact teachers' capacity to exercise agency. Despite these constraints, the authors examine how teachers find ways to push back against dominant norms and adjust their practices.

Following, in the Vietnamese context, Anh Nguyen (Chapter 11) investigates the narratives of teacher agency in Vietnam's primary English education during a period of national educational reform. Against a backdrop of a newly introduced competency-based curriculum as well as the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this study captures the exercise of agency across identity, pedagogical, and relational dimensions, emphasizing the role of self-efficacy in fostering pedagogical agency. Anh's analysis of teacher agency over time shows that significant identity negotiations occur mainly due to the gap between teachers' aspirations or limited background knowledge and their actual experiences, rather than being directly driven by reforms.

The final chapter in this section by Chloe Le and Anita Dubroc (Chapter 12) explores the agency enacted by English as a Second Language teachers and specialists in under-resourced K-12 public schools in the United States. Through an autoethnographic approach, the authors examine how an English as a Second Language teacher, an English as a Second Language instructional coach, and a university professor manage the constraints of data-driven curricula, accountability measures, and the widening achievement gap. The findings emphasize the spatial practices and daily challenges of teaching English to learners with disparate conditions, offering a discussion on how English as a Second Language teachers can enhance their students' social, cultural, and linguistic presence and visibility.

Language Teacher Agency for Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Responsibility

The third theme addresses the intersection of language teacher agency and social, cultural, and linguistic responsibility, highlighting the vital role educators play in addressing and challenging social inequities within their professional contexts.

Priscilla Leal (Chapter 13) begins this section by examining how language teachers develop agency for social justice during their teacher education. The study investigates the experiences of twenty-nine in-service language teachers from fifteen countries, focusing on how they perceive and act on social contradictions in their local and global contexts. With a focus on the process of conscientização—raising critical consciousness—during teacher education,

this study underscores the importance of equipping pre-service teachers with the skills and awareness needed to address social, political, and economic inequalities.

Shifting the focus to the profession itself, Olive Nabukeera (Chapter 14) explores the paradoxical visibility and invisibility of Black educators within the field of TESOL and English for Academic Purposes in the United States. With a focus on the dynamics of racial and linguistic identity in predominantly white academic spaces, and using narrative positioning theory and the invisibility framework, this chapter reveals how these educators navigate their professional engagement and representation within the broader global discourse of English language teaching. An important message from this study is the need for non-Black English language teacher colleagues to actively reflect on and address their contribution to the invisibility that Black educators can encounter, and then seek ways to actively work toward genuine inclusion in the field of English language teaching.

Our final chapter (Chapter 15), by Johanna Tigert, shifts the focus to a Finnish heritage language school in the United States, where teachers are engaged in promoting plurilingualism in an English-dominant context. Utilizing ethnography and autoethnography, the study examines how teachers construct plurilingual spaces while adhering to a Finnish-only policy during instruction. The study also explores the pedagogical beliefs underpinning teachers' choices and the factors supporting their agency in negotiating plurilingualism. The findings provide insights into the broader field of Heritage Language education and the specific challenges faced by Heritage language teachers, connecting with the themes of identity, agency, and social justice discussed in previous chapters.

Through the chapters in this volume, we invite our readers to adopt a critical posture toward the conflation of factors and dimensions that facilitate or hinder language teachers' agency in diverse contexts. A critical stance on the (c)overt issues that influence language teacher agency is vital for developing a more nuanced understanding of what (dis)empowers teachers to assert and exercise their agency. It also opens up possible avenues for disruption and contestation that can lead to transformative teaching practice. With full awareness of the need for pluriversalizing language(s) pedagogy—that is, "re-centering and amplifying marginalized, Indigenous ways of knowing and being as well as world-making practices that may support life in all its forms" (Veliz et al., 2024, p. iv)—we put forth the importance of embracing diverse perspectives, methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies when researching language teacher agency.

We hope this volume serves as a call to action, inspiring educators, policymakers, researchers, and all those involved in education to recognize the vital role of teacher agency in not only disrupting "the norm" but in creating dynamic, inclusive, and effective language education spaces for multi/plurilingual advocacy. We are cognizant that contributing authors to this volume have not found solutions to problems or provided definitive answers to the pressing questions facing language teacher agency today. Instead, their work represents an ongoing dialogue as well as a critical exploration of complex challenges that still need further scrutiny from diverse methodological and epistemological perspectives.

References

Ahearn, L. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *30*, 109–37. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1.

Biesta, G. J., & Tedder, M. (2006). How is agency possible? Towards an ecological understanding of agency-as-achievement (Working Paper 5).

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the life course: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Bonar, G., Slaughter, Y., Keary, A., & Alderton, T. (2024). Supporting students from linguistically diverse backgrounds during remote learning: A Q methodology study. *Australian Educational Researcher*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00753-w.

Chisholm, J. S., Alford, J., Halliday, L. M., & Cox, F. M. (2019). Teacher agency in English language arts teaching: A scoping review of the literature. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *18*(2), 124–52. https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-05-2019-0080.

Cong-Lem, N. (2021). Teacher agency: A systematic review of international literature. *Issues in Educational Research*, *31*(3), 718–38. https://www.iier.org.au/iier.html.

Cross, R. (2010). Language teaching as sociocultural activity: Rethinking language teacher practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(3), 434–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01058.x.

Cross, R., D'warte, J., & Slaughter, Y. (2022). Plurilingualism and language and literacy education. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 45, 341–57. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44020-022-00023-1.

De Costa P., & Uştuk, Ö (Eds.) (2023). *A sociopolitical agenda for TESOL teacher education*. Bloomsbury Academic.

de Jong, E. (2011). *Foundations for multilingualism in education—from principles to practice*. Caslon Publishing.

Dovchin, S. (2020). The psychological damages of linguistic racism and international students in Australia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *23*(7), 804–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1759504.

Edmett, A., Ichaporia, N., Crompton, H., & Crichton, R. (2023). *Artificial intelligence and English language teaching: Preparing for the future*. British Council. https://doi.org/10.57884/78EA-3C69.

Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *43*(3), 168–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2006.06.010.

Gao, X., & Yang, W. (2023). Multilingualism and language teacher education. *System*, *118*, 103127. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103127.

García, O. (2009). Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, R. Phillipson, A. K. Mohanty, & M. Panda (Eds.), *Social justice through multilingual education* (pp. 140–58). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691910-011

Hajek, J., & Slaughter, Y. (Eds.) (2014). *Challenging the monolingual mindset*. Multilingual Matters.

Heugh, K., Stroud, C., Taylor-Leech, K., & De Costa, P. (2021). *A sociolinguistics of the south*. Routledge.

Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal*, *60*(4), 385–7. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl030.

Johnson, K. E. (2009). Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective. Routledge.

Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., Chan, E., & Dalley-Trim, L. (2016). *Literacies*. Cambridge University Press.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Multiple identities, negotiations, and agency across time and space: A narrative inquiry of a foreign language teacher candidate. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *12*(2), 137–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2015.1032076.

Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.) (2019). *Theorising and analysing language teacher agency*. Multilingual Matters.

Kramsch, C. (2019). Between globalization and decolonization: Foreign languages in the crossfire. In D. Macedo (Ed.), *Decolonizing foreign language education: The misteaching English and other colonial languages* (pp. 50–72). Routledge.

Lewis, W., & Young, T. (2013). The politics of accountability: Teacher education policy. *Educational Policy*, *27*(2), 190–216. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812472725.

Li, W., & De Costa, P. (2019). Problematizing English language teaching in China through a local English teacher agency lens. In H. Kayi-Aydar, X. Gao, E. R. Miller, M. Varghese, & G. Vitanova (Eds.), *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (pp. 182–202). Multilingual Matters.

Lucas, T., & Villegas, A. M. (2011). Preparing classroom teachers for English language learners: The policy context. In T. Lucas (Ed.), *Teacher preparation for linguistically diverse classrooms: A resource for teacher educators* (pp. 35–52). Routledge.

Maclellan, E. (2017). Shaping agency through theorising and practising teaching in teacher education. In D. Clandinin, & J. Husu (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of research in teacher education* (pp. 253–68). Sage.

Martin, A. D., & Strom, K. J. (2016). Toward a linguistically responsive teacher identity: An empirical review of the literature. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, *10*(4), 239–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2016.1189799.

Mausethagen, S. (2013). A research review of the impact of accountability policies on teachers' workplace relations. *Educational Research Review*, *9*, 16–33. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2012.12.001.

May, S. (2013). *Language and minority rights: Ethnicity, nationalism and the politics of language*. Routledge.

Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.

Moser, K. M., Wei, T., Brenner, D. (2021). Remote teaching during COVID-19: Implications from a national survey of language educators. *System*, *97*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102431.

Murray, D. E. (2020). The world of English language teaching: Creating equity or inequity? *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(1), 60–70. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818777529.

Ndhlovu, F. (2015). Ignored lingualism: Another resource for overcoming the Monolingual mindset in educational linguistics. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, *35*(4), 398–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2015.1087365.

Ndhlovu, F., & Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (Eds.) (2024). *Language and decolonisation: An interdisciplinary approach*. Routledge.

New London Group (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 9–37). MacMillan.

Nguyen, M. H. (2019). *English language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on preservice teachers' learning in the professional experience*. Springer.

Oldani, M., & Truan, N. (2022). Navigating the German school system when being perceived as a student "with migration background": Students' perspectives on linguistic racism. *Linguistics and Education*, *71*, 101049. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101049.

Pennycook, A. (1990). Towards a critical applied linguistics for the 1990s. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, *1*(1), 8–28.

Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Pennycook, A. (2021). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical re-introduction*. Routledge.

Pennycook, A. (2022). Critical applied linguistics in the 2020s. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *19*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2022.2030232.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Slaughter, S. (2005). *Liberty beyond neo-liberalism: A republican critique of liberal governance in a globalising age*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Tajeddin, Z., & Yazan, B. (2024a). Language teacher identity tensions: An overview. In Z. Tajeddin, & B. Yazan (Eds.), *Language teacher identity tensions: Nexus of agency, emotion* (pp. 1–11). Routledge.

Tajeddin, Z., & Yazan, B. (Eds.) (2024b). *Language teacher identity tensions: Nexus of agency, emotion, and investment*. Routledge.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge.

Themelis, S. (Ed.) (2021). *Critical reflections on the language of neoliberalism in education: Dangerous words and discourses of possibility*. Routledge.

Towers, E., Gewirtz, S., Maguire, M., & Neumann, E. (2022). A profession in crisis? Teachers' responses to England's high-stakes accountability reforms in secondary education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *117*, 103778. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103778.

Veliz, L. (Ed.). (2024). *Multiculturalism and multilingualism in education: Implications for curriculum, teacher preparation and pedagogical practice*. Brill.

Veliz, L., Barahona, M., & Darwin, S. (Eds.). (2025). *Critiquing the teaching and learning of English in Chile: Challenges and opportunities for transformative practice*. Routledge.

Veliz, L., Bonar, G., & Premier, J. (2023). Teaching EAL/D learners across the curriculum. *TESOL in Context*, *32*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.21153/tesol2023vol32no1art1909.

Veliz, L., & Chen, J. (2024). Challenging the monolingual mindset: Language teachers' pushback and enactment of critical multilingual language awareness in Australian schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2352161.

Veliz, L., Chen, J., & Véliz-Campos, M. (2025). An exploration of language teachers' multilingual identities in Australia. *International Journal of Multilingualism* (Online First). https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2025.2460473.

Veliz, L., Diaz, A., & Heinrichs, D. (2024). Introduction to the special issue: Pluriversilizing the teaching and learning of Spanish. *Critical Multilingualism Studies*, *11*(2), i–xvi. https://cms.arizona.edu/index.php/multilingual/article/view/313/345.

Zhang, Q., Liu, Y., & Peng, J.-E. (2023). Unpacking EFL teachers' agency enacted in nested ecosystems in developing regions of Southern China. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, *43*, 100775. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2023.100775.

Part One

Language Teacher Agency and Identity

1

Vietnamese Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Agency in Negotiating the Tensions between Aspired and Experienced Identities

Minh Hue Nguyen and Xuan Minh Ngo

Introduction

Language teacher agency (LTA) has received growing scholarly attention over the last two decades since it is widely regarded as the key to achieving effective educational policy implementation and sustaining teachers' professional development (Cong-Lem, 2021; Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2021). Nevertheless, a widely agreed definition of LTA remains elusive (Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2021) partly because the topic has been examined from various theoretical perspectives (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Tao & Gao, 2021). For example, agency can be defined as "to intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2) in social cognitive theory, the ability to "move within and between discourses" (Davies, 2000, p. 6) in positioning theory, or the teacher's socio-culturally mediated capacity to act (Edwards, 2019) from the socio-cultural perspective. In this chapter, we subscribe to the ecological perspective on LTA whereby agency is "not … merely a capacity or possession of the individual" but "achieved in particular (transactional) situations" (Priestley et al., 2012, p. 197). Our decision to adopt the ecological perspective for this chapter primarily stems from the fact that in addition to acknowledging the role of contextual constraints and affordances, the ecological perspective also accounts for "individuals' subjectivities" or "how individuals engage with immediate social influences" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 56) within their social practices and contexts.

LTA is frequently examined alongside language teacher identity (LTI) because "agency and identity are intertwined" and "teachers make and remake themselves

by drawing on their current self-conceptions and then acting in ways that seek to match those self-conceptions" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 705) (see also Tao and Gao (2017, 2021)). Notably, LTA plays a key role in helping teachers navigate professional identity tensions (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Xu & Tao, 2023), which is defined as the dissonance between aspired identities and actual experiences (Pillen et al., 2013). Identity tensions are relevant to the study of LTA because they can represent valuable professional learning opportunities through motivating agentic responses or severe consequences depending on whether these tensions are properly resolved (Nguyen, 2017; Pillen et al., 2013). Despite this acknowledgment of the role of agency in navigating identity tensions and the growing body of research that explores teachers' agency enactment to overcome contextual constraints (Cong-Lem, 2021), only a few studies (Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Uştuk & Yazan, 2023; Xu & Tao, 2023) have explicitly explored how teachers exercise agency to overcome identity tensions. Even fewer have attempted to do so in developing countries (Cong-Lem, 2021) with preservice teachers (PSTs).

To bridge the above gaps, this chapter examines three Vietnamese PSTs' agency in negotiating identity tensions in the process of learning to become English teachers in Vietnam. Considering the temporal nature of agency (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a; Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2017, 2021), we will focus on how they exercise agency in negotiating identity tensions arising from their previous experiences, current conditions, and future aspirations. The study is expected to offer implications for initial teacher education programs on how to support PSTs' enactment of agency to navigate identity tensions not only in Vietnam but also in similar developing nations.

Literature Review

In this section, we review the relevant literature on teacher agency and identity tensions as well as the role of agency in resolving professional identity tensions.

Teacher Agency

As previously noted, LTA has become a recognized research strand alongside LTI as evidenced by the number of monographs, special issues, chapters, and articles devoted to the topic (Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2021). As observed by Kayi-Aydar (2019a), LTA researchers, regardless of their theoretical perspectives, generally agree that agency is "both individual and collective," "context dependent," affected

by "teachers' judgements of their competence in teaching," "shaped by the past, present, and future," and "exercised through discourse, action, identities, and emotions" (pp. 15–16).

Among the theoretical frameworks on LTA, the ecological perspective has emerged as the most utilized (Cong-Lem, 2021) and comprehensive (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a) since this framework accounts for not only the contextual constraints and affordances but also the temporal nature of agency (Tao & Gao, 2021; Xu & Tao, 2023) and "individuals' subjectivities" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 56) within their engagement with social practices and contexts. The root of the ecological perspective can be traced back to sociology, particularly to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who define agency as a

> temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (p. 963)

Drawing on Emirbayer and Mische (1998), we operationalize teacher agency in this chapter as teachers' temporally embedded purposeful responses to affordances and constraints inherent within their context. Particularly, we investigate how their "linguistic and educational histories, their own language learning experiences, current practices and future goals, dreams and expectations contribute to their decision-making processes, choices and ways they exercise agency" (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a, p. 17).

A prominent theme in the LTA literature drawing on the ecological perspective is the crucial role of identity in teachers' enactment of agency (Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2017, 2021; Xu & Tao, 2023). Specifically, it has been found that teachers often exercise their agency to maintain their professional identity, for example, by complying with or resisting external policies (Buchanan, 2015; Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2017). In other words, identity mediates the development of teacher agency (Tao & Gao, 2017). Furthermore, teachers' agentic actions and choices then "feed back into the ongoing identity construction process" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 704). The role of agency is particularly striking when identity tensions occur (Tao & Gao, 2021; Xu & Tao, 2023). In the next part, we will elaborate on the concept of identity tensions and how they contribute to teacher agency.

Identity and Identity Tensions

Like teacher agency, teacher identity has been an established research strand in both general and language teacher education, with identity work or the "ongoing

identity negotiation and construction" (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020, p. 2) seen as an indispensable part of the teacher-learning process (Kayi-Aydar, 2019b; Nguyen, 2017; Veliz et al., 2025; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020; Yuan, 2019). Identity has been variedly defined due to the plethora of theoretical frameworks adopted to research this topic (Kayi-Aydar, 2019b; Nguyen, 2017). A frequently cited definition is arguably Norton's (2013), in which identity is seen as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 4). Irrespective of the differences, the literature generally concurs on the key features of teacher identity. First, teacher identity is multiple; in other words, teachers assume different identities depending on their social contexts (Kayi-Aydar, 2019b). Second, teacher identity is dynamic, or the process of identity negotiation and (re)construction is ongoing (Nguyen, 2017; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). Third, teacher identity is context-bound and mediated by numerous factors such as their linguistic background (Varghese et al., 2016), ethnicity and gender (Huang & Varghese, 2015), and institutional demands (Nguyen, 2017). As a result, teacher identity is both personal and social (Yuan, 2019). Fourth, teacher identity has a temporal dimension and is linked to how teachers (re)interpret their experiences across the past, present, and imagined future (Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; see also Norton, 2013). Finally, teacher identity development is "a site of struggle" (Norton & Morgan, 2013, p. 4) or imbued with tensions (Nguyen, 2017; Pillen et al., 2013; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). Nevertheless, not many studies have explicitly defined the construct of identity tension.

One pioneering attempt to demystify this construct is Pillen et al. (2013), who conceptualize identity tensions as "internal struggles between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional regarding an undesirable situation" (p. 662). Based on teacher education and nursing/social work literature, Pillen et al. (2013) propose a list of thirteen identity tensions which can be divided into three prominent themes, namely "(1) the change in role from student to teacher, (2) conflicts between desired and actual support given to students, and (3) conflicting conceptions of learning to teach" (p. 674). Drawing on Pillen et al. (2013), Uştuk and Yazan (2023) view "identity tensions as teachers' internal struggles between their rendition of the professional expectations and their aspirations regarding the kind of teacher they would like to become" (p. 741) and attribute a main source of tensions to "the interplay between teachers' personal history and institutional forces" (p. 741). Likewise, Xu and Tao (2023) trace the source of identity tensions to teachers' pedagogical and socio-affective commitment. In their view, pedagogical identity tensions result from "a gap

between one's own concept of a good teacher and the top-down policies … or a gap between language teachers' habitualised role and the role expected by the local culture …" (p. 3), whereas socio-affective identity tensions can be traced back to "the gap between the desired and actual support given to students" (p. 4).

In this study, we emphasize the temporal dimension of teacher identity and view identity tensions as a sense of dissonance between aspired (future) and experienced (past and present) identities, considering the past, present, and future as contributing to forming these identities. We adopt Xu's (2013) conceptualization, which sees aspired or imagined identity as individuals' aspired/imagined relationships with people in their context and experienced identity as "[relying] on real practices people are engaged in" that "is nurtured through the particular composition of available resources" (p. 80, see also Uştuk and Yazan (2023)). Notably, our view of identity tensions is not entirely negative. While identity tensions may lead to serious consequences such as teacher identity crisis, burnout, and attrition (Pillen et al., 2013; Trent, 2012), tensions, if properly resolved, may act as a catalyst for identity development (Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Nguyen, 2017; Pillen et al., 2013). The resolution of such identity tensions, as shown by the literature (Buchanan, 2015; Kayi-Aydar, 2015a, 2019b; Nguyen et al., 2024; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Tao & Gao, 2017; Xu & Tao, 2023), depends largely on teachers' enactment of agency. Hence, the questions of what identity tensions teachers face and how they exercise agency to navigate these tensions merit further research. This is especially true in the case of PSTs, the target population of this study, who need considerable support during their difficult transition from student teachers into fully fledged teachers (Pillen et al., 2013).

Research Aims and Questions

Motivated by the gaps in the literature, we aim to explore identity tensions facing Vietnamese pre-service teachers of English in their professional learning and their enactment of agency in response to these tensions. The following research questions guided our research:

1. What identity tensions did the PSTs encounter in their professional learning?
2. In what ways did they exercise agency in responding to the identity tensions?

Methodology

The qualitative study drew on data from narrative frames and individual interviews with three Vietnamese PSTs. The study was conducted at Babel (pseudonym), a public university that prepares foreign language teachers and interpreters in Northern Vietnam. The participants (pseudonyms: Anna, Hailey and Tina) were enrolled in the teacher education program at Babel's Faculty of English Language Teacher Education.

To graduate from this program, each student was required to attain 136 credits from three components, namely general courses in philosophy, sciences, and physical education (40 credits), English language skill courses (39 credits), and English linguistics and pedagogy courses (57 credits). The English language skill courses were designed to upgrade their proficiency levels from B1 to C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Meanwhile, the English linguistics and pedagogy courses can be further divided into two strands: The first one equipped students with a comprehensive knowledge of English linguistics, literature, and the cultures of English-speaking countries. The second strand featured an extensive range of core and elective courses such as language teaching methods, language assessment and evaluation, curriculum and syllabus design, second language acquisition, technology in language teaching, teaching young learners, teaching English as an international language, and practicum. As the practicum is organized in the final semester of their course, at the time of data collection, none of the participants had taught on practicum. Students achieving a distinction GPA in their first three years (e.g., Hailey) had the option to write a dissertation for six credits, while the others earned the equivalent credits from two elective courses. According to the program handbook, most students, upon graduation, typically teach English in high schools, colleges, and universities as well as language centers, while some continue with postgraduate studies to become researchers in language education, linguistics, and international studies.

The three participants were included in this study firstly because they responded to our call for participants with promptness and enthusiasm. This is essential because enthusiastic participants are more likely to offer in-depth insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We also selected participants from differential backgrounds to gain breadth of data and facilitate cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Table 1.1 summarizes the participants' profile.

The data was collected through narrative frames and interviews. Our narrative frames (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008) consist of sentence starters and blank spaces to

Table 1.1 Participants' Profile

Name	Age	Gender	Year in TESOL program	Years of English learning	English teaching experience and context
Anna	20	Female	3rd year	13	Private classes
Hailey	21	Female	4th year	16	Tutoring and private English language centre
Tina	22	Female	4th year	10	Tutoring

guide participants in writing their narratives about English learning from primary school to university levels, learning to teach experiences at university, and their future aspirations as language teachers. Subsequently, each participant attended a semi-structured interview which lasted around one and a half hours. The interview had a similar structure to the narrative frames but enabled the participants and researchers to explore further points of interest emerging from the frames. The interviews were conducted in the participants' first language (Vietnamese) so that the PSTs could express their ideas as fully and accurately as possible.

We used thematic analysis with the support of the concepts of aspired identity, experienced identity (Xu, 2013), identity tensions (Pillen et al., 2013), and an ecological perspective on LTA (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kayi-Aydar, 2019a). We first coded the data from each participant into aspired and experienced identities before identifying tensions between these. Finally, we analyzed the participant's agentive responses to these tensions. Based on these levels of coding, we constructed narratives of the participants' agency in negotiating the tensions between their aspired and experienced identities, which we present and discuss in the following section.

Findings and Discussion

Anna: Finding a Balance between Aspired and Experienced Identities

Anna's aspired identity was revealed through the interviews and narrative frame. Firstly, in her future imagination, she wanted to create a stress-free class environment. She wrote:

> I will also pay attention to the class atmosphere because when the students learn in a comfortable environment, they would feel relaxed, so it would be easier for

> them to absorb the knowledge. The relationship between my students and me should be like friends because I believe such a close relationship would help them trust me more, make them feel comfortable in my classes, and I could understand my students from their viewpoints, so I may make some changes in my teaching methods to make them better.

In the quote above, Anna further justified her aspired identity, considering the relaxing approach as making it "easier for [students] to absorb the knowledge," building trust and positive relationship, allowing her to "understand [her] students from their viewpoints," and enhancing her teaching methods based on the understanding. Her aspired identity is manifested through her *imagination* about a relaxing *relationship* with her students (Xu, 2013). The statement of her aspired identity and insightful reasoning above show that Anna's aspired identity of a relaxed teacher had been well-formed and deeply rooted. This is also evident in the interview as she repeatedly emphasized the aspiration to become a relaxed teacher who would motivate her students to find meaning in learning for themselves and to own their learning. She further added:

> I don't want to be harsh on students … Learning is already challenging. If the teacher puts on a serious face, that will discourage the students from learning even further.[….] I don't want to pressure students by marking their homework every day to make them do it. They have to be in charge of their learning.

Her relaxing approach to teaching was also imagined to include "integrating real-life stories in classroom tasks" and "incorporating hands-on activities to make the lesson more engaging."

However, Anna's imagined future identity as a relaxed and engaging teacher sometimes clashed with the identity she experienced through *real practices* (Xu, 2013) in her private classes. For example, she mentioned that sometimes the relaxing teaching approach wasted too much time and did not meet curriculum goals.

> I think my teaching is currently too intuitive. Sometimes, I focus too much on interactive activities and games that I lose track of time and cannot complete the lesson …. It's not reasonable to play games for 30–40 minutes in a one-hour lesson, and often students are carried away by the games.

The experienced identity shown in the quote above was mediated by the "available resources" in her context (Xu, 2013, p. 80). When asked about an area that she would like to improve on, she identified better time management to balance between curriculum goals and a relaxing approach to teaching, citing the sense of dissonance between her aspired and experienced identities mentioned above.

> Although it's good to engage students in games and activities, it's important to ensure students learn the essential knowledge and not to focus too much on games. [….] The teacher needs to keep track of time and a reasonable balance.

The quote above reveals Anna's agency in negotiating the tension between her aspired future identity and her present experienced identity as a language teacher. The agency is manifested through her deliberate intention and self-perceived responsibility (Cong-Lem, 2021; Kayi-Aydar, 2015b; Tao & Gao, 2017, 2021) in striking a balance between adopting a relaxing teaching approach and meeting the curriculum demands. She further elaborated:

> If, through our teaching, students don't achieve the curriculum standards, we need to evaluate our teaching to see if it is really effective …. However, one dilemma is that if the orientation is towards curriculum standards and exams, many students will only focus on preparing for the exams and feel pressured, while it is important to create a relaxing learning environment where students can learn what is useful for their work and life as opposed to just preparing for exams.

Here, Anna appeared agentive in constantly monitoring and adjusting her teaching to ensure students both achieve curriculum goals and feel relaxed and learn what would be useful in their future work and life. This resonates with the ecological view that teacher agency entails teachers' purposeful responses to contextual affordances and constraints by linking the past and present experiences with future imaginations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kayi-Aydar, 2019a). It also highlights the important role of identity tensions as a context for teacher agency to manifest and benefit teaching and learning (Nguyen et al., 2024; Pillen et al., 2013).

Hailey: Bridging the Gaps in Personal and Professional Qualities

The data revealed Hailey's aspired identity as an engaging teacher using humor and stories effectively to engage learners, which also illustrates her *imagined relationship* with her students (Xu, 2013). She wrote in the narrative frame, "I think I will need to work on my sense of humor as a teacher, I am quite stiff and strict as described." This sentence reveals the tension between her aspired identity as a teacher with a sense of humor and her experienced identity as a "stiff and strict" teacher. She elaborated:

> I think it's very good to have a sense of humour as a teacher. Everyone likes it. [….] I'm quite jealous of teachers who have a good sense of humour because I

> am a stiff and serious person with little sense of humour. But I have to admit that a sense of humour can make the class much more interesting and relaxing.

On the one hand, Hailey aspired to "work on [her] sense of humour" and develop a "charisma" to make her teaching more engaging. In contrast to her future aspiration, she depicted her present self as a strict, stiff, serious teacher and as a person through *real practices* (Xu, 2013).

The extracts above paint two contrastive pictures of teacher identity, which illustrates an identity tension between Hailey's aspired identity as an engaging and humourous teacher and her experienced identity as a quiet and serious teacher (Pillen et al., 2013). This identity tension triggered her agency in navigating it. She added in the interview, "I have been trying to develop a bit of a sense of humour, but this is difficult because we don't have it when we don't have it." This demonstrates Hailey's *purposeful response* based on her awareness of the identity tension and her agentive attempts oriented toward bridging the gap between her experienced personal characteristics (being an introvert/strict) and aspired professional quality (having a good sense of humour). Both her goal and action can be seen as agentive moves in resolving the identity tension that caused her concern (Nguyen & Ngo, 2023), which lends support to Kayi-Aydar's (2019a) point that agency can be "exercised through discourse, action, identities, and emotions" (p. 16). Her last comment, "This is difficult because we don't have it when we don't have it," shows her conception of a sense of humor as being innate. However, she also attributed her lack of a sense of humor to her past experience as a class monitor, and in a strict school, saying "I attended a private school and I think that is the source of my seriousness because the school has very strict rules."

With this conception of humor as being difficult to develop, she exercised her agency by resorting to another strategy, alongside working on her sense of humor, to resolve the tension. More specifically, she invested in "enriching [her] knowledge in the field and also outside of it … because that will really attract the students into what the teacher has to say." This action demonstrates Hailey's agency as it draws on the available *affordances*, oriented toward making her teaching more engaging and driven by the identity tension she experienced. She believed this professional learning would enable her, in her own words, "to be able to tell stories, to live what I share, what I teach and not just repeating the textbook," which would resolve the tension between her aspired and experienced identities and engage her students in learning.

Tina: Bridging the Gaps in Professional Knowledge

Tina experienced a tension between her aspired identity as a competent teacher of English and her experienced identity as a PST with some professional knowledge gaps. When asked about the qualities and skills needed to become a good teacher of English, she emphasized the central role of English proficiency and pedagogy:

R: What qualities and skills do you think you need to be a good English teacher?
T: First, it's English proficiency and pedagogical skills.
R: In your opinion, what level of proficiency is adequate?
T: It depends on the students' year levels. The higher the level, the more advanced proficiency is needed …. Moreover, I want pronunciation and speaking skills to be at a higher level than all other language skills.

Firstly, in terms of language proficiency, Tina attributed great importance to having high-level speaking and pronunciation skills, especially when teaching older students, which shows her *aspired relationship* with students (Xu, 2013) in the area of communication skills. Tina's aspiration matches well with the literature on language teacher knowledge which considers knowledge of language, including language proficiency, an important area of teacher knowledge, especially for English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) teachers (Freeman, 2020; Nguyen, 2013). However, Hailey acknowledged this knowledge area as her weakness in the interview:

> When I started the course at university, I felt shocked by the new teaching and learning styles because I had not been taught English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills or pronunciation properly before. And I had never learned to speak in English before, so I was very confused.

In this quote, Tina revealed a major gap in her English communication skills as she experienced, which caused her anxiety and confusion. Research has also shown that language teachers with low confidence in language competency meet with numerous emotional, cognitive, and operational challenges when interacting with their students (Nguyen, 2018), which can have serious consequences on their professional identity (Nguyen, 2014, 2019; Nguyen & Parr, 2018). Such emotions were further intensified by the learning pace at university:

> At first, I was not used to that and I had to focus on developing my language skills, so managing the deadlines was really challenging. Also, my classmates were much more capable, so I felt a lot of pressure when working in groups.

Here, Tina felt stressed by managing deadlines and collaborating with peers who had much higher language proficiency. Tina also indicated her sense of agency in addressing the knowledge gaps and emotions. Her statement, "I had to focus on developing my language skills," shows her investment in language learning, which is an example of teacher agency (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). In addition, she actively sought part-time teaching opportunities to, in her words, "develop my English skills then my professional networks, through which I feel more confident and my communication skills are enhanced." Through this *purposeful response to the constraints*, she actively searched for and leveraged affordances in her context to consolidate her identities.

Secondly, Tina experienced another tension between her aspired and experienced identities which was manifested as a gap in her pedagogical knowledge. This is also a key area of language teachers' professional knowledge (Freeman, 2020; Nguyen, 2013), and one which PSTs are often found to be lacking in (Nguyen, 2018). On the one hand, Tina aspired to have the ability to plan for teaching that is responsive to learners' needs and the ability to teach and manage the lesson well:

> Regarding pedagogical skills, the first important skill is lesson planning … Depending on knowledge about learners' characteristics such as English levels, learning preferences, an effective teacher is able to plan suitable activities that motivate learners to learn English. The second important skill is the ability to explain knowledge and manage classroom issues well.

Despite this aspiration, Tina lacked confidence in her current skills, which is an aspect of her experienced LTI. When asked about her recent microteaching experience as part of her teacher preparation program, Tina said, "I felt my teaching skills were not so good." She further clarified, "I'm currently not confident in being in front of the class and delivering the content to students." Such a lack of confidence has been commonly found amongst PSTs in previous studies and motivated agentive action to address the gaps in professional knowledge (Nguyen, 2018). In the case of Tina, in addition to her agentive investment in developing language skills and part-time teaching, as reported above, Tina also sought opportunities to observe her current fellow PSTs and lecturers' teaching to develop her pedagogical skills further.

Moreover, when asked about future strategies, she said she would attend "professional development opportunities for teachers" and "learn from my fellow teachers in my school because they often know the teaching context well,

including students' characteristics" to enhance her lesson planning and teaching. This shows that Tina identified professional learning opportunities and future fellow teachers as contextual resources to help her negotiate the tension between her aspired and experienced identity in relation to professional knowledge. This exemplifies her agency through investment in professional learning and her purposeful responses to affordances (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020) to bridge the gaps in her pedagogical knowledge.

Conclusion

The chapter set out to investigate three PSTs' tensions between aspired and experienced identities and how they exercised agency in negotiating these tensions. Drawing on the concepts of aspired and experienced identities (Xu, 2013), identity tensions (Pillen et al., 2013), and an ecological perspective on LTA (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kayi-Aydar, 2019a), we collected and analyzed data from narrative frames and interviews. Thematic analysis revealed that while Anna directed her agency toward finding a balance between implementing a relaxing teaching approach and meeting curricular demands, Hailey exercised her agency in bridging the gaps between her personal qualities as a stiff and strict person and her professional self as a teacher with a sense of humor, and Tina in further developing her knowledge of language and pedagogy. The findings from all PSTs illustrated the role of identity tensions in motivating their agentive responses to negotiate the dissonances, which lends support to the literature (Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Nguyen, 2017; Pillen et al., 2013) but at the same time extends that to the under-researched pre-service teacher cohort who are experiencing one of the most formative periods of LTI development (Nguyen, 2017). The study also extends the current literature on language teacher identity tensions and agency to the Vietnamese context, where English education is underperforming, teachers' competencies are questionable, and major curricular reforms are taking place to address the issues (Ngo, 2021). Such a context poses a strong need for an agentive teacher workforce to navigate the demands, and the findings could be relevant to other contexts facing similar issues.

The study has the potential to inform second language teacher education practice and research. Firstly, constraints were found to motivate the PSTs' agency, which contributed to their teacher identity development. Although the participants were all working toward completing their course, they faced constraints or tensions related to self-confidence in the areas of teaching style and

curricular fulfillment (Anna), professional qualities (Hailey), and professional knowledge (Tina). These findings suggest potential areas for language teacher education programs to focus on in developing PSTs' ideal future identities. Identifying the tensions between PSTs' experienced and aspired identities through teacher education activities can potentially guide this work. Specifically, it is important to consider PSTs' backgrounds and prior experiences as well as future aspirations when designing and delivering teacher education programs. Once made explicit, the tensions between aspired and experienced identities can guide both PSTs and teacher educators in developing teacher agency for responding to these tensions.

Secondly, the findings demonstrated that affordances mediated teacher agency in developing teacher identity. As PSTs engage in practices that prepare them for future teaching, they not only face constraints but also can leverage the resources available in their context to address these constraints. Based on knowledge about PSTs' identity tensions, teacher education programs could provide purposeful and contingent resources such as opportunities for peer learning, authentic and quality teaching placements, teacher educators' mentoring as well as material resources to support teacher learning.

Finally, we are conscious that the findings from three PSTs in the same context are inherently limited. Readers' generalization of the findings to other contexts and teacher cohorts should be made with caution. For future studies, we suggest that researchers use data from a larger cohort of PSTs, potentially using quantitative and mixed-method designs. Research into this topic could also be expanded to other contexts to better understand how teachers' and learners' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds contribute to tensions between teachers' experienced and aspired identities and their agency in resolving these tensions.

References

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1.

Barkhuizen, G., & Wette, R. (2008). Narrative frames for investigating the experiences of language teachers. *System*, *36*(3), 372–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.02.002.

Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability [Article]. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *21*(6), 700–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044329.

Cong-Lem, N. (2021). Teacher agency: A systematic review of international literature. *Issues in Educational Research*, *31*(3), 718–38.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.

Davies, B. (2000). *A body of writing: 1990–1999*. AltaMira Press.

Edwards, A. (2019). *Helping to create agentic teachers: Motive orientation and the exercise of agency* [Seminar at Monash University]. Monash Univesrity.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, *10*, 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001.

Freeman, D. (2020). Arguing for a knowledge-base in language teacher education, then (1998) and now (2018). *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(1), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818777534.

Huang, I. C., & Varghese, M. M. (2015). Toward a composite, personalized, and institutionalized teacher identity for non-native English speakers in U.S. secondary ESL programs. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *12*(1), 51–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2015.997651.

Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (2020). Informing and transforming language teacher education pedagogy. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(1), 116–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818777539.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015a). Multiple identities, negotiations, and agency across time and space: A narrative inquiry of a foreign language teacher candidate. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *12*(2), 137–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2015.1032076.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015b). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *45*, 94–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019a). Language teacher agency: Major theoretical considerations, conceptualizations and methodological choices. In H. Kayi-Aydar, X. Gao, E. R. Miller, M. Varghese, & G. Vitanova (Eds.), *Theorising and analysing language teacher agency* (pp. 10–21). Multilingual Matters.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019b). Language teacher identity. *Language Teaching*, *52*(3), 281–95. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000223.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative resarch: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Ngo, X. M. (2021). Vietnam's trillion-dong attempt to reform English education: A laudable reform or a costly failure? *English Today*, *37*(2), 115–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078419000440.

Nguyen, M. H. (2013). The curriculum for English language teacher education in Australian and Vietnamese universities. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *38*(11), 33–53. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n11.6.

Nguyen, M. H. (2014). Preservice EAL teaching as emotional experiences: Practicum experience in an Australian secondary school. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *39*(8), 63–84. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n8.5.

Nguyen, M. H. (2017). Negotiating contradictions in developing teacher identity during the EAL practicum in Australia. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *45*(4), 399–415. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2017.1295132.

Nguyen, M. H. (2018). ESL teachers' emotional experiences, responses and challenges in professional relationships with the school community: Implications for teacher education. In J. d. D. M. Agudo (Ed.), *Emotions in second language teaching: Theory, research and teacher education* (pp. 243–57). Springer.

Nguyen, M. H. (2019). *English language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective on preservice teachers' learning in the professional experience*. Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9761-5.

Nguyen, M. H., Berry, A., & Filipi, A. (2024). Negotiating tensions between aspired and practiced identities: An Australian case of agency in language–content teacher collaboration. In Z. Tajeddin, & B. Yazan (Eds.), *Language teacher identity tensions: Nexus of agency, emotion, and investment* (pp. 47–61). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003402411-5.

Nguyen, M. H., & Ngo, X. M. (2023). An activity theory perspective on Vietnamese preservice English teachers' identity construction in relation to tensions, emotion and agency. *Language Teaching Research* (Online First), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221151046.

Nguyen, M. H., & Parr, G. (2018). Mentoring practices and relationships during the EAL practicum in Australia: Contrasting narratives. In A. Fitzgerald, G. Parr, & J. Williams (Eds.), *Re-imagining professional experience in initial teacher education* (pp. 87–105). Springer.

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Norton, B., & Morgan, B. (2013). Poststructuralism. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 1–6). Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0924.

Pillen, M., Beijaard, D., & den Brok, P. (2013, 2013/12/01). Professional identity tensions of beginning teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, *19*(6), 660–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.827455.

Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry, 42*(2), 191–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2012.00588.x.

Reeves, J. (2022). Understanding language teacher agency. In K. Sadeghi & F. Ghaderi (Eds.), *Theory and Practice in Second Language Teacher Identity: Researching, Theorising and Enacting* (pp. 75–88). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13161-5_6.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2017). Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *63*, 346–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.010.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108916943.

Trent, J. (2012). Teacher professional development through a school-university partnership. What role does teacher identity play? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *37*(7), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n7.2.

Uştuk, Ö, & Yazan, B. (2023). Tensions in an identity-oriented language teaching practicum: A dialogic approach. *TESOL Quarterly, 58*(1), 363–93. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3234.

Varghese, V. M., Motha, S., Park, G., Reeves, J., & Trent, J. (2016). In this issue. *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(3), 545–71. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.333.

Veliz, L., Chen, J., & Véliz-Campos, M. (2025). An exploration of language teachers' multilingual identities in Australia. *International Journal of Multilingualism* (Online First). https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2025.2460473.

Xu, H. (2013). From the imagined to the practiced: A case study on novice EFL teachers' professional identity change in China. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *31*(April 2013), 79–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.006.

Xu, Y., & Tao, J. (2023). The pedagogical and socio-affective dimensions of identity tensions and teacher agency: Case studies of university English teachers teaching online. *Language Teaching Research*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221151047.

Yazan, B., & Lindahl, K. (2020). Language teacher learning and practice as identity work: An overview of the field and this volume. In B. Yazan, & K. Lindahl (Eds.), *Language teacher identity in TESOL: Teacher education and practice as identity work* (pp. 1–10). Routledge.

Yuan, R. (2019). A critical review on non-native English teacher identity research from 2008 to 2017. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *40*(6), 518–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2018.1533018.

2

A Longitudinal Study of Pre-Service and Early Career Languages Teacher Agency

Gary Bonar, Ruth Fielding, and Meihui Wang

Introduction

As various aspects of languages[1] teacher agency have garnered the attention of researchers and practitioners, much of the focus has been within the sphere of English language teaching (Tao & Gao, 2021). Less attention, however, has been paid to how teachers of other languages can be supported to develop and enact their agency. While some insights from research into English language teacher agency are applicable to teachers of other languages, there are often significant contextual factors that make teaching of these languages different and uniquely challenging. As recent literature suggests, the teaching of languages other than English (in Anglophone contexts in particular) gives rise to a range of structural and socio-cultural challenges for teachers (Lanvers et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2020; Reagan & Osborn, 2021).

In Australia, the context of this study, there is a stark contrast between the highly diverse linguistic landscape across much of the country, and the pervasive "monolingual mindset" (Clyne, 2008) that works against elevating the value of being multilingual. This monolingual (i.e., English language) worldview elevates English as the desired norm and permeates all layers and spheres of decision making within society, including in education (Piller, 2016). This is despite the reality of Australia being a diverse multilingual society with more

[1] We use "languages" without qualifiers to reject problematic descriptors such as "foreign," "modern," or "world" and to avoid centering English and "othering" languages, i.e., languages other than English (LOTE). Additionally, to move beyond the problematic term "native-speaker," we adopt Dewaele's (2018) terminology of L1 as someone's first language(s) and Lx as the subsequent additional languages they have learnt.

than 300 languages other than English spoken at home among approximately a quarter of all Australian children (Australian Government, 2019).

The position of languages in Australian schools, similar to other Anglophone contexts (Lanvers et al., 2021), is a marginalized and precarious one. With language learning often optional toward the senior years of high school, and the absence of high-stakes exams that compel students to learn additional languages, languages teachers regularly encounter persistent questioning of the value of learning languages in the curriculum (Mason & Matas, 2015). The result of this is that while languages are still a key learning area in the Australian curriculum, it is often the case that "languages education does not hold the same value as some other learning areas" (Scarino, 2014, p. 293).

These contextual factors are all influential to varying degrees in shaping the teaching environment into which pre-service languages teachers (PSLTs) and early career languages teachers (ECLTs) enter. PSLTs and ECLTs encounter these challenges during their initial teacher education placements and again once they have graduated. How they perceive and exercise their agency in these contexts can be a crucial factor in not only their investment in their work and their sense of job satisfaction and of achievement, but also a determiner in their longer-term commitment to this work. This is an important consideration since the attrition rates for graduate teachers are notably high in Australian schools (Sullivan et al., 2019) and graduate languages teachers are subject to the same if not more pressures given the challenges languages teachers face in Australian schools (Mason, 2010).

Against this contextual backdrop, we argue that there is value in exploring how PSLTs and ECLTs develop and enact their agency and the affordances and constraints they experience over the period from initial teacher education into their own classrooms as recent graduates. The ecological perspective of agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015) used in this study emphasizes the multiple temporal and relational aspects that interact in particular settings with a focus on how individuals act by means of their environment. This temporal aspect is important as many PSLTs and ECLTs often enter into this challenging landscape while still grappling with an understanding of their identities as emergent languages teachers (Bonar et al., 2022). Some PSLTs and ECLTs may also have self-doubts about their linguistic competence and socio-cultural connection to the language, as well as a lack of current and possibly future opportunities for meaningful interactions in the language and in related cultural activities (Bonar et al., 2024).

Literature Review

We discuss briefly here the most contextually relevant studies that, while not on agency explicitly, have relevance to the context and the factors that can influence agency. Cross' (2010) study of an early career teacher of Japanese [Dan] in an Australian high school provides some relevant findings on how languages teachers manage to exercise their agency despite external and internal tensions. Through a microgenetic analysis Cross showed how Dan's agency was molded by contextual elements such as rules, division of labor, and community dynamics. Dan strategically employed various tools, including target language use, to negotiate and address the needs of his students. This agentic positioning, however, unfolded within ongoing tensions stemming from disparities between the theoretical ideals of languages teaching and the practical exigencies of the classroom.

Drawing on interviews with languages educators from diverse educational contexts in Australia, Weinmann and Arber (2017) investigated the ways in which teachers' practices and identities are shaped by intersecting factors such as race, class, education, and Western hegemony. Grounded in socio-cultural theory and critical discourse analysis, the research reported on the ways two experienced and leading languages teachers navigated institutional norms as they challenged perceptions surrounding language proficiency, cultural authenticity, and professional competence. Among the findings was the way in which certain languages and teachers are privileged over others, perpetuating parochial and monolingual norms within language education. Despite not having an explicit reference to agency, the findings implicitly highlight the exercising of agency by languages teachers in advocating for the recognition of diverse languages and cultures within the curriculum and broader school communities.

Another study that is more closely connected to languages teacher agency through the concept of positioning was carried out by Turner (2018) into tertiary level languages teachers and how the concepts of authenticity and legitimacy (Creese et al., 2014) shaped their teaching experiences and language choices. Creese et al. suggested that an individual may be acknowledged as an authentic speaker but harbor doubts regarding their ability to meet the requirements of a particular role. In effect, they question their own legitimacy to carry out that role. In the case of languages teachers, this manifests as someone doubting their legitimacy as a languages teacher even though they may be positioned by others as an authentic speaker of that language. Using observational and interview data,

Turner discusses how authenticity and legitimacy are negotiated in the classroom between teacher and students. The study highlights the influence of cultural backgrounds and institutional contexts and the outcomes of different pedagogical approaches to using the target language in meaningful ways in the classroom.

From these limited studies it is evident that pre-service and early career languages teachers are faced with a wide range of challenges that they may have had minimal previous detailed understanding or preparation. The overarching aim of this longitudinal study, therefore, was to better understand and support languages teachers through exploring how they develop and enact agency as PSLTs and ECLTs. The research questions addressed in the chapter are:

1. What is the trajectory of agency (re)negotiation among early career languages teachers as they transition from pre-service education to their early career roles?
2. How do internal and external factors influence this trajectory?

Theoretical Framework

As has been suggested in recent reviews of languages teacher agency as a concept, there are multiple theoretical influences that have naturally led to diversity in how the concept has been defined (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Reeves, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2021; White, 2018). In the field of sociology with a focus on human action, agency is considered an internal attribute of individuals that enables them to act (or not) in given situations. Critiques of this purely individual notion of agency have pointed out that this unhindered exercising of agency is not universally available to all (Davies, 2007; Zembylas, 2003). If, however, agency is theorized as a product of discourse, then an individual's agency is actually a question of their position or location within certain discourses. As Davies argues,

> How that agency is taken up depends on the way in which one has discursively constructed oneself as a moral being, the degree of commitment to that construction, the alternative discourse structures available to one, as well as one's own subjective history—informing one's emotions and attitudes to agentic and non-agentic positionings. (2007, pp. 313–14)

This moves toward a political and cultural understanding of agency in which it cannot be understood without taking into account "the dynamics of power from which it is constructed" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 225).

Though this conceptualization of agency is a potentially powerful analytic tool for examining the possibility of agency, the nature of teacher education and the *in-between* role that pre-service teachers play create a paradox. As Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate point out, "in teacher education, agency work is often anticipatory, rather than contemporaneous" (2015, pp. 47–8). This presents the dilemma of "how to sow the seeds of agency for future teacherhood within the context of pre-service education [that] tends to promote responsibility *to* another rather than responsibility *for* another" (2015, p. 48). This temporal aspect of agency (or lack of) was a focus of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) critique of previous theories of agency. They sought to reconceptualize agency as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past … oriented toward the future … and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)" (1998, p. 963).

These temporal aspects of agency—iterational (past), projective (future) and practical-evaluative (present)—are foundational in the ecological perspective toward agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015). An ecological perspective emphasizes the multiple temporal and relational aspects that interact in particular settings and the focus is on how individuals act by means of their environment. The result is an interaction between individual efforts, available resources, and contextual and structural factors that "come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137). The temporal element opens up ground to consider how biographical learning relates to the possibility and potential achievement of agency, since "learning about the particular composition of one's agentic orientations and how they play out in one's life can play an important role in the achievement of agency" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 132). These stories about one's life serve as fertile ground for such learning. In this longitudinal study, we sought to explore how participants discussed aspects not only relevant to the possibility and potential achievement of agency through reference to their past, present, and future, but also temporally over the stages of the interviews by considering how participants referred back to previous conversations and projected forward to future intentions.

Methodology

The case study (Yin, 2014) discussed in this chapter is from a larger mixed-methods study that used a consistent data collection tool (Q-sorting) for participants to respond to a set of statements, which was followed by a discussion

based on their arrangement of the statements (Bonar et al., 2024). This included their reflections on whether they felt their responses had changed over time (and if so, in what way) and follow-up discussions to explore the specifics of their experiences in languages teaching. This consistency of data collection method and interview process not only provided opportunities for us as researchers to gain insights into the agentic aspects of the participants' lives as pre- and in-service languages teachers, but also served as learning opportunities for the participants to distance themselves from their "agentic orientations so as make them an object of attention, reflection, evaluation and imagination" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 138). This distancing aligns with the importance Emirbayer and Mische (1998) place on the learning about one's agentic orientations and how these take place in one's life. The analysis of the interviews, therefore, also focused on any opportunities afforded to the participants to engage in that process of distancing and evaluation. This aligns well with Davies' observation that agency lies "in the capacity ….to critically examine thought" (2010, p. 67), which reiterates the self-reflective element to agentive action. Interviews were transcribed and thematically coded in NVivo. To ensure the quality of our data analysis, we followed a systematic cyclical coding process (Saldaña, 2021). This interactive process began with deductive coding informed by the theoretical framework (see Bonar et al., 2022 for a detailed discussion). A second phase of coding drew on these deductive coding results, but was also inductive in nature so that unexpected yet relevant codes could be considered. This coding approach aligns with Saldaña's suggestion that "induction and deduction are actually dialectical rather than mutually exclusive" (2021, p. 41).

Participant

The participant (Claire, a pseudonym) discussed as a case study in this chapter was one of a cohort of seven who had participated in a three-year study into languages teacher identity development (Bonar et al., 2022, 2024). The study commenced in 2020 as the participants were completing their initial teacher education to become languages teachers. In their fourth (and final) year of the four-year undergraduate teacher education program, students are enrolled in two twelve-week courses focused on language teaching pedagogy aimed at preparing them for future roles as languages teachers in Australian schools. These courses bring together all languages teachers, offering them valuable opportunities to collaborate within and across different language groups. Language learning is not part of the course as students are either teaching their L1 or have completed

tertiary level studies in an Lx. However, for students who do not meet these criteria, there are alternative entry pathways, including proficiency testing. The twelve-week semester includes a practical placement experience in schools lasting approximately three to five weeks during which these pre-service teachers gradually take on the responsibilities of a classroom teacher under the guidance of a mentor (in-service languages teacher).

Data Collection and Analysis

During both semesters of 2020, students posted reflective forum responses that linked to the syllabus and weekly topics. Prompts for these responses related to their own language learning experiences, their beliefs, aims and motivations as future languages teachers, and their expectations about language teaching. After receiving university ethics approval, we invited students to participate in the study and those who volunteered also gave permission to use their forum posts for this research. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subjected to thematic, systematic, and longitudinal analysis. Names used are pseudonyms.

Case Study

Our case study begins with a brief biographical outline of Claire followed by examples of her written and spoken responses to forum prompts and interview questions grouped into two categories: those that relate to authenticity, legitimacy, and agency over time, and those that discuss her reflective positioning and agency. The initial analysis presented here is elaborated on in the following discussion section.

Claire, an L1 user of English, began learning German in her first year of high school. Given a choice between taking German or Japanese, she chose German since Japanese seemed more challenging. No family members knew the language or had connections with Germany or speakers of German. She recalls in her first classes the teacher spoke only in German, something she and her friends thought was an odd and funny experience. Her recollection was that she enjoyed language learning in general and was able to do well in German, one of the reasons why she opted to continue studying it all through high school. Without family or community links to German speakers she recollects that she and her best friend tried to use the language outside of the classroom for "real" communication, something she found very hard to sustain. Looking back at this period she regrets not looking for other opportunities such as joining a language

club or seeking out other German speakers. Now as a pre-service teacher of German, she was actively looking to work on her oral competency by joining an online language community forum.

Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Agency Over Time

We were interested in what motivated our participants to take up language teaching, and for Claire it was not something she was initially contemplating. As she recounted when asked if she had always thought of being a languages teacher, she replied:

> I think at the start, no. In the younger year levels I was like, "No. I just like learning languages, I don't think I could see it as a career." Then as I started to get into it, I was like, "Oh I really do enjoy this." I find a lot of enjoyment in it, and it kind of comes … not naturally, but I think a bit easier than other people. I was like, "Oh maybe I could teach German." Then I was like, "Oh I don't know, I don't think I'm good enough."

Despite her enjoyment in learning the language, and apparent aptitude, Claire regularly expressed doubts about her proficiency. Upon entering university she continued her German studies and excelled to achieve result equivalent to the highest level of C2 standard within the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) (CoE, 2018) for language proficiency. Nevertheless, Claire expressed doubts about her ability by stating, "I don't think I'm actually at C2. I don't think at all. Maybe my writing and reading skills, but not my speaking skills at all." For one of the forum response tasks, students were asked to discuss their expectations and intentions for target language (TL) use inside and outside the classroom, and whether their own connection with the TL (either as L1 or Lx) influenced their intentions. Claire's response suggests how her own experiences were strongly influencing her expectations for her future students:

> I have concerns that students will be reluctant to converse in the TL. From experience, I sometimes felt anxious answering questions in the TL as I didn't want to get the answer wrong. Therefore, I want to create an environment where students feel confident enough to have a go and make mistakes. Although it can be daunting speaking in the TL, I know this is an incredibly important part of language acquisition.

During the first set of interviews before participants had been assigned to schools for their first language teaching practicums (placements), we asked

participants about their expectations and how they felt about teaching a class. Claire commented:

> I'm excited, but I know I really need to improve. I could obviously do it if I had to. I think I could teach the younger year levels … But in terms of where I want to be, I don't think I'm where I want to be yet … That's why I wanted to take maybe a gap year to go live in Germany for a bit, work there, then come back and be a teacher.

When we sought to understand what may have been driving the sense of self-doubt and feelings of "illegitimacy," it was evident that Claire tended to default to comparing her language proficiency to an L1 speaker of German ("native speaker"). When asked to explain more about what she felt was lacking in her language learning experience, she reflected on her experience during a brief study abroad and what she felt were things she struggled with:

> Speaking strategies, I feel like they didn't teach that as well. I feel like when I went to Germany I struggled sounding like having those phrases in there that make you sound like a native speaker. I sounded a bit not native, if you know what I mean?

As can be gathered from these reflections, and despite the obvious academic success Claire had achieved, the lack of confidence and feelings of being an "inauthentic" speaker of German was a recurring theme in Claire's discussion. Of note was one occasion where she reacted against the positioning of her as an authentic German speaker in a university course. As Claire recounts:

> I did this culture class once, and the teacher was only talking in German the whole time and the stuff was incredibly hard. It was about German literature. And I was lost. I had no idea what was going on… They didn't scaffold it at all, it was just above me. I felt really anxious going to the class, honestly. Because he'd ask me questions and I'd just be like, "I don't know." Yeah, it was very difficult.

Even though in this situation her university tutor was positioning her as an authentic and capable German speaker, she had a negative reaction to this positioning as though she doubted her own ability, i.e., her own legitimacy as a speaker of German (Creese et al., 2014). Through this reflection on a past experience, Claire referenced her own approach to how she intended to position students in her future classes. Although she acknowledged the importance of maximizing the use of target language in the classroom, Claire rejected the idea of trying to only use the target language, commenting that:

> I don't think talking directly to the students only in German is beneficial. I don't think my high school teachers did that, but I know in university a couple of my teachers did that and it made me feel like the content was just way too hard.

Though, at the very early stages of her teaching career, Claire demonstrated reflective engagement with the psychological aspects and impacts of language teaching on students, and how rather than just drawing on her own positive and negative experiences, she was considering possible pedagogical approaches (i.e., scaffolding target language use) to ensure her students did not also suffer from the anxiety she experienced.

Reflexive Positioning and Agency as an ECLT

During the interviews that were done after these PSLTs had graduated and had accumulated some classroom experience to reflect on, we asked them about their approaches to encouraging students to actively use the target language. Claire summed up her plan as follows:

> I definitely think not correcting them every time is a good thing to do. And just focusing on meaning rather than form is a good idea as well … definitely not correcting them. I think that downs their spirits kind of, because then when they talk they're just like, "Oh I'm just going to get it all wrong." I know sometimes in my uni classes I just felt so out of my depth and not comfortable, and anxious to respond to questions. I don't want that for my classroom. I want the kids to be really, really comfortable in talking and making mistakes and show them that I can make mistakes as well.

We see here a shift in Claire's confidence in her language ability and an acceptance that "making mistakes" is a natural part of language learning. Through reflecting on her negative university experiences and actively positioning herself as a lifelong learner who also "makes mistakes," she expressed her agency and claimed ownership as a legitimate speaker (and teacher) of German. This was something that gradually happened during her study abroad time in German, as remarked upon here:

> I know that when I first went to Germany for those two weeks, at the start I was very hesitant to use it. I knew it was there, but I was scared to just actually say it. Then as time went along I was like, "You know what? If I get it wrong, it's fine. It doesn't matter." Then I started to use it a bit more.

This questioning of what it means to be an authentic speaker of a language continued when she considered how she herself engaged with speakers of other languages in Australia:

> Yeah, I'm a perfectionist. I didn't want to get it wrong. But then I just realized, people, like EAL [English as an additional language] students come here and

> they don't say everything correctly, but we still understand what they're saying. It's fine to not sound like a native speaker.

This is also evident in some shift in her thinking of "native speaker" as the ideal model and truly legitimate languages teacher. As she noted when discussing students' reactions to being taught by L1 versus L2 teachers of a language:

> I think non-native speakers understand what it's like to learn a foreign language, and I really do believe that. I feel like sometimes my native teachers, they don't really get it. Whereas me as a non-native speaker, I can understand why the kids are getting certain things wrong, because I was there as well.

This shift in thinking was also driven by the insights gained from an independent research project Claire completed as part of her education degree. She chose the topic of the "native-speaker/non-native speaker" dichotomy and from this research she was able to reflect on her own assumptions, as well as ones her students may hold. She explained how she was critically questioning these by saying:

> I definitely think that students would have that perception that maybe native teachers know more. I say it like that because they're native speakers, they must know more. They must be better teachers inherently, but obviously from what I've researched and also being a non-native speaker myself I know that's not true. I think native teachers and non-native teachers both have things to give, both have benefits and disadvantages as well.

Considering Claire's initial thoughts on her own feelings of not being a legitimate speaker and teacher of German and her reference to "native-speaker" model as her benchmark and aspiration, it is evident that over time this thinking has shifted to feelings of authenticity and confidence. Rather than remaining bound to those initial doubts and anxiety of "making mistakes" she has made agentic choices to draw on research and the positive examples in society to take ownership of being an L2 speaker and elevate its positives. This is also evident in her approach to teaching in which she draws on her negative experiences to inform how she aims to ensure her students do not go through similar experiences.

Discussion

While we have only been able to present some excerpts from the large volume of rich data that we have collected through our interviews and forum responses from Claire, the account of her journey to becoming a languages teacher reveals

important interconnections between agency and learning in the life course, and about the ecological conditions under which Claire has been able to achieve a degree of agency. Viewed as an interconnected series of past experiences, present actions, and future aspirations (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), Claire's narrative encapsulates this trajectory as she transitioned from a novice language learner to an aspiring languages teacher. With her previous limited use of German outside of classroom learning, she initially grappled with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt regarding her language proficiency. Her anxiety over feelings of inauthenticity (Creese et al., 2014) as a speaker of German seemed to be borne from a constant deference to the "native speaker" norm as ideal model. Just as those within the field of English language teaching have slowly recognized the harm that this centering of L1 users of English perpetuates, there is a need to apply the same critique of how other languages privilege certain groups. This echoes related research which argues that "languages teachers' identities are shaped by the normative terms and conditions of an understanding of languages and languages education that is rooted in parochial and monolingual norms and behaviours" (Weinmann & Arber, 2017, p. 178). In Claire's case, she overcame this apprehension through agentic choices to develop her fluency and sense of security in using the language in unstructured ways. This iterative process of reflection and action exemplifies the temporally embedded nature of agency, wherein past experiences inform present actions and future aspirations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

The anticipatory nature of agency in initial teacher education was also evident in Claire's proactive approach to addressing perceived shortcomings and preparing for future challenges. As argued by Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2015), teacher education programs should cultivate anticipatory agency by providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to critically reflect on their identities and aspirations as educators. In Claire's case, her transition from self-doubt to confidence as a languages teacher is marked by deliberate efforts to enhance her language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge.

Throughout her pre-service education, Claire also actively sought out opportunities for professional learning and self-improvement, reflecting a forward-looking orientation toward agency. Her engagement in independent research projects and participation in language immersion experiences signify a proactive stance toward anticipating and addressing the future demands of being a languages teacher. This anticipatory agency is crucial in preparing pre-service teachers like Claire to navigate the complexities of the language teaching

profession and contribute meaningfully to educational contexts characterized by linguistic diversity and cultural pluralism (Lanvers et al., 2021). The trajectory of agency development outlined here also reiterates the theorization of agency as something "achieved rather than being solely about the capacity of actors" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 25). The implication of this, however, is that the contextual factors that may act to impede individuals from achieving higher levels of agentic capacity need to be understood and addressed. For teacher educators, this reinforces the value of encouraging self-reflection and engagement with ideas that promote productive outcomes from this reflection. For mentors and school leaders who are tasked with supporting pre-service and early career languages teachers, modeling these processes and encouraging space and time for critical reflection and discussion can create a supportive context for positive agency outcomes. As Davies (2007, p. 329) emphasizes, "the taking up of agentic lines of action depends on whether or not the individual person has available to him or her the knowledge resources to recognize the choices that are available and to carry through the line of action chosen."

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the development and enactment of languages teacher agency among pre-service and early career teachers, particularly in the Australian context. Through a longitudinal examination of Claire's journey as a pre-service teacher of German, we have observed the interplay between past experiences, present actions, and future aspirations in shaping her agency. The findings underscore the anticipatory nature of agency in initial teacher education and highlight the importance of reflexivity, positioning, and authenticity in navigating the complexities of language teaching. By critically engaging with normative discourses and embracing diverse perspectives, languages teachers can assert their identities and promote inclusive pedagogical practices.

We also aimed to not only explore languages teacher agency but also to prompt incidents of reflection on one's agency and what results from this. The findings provide a means to inform what might be possible within languages teacher pre-service education if agency as a concept is elevated within ITE. It also highlights the potential for mentoring in schools and ongoing professional development to support teachers in their initial and ongoing careers in language

teaching. In summary, we emphasize the importance of not only analyzing how languages teachers respond to situations, but also exploring how pre-service and early career languages teachers can actively shape and influence situations through access to agentic positioning.

References

Australian Government (2019). *Australian early development census: Language diversity and the AEDC*. https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/language-diversity-and-the-aedc-2015.

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Bonar, G., Fielding, R., & Wang, M. (2024). Exploring pre-service language teacher identities using Q methodology. In N. Fraschini, A. Lundberg, & R. Aliani (Eds.), *Advancing language research through Q methodology (pp. 25–43)*. Multilingual Matters.

Bonar, G., Wang, M., & Fielding, R. (2022). Pre-service language teachers' multilingual identities—linking understandings of intercultural language learning with evolving teacher identity. In R. Fielding (Ed.), *Multilingualism, identity and interculturality in education* (pp. 139–57). Springer.

Clyne, M. (2008). The monolingual mindset as an impediment to the development of plurilingual potential in Australia. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, *2*(3), 347–66. https://doi.org/10.1558/sols.v2i3.347.

Council of Europe (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors*: Council of Europe. Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989.

Creese, A., Blackledge, A., & Takhi, J. K. (2014). The ideal "native speaker" teacher: Negotiating authenticity and legitimacy in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, *98*(4), 937–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12148.

Cross, R. (2010). Language teaching as sociocultural activity: Rethinking language teacher practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(3), 434–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01058.x.

Davies, B. (2007). Agency as a form of discursive practice: A classroom scene observed. In L. Barton (Ed.), *Education and society: 25 years of the British Journal of Sociology of Education* (pp. 316–39). Routledge.

Davies, B. (2010). The implications for qualitative research methodology of the struggle between the individualised subject of phenomenology and the emergent multiplicities of the poststructuralist subject: The problem of agency. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, *1*(1), 54–68. https://doi.org/10.7577/rerm.171.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2018). Why the dichotomy "L1 versus LX user" is better than "native versus non-native speaker". *Applied Linguistics*, *39*(2), 236–40. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw055.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, *10*, 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001.

Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.) (2019). *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency*. Multilingual Matters.

Lanvers, U., Thompson, A. S., & East, M. (Eds.) (2021). *Language learning in Anglophone countries: Challenges, practices, ways forward*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56654-8.

Mason, S. (2010). Language teacher: To be or not to be. *Babel*, *45*(1), 14–21.

Mason, S., & Matas, C. P. (2015). Teacher attrition and retention research in Australia: Towards a new theoretical framework. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(11): 45–66. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n11.3.

Piller, I. (2016). *Linguistic diversity and social justice: An introduction to applied sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Porter, A., Myles, F., Tellier, A., & Holmes, B. (2020). Supporting foreign languages in an Anglophone world: Implementation challenges in English primary schools. *Language Teaching for Young Learners*, *2*(2), 213–39. https://doi.org/10.1075/ltyl.19013.por.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Reagan, T. G., & Osborn, T. A. (2021). *World language education as critical pedagogy: The promise of social justice*. Routledge.

Reeves, J. (2022). Understanding language teacher agency. In K. Sadeghi, & F. Ghaderi (Eds.), *Theory and practice in second language teacher identity: Researching, theorising and enacting* (pp. 75–88). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13161-5_6.

Ruohotie-Lyhty, M., & Moate, J. (2015). Proactive and reactive dimensions of life-course agency: Mapping student teachers' language learning experiences. *Language and Education*, *29*(1), 46–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2014.927884.

Scarino, A. (2014). Situating the challenges in current languages education policy in Australia—unlearning monolingualism. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *11*(3), 289–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2014.921176.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.

Sullivan, A., Johnson, B., & Simons, M. (Eds.) (2019). *Attracting and keeping the best teachers: Issues and opportunities*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8621-3.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (Andy) (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108916943.

Turner, M. (2018). Teacher legitimisation through language(s) use: Towards a framework for language teacher education. *The Language Learning Journal*, *46*(4), 430–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2016.1172329.

Weinmann, M., & Arber, R. (2017). Orientating multilingualism: Navigating languages teacher identities. *Curriculum Perspectives*, *37*(2), 173–9. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-017-0028-4.

White, C. J. (2018). Language teacher agency. In S. Mercer, & A. Kostoulas (Eds.), *Language teacher psychology* (pp. 196–210). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783099467.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Zembylas, M. (2003). Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective. *Teachers and Teaching*, *9*(3), 213–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600309378.

3

The Development of Collective Agency among Language Teachers in a Professional Community

Jian Tao and Xuesong (Andy) Gao

Introduction

Language teachers are required to respond to a variety of challenges, such as shifting political ideologies and changing socio-economic conditions at the macro-contextual level, which lead to the adoption of new languages, new curricula, and new pedagogical approaches in different educational systems. These changes often require language teachers to develop new knowledge and pedagogical practices, which can imply that their well-honed teaching practices are not valued and they need to go through a process of deskilling. For instance, language teachers may feel disadvantaged when undertaking teaching tasks beyond their expertise (e.g., teaching content and language integrated language instruction classes) in contexts such as Vietnam where English is promoted as a medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools (Nguyet et al., 2024). Likewise, as university instructors of languages other than English (LOTE) are expected to conduct and publish research as part of their tenure requirements, they also face significant challenges in fulfilling the research-related requirements. They may find academic publishing challenging because publications focusing on the English language dominate the venues for academic publishing and there are limited opportunities to publish LOTE-related research in international and domestic journals (Guo, Sit & Bao, 2020). In response to these challenges, language teachers must become fully empowered agents in control of their professional practice and development (Gao & Yang, 2023). Consequently, the agency of language teachers has received considerable attention in recent research (e.g., Tao & Gao, 2021; Tao, Xu & Gao, 2024).

A variety of perspectives have been used to conceptualize the notion of agency (Tao & Gao, 2021). In this chapter, we adopt an ecological perspective to theorize agency as something "achieved and not as merely a capacity or possession of the individual" (Priestley et al., 2012, p. 197). This ecological perspective on teacher agency contends that the enactment of teacher agency requires not only capability and contextual resources, but also a recognition of the "contingencies of the environment within which such action occurs" (p. 196). Whilst agency is often associated with individuals, the ecological perspective on teacher agency also emphasizes that agency is shared among individuals in a given community or social group. For this reason, the notion of collective agency also warrants scholarly attention. In this chapter, we advance this notion of collective agency for language teachers' professional growth by examining and interpreting the accounts of a group of language teachers in relation to their professional practice in a Chinese university.

Literature Review

Like the concept of agency, the notion of collective agency is also rooted in multiple theoretical perspectives (Tao & Gao, 2021). For example, social cognitive theory puts forth a view of collective agency as one of the modes of human agency, emphasizing the common belief of a group of people in their capability as an essential factor in their achievement of their goals (Bandura, 2006). Collective agency is thus closely related to people's self-efficacy belief in collective power which pools their understandings, aspirations, and actions together. Building upon Vygotskian view on the distributed nature of human cognition, socio-cultural theory re-defines the unity of analysis of collective agency at the group rather than the individual level, and conceptualizes collective agency as people doing things together using mediation (Lasky, 2005). Such a view highlights groups of people engaging in concerted actions to shape and reshape the contextual structures surrounding them. Despite their differences, these conceptualizations of collective agency all point to the importance of commonalities among individuals, including their shared interests, competences, beliefs, and actions. Building on this, the more recent ecological perspective brings identity to the fore as an indispensable element of agency (Etelapelto et al., 2013). This perspective suggests that collective agency is more than mere collaboration; rather, it is intertwined with collective identity, including "shared commitments, identifications, and group memberships"

(Hokka et al., 2017, p. 38). Therefore, collective agency is defined at the level of professional communities, enabling individuals to make agentic choices and take agentic actions in ways that change their work practices and professional identities (Hokka et al., 2017). This ecological perspective of collective agency will be adopted in this study in order to examine a multilingual research team—an institutional unit which aims to form a professional community among teachers specialized in different languages.

Research on collective agency has discussed various forms of collective agency and related factors (e.g., Fu & Clark, 2022; Hokka et al., 2017; Spicer, 2011; Tran, 2019). Collective agency has primarily been examined through professional collaboration. In a study by Spicer (2011), collective agency was enacted when a group of teachers engaged in collaborative actions to transform institutionally defined artifacts into collectively mediated tools for their teaching practice, reflecting a growing sense of confidence and ownership of teaching ideas. Collective agency has also been manifested as teachers showing vulnerability and engaging in collective reflection in the face of Covid-19, suggesting the importance of having a clearly defined common goal (Fu & Clarke, 2022). In a different context where educational reforms prioritize English as the most important foreign language, Tran's (2019) study examines how foreign language teachers reacted as a group to the forced transition to teaching English from teaching other languages (e.g., French) in Vietnamese universities. Their collective agency was manifested as the building of connections with their peers, who specialized in the same languages, to maintain their bond and reconcile themselves to increasingly disadvantageous positions due to the rise of English as the dominant foreign language in Vietnamese universities. Hokka et al. (2017) explicitly emphasize how crucial it is to build trust and group affinity when developing collective agency: only when language teachers get to know and trust each other can they initiate collaboration and act upon shared issues. Although they deal with different settings, the aforementioned studies all conclude that collective agency can be achieved when language teachers take collective or collaborative action to provide each other with intellectual and emotional support they need when facing external challenges such as those introduced by policy changes.

Previous research has acknowledged the intertwined relationship between agency and identity (e.g., Tao & Gao, 2017). For example, language teachers' identity commitments have been proven to affect their agentic choices in a way that directs their career path (Tao & Gao, 2017); in other words, agency is exercised to align with one's professional identity. On the other hand, agency can

be enacted to modify or maintain one's professional identity; this is manifested through gaining group membership and having one's participation recognized by other group members (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). Although most of the studies in the literature focus on individual identity and agency, we argue that collective agency cannot be fully understood without considering collective identity (Etelapelto et al., 2013).

In this study, the term "collective identity" is used in relation to a group of language teachers and researchers and thus inevitably entails their own professional identity. Therefore, collective identity has a twofold meaning: it refers to the group members' professional identity while simultaneously including their group affinity, membership, or sense of belonging. Nevertheless, we cannot assume the existence of a professional community based on an institutionally defined research group in which the teachers gain membership based on their institutional affiliation. Thus we resort to the theorization of a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998) to examine this professional community in the making and their collective identity. According to the CoP theory, a professional community is built upon the synergy of three dimensions: a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998). People must keep learning at the center and push the development of the community in order to establish a joint enterprise; they also need to know and trust in others' abilities in order to practice mutual engagement (e.g., the giving and receiving of help). In addition, they need to be conscious of the language and tools of the community, and how they develop and affect their practices (Wenger, 1998, 2000). These three dimensions informed the data analysis we conducted to understand the building of this community, together with the resultant collective identity and agency. The study thus addresses the following research question: How did collective agency emerge and develop in the studied professional community?

Methodology

The Research Context and the Participants

This research was conducted in a Chinese university as the Chinese government renews its investment in LOTE education for its "Belt and Road" initiative, which results in a growing number of LOTE teachers in universities (Gao & Zheng, 2019). We also take into account the institutional context that the focal university, like many other top universities in China, strengthened teacher appraisal in the

newly introduced "promote-or-leave" academic personnel system similar to tenure systems in universities in the West (Guo et al., 2020). The faculty members, including English and LOTE teachers, are required to publish in order to secure their jobs. Under such national and institutional contexts, the paper reports on a case study of a newly established research group of language teachers who were also researchers facing stringent research performance exercises in the focal university. The group was established in June 2018 and eight teachers teaching different languages joined voluntarily to conduct collaborative research. The research group was rather active in organizing and participating in a variety of group activities (see Table 3.1). That is, they produced reports about recent research projects and regularly made research plans in group meetings; they also took turns to chair seminars by sharing their research and learning about new theories and research methods. Beyond these group activities, they joined talks given by external speakers, attended conferences together, and also organized an international conference. It is worth noting that Wang, the group leader, showed strong leadership and played a critical role in organizing these activities.

The research group consisted of eight teachers who taught English, Japanese, and French, and had PhD training in different research areas (see Table 3.2). Their main commonality was their shared passion for research and their interest

Table 3.1 Group Activities from June 2018 to December 2019

Activity type	Group meetings	Seminars/ workshops	External speakers' presentations	Conference attendance	Organization of international conference
Number	3	3	3	3	1

Table 3.2 The Participants

Pseudonym	Specialized language	Educational background (PhD)	Articulations of academic identity/pursuit
Zhao	English	English language education	To do the research I like.
Qian	English	Business studies	I hope to do something that will be useful to my and others' practices, or have [important] implications.
Sun	French	French linguistics	I hope to have a clearer area to explore with my interest.
Li	English	Applied linguistics	To do something to I identify with, and something I find meaningful.

Pseudonym	Specialized language	Educational background (PhD)	Articulations of academic identity/pursuit
Zhou	Japanese	Japanese language and culture	To be a good educator.
Wu	English	Intercultural communication	I want to do something of my own within the topic of intercultural communication.
Zheng	English	English language education	To do meaningful research.
Wang	English	Learning science	To integrate my expertise with teaching and research.

in pursuing academic careers, which may have motivated them to join the group voluntarily. In particular, their articulations of academic identity reveal that they shared a commitment to working on topics that they found interesting, meaningful, and valuable, which may have contributed to their development of a joint enterprise.

Data Collection and Analysis

This is a longitudinal qualitative case study, using multiple data sources. Consent forms were obtained from the group leader and all participating group members prior to the data collection. The first author conducted participant observation by participating in and also taking field notes on the group's activities and some of their informal interactions for a period of one and half years. By the end of the observation period, a questionnaire and follow-up interviews were conducted in February 2020. The questionnaire was designed to collect the biographical information of the participants and their interactions with other group members, which helped customize the interview questions for each participant. The follow-up interviews were then conducted to allow the participants to elaborate on their interactions with each member of the group, with a focus on their agentic choices and actions, and also on the potential interplay between their collective identity and their own professional identity. Each interview lasted around one to one and a half hours, and was transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Due to space limitations, this chapter will focus on reporting the results of the analysis of the interview data. To understand the community-building within the group and their collective identity, we draw on the concepts of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire from Wenger's (1998) theorization of

CoP to analyze the data through an iterative process. Specifically, the three concepts worked as axial codes to categorize the data, which were then re-analyzed through open coding and analytic coding to reveal specific manifestations (Cohen et al., 2002). The ecological perspective was also adopted to analyze the group members' agentic efforts, which exerted influences on their work practices and professional identities (Etelapelto et al., 2013). Following a bottom-up coding procedure, content analysis was conducted to yield three themes (i.e., collaboration, consultation, and co-regulation). The observation and questionnaire data were primarily used to contextualize our interpretation of the interview data.

Findings

Transforming an Institutionally Defined Group into a Professional Community

Analysis of the data reveals that collective agency starts with individual agency during the transformation of an institutionally defined group into a professional community with which the members identify. The participants, especially the team leader, exercised agency in developing a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire; this contributed to their collective identity and also facilitated the emergence of collective agency.

Wang, the team leader, showed strong leadership in developing a joint enterprise at the academic and managerial levels. She organized a series of group activities with the aim of building a professional community in which the members "appreciate each other's research." The following extract showcases how she organized a range of intra- and inter-group activities in order to achieve this:

> [1] The main and most important purpose is to build a community. I hoped that we could all appreciate one another's research in this community. So, we organized seminars inviting some of the teachers to share their research, where we learned to understand and appreciate one another's research from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. At the same time, I hoped that we could support one another and find something to explore together. I also invited world-class researchers or teams to keep us updated with their cutting-edge research and also developed connections with them. (Wang)

The above extract shows Wang's strong awareness of the need to keep learning at the core of the community. Wang's agentic efforts helped the members understand

each other's research, in terms of both their theoretical and methodological expertise, and eventually to identify with their joint enterprise: "something to explore together." Moreover, Wang's agentic efforts were concerned not only with the sense of community among the members but also with the positioning of the group in the broader academic context. This explains why she endeavored to build connections with "world-class researchers or teams" by inviting external speakers, thus encouraging the development of the community (Wenger, 2000). It should be noted that a joint enterprise cannot be developed by the leader's individual efforts alone. The observation notes also indicate that the other members were all proactive in sharing their research expertise and outlining the progress they had made. For example, Zheng, Wu, and Zhao presented their working paper in seminars, while Wang and Li introduced the research methods they specialized in through workshops.

Due to their continued participation in collective activities, the participants were able to learn about one another's research and believe in one another's research capabilities, which allowed for mutual engagement. All participants confirmed that they had good knowledge of other members' research, which was mainly enabled through top-down activities:

> [2] I had a general understanding of other members' research, because we talked about our own research in seminars. (Wu)

> [3] We often had group meetings where we reported what kind of research we were doing. So I got to know [the others'] research. (Zhou)

The extracts above suggest that the participants continually developed their relational knowledge, including their knowledge on one another's research expertise and recent projects. Their relational knowledge made it possible for them to seek help and to support others within the community. Moreover, their continued participation not only helped them become familiar with other members' research, but also helped to build trust in one another's abilities, which allowed them to start collaborative projects when invited to. For example, Qian, a French teacher, received an invitation from her English colleague, Zhao, to collaborate on a multilingual project:

> [4] I had a firm belief in Zhao's capability as a researcher. He could publish three SSCI-index papers in a year. I believed that I could learn a lot from working with him, which I was glad to do. (Qian)

The extract above demonstrates Qian's knowledge of the other group member's academic performance, to the extent that she could remember Zhao's publication record over the previous year. This kind of knowledge helped to build trust

between Qian and Zhao, who believed that they were capable of contributing to the enterprise together through mutual engagement, for example, by conducting multilingual research (see extracts [8] and [9]).

The participants also developed a shared repertoire that enabled them to have more intellectual exchanges at a deeper level. For example, an array of applied linguistics theories emerged as part of their shared repertoire. The following extract illustrates how theories were circulated among the members and how they emerged as part of their shared repertoire. Sun, an English teacher, conducted a study using language policy theory and shared about it at a group meeting. In turn, this caught the interest of the other members. As shown in the following narrative, she was subsequently approached by Qian and Zhou to discuss the applicability of the theory in different language settings, such as Japanese and French companies:

> [5] She (Zhou) came to me because I was writing a paper on language management in the context of a Spanish bank. She showed great interest in the paper and read [it] before publication … Qian and Zhou asked me about the language management theory and we discussed its potential application into their fields of [Japanese and French], which made research collaboration possible. (Sun)

The extract above demonstrates the circulation of theories, in this case language policy theory, through group activities. These theories were then integrated into the language or shared repertoire of the community. It should be noted that the theories were further utilized by the participants for various purposes. That is, Zhou used the language policy theory when supervising an undergraduate student's thesis exploring language management at a Japanese bank, and later sought to co-author a paper with Sun (see extracts [10] and [11]). Clearly, the group's shared repertoire was critical to developing a joint enterprise through which collective agency was likely to emerge.

With all their agentic efforts, the participants transformed the institutionally defined group into a professional community with which they began to identify. Four participants—Zhao, Wu, Sun, and Zhou—explicitly articulated their membership. For example, Wu talked about collective identity "as a team" based on participation in the regular group activities. Moreover, she mentioned that they conducted research projects and supported each other, which are manifestations of collective agency:

> [6] The group members like having meetings and interact a lot, which I like too. It will be good to do research projects as a team, since an individual's capability is limited. So we need to support each other. (Wu)

While collective identity may be based on collective experiences, Sun also described her perception of collective identity as "a sense of belonging" based on the commonalities of their "research interests" and "directions," as a more explicit statement about the elements of a joint enterprise and mutual engagement:

> [7] Since we've had this group, I seem to have a sense of belonging. That is, I belong to a team. At least I know there is a group of people with similar research interests, creating a huge space for intellectual exchange … I also know that we are doing things in the same directions, including attending conferences together or having internal meetings. (Sun)

The extracts above illuminate the process of transforming an institutionally defined group into a professional community, which in turn contributes to the emergence of collective identity and agency. The process began with individual initiatives and involved individual agency in the development of a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire, which were mediated by a series of activities at the group level. The formation of the professional community then contributed to the participants' collective identity through their gaining group membership, and in turn this collective identity facilitated the emergence of collective agency. Therefore, this was also a process of moving from individual agency toward collective agency, through the participants' development of an emerging collective identity.

Exercising Collective Agency in the Professional Community

By building upon the formation of the community and their continued participation in it, the participants were able to exercise collective agency at the intellectual and emotional levels. That is, their collective agency was manifested in the agentic actions of conducting research collaboration and consultation, and co-regulating one another's professional activities.

The participants all forged potential or ongoing research collaboration relationships with other group members. In particular, the data from the questionnaire revealed that seven of the eight participants had established multiple collaborative relationships with different group members, indicating a high level of mutual engagement (see Figure 3.1). For example, Zhao conducted two collaborative projects: one with Qian and Zhou, and the other with Wang. Zhao, who had expertise in narrative approaches to identity, initiated a narrative study with teachers of French (Qian) and Japanese (Zhou) in the community. The following explanations by Zhao and Qian illustrate how they



Figure 3.1 The collaborative relationships among the participants.

enacted collective agency by transforming linguistic barriers into resources through collaboration:

> [8] I was interested in doing multilingual research. I contacted Qian and Zhou because they teach French and Japanese. I wanted to do a narrative study of our three [distinct] language learning experiences as teachers … Being part of the team does not make me feel alone. (Zhao)

> [9] I am very interested in the topic and believe that we will create a very meaningful paper, which may help improve the marginalisation of small language teachers[1] like us … The collaboration stemmed from a conference that we attended together. After the conference, [Zhao] came to me and said that we could work on a paper. Later, we held a research seminar in which Zhao shared our research idea. Then Zhou wanted to join us; the three of us started to work on a paper … I feel [as though I'm] being mentored and [working on] a team in which we support one another. (Qian)

The extracts above are indicative of the participants' collective agency in conducting multilingual research involving members who taught different

[1] Small language teachers refer to LOTE teachers in the local discourse, due to the small scale compared to English.

languages. Indeed, Zhao, Qian, and Zhou were able to offer different kinds of input to the project due to their linguistic expertise in different languages. The collective agency the participants manifested in this research collaboration may have been affected by their collective identity as "being part of the team," sharing similar research interests, and "supporting one another." Moreover, their collective agency when collaborating on research was also mediated by a series of collective activities, such as conference attendance and group seminars, which provided further opportunities for ongoing intellectual exchange.

The collective agency of the participants was also manifested as providing complementary research input and resources through collaboration. That is, they divided the labor involved in a project, and took responsibility for the parts that they were most capable of managing. For example, Zhou, an experienced Japanese teacher, had an established relationship with Japanese companies that allowed her to access research sites to collect data. Inspired by Sun and Wang's study on the language policies of multinational corporations, Zhou and her student collected relevant data on the same topic from a Japanese bank but was concerned about her and her student's academic writing skills. With limited experience of writing English for publication, she initiated a collaborative relationship with Sun, who was an experienced English teacher and had previously performed research on the topic:

> [10] I approached Sun for the data processing part. Once I had some preliminary findings, I wanted to refine the data analysis and see where it could be published … Because we are in a team where everyone gets along well with others … I felt [as though I had] a more multilingual identity. I had been confined to the Japanese field, and then I realized that research should not have linguistic boundaries. (Zhou)

> [11] [Zhou] came to me because she had the data and wanted to put it into a publishable paper. At that stage, she had difficulty writing in English, and sought to collaborate with me. Since she already had the interview data, I could do the data analysis—it was easier than starting from scratch. The group was offering a seed fund at that time, for which we made a proposal and applied … I had actually thought that doing research was a lonely thing and [one had to rely on oneself]. (Sun)

As the extracts above show, Zhou and Sun were both clear about one another's strengths and weaknesses. Sun appreciated the data that Zhou collected, and while Zhou felt less capable of analyzing the data and writing up the paper, Sun felt capable of doing so. Their exercise of collective agency in this

research collaboration may have been affected by their collective identity as being "on a team" or having a sense of belonging, but it also contributed to the development of their professional identity. For example, Zhou identified herself as more of a multilingual researcher, while Sun seemed to have a shifting conception of research. Moreover, their exercise of collective agency in initiating the collaboration was also mediated by resources such as the seed fund that facilitated their collaborative efforts.

As the data indicate, the group's manifestation of collective agency was not only confined to collaboration but also included various kinds of intellectual support in informal interactions among members. In this way, collective agency was achieved when the members knew whom to seek help from in pursuit of their academic aspirations. For example, as a dedicated teacher and a researcher interested in intercultural communication, Wu recalled her PhD application experiences and was able to find the best person for consultation:

> [12] I often sought help from her [Wang] for methodological issues. I was writing a PhD proposal, got stuck in the middle, and had no idea of how to continue the proposal. I would go to her for help. (Wu)

It should be noted that Wang was a productive researcher with the most experience in supervision among the group, and also shared similar research interests (e.g., intercultural communication) with Wu. Therefore, Wang was deemed the ideal person to ask for help, and did offer Wu support in response. The questionnaire data reveal that this kind of consultation occurred two to three times a month in private settings beyond their group activities. In this case, collective agency was manifested in Wu's agentic act of finding the ideal person to ask for help and receiving generous support in response.

Importantly, the participants' collective agency was also manifested in their efforts to co-regulate one another's activities, especially when collaborating. The following extract illustrates some of the daily interactions between Sun and Wang, who were working on a paper together:

> [13] We interacted a lot recently because we were doing a paper. Wang urged me to speed up my writing every day, asking about my writing progress. We were finishing up a manuscript. She often sent me reminders in that period of time, and sometimes with revision ideas … If I had worked alone, my work efficiency would be much lower. (Sun)

Aside from intellectual exchange, Sun also emphasized affective support through co-regulating each other's activities, in this example by Wang inquiring about research progress and sending regular reminders, and its impact on boosting

"work efficiency." Such co-regulation efforts helped the pair to become more productive in terms of research publications. That is, they produced two research papers in quality journals in two years, which helped Sun to secure tenure at the university. Other participants also reported co-regulation in their collaborative efforts, which manifested as feeling "less lazy" (Li) and "compelled to follow the research plan or schedule" (Qian).

Furthermore, the expression of the participants' collective agency as co-regulation was also enacted among those who were not engaged in collaboration. That is, they would encourage others but also feel encouraged within the co-regulatory network of the community as a whole. For example, the following narratives from Wang and Wu demonstrate the emergence of co-regulatory power from the community.

> [14] We all feel uplifted and have created an environment which encourages us to catch up with one another. When we hear about the others' publications, we sincerely congratulate each other but also feel a bit of pressure. I often heard this from Zhao, who said: "You guys have lots of publications, I need to hurry up." It is a virtuous circle … We do not have negative emotions and we are all positive, because we have clear goals and support one another in this community. (Wang)

> [15] Zhao often urges us to write quickly. (Wu)

As the group leader, Wang was able to provide an overview of the community, stating that the members felt the "pressure" to "catch up with one another" in "a virtuous circle," indicating the enactment of collective agency in building a co-regulatory network. Furthermore, both Wang and Wu described their informal interactions with Zhao, who felt encouraged by the other members but also encouraged them. This kind of collective agency may have been affected by their collective identity, which gave them a sense that they were members of a community with "clear goals," or a joint enterprise.

Altogether, the extracts above suggest the enactment of collective agency in different forms when the community exerted influence on them to engage in collaboration, consultation, and co-regulation. It is worth noting that the different manifestations of collective agency were present in both formal and informal settings and involved all members, regardless of whether or not they had collaborative relationships with each other. The prevalence of collective agency in the community influenced the members' professional practices, which may have been due to them sharing a collective identity based on a strong sense of community.

Discussion

The study draws on CoP theory (Wenger, 1998, 2000) and the ecological perspective of agency (Etelapelto et al., 2013) to examine the emergence of collective agency among a group of language teachers, alongside their collective identity. The findings are discussed below and split into four categories.

First, previous research has mainly examined the collective agency of language teachers when they are confronted with common challenges (e.g., Fu & Clark, 2022; Spicer, 2011; Tran, 2019). It appears that language teachers are assumed to pool their resources together and engage in collaborative action in order to resolve challenges, although trust and affinity have been proven to be pre-conditions for collective agency (Hokka et al., 2017). While this study focuses on a newly established research group of language teachers who joined the group voluntarily in pursuit of their academic aspirations, we do not assume that collective agency arises from an institutionally defined group or people merely sharing similar interests. In line with Hokka et al. (2017), our findings reveal that collective agency begins with individual agency, in this case through building a professional community and gaining membership of it. An institutionally defined group may provide opportunities for the members to engage in collective activities through which they may begin to identify with a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire, thus contributing to their collective identity and therefore making collective agency possible. In other words, collective agency is likely to emerge only when language teachers develop a sense of community and the community can exert influence on them.

Second, previous research has focused on collaboration as the primary manifestation of collective agency (Fu & Clark, 2022; Spicer, 2011; Tran, 2019). Our findings confirm this analysis, but also further identify different kinds of collaboration among language teachers who strive to become researchers. Collective agency may be achieved when language teachers are able to transform linguistic barriers into resources and provide unique and valuable input based on their distinct linguistic expertise, as the triple collaboration among Zhao, Qian, and Zhou shows. Collective agency may also be enacted when language teachers are able to mobilize their research expertise and resources and take charge of the part of a project which they are most capable of doing, for example, in the dual collaboration between Sun and Zhou. These two kinds of

collaboration may be especially applicable to multilingual teams of teachers. Beyond collaboration, which represents a more formal relationship, collective agency was also manifested in the act of finding the ideal group member to seek help from, and receiving a positive response from that member, in informal settings (e.g., Wu and Wang).

Third, previous research has also touched upon emotional support as an essential element of collective agency; it can help group members increase their confidence (Spicer, 2011), build language community bonds (Tran, 2019), and show and acknowledge vulnerability (Fu & Clark, 2022). Our study's findings further identify co-regulation as the affective element of collective agency. The findings suggest that members who collaborate are likely to co-regulate each other. Furthermore, when members have a strong sense of community, they are likely to engage with a broader co-regulatory network in which they may encourage and feel encouraged by other members. This kind of co-regulatory power may be transferred implicitly through their academic achievements (e.g., extract [14]) or explicitly through verbal exchanges (e.g., extract [15]) in the community.

Finally, we argue that collective agency consists of more than just collaboration or a group of people doing things together. While previous research described collective agency as people engaging in concerted actions (Lasky, 2005), the findings of our study further suggest that the development of collective agency is closely related to collective identity. Informed by the ecological perspective of agency (Etelapelto et al., 2013), our study reveals that the participants' collective identity, based on their sense of community or membership, pre-conditioned their agentic actions of initiating and sustaining collaboration, consultation, and co-regulation. Moreover, their collective efforts also exerted an influence on the development of their own professional identities, especially their academic identities (e.g., Sun and Zhou in extracts [10] and [11]).

Conclusion

This study is not without limitations. While the research was mainly based on retrospective interviews, we call for more longitudinal studies to further examine the emergence and development of collective agency at different stages and over a longer time period. Other data sources, such as focus group interviews and reflective journals, will need to be explored to understand perceptions of collective agency from different perspectives.

Nevertheless, these findings have important implications on how collective agency can be facilitated among language teachers in higher education. First, management teams in universities are advised to organize top-down collective activities on a regular basis, as these can provide language teachers with the space and time to get to know and trust one another. In turn, this enhanced sense of mutuality will be essential to their future collaborative efforts at both an intellectual and emotional level. Second, language teachers should not be segregated based on the languages they teach; instead, they should be given opportunities to engage in a continued dialogue with colleagues teaching other languages in order to identify joint enterprises and make complementary contributions using their own linguistic and research expertise; this is particularly important in today's multilingual world. Finally, based on the findings highlighting the influence of collective identity on collective agency, identity-coaching programs (Vähäsantanen et al., 2017) can be used to guide language teachers toward developing their collective identity as well as their individual professional identity, which in turn will facilitate the development of collective agency.

References

Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *1*(2), 164–80.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research Methods in Education*. Routledge.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, *10*, 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001.

Fu, G., & Clarke, A. (2022). The development and impact of teachers' collective agency during Covid-19: Insights from online classrooms in Canada and China. *Educational Review*, *74*(3), 664–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1997921.

Gao, X., & Yang, W. (2023). Multilingualism and language teacher education. *System*, *118*, 103127. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103127.

Gao, X., & Zheng, Y. (2019). Multilingualism and higher education in Greater China. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *40*(7), 555–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1571073.

Guo, Y., Sit, H., & Bao, M. (2020). Sustainable careers of teachers of languages other than English (LOTEs) for sustainable multilingualism in Chinese Universities. *Sustainability*, *12*(16), 6396. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166396.

Hökkä, P., Vähäsantanen, K., & Mahlakaarto, S. (2017). Teacher educators' collective professional agency and identity: Transforming marginality to strength. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *63*, 36–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.12.001.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*(8), 899–916. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003.

Nguyen, H. T. M., Nguyen, H. T. T., Gao, X., Hoang, T. H., & Starfield, S. (2024). Developing professional capacity for Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teaching in Vietnam: Tensions and responses. *Language and Education*, *38*(1), 118–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2023.2260374.

Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *42*(2), 191–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873x.2012.00588.x.

Ruohotie-Lyhty, M., & Moate, J. (2016). Who and how? Preservice teachers as active agents developing professional identities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *55*, 318–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.022.

Spicer, D. H. E. (2011). From artefact to tool: Teachers' collective agency in school reform. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, *6*(4), 359–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2011.614798.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2017). Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *63*, 346–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.010

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language Teacher Agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Tao, J., Xu, Y., & Gao, X. A. (2024). Teacher emotions and agency enactment in online teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *137*, 104389. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104389

Tran, H. (2019). Teacher agency in times of educational change: The case of transitioned teachers in Vietnam. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *20*(5), 544–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2018.1553912.

Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., Paloniemi, S., Herranen, S., & Eteläpelto, A. (2017). Professional learning and agency in an identity coaching programme. *Professional Development in Education*, *43*(4), 514–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2016.1231131.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, *7*(2), 225–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002.

4

Language Teacher Agency in a Transnational Telecollaborative Project between Türkiye and the United States

Babürhan Üzüm, Özgehan Uştuk, Bedrettin Yazan, Sultan Maviş, Serdar Şen, Sedat Akayoglu, and John Turnbull

Introduction

Becoming a teacher involves practicing agency to chart the contours of identity construction (Hiver & Whitehead, 2018; Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018) and associated emotions and investment in teaching practice (Benesch, 2018). Learning to teach and enacting their teacher identity both require teachers to practice agency which is always negotiated through and situated within the socio-political and socio-cultural contextual constraints (Priestley et al., 2015). Responding to recent calls for making teacher identity, agency, and emotions central principles of language teacher education (Üzüm et al., 2024a; Varghese et al., 2016), we designed this telecollaboration to explicitly support language teachers' identity work while engaging in an intercultural professional exchange. In this telecollaboration, our pedagogical purpose was to open up a discursive space for teacher candidates to construct their identity and understand their agency and emotions as language teachers.

Literature Review

In the last decade, with the extensive focus on language teacher identity as part of being and becoming teachers, scholars started attending to language teachers' agency which is inseparable from teacher identity work (Hiver & Whitehead, 2018; Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018). The current ecological theorization of teacher agency

in language education points to the complex nature of agency. Scholars with that approach view agency as a contextual, relational, and social construct whose negotiation and enactment depend on the intersection of macro-, meso-, and micro-level contextual parameters reflecting the competing ideologies, and the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Ustuk & Yazan, 2024). Recent research on language teacher agency has examined teachers' experiences in various contexts including, for example, responding to language-in-education policies (Dang et al., 2023; Le et al., 2021), collaborating with colleagues (Giles, 2018; Nguyen & Dang, 2021), engaging in emotion labor (Benesch, 2018; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Wolff & De Costa, 2017), engaging in translingual practices (Ishihara et al., 2018), constructing agentive teacher identities vis-a-vis race, gender, language, and culture (Lindahl & Yazan, 2019; Vitanova, 2018), and carving spaces and advocating for social justice (Leal & Crookes, 2018; Peña-Pincheira & De Costa, 2021; Üzüm et al., 2023).

This extant theoretical and empirical research tends to conclude with the implication that teacher education practices should include opportunities for teacher candidates (TCs) to reflect on their emergent teacher identity and agency as well as the corresponding emotional experience. However, investigating TCs' identity work in relation to their agency and emotions has been an issue due to TCs' lack of classroom teaching experience and opportunities, which foregrounded social constructivist pedagogies that rely on TCs' identities (Ustuk & Yazan, 2024). Relatedly, there is a need for further studies to address this empirical gap so that we can examine identity-oriented pedagogies to promote agency and emotions in teacher learning. With more empirical findings from unique settings, it will be possible to provide a clearer connection between identity and innovative teacher education models such as telecollaboration, which was found useful to systematically incorporate identity as an explicit goal in teacher learning (Üzüm et al., 2023). Therefore, heeding that implication as teacher educators and researchers of teacher education, we asserted agency to design an eight-week telecollaboration, a transnational and transcultural teacher-learning activity for teachers from Türkiye and Texas. Through that activity, embedded as a required component in teacher education course syllabi in both university programs, our goal was to provide TCs with discursive and experiential spaces to reflect on their identities as teachers of multilingual learners and associated agentive and emotional engagement in that identity work.

Telecollaboration (aka virtual intercultural exchange) is a technology-enhanced pedagogical strategy teachers and teacher educators use to create virtual spaces and bring together students from different geographical

locations. Using three widely implemented task types—"information exchange, comparisons and analysis, and collaboration" (Wu, 2022, p. 292)—these projects investigated students' language awareness, intercultural competence, motivation, critical engagement in social justice issues, instructional skills, and integration of technology (Ciftci & Savas, 2018). It has been adopted as an affordable alternative to study abroad experiences in teacher education programs and produced hundreds of exchange projects around the world. This body of research has expanded over the last few years and produced positive outcomes and pedagogical implications for teacher educators (Wu, 2022). While previous research focused on various issues in telecollaboration such as its instructional design, challenges and affordances, students' learning, and the pedagogical outcomes as a *product* of telecollaboration, there is still little research conducted on the *process* of telecollaboration, more specifically the nature of the language used in these exchanges. As students engage in telecollaborative tasks such as exchanging information, making comparisons, discussing critical issues in education, and analyzing cultural products (O'Dowd, 2016), they make discursive choices wittingly or unwittingly which may reflect their emerging identities and agencies in the translingual virtual space. Their discursive representations of themselves and their beliefs about various issues in education, as revealed in their linguistic choices, may be subtle, but could have a profound impact on how their narratives are interpreted by their peers in the exchange. For example, students may take responsibility for the information they convey in different ways by adopting various epistemic positions via lexical markers, grammatical markers, adjectives/adverbs, and pronouns (Üzüm et al., 2024b). In their discursive choices, they may communicate personal belief, certainty, doubt, (un)favorable opinion, (dis)agreement, and opposition, and also interpret the similar choices made by their peers in the virtual translingual contact zone (Canagarajah, 2013). These conversations may sometimes be challenging and unpack difficult conversations in critical education issues. Given its increasing use as a pedagogical strategy in teacher education, the telecollaborative discourse needs a close analysis to better understand how students discursively express themselves as they critically reflect on their identities, agencies, beliefs, and experiences in their cultural and educational context.

In this chapter, we draw data from the tasks that participating TCs completed individually and interactively and use an ecological perspective (Priestley et al., 2015) to examine TCs' "emergent agency" (Vitanova, 2018) or "agency in the making" (Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018) in this telecollaboration through participation in those learning tasks. Telecollaboration space is a unique

transnational one to examine agency because TCs need to explain their socio-political context to their peers and answer questions about their learning and teaching experiences which may not have been posed before. Therefore, we believe our study will contribute to the existing research by closely examining language teacher agency discursively constructed in a translingual and transnational space where contexts collide. Below we discuss our ecological perspective to teacher agency as our theoretical framework and proceed with describing methodological procedures.

Theoretical Framework

In the previous research literature, teacher agency has often been conceptualized as personal *capacity*, a quality that people possess to varying degrees and possible action they can take against certain structures (see Ahearn, 2001), but such a view did not account for the contextual affordances and restraints. Priestley et al. (2015) adopted an ecological approach in which both *individual capacity* and *contextual dimensions* were equally important and were in constant interplay. Adding context and temporality to such conceptualization, an ecological approach argued that "agency is rooted in past experience, oriented to the future and located in the contingencies of the present" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 20). Therefore, agency can be understood as a variable informed by past experiences, oriented toward an imagined future, and is eventually enacted in the present conditions and contexts. In tandem with this, teacher identity, which refers to teachers' conceptions and expectations of themselves and the teaching profession, is also based on their past experiences, current practices, and future professional engagements (Beijaard et al., 2004). Therefore, the connection between identity and agency has motivated teacher educators to integrate identity work explicitly into teacher learning to promote agency (e.g., Nguyen & Dang, 2021; Üzüm et al., 2023; Vitanova, 2018). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) refer to these three dimensions as the *iterational* (influences from past experiences), projective (orientation toward the future), and *practical-evaluative* (enactment in the present context). In their ecological model, Priestley et al. (2015) further define these dimensions: (a) *iterational*—life histories and professional histories; (b) *projective*—short-term and long-term objectives; and (c) *practical-evaluative*—cultural values, beliefs, ideas, discourses, social structures, roles and relationships, materials, resources, and physical environment.

In our telecollaborative project, we adopted Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological approach to teacher agency in the design of the project and in the analysis of the

findings. As we designed our discussion prompts and activities, we approached agency as "an emergent phenomenon of the ecological conditions through which it is enacted" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 22); therefore, agency is not something people can *have* or *possess*, but something they can *achieve*. Therefore, teacher education programs have an important role in making this possible by providing the TCs the opportunities and the discursive space to critically think about their own past experiences, their emotions, relationships with their current context, and their goals for the future as teacher candidates. In the analysis of our findings, we coded the telecollaborative discussions and artifacts TCs created using the three dimensions of the ecological approach. That said, we examined this research question: how do the language teacher candidates in the United States and Türkiye use the discursive space of telecollaboration to inform their identity and agency work?

Methodology

Implementation of Telecollaboration

Telecollaboration as a pedagogical activity became more available for language practitioners with the advent of the Internet access provided in educational settings. It involves "the practice of engaging classes of geographically dispersed learners in online intercultural exchange using Internet communication tools for the development of language and/or intercultural competence" (Helm, 2015, p. 197). Initially adopted to support language learners' exposure to culture and language, telecollaboration has recently become more common in the teacher education classrooms. By building upon the practices of colleagues (O'Dowd & Dooly, 2022; Schreiber, 2019) and our earlier iterations (Üzüm et al., 2020, 2022), we designed a telecollaboration between two university-based teacher education programs in Türkiye and the United States. In that particular iteration, our goal was to attempt to pedagogize identity, agency, and emotions through newly designed tasks, which is our response to the recent calls in language teacher education (Toker-Bradshaw, 2023; Varghese et al., 2016).

Over eight weeks in the Fall 2022 semester (September 19, 2022 to November 14, 2022), TCs engaged in teacher-learning activities (e.g., teacher identity posters, narrative frames, responses to critical cases, one-to-one video conferences) on Google Classroom (see all tasks). The medium of communication in completing those activities was English. To enhance student engagement in these various activities, we created thirteen small groups, each comprising seven

participants so that they could find more opportunities to discuss the topics and share their opinions. Considering the number of TCs from each side, there were four TCs from Türkiye and three TCs from the United States in each small group. Every week on Mondays, to start the small group conversation, we posted a task for TCs to complete individually and post in their small groups. The TCs were expected to complete the task first and then to read and comment on peers' posts and respond to comments peers made on their posts. We assigned a facilitator from the research team to each group who was responsible for following group conversations, making comments on participants' posts, and asking questions to encourage further conversation on the task. The facilitators did not interfere with the discussions directly, but they initiated the discussions or moved the discussions further when the TCs may have been inactive for a while in an effort to encourage participation and engagement.

Participants

In the study, ninety TCs from both Türkiye and United States participated voluntarily. Of these TCs, fifty-two were from Türkiye and thirty-eight were from Texas, USA. In the Turkish context, there were thirty-nine female students and thirteen male students, and their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-three. They were students enrolled in an undergraduate-level English language teaching program and receiving training to become English as a foreign language teachers who will work with ethno-linguistically diverse students following their graduation due to the increasing diversity in Türkiye's schools. TCs learned English as a school subject as it does not have any dominant social use in the linguistic landscape of Türkiye. They had intensive English learning especially in high school and took a national proficiency exam (apart from a national content exam) to be placed in a university program. As for the TCs from the United States, there were thirty-eight students. Of these students, thirty-six were female and two were male and their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-five at the time of the project (see Table 4.1). As can be seen from the demographic information, the participant TCs were mainly female students. TCs from the

Table 4.1 Summary of Participant Demographics

	Total	Male	Female	Age	Focal participants
Türkiye	52	13	39	19–23	Melis, Can, Arda, Aylin
USA	38	2	36	19–25	Lindsey, Victoria

United States were students in an undergraduate-level Early Childhood to Grade 6 (EC6) teacher education program and were receiving training to become EC6 teachers who will also be serving emergent bilinguals in the US schools, the most ethno-linguistically diverse group of students in this context. TCs learned English either at home or through schooling in a context where English has dominant socio-cultural and socio-political power and status. In both contexts of Türkiye and the United States, the number of ethno-linguistically diverse students has been increasing exponentially in the last ten years, and teachers reported being under-prepared to serve those students (Toker-Bradshaw, 2023; Üzüm et al., 2023). Two contexts are similar in that the language of schooling (Turkish in Türkiye, English in Texas) does not allow ethno-linguistically diverse students to have access to the academic content, which lead to their minoritization and marginalization in school life and afterwards (Davoodi, 2024; Toker & Olğun Baytaş, 2022; Veliz & Chan, 2024). Raising TCs' awareness about that issue was one of the purposes of the courses they were taking in their own teacher education program.

Data Collection and Analysis

We draw the data for this study from the two groups with high-participation rates in the submission of tasks and corresponding follow-up conversations (see Focal Participants in Table 4.1). We chose to focus on those two groups to make the analysis manageable to report on in this book chapter, given the large size of the project participants. We downloaded their discussion board posts with responses from peers and organized the data of their tasks into different folders.

In the analysis of our findings, we used a discourse analysis method (Gee, 2018) to analyze how the three dimensions (iterative, projective, practical-evaluative) of the ecological approach were enacted in TCs' telecollaborative discourse, and how their emerging teacher agencies were discursively negotiated. Admittedly, it is not always possible to differentiate these three dimensions in TCs' discourse. For example, a statement may not possess any of the features of a particular dimension, or they can take place in an overlapping fashion, possessing attributes from many, within the clause. In the analysis, we conducted a macro- and micro-analysis respectively. In the macro-analysis, we conducted a cycle of initial coding and generated the themes. The researchers independently coded the data and compared their codes through analysis meetings and discussed any disagreements before arriving at a final decision for the emerging themes. In the next stage, we selected representative example excerpts that illustrate a theme

(e.g., emotions and agency) and conducted a micro-analysis on them to further illustrate the interplay of these three dimensions. In each clause, we first looked at the "verb" since "the verb is the heart and soul of the clause" (Gee, 2018, p. 45) and carries information that can help us differentiate between the dimensions. Then, we identified the tense (temporality) of the verb as well as the agents/subjects present, marked with pronouns and nouns (e.g., I, you, they, teachers, students). In the absence of a verb and therefore temporality, we treated the clause as a "hidden clause," "because a phrase is actually carrying a clause-worth information" (Gee, 2018, p. 46), and looked at the nominalization process as well as the verbs represented. For example, the noun phrase "destruction of Greece" carries the meaning of "Rome destroyed Greece" with the implied meaning through a missing subject (see Gee, 2018, p. 46). In the data analysis, this rule was applied to clauses that did not have context or temporality information explicitly, but an implied subject and action were present.

In the findings section, we present selected representative excerpts (with participant pseudonyms) under each theme with markings showing *iterational*, *practical-evaluative*, and *projective* dimensions within the excerpts. We also provide a coding table to better illustrate the coding process and how the themes were generated (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Example Coding Process

Excerpts	Deductive codes from the ecological framework for teacher agency marked with different fonts *Iterative*, practical-evaluative, **projected**	Analytic notes and themes
I like that you mentioned how you want to be kind to your students! *I remember how scared I would be if I did something wrong and how my teacher's would scold me for it.* I like that you want to understand why the student didn't do what they needed to do instead of just scolding them! **I think that will definitely grow the bond between you and your future students!**	*Iterative:* life histories—prior schooling experiences, past learner emotions Practical-evaluative: cultural, values and beliefs-present emotions, being a kind and mindful teacher, establishing support with students. **Projected**: Long-term-aspired teacher identity as a kind teacher, growing the bond with future students	Past learner emotions Being a kind and mindful teacher Establishing rapport with students Present emotions Aspired teacher identity as a kind teacher Growing the bond with future students

Findings

Informed by the ecological framework of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), our data analysis indicates that (1) the participating pre-service teachers of English language learners exercised their agency by integrating all three dimensions of iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative elements; (2) they integrated their past, current, and future emotions into their emerging teacher agency; and (3) their past (language) learner identity and emerging teacher identity informed their teacher agency.

The Three Dimensions of Teacher Agency Are in Constant Interaction with Each Other

In the artifacts TCs created and in their discussions, the three dimensions of teacher agency were visible and were in constant interplay. When TCs described their present contexts, the challenges they are going through, and their plans to address them in the future, they made discursive choices that were in alignment with the three dimensions of the ecological approach. Therefore, the description of an aspired teacher identity was often accompanied by the past and present factors that contributed to shaping it. In the following excerpt, Lindsey is describing why she chose teaching as a career[1]:

> I chose to pursue a career in teaching as I was deeply inspired by a teacher at my high school. Coming from a dysfunctional family and struggling in school, I was always seeking positive role models. I found it in my high-school biology teacher, who made a great impact on my life. She helped me gain self-confidence, which allowed me to achieve goals that I didn't think I would accomplish, and was always their for me, when I needed someone. This teacher played a major role in my life, <u>which allowed me to realize that I could play a tremendous role in the life of children as well. The impact this teacher made allowed me to realize I wanted to become a teacher,</u> **as I could make a huge positive impact on my students.** (Lindsey, September 19, 2022)

In this excerpt, Lindsey is describing her past family and schooling experiences and how they shaped her identity and her current beliefs about herself. Her word choices such as "realize" and "could" point to a previous disbelief about her identity and capacity, but the past experiences with an inspirational teacher in

[1] Excerpts are marked with italics to refer to iterational, underlined for practical-evaluative, and bold for projective dimensions of teacher identity.

high school "allowed" her to "gain self-confidence" and to "realize" that she could impact other children's lives similar to the way hers was affected. In her excerpt, past experiences, present beliefs and emotions, and future aspirations are all visible and impact each other. Through her discursive choices of "I," "my," and "me," she also positions herself within the narrative of these three dimensions.

In the next example, the three dimensions of teacher agency do not appear together, and the agency negotiated is affected by a lack of such interplay. In the excerpt, Melis is responding to a peer's poster on "Who am I as a teacher?" and describing a negative past schooling experience and how it has contributed to her present beliefs and emotions. However, while iterative and practical-evaluative dimensions are present in her comment, the projective component is not visible[2]:

> I remembered. When I was a student in middle school, I sent a message to my teacher about homework. It was confusing and I couldn't complete it. The next day, she was so angry to me. Still I dont get the reason behind that. it was so trivial. I believe that students need a access. It is essential. Not for every stuff but for important things. (Melis, November 16, 2022)

In this example, the iterational (life history, past learner emotions) and practical-evaluative (cultural, values/beliefs, beliefs on being accessible to students) are visible and there is an implied indication to future (accessible for future students), but Melis' language choices positioned her out of such imagination, which impacted her identity and agency enactment in this narrative. Her use of "I, me, and my" was used with the verbs "remember," "think," and "believe," but did not further evolve into a future projection which can happen with verbs like "hope," "be," and "do" in the future tense. In other words, she articulated her belief that "students need access," but she does not elaborate on how *she* would offer such access and do things differently in her future classroom like how Lindsey did in the previous example "I could make a huge positive impact." This example illustrates the ecological nature of teacher agency and how the three dimensions work together in constant interplay, creating a whole which is more than the sum of its parts. In Melis' example, it is not clear if her past experiences and present emotions were powerful enough to create agentive intentions and plans (Benesch, 2018; Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018; Vitanova, 2018) that can be more explicitly observed in the alignment of the three dimensions together (Peña-Pincheira & De Costa, 2021; Priestly et al., 2015). In terms of

[2] The teacher candidates' excerpts are presented as is and no editing is made to language and grammar.

its pedagogical implications, this is a missed opportunity for the facilitators to ask a follow-up question and offer her a discursive space to reflect on her own positioning and construct her emerging identity and agency as a future teacher.

Emotions from Past, Present, and Future Are Integral Parts of Teacher Agency

In their discussions, TCs described not only their beliefs about various educational issues but also their emotions from certain past and present experiences. As they described their emerging teacher identity, who they are, and what kind of teacher they want to be, emotions were an integral part of such imagination. In the following example, Can responded to the prompt "what made you decide to become a teacher?" His discursive choices illustrated strong emotions about his emerging teacher identity and agency as well as the past and present conditions that had impacted them:

> I was always fascinated by foreign languages and always had thoughts like "What are these people saying?" or "I wonder what language this is." going on in my head whenever I heard some unknown language being spoken and I love to learn a new language. This drove me to focus on foreign language studies and in high school I met a real charismatic and friendly teacher who basically was an idol of mine at that time and still is. Over time I discovered in myself that I actually love teaching people anything and then see them use the stuff I taught them. So I said to myself "Why shouldn't I combine these two things I absolutely love and become an English teacher?" and so here I am. **Maybe I can also be an idol to someone else, who knows?** (Can, September 24, 2022)

In this example, Can described his "fascination" about foreign languages as a driving force to study foreign language education. This fascination was further strengthened after meeting a "charismatic and friendly" teacher who served as a role model to him over the years. Unlike some excerpts which described negative past experiences and emotions that could serve as a driving force to *do* and *be* better, according to his description, Can's identity and agency were informed largely by his fascination with foreign languages and his admiration of a past role model teacher. The iterational (influential teacher) and practical-evaluative (love to learn languages) contributed to his emerging teacher identity and agency. In terms of a projective component, he imagined the possibility of being someone else's role model in the future.

In the next example, Victoria also responded to the prompt "what made you decide to become a teacher?" In her response, the emotions from past

experiences as a learner played a major role in the ways she saw herself as a future teacher and her role in the lives of her students:

> I always admired my teachers throughout the years and thought about being like them one day. I moved around a lot when I was little so I got to have a lot of different kinds of teachers. Each of them had a different impact on me and always made me feel safe and comfortable … **I want to be able to make a difference in kids' lives just as my past teachers made in mine**. (Victoria, September 19, 2022)

In this example, Victoria's feelings of "safe and comfortable" become the driving forces of her emerging teacher identity and agency. Her discursive choices of "safe and comfortable" do not look haphazardly selected, but possibly are strong feelings that are linked to her narrative of "having to move a lot" since she led with such narrative context. In light of and as a response to her own personal experiences, she wanted to be a teacher that "makes a difference" in her students' lives.

Past (Language) Learner Identity and Emerging Teacher Identity Inform Teacher Agency

As TCs described their emerging teacher identity or how they see themselves as future teachers, their past learner experiences and identity were almost always mentioned as an impactful factor. In the following example, Arda described his future teacher identity as "home for someone who needs a backbone":

> I always have encountered lovely teachers and seen that even someone who has not bound with you may have meaning for you or your life. **I want to touch people's lives and try to be a bridge that goes to their dreams and I want to hear "Arda Hocam, I did this thanks to you".** Furthermore, I love to inspire someone since the teacher should be a person who inspires his/her students. Also, sometimes we see our teachers more than our families, and in time we become a family. **I want to be a home for someone who needs a backbone**. (Arda, September 20, 2022)

In this excerpt, the iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective dimensions illustrate a strong relationship and are in alignment together in informing Arda's teacher identity and agency as he responds to the question "what made you decide to become a teacher?" He described his past schooling experiences as "sometimes we see our teachers more than our families" and connects this experience to his future teacher identity "I want to be a home for someone who needs a backbone." Therefore, he imagined a student who might need a home

or possibly see the school more of a home that they may need. We could argue that Arda's feelings of "home" and his positive emotional experience when he was a language learner are similar to what Victoria described as feeling "safe and comfortable" attributing "safety," "loving," and "caring" qualities to schools and more importantly to teachers. Such imagination is often situated in direct personal experiences as seen in his descriptions. Arda imagined his future teacher identity as someone who can offer a home to a student that needs it. He also wanted to be a teacher who "inspires" and can help students actualize "their dreams."

In some excerpts, TCs described their past learner identities as a source of empathy and a strength that can help them relate to their future students and understand them better. In the following example, Aylin responded to the discussion on some difficulties teachers may encounter in their career, and directly drew from her past learner identity to achieve such empathy:

> I think learning English will have a big impact on the lives of my future students in many ways. For example, when they go abroad, they will use English to communicate with people. This makes my job as a teacher important because I know that I am responsible for teach them a language not a lesson. And when we talk about language, we talk about culture and the people who belong it and living system. **When my learners cannot let their voices heard, I can make them the people who can express their ideas easily, freely and fearlessly.** And knowing English of the best way to do this. **I also know that I may encounter problems such as shyness, self- confidence while helping my learners build up their linguistic skills and competencies**. *I know this because I felt the same way.* However, I know that these things are not big problems for us. **This makes me feel relaxed and hopeful for future**. (Aylin, November 2, 2022)

In this excerpt, Aylin articulated her current beliefs about the need for learning English and how it may impact her future students' lives. A key theme that came up in her description of her identity that crosses the boundaries of past and present is "voice" and "expressing ideas freely and fearlessly." She drew from her past experience where she was shy or was not able to have her voice heard—connected it with her current beliefs about the importance of learning languages, and projected to her imagined future in which students should be able to "express their ideas freely and fearlessly." We can argue that this conceptualization has an "advocacy" quality to it and although she did not use these exact words, she imagined her future identity as a "teacher as an advocate of students," to prepare students who can develop linguistically and express themselves "freely and fearlessly." She assigned herself the role to make this possible with a strong verb choice "I can *make* them the people who can express their ideas freely and

fearlessly," for example, more agentive and impactful than an alternative "I can *help* them be …." Moreover, her optimistic emotional state (e.g., "relaxed" and "hopeful") can also be a driving force for her agency and her positioning herself as a language teaching professional.

Implications

TCs in the two focal groups of telecollaboration constructed their emergent teacher agency through their participation in the tasks, and ecological approach helped us analyze the complexity of that construction as relational, social, and contextual. Our analysis led us to three implications. First, examining agency should include the influence of identity and emotions which are the outcome of a complex interaction among cognitive, neurological, social, and cultural factors (Wolff & De Costa, 2017). TCs discursively constructed their agency based on their past language learner or future teacher identity and mostly articulated or sometimes implied certain emotional relevance to those identities and associated agency. For example, Lindsey grounded her teacher agency in the role model teacher who helped her when she was dealing with family issues and a struggling student, which implies past emotionally difficult times. She wanted to be able to impact her students' life as her biology teacher did to her in high school and helped her in the midst of those difficult times or alleviated her emotional distress to some extent. She located in her past emotional experience the kind of teacher she wanted to become and the agentive role she wanted to achieve. Second, TCs constructed their teacher identity and emergent agency as teachers in relation to discourses dominant in their educational context. For example, Aylin defined her responsibility as a teacher in relation to the "English as a course subject" discourse which focuses on passing the test but not learning to use the language in real-life situations. In contexts where English is not a dominant language of daily use such as Türkiye, English classes tend to become dissociated from the idea of learning the language to use it and instead promote the learner's investment to focus on earning a grade which does not translate into language learning necessarily. Aylin rejected the identity of a teacher who teaches English as "a lesson" and wanted to become a teacher who exercises her agency to offer her students language learning experience and provide the emotional support they would need for that. Third, TCs' identity and agency as future teachers tended to rely on imagined and expected positive emotions they would like to feel when they become the kind of teacher they envision and achieve the agency needed to enact that identity. For instance, Arda wanted to

be the teacher who hears students say "I did this thanks to you" and implies that he wants to feel the associated emotions of having achieved that agency as a teacher. Arda relied on his past emotions as a language learner and remembers feeling grateful to his past "lovely teachers" for leading him to where he is right now. He projected the agency to act like those teachers in order to have his future students feel his past emotions of gratitude and other related positive emotions.

Pedagogically speaking, the telecollaboration tasks provided the space for TCs from both contexts to discursively construct their teacher identity with emergent agency with implicit or explicit reference to their past or future emotional experience. We do not mean to argue that all TCs experienced the activities the same way and left the telecollaboration with the same learning. Designing activities based on teacher identity, agency, and emotions helps TCs start understanding their situatedness as a future teacher within their context and acknowledge the influence of their past lived experience and future aspirations.

References

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *30*(1), 109–37. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109.

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*(2), 107–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001.

Belz, J. A., & Müller–Hartmann, A. (2003). Teachers as intercultural learners: Negotiating German–American telecollaboration along the institutional fault line. *The Modern Language Journal*, *87*(1), 71–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00179.

Benesch, S. (2018). Emotions as agency: Feeling rules, emotion labor, and English language teachers' decision-making. *System*, *79*, 60–9.

Canagarajah, S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge.

Çiftçi, E. Y., & Savaş, P. (2018) The role of telecollaboration in language and intercultural learning: A synthesis of studies published between 2010 and 2015. *ReCALL*, *30*(3), 278–98. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344017000313.

Dang, T. K. A., Bonar, G., & Yao, J. (2023). Educators' agency in implementing English-medium-instruction in Chinese higher education: A cultural-historical perspective. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 20*(2), 117–36.

Davoodi, A. (2024), Digital echoes of heritage: Toward a culturally balanced pedagogy in technology-enhanced bilingual education. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, *18*(1, 2), 192–205. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-10-2023-0107.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023.

Gee, J. P. (2018). *Introducing discourse analysis: From grammar to society*. Routledge.

Giles, A. (2018). Navigating the contradictions: An ESL teacher's professional self-development in collaborative activity. *TESL Canada Journal*, *35*(2), 104–27. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v35i2.1292.

Helm, F. (2015). The practices and challenges of telecollaboration in higher education in Europe. *Language Learning & Technology*, *19*(2), 197–217.

Hiver, P., & Whitehead, G. E. (2018). Sites of struggle: Classroom practice and the complex dynamic entanglement of language teacher agency and identity. *System*, *79*, 70–80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.04.015.

Ilieva, R., & Ravindran, A. (2018). Agency in the making: Experiences of international graduates of a TESOL program. *System*, *79*, 7–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.04.014.

Ishiara, N., Carroll, S. K., Mahler, D., & Russo, A. (2018). Finding a niche in teaching English in Japan: Translingual practice and teacher agency. *System, 79*, 81–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.06.006.

Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X. A., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.) (2019). *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (Vol. 70). Multilingual Matters.

Le, M. D., Nguyen, H. T. M., & Burns, A. (2021). English primary teacher agency in implementing teaching methods in response to language policy reform: A Vietnamese case study. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *22*(1–2), 199–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1741209.

Leal, P., & Crookes, G. V. (2018). "Most of my students kept saying,'I never met a gay person'": A queer English language teacher's agency for social justice. *System*, *79*, 38–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.06.005.

Lindahl, K., & Yazan, B. (2019). An identity-oriented lens to TESOL teachers' lives: Intro ducing the special issue. *TESOL Journal*, *10*(4), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.506.

Miller, E. R., & Gkonou, C. (2018). Language teacher agency, emotion labor and emotional rewards in tertiary-level English language programs. *System*, *79*, 49–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.03.002.

Nguyen, M. H., & Dang, T. K. A. (2021). Exploring teachers' relational agency in content–language teacher collaboration in secondary science education in Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *48*(4), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-020-00413-9.

Nguyen, M. H., & Ngo, X. M. (2023). An activity theory perspective on Vietnamese preservice English teachers' identity construction in relation to tensions, emotion and agency. *Language Teaching Research* (Online First), https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221151046.

O'Dowd, R. (2016) Emerging trends and new directions in telecollaborative learning. *CALICO Journal*, *33*(3), 291–310. https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v33i3.30747.

O'Dowd, R., & Dooly, M. (2022). Exploring teachers' professional development through participation in virtual exchange. *ReCALL*, *34*(1), 21–36. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344021000215.

Peña-Pincheira, R. S., & De Costa, P. I. (2021). Language teacher agency for educational justice–oriented work: An ecological model. *TESOL Journal*, *12*(2): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.561.

Priestly, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Schreiber, B. R. (2019). "More like you": Disrupting native speakerism through a multimodal online intercultural exchange. *TESOL Quarterly*, *53*(4), 1115–38. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.534.

Toker-Bradshaw, S. (2023). *Critical pedagogy of emotion and identity: A participatory action research study in a pre-service EFL teacher education program*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.

Toker, Ş., & Olğun Baytaş, M. (2022). Grappling with the transformative potential of translanguaging pedagogy in an elementary school with Syrian refugees in post-coup Turkey. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, *16*(2), 148–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2021.2004768.

Ustuk, O., & Yazan, B. (2024). Pedagogizing identity through perezhivanie: A longitudinal study of identity-oriented practicum in Türkiye. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *146.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104643.

Üzüm, B., Akayoglu, S., & Yazan, B. (2020). Using telecollaboration to promote intercultural competence in teacher training classrooms in Turkey and the USA. *ReCALL*, *32*(2), 162–77. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344019000235.

Üzüm, B., Yazan, B., Akayoğlu, S., & Keles, U. (2024a). Teacher candidates' intercultural communication in telecollaboration: Locating acts of positioning in translingual negotiations. *Journal for Multicultural Education, 18*(1/2), 53–66. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-09-2023-0096.

Üzüm, B., Yazan, B., Akayoglu, S., & Mary, L. (2022). Pre-service teachers' translingual negotiation strategies at work: Telecollaboration between France, Turkey, and the USA. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *22*(1), 50–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2021.1981360.

Üzüm, B., Yazan, B., Mary, L., & Akayoglu, S. (2023). Teacher agency for social justice in telecollaboration: Locating agentive positioning in virtual language interaction. *The Language Learning Journal*, *51*(6), 766–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2080857.

Üzüm, M., Lindahl, K., Üzüm, B., Yazan, B., & Akayoğlu, S. (2024b). Epistemic modality and evidentiality in virtual intercultural exchanges between Turkish and Texan users of English. *World Englishes* (Online First). https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12712.

Varghese, M., Motha, S., Trent, J., Park, G., & Reeves, J. (2016). Language teacher identity in multilingual settings. *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(3), 545–71.

Veliz, L., & Chan, E. (2024). Unpacking EFL learners' agency at the intersection of global citizenship and marginalization of local identities through a multiliteracies approach. In V. Tavares (Ed.), *Empowering language learners in a changing world through pedagogies of multiliteracies* (pp. 141–62). Palgrave Macmillan.

Vitanova, G. (2018). "Just treat me as a teacher!" Mapping language teacher agency through gender, race, and professional discourses. *System*, *79*, 28–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.05.013.

Wolff, D., & De Costa, P. I. (2017), Expanding the language teacher identity landscape: An investigation of the emotions and strategies of a NNEST. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101, 76–90. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12370.

Wu, S. (2022). Methodologies and pedagogical applications of integrating telecollaboration in language teacher education: A synthesis of 56 studies from 2010–2020, *CALICO Journal*, *39*(3), 281–305. https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.23991.

5

Understanding Linguistic Repertoire: Language, Identity, and Agency in Pre-Service Language Teacher Education

Yvette Slaughter and Julie Choi

Introduction

Recent research into the experiences of pre-service language teacher candidates has found that although their field of practice requires the development of knowledge and skills to embed plurilingual perspectives into their classrooms, monoglossic perspectives continue to dominate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs (D'warte et al., 2021; Lauwo et al., 2022; Molway, 2021). Normative pressures also perpetuate these perspectives and practices within schools resulting in the privileging of monolingual framing of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment (e.g., Cross et al., 2022; Lauwo et al., 2022; Windle & de Araujo Rosa, 2023). Consequently, an antagonism can exist between contemporary heteroglossic approaches to language and language learning, where language is recognized as a complex reflection of the socio-cultural lives of speakers (Bakhtin, 1981), and the valuing of monoglossic competencies in schools and language classes (Trent, 2010).

Given these tensions, it is critical that language teacher candidates are supported to develop an understanding of the relationship between heteroglossia and the socio-cultural and socio-political factors that shape attitudes toward language and education. This includes developing an awareness of language ideologies and power dynamics that perpetuate deficit and racialized views of language and language diversity (Bakhtin, 1981; Cross et al., 2022; Lauwo et al., 2022). Alongside this, D'warte et al. (2021) point to the important work of teacher educators in facilitating the development of language identity and language teacher identity because teachers may choose to hide their multilingual

capabilities and identities if they are not supported to recognize and value their own linguistic resources. A key part of language teacher preparation needs to focus, therefore, on supporting language teacher candidates to interrogate their own linguistic lives and the forces that have shaped their attitudes and beliefs, and to consider how this critical self-awareness intersects with an agentic language teacher identity (Trent, 2010; Vallente, 2020; Windle & de Araujo Rosa, 2023).

As educators of pre-service and in-service TESOL and Languages teachers, we take a critical stance toward heteroglossic perspectives and notions of hybridity in language use as neither monoglossic nor heteroglossic understandings of language are neutral or apolitical (Kubota, 2014; Pennycook 2022). We remain mindful of the cultural, linguistic, and educational journeys of our students and their likely future teaching contexts as we understand education to be culturally and politically constructed and deeply intertwined with issues of power, and inclusion and exclusion (Raaper & Olssen, 2016). In the more immediate term, we are also acutely aware of placement or in-school training programs and the potential contradictions between the heteroglossic perspectives that we seek to bring to our teacher training programs and the dominant monolingual understandings of language and literacies that may be experienced by language teacher candidates in placement programs (Chang-Bacon, 2022; Cross et al., 2022; Schalley et al., 2015).

To support our language teacher candidates in developing an agentic language teacher identity, we emphasize research into heteroglossic approaches in education, seeking to provide a critical and transformative reimagining as to how language and identity can be understood. Part of this work is undertaken through exploring linguistic repertoire, understood as the languages, dialects and semiotic resources used for communication, "formed and deployed in intersubjective processes located on the border between the self and the other" (Busch, 2017, p. 346). The intention is to support teachers to develop a critical multilingual language awareness, including an understanding of factors which shape their sense of agency. In turn, this awareness can support their ability to recognize and resist neoliberal and neocolonial discourses that can perpetuate monolingual norms in education systems (Lauwo et al., 2022; Pennycook, 2022; Windle & de Araujo Rosa, 2023).

A growing body of work has focused on methods and approaches for developing critical multilingual language awareness among teachers and teacher candidates, including work on the linguistic repertoire and its role as an intersection of language, identity, and ideology (e.g., Busch, 2017, 2021; Deroo & Ponzio, 2023; Fu et al., 2023; Lauwo et al., 2022; Muller, 2022; Rocafort, 2019; Shin

& Jang, 2023). In this research project, as is elaborated in the Research method section, we have drawn on Busch's (2017, 2021) work on visual methodologies and the linguistic repertoire to answer the following research questions:

1. How do pre-service language teachers understand their linguistic repertoires?
2. In what ways have socio-cultural context, and individual histories and experiences shaped their linguistic repertoires?
3. How is agency understood in relation to their lived experiences of language and their emerging teacher identity?

Literature Review

In recent decades, a broad body of work focusing on languaging and heteroglossia has emerged, bringing with it different theorisations, perspectives, and interpretative frames, including translanguaging, plurilingualism, polylanguaging, multilingualism, and translingualism, among others (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2009; Busch, 2017; Galante, 2020; García & Wei, 2014; Jørgensen 2008). In educational research, this work has focused predominantly on learners and on productively mobilizing a full range of linguistic resources and communicative repertories for learning (García & Wei, 2014), although a growing body of work is focusing on the experience of multilingual language teachers (e.g., D'warte et al., 2021; Ellis, 2016, 2018), as will be discussed further shortly.

Although this breadth of work seeks to challenge monoglossic views of languages and language use, of common everyday multilingual practices, and the positioning of linguistic and cultural resources in language learning, Kubota (2014) reminds us of the importance of remaining critical and recognizing the political and ideological influences underpinning our own work. Critical perspectives demand advocacy—the goal, as Pennycook (2022) maintains, is not to just argue for flexible use of languages in everyday and school-based contexts but to demonstrate and advocate for what is possible when normative language policies are dismantled. The more important work, he argues, is in creating space for and demonstrating "what fixed or fluid language practices enable" (p. 11).

Clearly, pre-service language teachers need to develop an understanding of the professional standards, policies, and prescribed curriculum required for teaching. However, they also need an understanding of how to engage

with school-based discourses that prevent the acknowledgment, valuing, and mobilization of the diverse and rich linguistic resources available to teachers and learners (Cross et al., 2022; García et al., 2017; Trent, 2010). This work requires a sense of agency, and one which needs to be recognized as a career-long endeavor. If agency is defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" and education is understood as a "complex sociopolitical configuration" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112), then agency can be seen as co-constructed by both individuals and stakeholders (and other external forces). It is something that is "achieved by individuals, through the interplay of personal capacities and the resources, affordances and constraints of the environment by means of which individuals act" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 5). Agency is, therefore, a dynamic and ever-changing outcome of the interaction between individuals and their educational environment.

Part of developing an agentic language teacher identity is recognizing lived experiences of language as complex and shaped by socio-political and socio-cultural contexts. The pursuit of homogenizing, "one nation, one language" policies by many nation-states, for example, ensures that linguistic racism and discrimination are common experiences for speakers of minority languages and dialects, including migrants and international students (Dovchin, 2020; May, 2020; Nigar et al., 2024). Such monolingual language ideologies not only impact speakers' linguistic lives, they can also lead to social, political, and economic marginalization (May, 2020). As Dovchin (2020) argues, "[L]anguage is never judged in separation from the speakers" (p. 807). Linguistic racism and discrimination can also include experiences of ethnic accent bullying based on accents "connected with one's sociolinguistic histories and biographies," and linguistic stereotyping, where speakers face "pre-fixed assumptions" about their linguistic fluency based on race or ethnicity (Dovchin, 2020, p. 807; Oldani & Truan, 2022).

For language teachers, experiences of linguistic discrimination are particularly true for non-native speakers of a language given the valorization of native-speakerism or the preference for and belief in the "birthright" of native speakers of a language, despite relevancy of qualifications and experience (Dovchin, 2020; Nigar et al., 2024; Wernicke, 2017). Even when teachers are positioned with rich, hybrid professional identities, they can still be subjected to "discourses of native-speakerism, neoracism, post-colonialism, neoliberalism, and multiculturalism" (Nigar et al., 2024, p. 1) and to the pressure to align with and comply with prevailing (monolingual) practices in schools (Kubota, 2014; Lauwo et al., 2022; Trent, 2010; Vallente, 2020).

In language teacher education programs, then, teacher candidates need support to understand the ideological influences that have shaped their linguistic lives, and to understand how they and their students are positioned by social identity markers such as race and gender and by prevailing language ideologies, in addition to understanding the effects of "shifting educational policies and ongoing curriculum reform" (Tao & Gao, 2021, p. 24) in their future workplace contexts. This process is a complex and unique experience for each individual, requiring tools and approaches that can provide the space to reflect on the lived experience of language from an inner perspective, as well as in relation to how it has been shaped externally by discourses and ideologies (Busch, 2017, 2021).

Research Method

The Phenomena of Experience

The multilingual turn has opened up a variety of creative, participatory methods for researchers and educators to explore language and identity in language teaching and learning, including visual, spatial, signed, spoken, written, and artistic modes of expression, among others (e.g., Busch, 2018; Choi & Slaughter, 2021; Cummins & Early, 2011; Lauwo et al., 2022). This broad body of work seeks to challenge monolingual biases with a "a range of theoretical lenses that help us to examine language and what it means to individuals and societies" (Conteh & Meier, 2014, p. 3). In this study, we have used language portraits (Busch, 2017, 2021) to investigate how pre-service teachers understand and position their linguistic repertoires. Busch's (2017) conceptualization of language portraits is informed by French philosopher Merleau-Ponty's work on the phenomenology of perception. Merleau-Ponty (1981) argues that perception is an embodied knowledge of the world which cannot be fully understood within a scientific conceptualization of existence:

> All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific world is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless … The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced. (Merleau-Ponty, 1981, p. vii)

Busch's (2017) work on language portraits interrogates the linguistic repertoire through the phenomena of experience, focusing on the connections between the linguistic repertoire, language ideologies, and the lived experience of language

or *Spracherleben*. As outlined in the introduction, a linguistic repertoire can be understood as the languages, dialects, linguistic variations, and semiotic resources used for communication and formed dynamically through intersubjective relations (Busch, 2017). The lived experience of language, therefore, refers to the "living body [*corps vivant*] as the subject of perception, feeling, experience, action, and interaction" (Busch, 2017, p. 341). It is only when we move beyond viewing language as a cognitive process and the lived experience as a physical one that we can understand linguistic repertoires as dynamic entities shaped and mediated through interaction and through the lived experience of the interlocutor (Busch, 2021).

Consequently, linguistic repertoires cannot be captured as static representations. Busch (2021) argues that visual methodologies and tools such as language portraits allow approximations of repertoires "understood as an imaginary (mostly not conscious) representation of the embodied self in interaction with others and the world" (pp. 191–2). An advantage of the language portrait is that it also offers the possibility of reflecting on an inner perspective of the self, as well as on an external viewpoint, looking at oneself "as an object-body" (p. 201). The silhouette shape used in the language portraits also supports the encoding of metaphors to capture emotional and cultural elements of the lived experiences of languages. This may include, for example, a sense of intimacy or distance or the significance of elements of a repertoire (Busch, 2021), as is exemplified in the data analysis in this chapter.

Research Process

The ten students who participated in this research project were enrolled in a Master of TESOL. In compliance with ethics regulations, and to avoid any conflict of interest, participants were only approached about the research project once the subject they were studying was completed, and marks released. The initial language portrait activity was undertaken at home by students in preparation for face-to-face classes where in-depth work was undertaken across the semester. Due to Covid-related lockdown, final interviews were conducted via zoom at the end of the semester. Data collected included the language portraits, written narratives and notes about the language portraits, and interviews. Additional comments were added to narratives by some students as they revisited and reflected on their lived experience of languages, and their future teacher selves, across the semester. The data therefore consists of an initial activity undertaken before the start of semester, followed by interviews and elaborations informed

by work undertaken across a semester in one of the language teacher educator subjects in their course.

This study used a thematic analysis to look for common themes across the identity texts and transcripts from the audio recordings. A free coding process was used initially, before coding for emotions, values, attitudes, and beliefs. As the use of metaphor was prevalent across the collected materials, data were also coded for ideas and imagery and included linguistic and visual signals (Saldaña, 2021). As we coded the data, we also made reference to key questions guiding Busch's (2017) research into connections between the "concepts of the linguistic repertoire, of language ideologies, and of lived experience of language" (p. 340).

Findings

What Is a Linguistic Repertoire?

The understanding of linguistic repertoires among the participants, as developed across a semester, extends beyond a simplistic view of language proficiency. In this study, participants conceptualized their linguistic repertoires as a dynamic organization of languages and dialects used in various communication contexts throughout their lives. These repertoires encompass not only languages learned academically but also those acquired through personal interests (e.g., music, anime, TV dramas), travel, and work experiences. Participants included languages with which they identified as having only passing familiarity, as well as those in which they had high proficiency, demonstrating their recognition of the multifaceted nature of their linguistic competence. In exploring their linguistic repertoires, participants also detailed how their repertoires are utilized across diverse social spheres, including interactions with family, friends, fellow students, acquaintances, and colleagues, capturing the complex ways in which language functions in their daily lives.

Language Portrait as Metaphor

In this study, participants created body metaphors, incorporating size and color, to create rich and complex representations of their linguistic lives. The heart, for example, was clearly connected to notions of intimacy and belonging. For several participants, the heart, placed centrally, represented dialect, or the language spoken with family. This was even when it was spoken infrequently

and without fluency, as illustrated by Huiying explaining that, while she only speaks in Hangzhou dialect when she returns to her hometown for Spring Festival each year in China, "in my heart, it is really important." For Ehuang, the heart represented a place of belonging as captured in her comment that, even though she had traveled all over the world, on reflection, she realized that her "heart will always belong to China."

Coupled with size, the heart also represented an intimate presence of language and identity as an invisible but distinctive element of identity. This idea can be seen, for example, in Diah's portrait where she used a blend of two blue colors to fill her body portrait, the colors representing the two main dialects that she frequently uses—Pontianak Malay and Sambas Malay. She drew a small heart to represent her Chinese dialect (see Figure 5.1). Diah is Malaysian of Chinese heritage, and also a Muslim, which she argues is an uncommon religious identity for a Chinese Malay. Given this, she feels that her Chinese identity is not visible

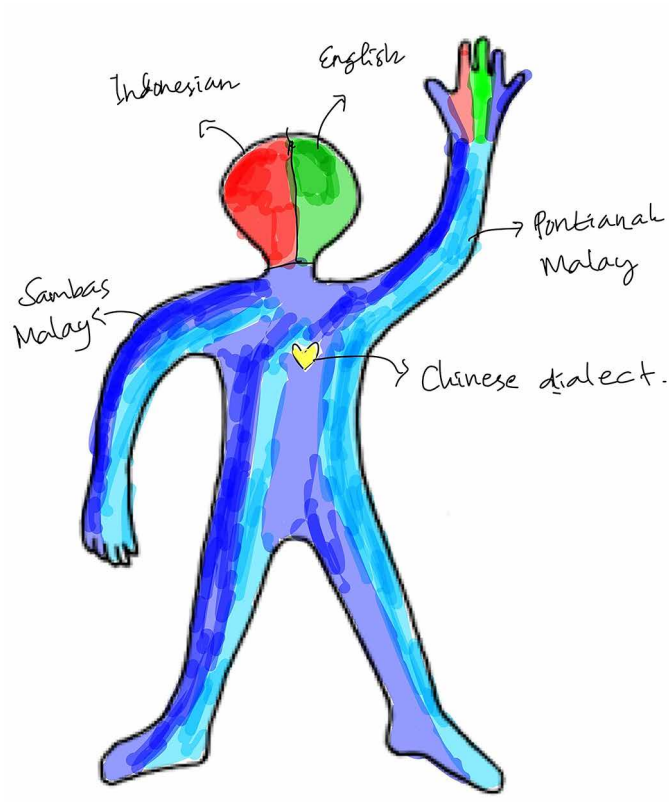


Figure 5.1 Diah's body portrait.

to those who just look at her physical appearance and religious garments. She placed her Chinese dialect in a small heart because although it seems less visible, "I still cherish, that part because it is part of my culture, part of my identity, and I like to think that being Chinese is kind of my identity as well."

Distal locations on the body were used to convey elements of the linguistic repertoire that are seen as more functional and less intimate in nature. The arms, feet, and legs were often used to convey this sense of functionality, as can be seen with Cassie placing languages of countries to which she has traveled on her feet, and Mei labeling English as a tool for communication (see Figure 5.2). Mei explains,

> I have to use English to communicate with neighbours, or the sellers, or the people which I meet in the daily life. So, English, as you can see, English is also made up my arm and my leg. It's because I view English as the tools which I can attach and use, but I will never paint English in my heart, or my brain.

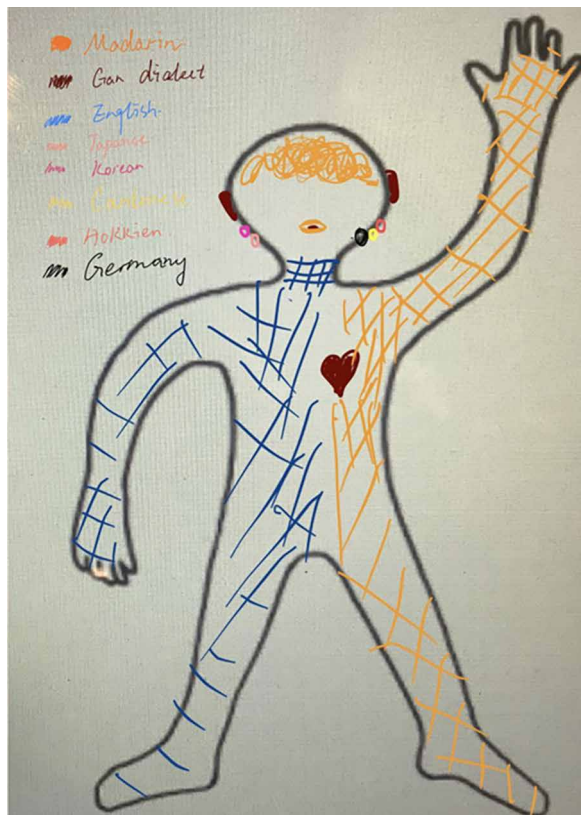


Figure 5.2 Mei's body portrait.

In this sense, the role of English in Mei's linguistic identity, located on the arm and leg, is discrete and impersonal.

However, legs and feet also represented groundedness, a deep connection with home, as articulated by Ling, who had, over time, come to understand her dialect as an important part of her identity.

> The first one is, I cherish my hometown dialect. So, I entered to the ankle, or above the ankle. And I think I find the importance of my hometown dialect since after—just in these recent years, after I came to Australia. Because I come from a small town in China … I used to not be comfortable with myself. Self-conscious, self-abasement, because I come from a small place and then after I go to college, I live in big cities … Then I gradually realized that hometown is very important for me because it raised me up.

In addition to the distal role of arms and legs for some students, external accoutrements were also used to indicate a sense of detachment, or a meaningful but disconnected experience of language. Ehuang, for example, drew a scarf around the neck of her body portrait to represent Thai, a language she had developed a limited knowledge of in her role as a volunteer teacher in a Bangkok high school (see Figure 5.3). She considered it important for communicating with students and at work, but positioned it functionally, as external to her body, as she felt that it did not "change my identity." She also drew several earrings on her ears to portray forgotten experiences of language that are rekindled when she is exposed to them.

However, as can be seen above, metaphor and body part are both culturally and individually constructed and for Keiko, we can see the role of performativity, in the use of a mask on her face and wings on her shoulder, in creating her English identity (Pennycook, 2004)—a performance that enables her to move beyond cultural expectations of a first language (see Figure 5.4). As she explained, "English is like a mask or a costume I wear on my actual self. Because I feel that English has given me more freedom in the way I think, or in the way I express myself, which I could never have if I only had Japanese."

The data also illustrated how participants had been positioned by discourse about languages, with the language portraits used to depict conflict and tension. Yuming, for example, depicted her heart as a place of conflict, arguing that,

> … my real heart is perhaps all in Mandarin, but as I learn a lot of things, I have different appearance, decisions, creations. So, if I have a very challenging decision to make, all these thoughts, influenced by perhaps different languages, different cultures, like they are fighting in my heart.

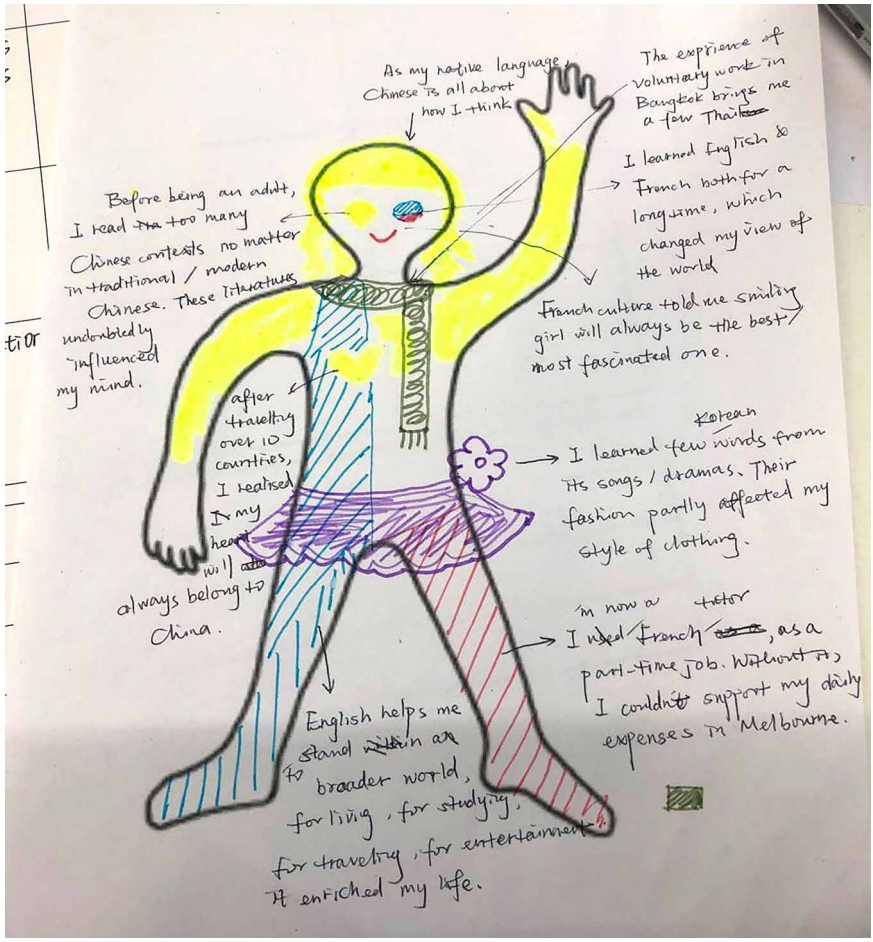


Figure 5.3 Ehuang's body portrait.

This tension or interaction between language, culture, and beliefs was not confined metaphorically to the heart, as can be seen in Cassie's language portrait where she blended colors to represent Chinese Mandarin, Chinese Sichuan/Shanghainese, and English. Cassie explained that because she had used multiple languages from a young age, they could not be separated, hence the use of intertwined colors in her language portrait (see Figure 5.5).

Diah's portrait also illustrates the blending of her dialects across her body through color as well as in her head (see Figure 5.1). As she explained,

> If you see on the head side, you can see that I'm actually thinking in Indonesian and English. It is happening to me most of the time because I want to speak in



Figure 5.4 Keiko's body portrait.

> Indonesian, but English comes up or when I want say something in English … the Indonesian part came out. That's why I have put these two in my head because this is what is going on in my head most of the time.

For Ehuang and Keiko (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4), the eyes indicated how languages and language learning had changed their identity, their view of the world, and how they express their thoughts. Keiko, for example, explained,

> My eyes and my mouth is a mix of Japanese and English, I think, because how I see things I think it's a mix of Japanese and English sense of value, or Japanese and English way of thinking. And I think what I articulate is also—The underlying value is from both Japanese and English. So, how I perceive things and how I express things, I draw it as a mix.



Figure 5.5 Cassie's body portrait.

Language Ideologies and Agency

The use of the language portraits also revealed the linguistic baggage and political discourses that have shaped participants' linguistic repertoires, most frequently expressed through the identification and positioning of dialects. Several students from China explained that only Mandarin was allowed to be spoken at school, with use of dialects forbidden. This practice had resulted in divergent family language practices, with some parents refusing to speak dialect with their children, while other families had positioned their dialect as a crucial part of family identity. Mei, for example, explained that her family speaks Gan dialect but never with her, "They just command, they just order me to use Mandarin because Mandarin in our language policy is only the language

which can be used in elementary schools, or middle schools." Nevertheless, Mei used red to represent Gan and to "paint the heart" because it is the most special language for her. She even colored her tongue red to represent Gan "because I will use it when I am strong angry, you know? You just can't pretend that you are so well-educated, you are just one who are very angry, and you switch to your own dialect" (see Figure 5.2).

The influence of a prevailing language ideology which prevents the use of dialects in school, essentially stripping them of worth, was evident in the disregard of dialects by some participants when speaking to their portraits during interviews. Jia, for example, stated that she did not think the language portrait activity would be useful for her teaching in China as it was not a multilingual country. This was despite Jia identifying seven languages in her linguistic repertoire, including a southern Chinese dialect, a northern Chinese dialect, and Mandarin. Despite other participants from China also sharing their portraits and languages and dialects in class activities, these were not visible in Jia's understanding and depiction of Chinese society during the interviews.

However, the dialogic process of sharing linguistic repertoires as lived experiences with classmates supported most of the participants to understand who they are as speakers by reflecting on how their experiences converged or diverged with each other. Yuming, for example, argued, "I can know the difference between us, like for many Chinese students, we speak the same language, I mean Mandarin, English or Cantonese, or speak among all of these. But we can be actually totally different people." For Keiko, understanding the imposition of language ideologies in other contexts enabled her to reflect more deeply on her own experiences of linguistic agency. As she explained,

> I knew that they had their dialect and Mandarin, and that they had even multiple languages even in their own country, but still I was kind of shocked that they were not allowed to speak in their dialect at school. I have never had those experience. I could talk to anyone about anything in my language, I had the right to do so.

Overall, among the students intending to return to China to teach, there was a sense of usefulness in the activity at a personal level, but little consensus that it was appropriate or feasible for language and identity-focused work to be undertaken in the English classroom in that national context. For teachers in other educational contexts, a more positive perception of identity work was apparent, both for those who intended to work in Australia and for those looking to work in overseas locations, including Malaysia and Indonesia.

Discussion

While it is well established that bodies matter in numerous ways in relation to the performance of identity (Butler, 1997, 1999), we are only just beginning to explore the relationship between the linguistic or semiotic repertoire and one's "bodily being in the world" (Busch, 2021, p. 203). As Busch (2021) argues, in connection with repertoires, bodies matter "on the level of how they are deployed and read in situated interactions, on the level of how they are conceived of in enregistered discourses and not least on the level of bodily stored experiences" (Busch, 2021, p. 203). The use of a language portrait or body image, therefore, "designates an emotionally highly loaded representation of one's bodily being in the world, formed and transformed in interaction with others" (Busch, 2021, p. 203). In asking our students to undertake autobiographical activities such as in this study, as teacher educators, we are cognisant that we are asking them to share and construct their narrative, in part, within the normative structures that have shaped their lived experiences of language (Bakhtin, 1981). Busch (2021) argues that autobiographical practices should therefore be understood "as performative acts that, paradoxically, enact the biographical 'I' while trying to describe it" (p. 201). In the context of this study, this identity development work was undertaken in a new educational context, with associated socio-cultural and socio-political differences. Developed over the course of a semester, the autobiographical accounts of participants, therefore, should be seen as representing the continuing construction and reconstruction of identity, alongside self-exploration, rather than an immutable, static representation of self (Busch, 2021). This work was also undertaken through a reflective lens, with participants considering past experiences, their current educational experiences, as well as their future expectations.

In this research project, the language portrait and associated autobiographical activities provided a powerful means for language teachers to explore and represent their linguistic repertoires, allowing them to paint complex and dynamic representations of language as a resource and language as a practice in interaction with others. The activities also illustrated the ways in which participants' linguistic repertoires have been influenced and shaped by socio-cultural contexts and individual histories, with extensive use of metaphor to represent the relationship between language, identity, and personal experiences. For instance, the heart metaphor was used to symbolize intimacy and belonging, often connected to dialects spoken with family or family languages, while the portrayal of linguistic elements on different body parts such as legs and arms was used to reflect both

functional and intimate aspects of language and identity. Additionally, external accoutrements, like scarves and earrings, were used to indicate both detachment and meaningful but disconnected experiences of language.

The impact of societal expectations, language policies, and language ideologies was also revealed through the autobiographical narratives, including the constraints and opportunities afforded by language and language use in society. For many students from China, for example, this included powerful and punitive educational policies focusing language use onto Mandarin. This in turn impacted on family language policy and decisions about language maintenance and the passing on of heritage languages/dialects. For other participants, the linguistic repertoire represented the enabling potential of language to create other, freer selves. As Blommaert and Backus (2011) argue, linguistic repertoires enable people to see "the opportunities, constraints and inequalities they were facing, the learning environments they had access to (and those they did not have access to), their movement across physical and social space, their potential for voice in particular social arenas" (p. 30).

This work, however, moves beyond the individual, with a key part of the autobiographical activities being the sharing of lived experiences with classmates. This dialogic process facilitated a deeper understanding of linguistic agency (or non-agency) experienced by others, allowing participants to reflect on the convergence and divergence of their experiences with their fellow students. This reflective process made visible the ideologies and experiences that had shaped participants' linguistic repertoires, contributing to a growing critical language awareness among the teacher candidates. The sense of agency participants articulated from this point diverged, with some participants understanding and articulating a deeper understanding of the structural, political, and ideological forces that have shaped their language lives but arguing that the status quo was immutable. Other participants expressed considered thoughts as to how heteroglossic perspectives could potentially be integrated into teaching practices.

Although participants expressed mixed feelings about the potential of a plurilingual lens in their language teaching classrooms, and their capacity to enact this work in practice, the autobiographical processes invited reflection on possibilities, despite experiences of impossibilities. As articulated by Ling,

> I thought of because in China, in more and more places, they don't encourage students to use their dialects even after class or after school, and I think this is a cultural loss for many people. So, I sometimes wonder maybe I can bring not only English and Mandarin, but also their dialects into our classroom to be more diverse. I need to consider everyone … Actually, I'm not very sure about what

this activity is end at because I think maybe I understand myself and my identity better, but not very sure what that will mean for me and for many people.

Concluding Comments

These final comments by Ling underscore the persisting challenges faced by pre-service language teachers in reconciling heteroglossic imperatives embedded in their pre-service language teacher classes with the monolingual paradigms they have encountered and may continue to encounter in their teaching careers. The study emphasizes the importance of supporting language teacher candidates in interrogating their linguistic lives and understanding the forces that have shaped their attitudes and beliefs. The autobiographical activities were effective in providing a window into the intimate and functional aspects of language, in revealing the impact of societal expectations, language policies, and ideologies on participants' linguistic repertoires, and in fostering a more critical language awareness among teacher candidates.

This work provides a foundation for language teacher candidates to navigate the complexities of language education with a more critical and reflexive lens, and to potentially push against or challenge neoliberal and colonial discourses that can perpetuate monolingual norms in education systems. The main limitation of this study was the lack of placement work as part of the semester and the lack of opportunity to further understand how language teacher identity and agency are shaped through school experiences. Further investigation is needed into the experiences of language teacher candidates during placement, including the degree of pedagogical alignment between their tertiary training and their in-school experiences with a mentor teacher, and during the transition to full-time teaching. Such research would enable us to better understand how teacher agency may manifest, as well as how it may be constrained in language teaching work within normative, monolingual educational contexts.

References

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *30*, 109–37. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Translated and edited by M. Holquist, C. Emerson, & M. Holquist. University of Texas Press.

Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2009). *Multilingualism: A critical perspective*. Bloomsbury.

Blommaert, J., & Backus, A. (2011). Repertoires revisited: "Knowing language" in superdiversity. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, *67*, 1–26.

Busch, B. (2017). Expanding the notion of the linguistic repertoire: On the concept of Spracherleben—The lived experience of language. *Applied Linguistics*, *38*(3), 340–58. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv030.

Busch, B. (2018). The language portrait in multilingualism research: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, *236*, 1–13.

Busch, B. (2021). The body image: Taking an evaluative stance towards semiotic resources. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *18*(2), 190–205. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2021.1898618.

Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Chang-Bacon, C. K. (2022). Who's being "sheltered?": How monolingual language ideologies are produced within education policy discourse and sheltered English immersion. *Critical Studies in Education*, *63*(2), 212–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1720259.

Choi, J., & Slaughter, Y. (2021). Challenging discourses of deficit: Understanding the vibrancy and complexity of multilingualism through language trajectory grids. *Language Teaching Research*, *25*(1), 81–104. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820938825.

Conteh, J., & Meier, G. (2014). *The multilingual turn in languages education*. Multilingual Matters.

Cross, R., D'warte, J., & Slaughter, Y. (2022). Plurilingualism and language and literacy education. *Australian Language and Literacy Journal*, *45*, 341–57. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s44020-022-00023-1.

Cummins, J., & Early, M. (Eds.) (2011). *Identity texts: The collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools*. Trentham Books.

D'warte, J., Rushton, K., & Abu Bakar, A. (2021). *Investigating pre-service teachers' linguistic funds of knowledge*. The Centre for Educational Research, Western Sydney University. https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:60711.

Deroo, M. R., & Ponzio, C. M. (2023). Fostering pre-service teachers' critical multilingual language awareness: Use of multimodal compositions to confront hegemonic language ideologies. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *22*(2), 181–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1863153.

Dovchin, S. (2020). The psychological damages of linguistic racism and international students in Australia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *23*(7), 804–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1759504.

Ellis, E. (2016). *The plurilingual TESOL teacher: The hidden languaged lives of TESOL teachers and why they matter*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Ellis, E. (2018). Languaged lives: A new perspective on language teacher identity. *Babel*, *52(*2), 15–24.

Fu, S., Harman, R., & Aubain, Y. (2023). Critical multilingual language awareness: Reflections on a YPAR program in teacher education. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *22*(4), 359–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2202584.

Galante, A. (2020). Pedagogical translanguaging in a multilingual English program in Canada: Student and teacher perspective of challenges. *System Journal* 92, 102274. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102274.

García, O., Ibarra Johnson, S., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Caslon.

García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Springer.

Jørgensen, J. (2008). Polylingual languaging around and among children and adolescents. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *5*(3), 161–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790710802387562.

Kubota, R. (2014). The multi/plural turn, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal multiculturalism. Complicities and implications for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, *37*(4), 474–94. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu045.

Lauwo, M. S., Accurso, K., & Rajagopal, H. (2022). Plurilingualism, equity, and pre-service teacher identity: Centring [Linguistic] diversity in teacher education. *TESL Canada Journal*, *38*(2), 113–39. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v38i2.1359.

May, S. (2020). Rethinking the principle of linguistic homogeneity in the age of superdiversity. In *Language, Nations, and Multilingualism* (pp. 37–53). Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1981). *Phenomenology of perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Molway, L. (2021). Key issues in pre-service language teacher education. In E. Macaro & R. Woore (Eds.), *Debates in Second Language Education* (pp. 122–41). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003008361.

Muller, S. (2022). Visual silence in the language portrait: Analysing young people's representations of their linguistic repertoires. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *25*(10), 3644–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2022.2072170.

Nigar, N., Kostogriz, A., Gurney, L., & Janfada, M. (2024). "No one would give me that job in Australia": When professional identities intersect with how teachers look, speak, and where they come from. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 45(1), 70–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2023.2239182.

Oldani, M., & Truan, N. (2022). Navigating the German school system when being perceived as a student "with migration background": Students' perspectives on linguistic racism. *Linguistics and Education*, *71*, 101049. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101049.

Pennycook, A., (2004). Performativity and languages studies. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies, 1*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427595cils0101_1.

Pennycook, A. (2022). Critical applied linguistics in the 2020s. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *19*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2022.2030232.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Raaper, R., & Olssen, M. (2016). Education and political theory: Prospects and points of view. In M. A. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational philosophy and theory* (pp. 1–5). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_251-1.

Rocafort, M. C. (2019). The development of plurilingual education through multimodal narrative reflection in teacher education: A case study of a pre-service teacher's beliefs about language education. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *75*(1), 40–64. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2017-0080.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.

Schalley, A. C., Guillemin, D., & Eisenchlas, S. A. (2015). Multilingualism and assimilationism in Australia's literacy-related educational policies. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *12*(2), 162–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2015.1009372.

Shin, H., & Jang, I. C. (2023). Language learning autobiographies, identity texts, and critical teacher education. *English Teaching*, *78*(1), 197–223. https://doi.org/10.15858/engtea.78.1.202303.197.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge.

Trent, J. (2010). "My two masters" : Conflict, contestation, and identity construction within a teaching practicum. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *35*(7), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n7.1.

Vallente, J. P. C. (2020). Framing pre-service English language teachers' identity formation within the theory of alignment as mode of belonging in community of practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *96*, 103177. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103177.

Wernicke, M. (2017). Navigating native-speaker ideologies as FSL teacher. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *73*(2), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2951.

Windle, J. A., & de Araujo Rosa, J. (2023). Navigating critical language education at the crossroads of neonationalism and neoliberalism: The role of border talk. *TESOL Quarterly*, *57*(3), 752–74. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3229.

6

Agentic and Less-Agentic Orientations in TESOL Student Teachers' Motivation

Mairin Hennebry-Leung

Introduction

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers globally is a persistent challenge (OECD, 2019). Early career teachers leaving the profession prematurely is of particular concern (Zhang et al., 2019). Agency and motivation are crucial, especially as professional identity emerges (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Moreover, while context is widely recognized as mediating agency, little is known about the role of cultural phenomena, such as filial piety, in facilitating or inhibiting agency in teacher preparation. Understanding pre-service teachers' sense of agency provides insight into their foundational perspectives and enables educators to equip them with skills to navigate challenges.

This chapter adopts an agency lens to examine pre-service teachers' possible selves during a one-year teacher education program, exploring internal and external influences on these selves. The study uncovers factors shaping these selves and their evolution over time using qualitative sociograms. The findings illuminate early teacher development stages, offering insights for nurturing agentic possible teacher selves.

Background

Language Teacher Agency

Agency, the capacity to act according to personal judgment and motivation (van Lier, 2010), is crucial for language teachers facing complex professional environments (Beijaard et al., 2004). Biesta and Tedder (2007) describe agency

as the ability to shape one's responsiveness to challenges. Teacher agency involves determining and pursuing personally meaningful goals. It is context-dependent and influenced by socio-cultural factors (Ahearn, 2001), shaped by institutional structures and socio-cultural contexts (Ortega, 2019). In the face of evolving educational landscapes, nurturing teacher agency is essential for empowering educators to enact meaningful changes in their practice.

Possible Selves and Teacher Agency

Teachers' cognitions shape their practices and are influenced by social reality and future aspirations (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). This future-oriented perspective is crucial in teacher education (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005) and is evident in teachers' interpretation of their professional interactions through envisioned future selves, known as possible selves (Kubanyiova, 2019).

Possible selves theory (Higgins, 1998; Markus & Nurius, 1986) posits that individuals hold self-concepts rooted in present reality and future aspirations. Possible selves are considered the cognitive manifestation of the individuals' goals, motives, desires, and fears (Markus & Nurius, 1986). They provide an essential link between self-concept and motivation. How individuals think about themselves (their self-concept) influences goal-setting, decision-making, and behaviors, guiding actions and efforts toward desired outcomes or away from feared ones (Sahakayan et al., 2018).

Possible selves are usually discussed in terms of *ideal* and *ought-to* selves. The ideal self is conceived as internally influenced, representing the attributes one would ideally like to possess—the representation of one's hopes, aspirations, and wishes. The ought-to self is more externally focused and represents the attributes others believe we should possess, often associated with a sense of duty or obligation (Trettevik & Grindal, 2016). Language education research has suggested other possible selves emerging in response to particular contexts. From an agentic perspective, the "anti-ought-to self" is particularly relevant (Thompson, 2017; Thompson & Liu, 2021). This possible self is motivated by the opposite of what external pressures demand, allowing the individual to take charge of their destiny (Thompson, 2017).

Possible selves emerge through the interplay of internal and external influences, with agentic and less-agentic orientations shaping and directing them. Agentic possible selves align with self-determined goals, while less agentic orientations stem from external expectations (Hennebry-Leung et al., 2023). The emergence of self-determined possible selves is crucial for teacher agency,

as individuals are more invested in realizing self-determined goals and are more likely to persist when facing challenges.

Studies on possible selves highlight their dynamic and complex nature (e.g., Hiver, 2013; Sahakayan et al., 2018) and the need to understand the factors that shape them (Kubanyiova, 2019). Novice teachers' possible selves undergo transformation in the face of classroom realities and career progression (Sahakayan et al., 2018). Meanwhile, novice and student teachers navigate a future-oriented space, shaping their identities as future educators (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). While some research has examined experiences within teacher education programs, less attention has been given to understanding how student teachers' past experiences and their habitus shape their future orientations. Exploring this space responds to the call for a richer understanding of teacher images (Kubanyiova, 2019).

This study examined student teachers' possible selves and development over a one-year teacher education program, exploring their agency over their possible selves. By understanding the influences shaping possible selves, teacher education programs can better support teacher preparedness and commitment to language teaching.

A Whole-Person View on Language Teacher Education

Van Canh (2020) notes that language teacher education has yet to fully embrace the idea that teachers are not just teaching language but rather learners. He argues that the *what* and *how* of teaching must be informed by the teachers' knowledge of learners' motivational fluctuations, social environments, and identities to serve real students' needs. Arguably, the same is true of language teacher education.

Preparing language teachers to adopt a whole-person approach to their learners requires that teacher education adopt a whole-person approach. This perspective has been increasingly advocated in language teacher education as integral to language teacher well-being (see, e.g., Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Understanding the habitus that student teachers bring to their teacher education program contributes to this whole-person perspective. An important feature of a Chinese cultural habitus is the relationships and traditions that strongly shape aspirations, notably through filial piety rooted in Confucian philosophy. A key feature of filial piety is the expectation that children will respect their parents by listening to their advice, following their instructions and obeying their authority.

Recent studies (e.g., Guo et al., 2022) highlight the enduring importance of filial piety for family harmony and adolescents' well-being while pointing to tensions that accompany a shift toward challenging traditional structures (Bedford & Yeh, 2021). This tension can challenge the exercise of agency among individuals in Confucian heritage cultures as they mediate between traditional norms and a growing desire for autonomy.

The Study

Participants

Ten Mainland Chinese student teachers enrolled in a TESOL Master's program in Hong Kong participated in this study. This chapter delves into the experiences of two participants, Lingqi and Ellie, to highlight commonalities and unique possible self-trajectories. Recruitment involved email invitations to the cohort and an in-person information session. Interested students contacted the research assistant to participate. The final selection aimed for diversity in participants' city tiers and educational backgrounds. The study received HREC approval from the University of Hong Kong (EA1908011).

Interviews

Qualitative methods give teachers a voice, uncovering their decision-making processes and the influences shaping them. This knowledge is crucial for effective teacher education. Qualitative sociograms allow exploration of complex relational data, supporting an insider view and context awareness. They are valuable for studying issues of agency, offering a qualitative capacity to visually communicate the factors shaping teachers' evolving possible selves (Altissimo, 2016).

Data was collected simultaneously through sociograms (see accompanied figures) and narratives during qualitative semi-structured interviews. Each student teacher participated in three interviews conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the one-year program of study.

Interview one (see appendix for sample protocol) explored participants' language learning history and their motivations for teaching. Participants reflected on their possible teacher selves and the influences (alters) that contributed to these notions. Interviews two and three revisited participants'

motivation for teaching and their possible teacher selves, exploring whether and how these might have changed, and participants' expectations of achieving these possible selves.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were presented with a sociogram template adapted from Kahn and Antonucci (1980). The central circle in the sociogram represents the ego (the participant). Through the narrative, participants identified alters (people, places, or experiences) relevant to these motivations and selves and situated these on the sociogram, with those closer to the center being the stronger influences.

Analysis

Analysis integrated narratives and maps while maintaining their distinct contributions (Altissimo, 2016). Sociogram analysis followed a three-step qualitative structural analysis, confirming narrative findings and offering unique insights, notably regarding sociogram density. Thematic analysis was employed for narratives, involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, review, definition, naming, and writing-up findings (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Finally, narratives and sociograms were combined to enhance understanding, focusing on convergence/divergence between them and various sociogram dimensions (Altissimo, 2016).

Findings and Discussion

Lingqi, a graduate from a teachers' university in Hangzhou, initially aimed to study Finance but reluctantly pursued English teaching due to her mother's influence, which is strong and evident throughout Lingqi's narrative. Lingqi also credits teachers during her school and undergraduate years for sparking her interest in English and modeling desirable teacher traits. Being concerned about social perceptions, the fact that around 80 percent of Lingqi's classmates chose to pursue an education career played a part in her decision, though not significantly so. Throughout the year, Lingqi's sociograms demonstrate various influences on her possible teacher self and teaching motivation. None of these influences, however, is as strong as that of her mother.

Ellie, born in Chizhou, Anhui, studied English in Jiangsu before pursuing TESOL. She now lives in Shanghai with her husband and child. Family and

her high school teacher influenced Ellie's English major. She rebelled against her father's desire for her to become a civil servant upon graduation. Inspired by tutoring experiences and teaching at a training institute, Ellie pursued a career as an English teacher. Compared to Lingqi, Ellie's sociograms show fewer influences, becoming sparser over time, suggesting a shift away from earlier influences as the year progressed.

The Roots of Possible Selves

Lingqi

Sociographic Insights

At the start of the year (see Figure 6.1), the innermost circle of Lingqi's sociogram, the strongest influence, is populated by family, namely her mother and aunty. Other family members feature, though seemingly less influential. For instance, her father appears in the third layer, and her grandparents and cousin in the sixth layer. Various teachers are also identified as influential on her idea of what a teacher should be like, particularly teacher Bai in the third level, featured in her narrative and, to a lesser extent, teachers in her undergraduate studies. Aside from a peripheral mention of English-speaking celebrities whom she admires, Lingqi does not mention influences outside her immediate circle.

Lingqi's second sociogram (see Figure 6.2), midway through the program, shifts in focus. She identifies fellow student teachers, units on her Master's program, and a particular tutor as influential. Significantly, however, these influences are all more distant, situated at levels four and five. Her mother has also moved further away to level four. This greater distance possibly signifies a greater sense of autonomy and agency. Lingqi's narrative at interview two refers to her mother as threatening her autonomy, and yet perhaps the ability to articulate this suggests an initial step toward greater exercise of agency.

Notwithstanding the seeming shift in the second sociogram, the third (see Figure 6.3) more closely reflects the first. Lingqi's mother and aunty come closer again at the third level, and her father reappears, albeit at the fourth level rather than the initial third level. School friends and schoolteachers have also reappeared, as have teachers from her undergraduate. Units, experiences, or tutors in her Master's program do not feature in the final sociogram, except for one fellow student teacher and teachers she observed during her independent project on the program.

Lingqi's sociograms give an initial indication of the significant and persistent influence of family members. More broadly, there is evidence of

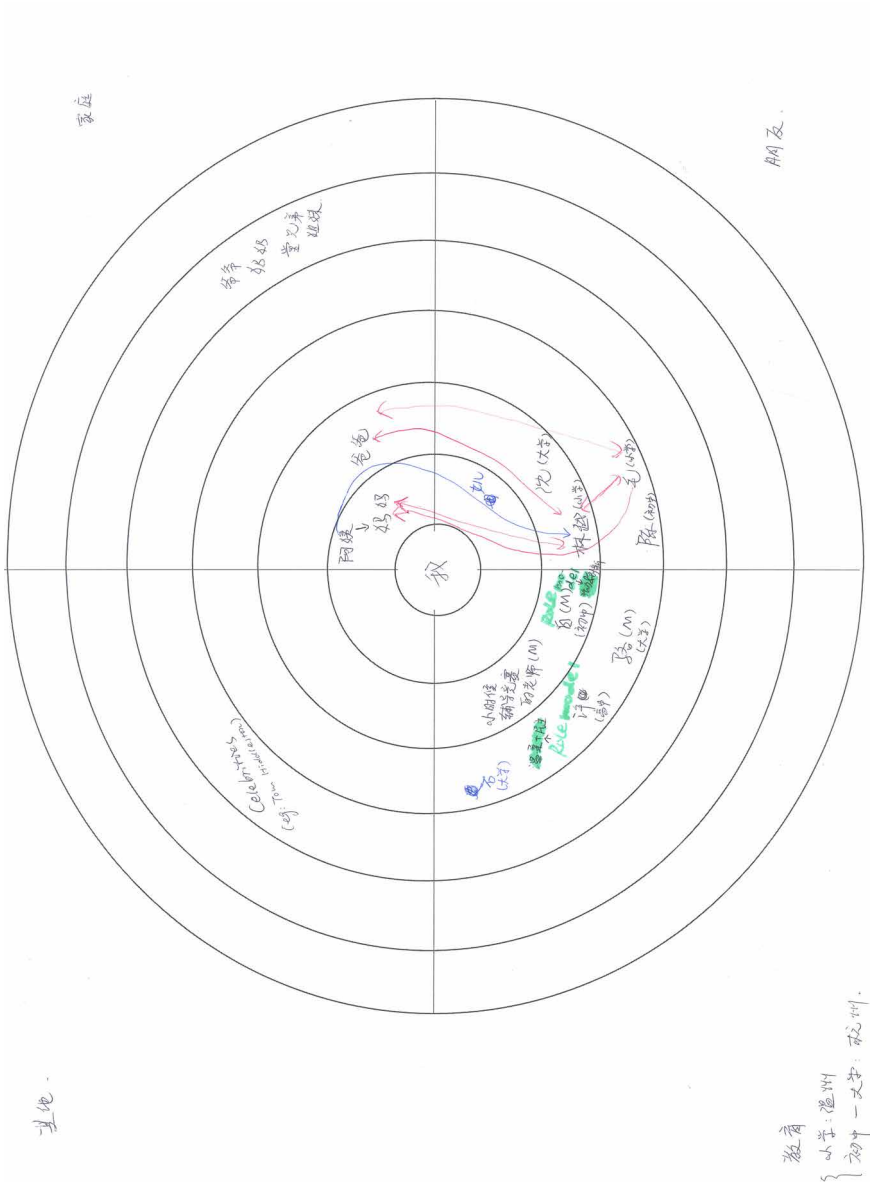


Figure 6.1 Lingqi's sociogram in interview 1.

the enduring influence of significant others from her childhood and former learning experiences, contrasting with the fleeting appearance of her learning experiences in the Master's program. Also worth noting at this stage is the higher density of Lingqi's sociograms, which contrast with Ellie's sociograms, as will be seen. This point is further elaborated on in the context of the narratives.

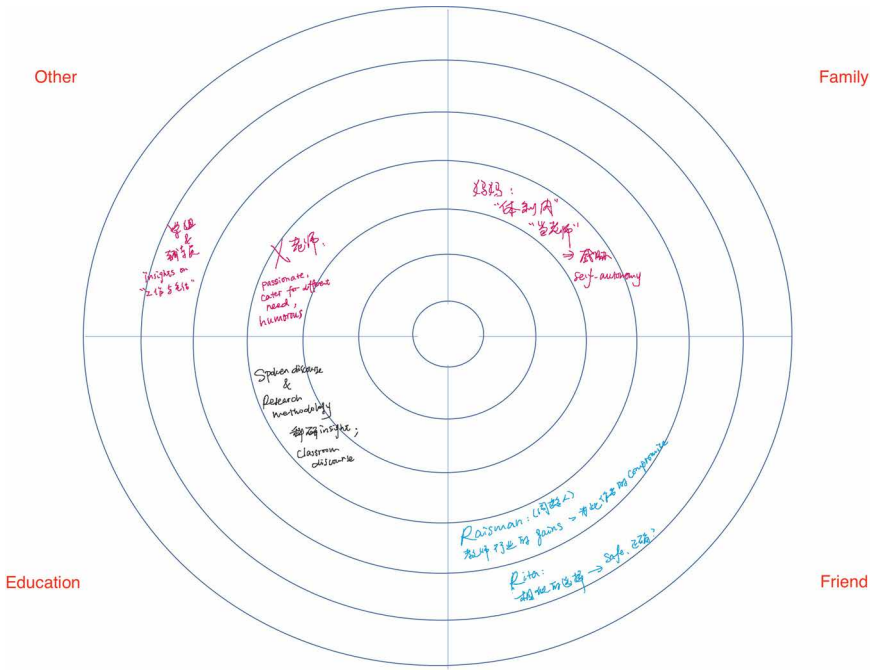


Figure 6.2 Lingqi's sociogram in interview 2.

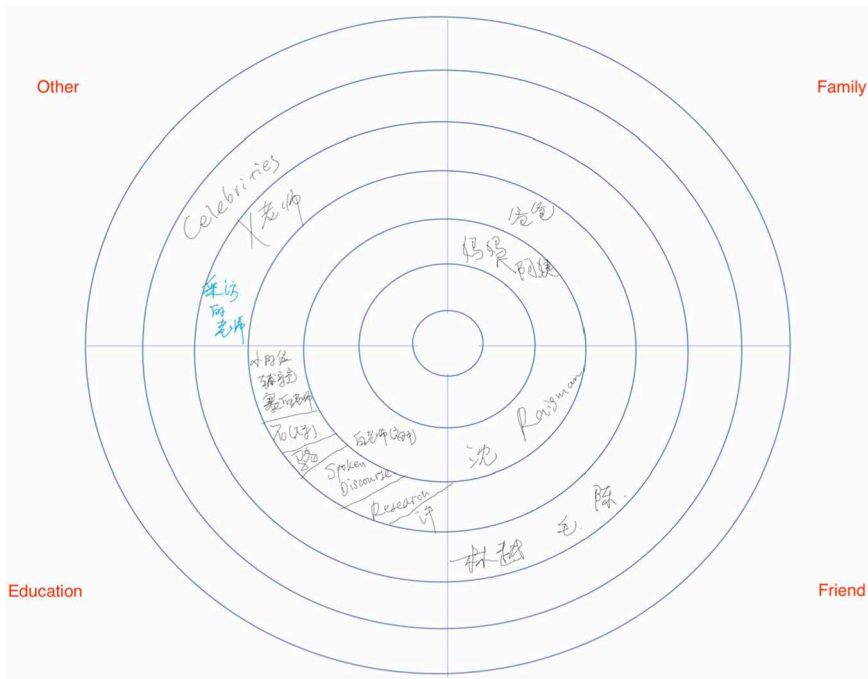


Figure 6.3 Lingqi's sociogram in interview 3.

Delving into the Narratives

Across the interviews, Lingqi's mother emerges as a significant influence on her education and career decisions, starting from the decision to pursue teaching:

> My mother often persuades me that it's good to be a teacher … I was not very assertive, and my parents may largely influence me, though I also have my ideas. (INT_1)

Lingqi's reflection points to her mother's strong influence on her decision to pursue a teaching career, perhaps even hinting at regret not having asserted her ideas. As the year unfolds, there is little evidence of internalization of motivations, which would suggest increasing agency and control of her actions guided by her own judgment (Beijaard et al., 2004). Instead, the influence of Lingqi's mother and her own perceived limitations persist:

> And she also said that being a teacher is the best choice for a girl … when I encounter more important life choices, I generally want to escape … (INT_2)

> [My mother] might threaten my autonomy … She is a threat to my self-space. I feel that threat grows stronger than before … (INT_3)

Lingqi also refers to teachers and social perceptions as positive influences, though neither seems to play a significant role. About teachers, she says: *none of them plays a decisive role … (INT_1).* On the other hand, repeated references to social perceptions of teaching suggested this was at least a consideration for her, for example: *I think people of my age may feel that being a teacher is quite profitable … when others talk with me, they would say that being a teacher is good. (INT_1)*

Lingqi's decision to become a teacher is seemingly rooted in the perceptions of others, particularly her mother and her lack of experience, rather than her aspirations. Challenges during her studies compound this initial lack of agency and motivation:

> In my second year of undergraduate study, I had an internship … [it] made me not want to be a teacher … a large part of the time of primary and secondary school teachers is devoted to things that have nothing to do with teaching … This will demotivate me to be a teacher. (INT_1)

The discrepancy between Lingqi's teaching expectations and her lived experience is common, particularly as the teaching role is ever-expanding, often into territory for which teachers are unprepared (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). If agency is the ability to shape one's response to challenges (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), Lingqi exhibits limited agency. Instead, she seems demotivated

and questions her career choice; both processes are recognized as contributing to early-career teacher attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021). For now, Lingqi feels compelled to continue because she does not see an alternative:

> I feel I have built a teaching path here … Although my current mood may not be 100% willing to be a teacher … I don't dare to step out of my comfort zone … (INT_1)

Notwithstanding, Lingqi's narrative offers glimpses into possible sources of pathways for supporting her sense of ownership, her agency, and her motivation. The first is conversations with peers she perceives as experiencing similar doubts about teaching yet persevering. With this, she begins to feel connected to a community of practice. At the same time, positive experiences at teaching interviews contribute to the feasibility of Lingqi's possible teacher self, as she identifies concrete evidence of traits that would make her a good teacher.

Ellie

Sociographic Insights

Like Lingqi, Ellie recognizes the significant impact of family on her life. Her father and husband occupy the innermost circle of influence (see Figure 6.4), with her father's role particularly pronounced. Other family members, like her mother and brother, also play a role, albeit less prominently. Ellie, like Lingqi, draws inspiration from teachers who have shaped her career aspirations. These educators span her secondary school and undergraduate experiences. Notably, Ellie recalls colleagues Stella and Chris, with whom she collaborated in the past on teaching strategies.

Ellie's sociograms exhibit lower density than Lingqi's, with her second (see Figure 6.5) and third (see Figure 6.6) sociograms sparser than the initial one. In her narrative, Ellie attributes this change to her role as a parent, which has led to reduced contact with former friends and colleagues.

In her second sociogram, Ellie's family no longer plays a prominent role in the second and third interviews. However, Chris and Stella, featured in the first sociogram, reappear in the third, albeit with diminished influence. Ellie clarifies that while she rarely interacts with them now, earlier discussions with these colleagues have left a lasting impact. At this point, Ellie includes the practice-oriented units in her Master's program, and these remain in the third sociogram, suggesting more than a fleeting role. Also emerging in this third sociogram is a friend Ellie has made on the program. Ellie sees Grace as a role model because of her drive and initiative for learning and personal growth. She observes that



Figure 6.4 Ellie's sociogram in interview 1.

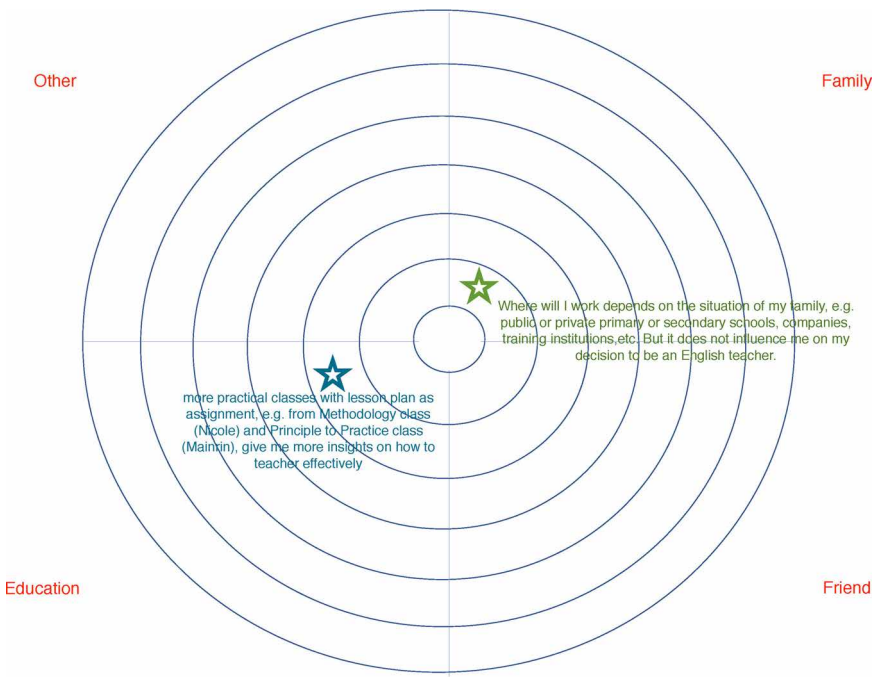


Figure 6.5 Ellie's sociogram in interview 2.

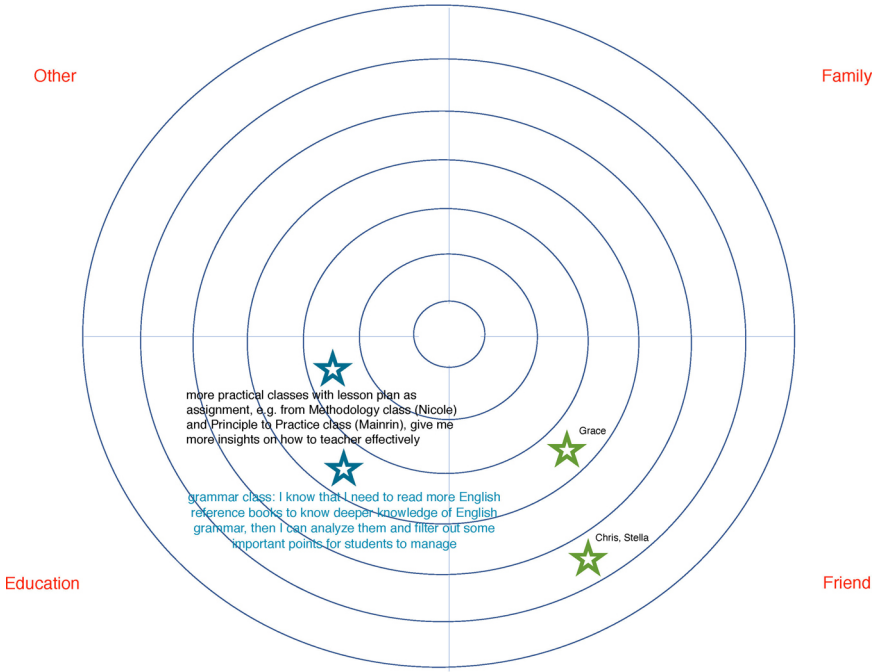


Figure 6.6 Ellie's sociogram in interview 3.

Grace enjoys learning and is driven to it beyond the requirements of the course, something that Ellie aspires to.

Delving into the Narrative

Ellie's trajectory opens similarly to Lingqi's, with her choice of university major strongly influenced by her father. Ellie lacks agency in early decisions, which she attributes to her sense of filial piety. However, she describes her relationship with her father as "close" and welcomes his guidance. In contrast with Lingqi, the decision is supported by her intrinsic interest and self-efficacy in learning English, traits that often form the basis of the motivation to teach (Zhang et al., 2019). Notwithstanding her father's encouragement to study English, Ellie's motivation to become a teacher is her own:

> My family helped me to apply for a job in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs … But I don't want to be a civil servant, so I just took the admission test without preparation … This is the first time I am very rebellious and have had a major conflict with them. (INT_1)

In the context of filial piety, this is a significant moment. Motivated by her desire to become a teacher and signaling her degree of commitment, Ellie exercises her agency:

> While looking for a job in my second year of graduate school, I wanted to be a teacher, though I majored in international politics in my previous postgraduate study … when I graduated, I wanted to find a job as an English teacher. (INT_1)

While both Lingqi and Ellie wrestle with a sense of filial piety, they respond differently. Reluctantly, Lingqi elects to preserve family harmony by obeying her mother. In exercising her agency, Ellie, on the other hand, risks family harmony but is regarded by her family's acceptance and eventual support, illustrating the increasing interplay between traditional cultural values and modernization (Bedford & Yeh, 2021). Her positive teaching experiences further bolster Ellie's decision:

> I have been a tutor for a month or two … and like being a teacher very much … These experiences made me feel that I especially like teaching English. So, I really want to be a teacher. (INT_1)

Lingqi's and Ellie's trajectories diverge. Ellie's unwavering commitment to teaching grows stronger over time, fueled by experiences and family support. Lingqi, on the other hand, faces oscillating motivation influenced by reluctance, maternal pressure, and perceived limitations. While fluctuations in self-perception are normal and offer learning opportunities, Ellie's agency contrasts sharply with Lingqi's resignation. Fluctuations in possible selves can offer opportunities for self-reflection and learning (Hiver, 2013; Sahakayan et al., 2018). However, while Ellie's agency strengthens over time, Lingqi's narrative suggests disempowerment and resignation. These trajectories seem headed in different directions; Ellie is seemingly committed to teaching, while Lingqi contemplates leaving the profession. In a study of Chinese novice early childhood teachers, Zhang et al. (2019) identified distinct profiles that captured the teachers' motivations, including:

- **Committed passionate**: These teachers exhibit high intrinsic motivation, enthusiasm for teaching, and a strong intention to remain in the profession. They actively invest in professional development.
- **Uncommitted**: Motivated primarily by employment pressure, these teachers view teaching as a fallback career. They intend to leave for better opportunities.

Ellie and Lingqi's trajectories resonate with the "committed passionate" and "uncommitted" profiles, respectively. Identifying and understanding these profiles can inform the work of teacher educators. As Zhang et al. (2019) suggested, early identification of "uncommitted" teachers can enable teacher educators to intervene, guiding these teachers to explore whether they are indeed suited to the teaching profession and supporting them toward personalized goals that account for the reality of the classroom context.

The Nature of Possible Selves

Lingqi

Interviews also explored the nature of student teachers' possible teacher selves and the influences shaping them.

Notwithstanding her reluctance to become a teacher, Lingqi began the year with a clear sense of the kind of teacher she wished to become:

> I want to be a teacher who can bring new things to my students … If I teach at a middle school, I also want to be a junior high school teacher like Teacher Bai. I hope to be closer to my students, and to be more democratic to students … I want to pass my passion for English to my students. (INT_1)

At this point, also midway through the year, Lingqi's possible teacher self focuses on fostering enjoyable learning experiences, embracing a student-centered approach, and recognizing the importance of being professional and responsible, seemingly inspired by past teachers, particularly Bai. When asked about the feasibility of attaining this imagined self, Lingqi expresses confidence in her ability to master the necessary skills: *Now that I am concerned about professional skills, I think I can achieve these skills in a short time (INT_1)*. However, the contextual challenges she anticipates seem insurmountable:

> But in the context of education in the Mainland … maybe [teachers] prioritize exams rather than raise students' cultural awareness … in the large environment of the Mainland I feel that being a teacher may be powerless … even though there are lots of things that I would like to teach, I will be bound by many rules … if the school is a test-oriented one, I might just drift alone aimlessly … Teachers in the Mainland have less room to decide what to teach. (INT_2)

Lingqi's perception of the education context threatens her agency, making her feel "powerless" and "bound by many rules." She views the Chinese education

context at the macro-level as constraining teachers. At the meso-level, she notes the rigidity of public schools.

Hennebry-Leung et al. (2019) note the challenge novice teachers face when trying to apply their learning from their teacher education program to real classrooms in China. The disconnect between the pedagogical approaches taught and the actual teaching context led to feelings of failure among these novice teachers. Like the participants in that study, Lingqi grapples with limited agency. Instead of seeking ways to alleviate tension, she contemplates abandoning her ideal teacher self and conforming to an "ought-to" teacher identity:

> I don't think my ideal teacher will be fulfilled because there are just too many restrictions. However, I don't think I will be stuck in school for the rest of my life because maybe 5 or 10 years later, maybe I leave school … But as for the present, I will try to be the kind of teacher that others expect me to be … because of the context … (INT_2)

Thompson (2017) posits the notion of the anti-ought to self to explain the exercise of individual agency in refusing to conform to expectations, as in the case of Ellie examined below. By contrast, Lingqi's lack of agency results in conformity. Thompson (2017) argues that language learners may "shut down" if they perceive the challenges of language learning to be too great. This notion may also help us understand Lingqi's reaction as, lacking agency, she prepares to abandon her possible teacher self in the face of anticipated challenges.

Ellie

Ellie's exercise of agency in choosing teaching above civil service follows through into an agentic possible teacher self, distinct from the norm:

> I hope not to become a traditional teacher. I hope to get closer to the students. I will try to make students interested in English in class. So, I want to be a teacher who can play with students … I want to create an environment that encourages openness … (INT_1)

Ellie exhibits ownership of this imagined self that is grounded in her teaching experiences:

> Starting from part-time teaching at my university, I hope my students can have fun activities in lessons. Because at that time, I felt that these children were all junior and senior high school students and the pressure of taking exams every day was quite heavy. (INT_1)

In the second and third interviews, Ellie indicates that this imagined self has been strengthened and enhanced by her experiences in the Master's program:

> I may know better than before how to respect some of the students' ideas. Many TESOL classes emphasize paying attention to students' needs and respecting them. (INT_2)

Observation opportunities are also significant. Undertaking school observations offered Ellie alternative perspectives on creating positive learning environments. It gave her practical examples of how she might implement the values underpinning her possible teacher self. This allowed Ellie to see the feasibility of realizing her possible self while also having good classroom management. This feasibility was also strengthened by Ellie's observations of tutors on the Master's program whose teaching style she envisaged emulating.

Ellie's imagined self also expands in relation to teaching methods as her learning on the program increases her confidence. Specifically, she shared how new approaches she had learned for teaching writing, for instance, helped to mitigate some of the anxieties she previously had in teaching. Her imagined self is characterized by feasibility, discerning attainable and unattainable goals, and equipping herself with skills to tackle challenges she anticipates. Feasibility is vital for ideal selves to serve a motivational purpose, guiding the individual to achieve the desired goal (Sahakayan et al., 2018). Nevertheless, like Lingqi, Ellie also sees contextual constraints hindering her full realization:

> If I am in a school … I can apply these methods and I can be what I would like to be in the future. I used to work at the language institute, because students set classes according to their own time, and the students in each class are not necessarily the same. Therefore, some teaching methods may be difficult to apply. (INT_2)

Unlike Lingqi, however, Ellie is committed to her possible self:

> I want to be a motivated teacher. I even consider doing some action research with my students. But if I don't have any passion or only try to meet others' expectations, I would not try to improve on it … if one is expected to meet a requirement, they may only try to meet the standard. But if you have passion, that will be different. (INT_2)

Ellie's possible teacher self is committed and passionate, manifesting in concrete ways such as considering possible future action research. Her ownership of the decision to become a teacher contrasts with Lingqi, who struggled with the pressure she felt, particularly from her mother, throughout the year to follow that path. Importantly, Ellie's commitment reflects van Lier's (2010) notion of

agency as the capacity to act according to personal judgment and motivation. She prioritizes her personal judgment and motivation above those of others, recognizing the importance of this as a strong foundation for being an effective teacher. In this sense, Ellie gives a greater sense of confidence than Lingqi that she will be well-equipped to face complex professional environments that no doubt await (Beijaard et al., 2004).

While Ellie and Lingqi identified discipline-specific aspects of their actual and possible selves, both seemed to emphasize aspects relating to teaching more broadly. There are various possible explanations for this. The interview questions were intentionally broad to allow participants to identify what was most significant for them in their journey toward becoming TESOL teachers. Data suggests that at this stage, the discipline-specific aspects of teaching were not most salient for Lingqi and Ellie. It is possible that at this early stage, they had yet to forge robust identities as discipline specialists and considered teaching in broader terms. Alternatively, they may have felt more confident with discipline-specific aspects of the profession, focusing their attention instead on aspects they were less confident about. While these possibilities merit further exploration, this raises important considerations around the focus and content of teacher education. Content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are recognized as core to effective teaching, as attested to by the emerging consensus for a stronger presence of the science of learning in teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). As Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) note, however, effective education unfolds when *all* aspects of the educational environment support *all* dimensions of children's development. Lingqi and Ellie seem to conceive this broader understanding as integral to how they perceive the role of the TESOL teacher.

Conclusion

Lingqi's and Ellie's trajectories illustrate the unique, dynamic, and complex nature of student teachers' emergent possible teacher selves and point to the broader influences that shape their trajectory into the teaching profession.

For both Lingqi and Ellie, filial piety plays an important role as they grapple with tensions between family loyalty and personal aspirations. In Lingqi's case, the tension seems to be a constant, while in Ellie's case, it manifests in a single event. Each reacts differently to this tension, suggesting different degrees of agency. Differences in agency also manifest in their respective decisions and

their response to anticipated future challenges. Lingqi exhibits limited agency, conforming to pressure from her mother, the perceptions of friends and society, and her self-perceived limitations. Feeling forced into a career not of her choosing, she expresses her intention to leave teaching in due course. Ellie, by contrast, "rebels" against family expectations to pursue teaching, a decision further affirmed by her personal and professional experiences and passion and pointing to ownership and agency in her career trajectory.

Differences in agency also manifest in the possible selves Lingqi and Ellie envisage. While Lingqi anticipates conforming to expectations that do not align with her ideal teacher self, as the teacher education program progresses, Ellie increasingly sees possibilities for realizing her ideal teacher self. Agentic selves can be seen as associated with personal goals, while goals determined by others are more likely to result in less agentic motivational orientations (Hennebry-Leung et al., 2023). This is clearly evident in the two trajectories presented in this study. Teacher agency is central to mitigating attrition and navigating educational reforms that may sit uncomfortably with teachers (Dunn, 2018). At this early stage, Lingqi's and Ellie's trajectories offer insight into the beginnings of teacher agency. Given the significance of a future-oriented dimension of possible selves for teacher motivation (Hiver, 2013), the differing degrees of agency in their possible teacher selves may foreground future divergence in Lingqi's and Ellie's future teaching motivation trajectories.

As illustrated, possible self trajectories are embedded in personal histories and social dynamics beyond the immediate context of the teacher education program. Recognizing and understanding this can enable teacher educators to explore such influences with student teachers and to adopt strategies that seek to internalize motivations for teaching to create a sense of ownership of teaching aspirations. Vision-building strategies can be a powerful tool (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014), particularly if implemented in the context of structures and approaches that allow student teachers to engage with real classroom and school challenges and are accompanied by scaffolded support for student teachers to reflect on what it might look like to realize their vision in the face of such challenges. Such strategies and approaches can allow for shaping goals that align with student teachers' personal vision, thus strengthening commitment. They must, however, also be accompanied by realistic pathways for achieving those goals in real-world contexts.

Little attention has been given to the motivational influences that student teachers bring to their teacher education program and the extent to which

decisions to pursue teaching have agentic beginnings. Specifically, little is known about student teachers' possible selves and the degree of agency that characterizes these. The present study contributes to a more "holistic perspective" (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020) on student-teacher motivation and the emergence of their possible selves. Helpful future directions could follow the trajectories of student teachers into the first years of teaching to understand how these different agency starting points unfold in the course of teaching.

References

Ahearn, L. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *30*, 109–37. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109.

Altissimo, A. (2016). Combining egocentric network maps and narratives: An applied analysis of qualitative network map interviews. *Sociological Research Online*, *21*(2), 14. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3847.

Bedford, O., & Yeh, K.-H. (2021). Evolution of the conceptualization of Filial Piety in the global context: From skin to skeleton. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.570547.

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*(2), 107–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001.

Biesta, G. J. J., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*, 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Thematic analysis. In *APA handbook of research methods in psychology: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (2nd ed. pp. 65–81). American Psychological Association.

Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, *24*(2), 97–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791.

Dörnyei, Z., & Kubanyiova, M. (2014). *Motivating learners, motivating teachers. Building vision in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Dunn, A. H. (2018). Leaving a profession after it's left you: Teachers' public resignation letters as resistance amidst neoliberalism. *Teachers College Record*, *120*(9), 1–34.

Guo, X., Li, J., Niu, Y., & Luo, L. (2022). The relationship between Filial Piety and the academic achievement and subjective wellbeing of Chinese early adolescents: The moderated mediation effect of educational expectations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.747296.

Hennebry-Leung, M., Hu, X., & Chen, X. (2019). Transitioning from master's studies to the classroom: From theory to practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, *53*(3), 685–711. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.505.

Hennebry-Leung, M., Tseng, W.-T., & Gao, X. (2023). Language learning motivation, learner agency, and the medium of instruction. *Psychology in the Schools*, *60*(9), 3575–91. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22935.

Higgins, E. T. (1998). Promotions and prevention: Regulatory focus as a motivational principle. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *30*, 1–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60381-0.

Hiver, P. (2013). The interplay of possible language teacher selves in professional development choices. *Language Teaching Research*, *17*(2), 210–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813475944.

Kahn, R. L., & Antonucci, T. C. (1980). Convoys over the life course: Attachment, roles, and social support. In P. B. Baltes, & O. Brim (Eds.), *Life-Span development and behavior* (Vol. 3, pp. 253–86). Academic Press.

Kelchtermans, G., & Ballet, K. (2002). The micropolitics of teacher induction. A narrative-biographical study on teacher socialisation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *18*, 105–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x(01)00053-1.

Kubanyiova, M. (2019). Language teacher motivation research: Its ends, means and future commitments. In M. Lamb, K. Csizér, A. Henry, & S. Ryan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of motivation for language learning* (pp. 389–407). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lauriala, A., & Kukkonen, M. (2005). Teacher and student identities as situated cognitions. In M. Kompf, & P. Denicolo (Eds.), *Connecting policy and practice* (pp. 206–15). Routledge.

Madigan, D. J., & Kim, L. E. (2021). Towards an understanding of teacher attrition: A meta-analysis of burnout, job satisfaction, and teachers' intentions to quit. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *105*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103425

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible Selves. *American Psychologist*, *41*(9), 954–69.

Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T. (2020). *Teacher wellbeing*. Oxford University Press.

OECD. (2019). *TALIS 2018 results (Volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. TALIS, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en.

Ortega, L. (2019). SLA and the study of equitable multilingualism. *The Modern Language Journal*, *103*(1), 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12525.

Sahakayan, T., Lamb, M., & Chambers, G. (2018). Language teacher motivation: From the ideal to the feasible self. In *Language teacher psychology* (pp. 53–70). Multilingual Matters.

Thompson, A. S. (2017). Don't tell me what to do! The anti-ought-to self and language learning motivation. *System*, *67*(38–49), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.04.004.

Thompson, A. S., & Liu, Y. (2021). Multilingualism and emergent selves: Context, languages, and the anti-ought-to self. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *24*(2), 173–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1452892.

Trettevik, R., & Grindal, M. (2016). The ideal and ought self-guides and the affective consequences of identity verification. In J. E. Stets, & R. T. Serpe (Eds.), *New directions in identity theory and research* (pp. 601–26). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190457532.003.0021

Urzúa, A., & Vásquez, C. (2008). Reflection and professional identity in teachers' future-oriented discourse. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*(7), 1935–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.04.008.

Van Canh, L. (2020). Remapping the teacher knowledge-base of language teacher education: A Vietnamese perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(1), 71–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818777525.

van Lier, L. (2010). Agency, self and identity in language learning. In O'Rourke, B., & Carson, L. (eds.), *Language learner autonomy: Policy, curriculum, classroom* (pp. ix–xviii). Peter Lang.

Zhang, L., Yu, S., & Liu, H. (2019). Understanding teachers' motivation for and commitment to teaching: Profiles of Chinese early career, early childhood teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, *25*(7), 890–914. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1670155.

Appendix

Example Interview Prompts (Interview 2)

The following prompts were used as guides only:

1. Tell me about your motivation to become a teacher at the moment. Would you say it's stronger than before? Weaker? About the same? What has impacted on this motivation? (Explore influence of teacher education program/friends & family/experiences/teachers/other influences the participant may identify.)
2. How important is it to you what X (family/friends/society/peers/teachers) think about you becoming a teacher? Did you ever consider doing something else? What was the deciding factor for you?
3. In our first interview, you outlined the kind of teacher you wanted to become and the kind you felt you should become. Do you think that's changed? What has influenced those changes? How do you feel about those changes? How achievable do you think that teacher self is?

7

Reshaping Agency and International Teacher Identity: Supporting EAL VCE Students via a Bilingual Immersion Model at a Sino-Australian Senior School in China

Jennifer Cutri

Journeying into the Chinese International Education Landscape

The Landscape of Chinese Internationalized Schools

The "English-speaking International Schooling" field is growing and changing despite being viewed as an insecure and precarious working environment with high turnover rates. Within the Asia Pacific, newer "Non-Traditional" models are emerging (Bunnell & Poole, 2023). One particular "Non-Traditional" model, the *Chinese Internationalized School* (CIS), has gained scholarly attention regarding its unique formation and delivery of international education credentials. Over the past decade, the high demand from affluent Chinese families for English-medium or bilingual education using an international curriculum has increased the establishment of these CIS (Poole, 2020, 2021). CIS typically caters to these local middle-class elites, providing an alternative to conventional international schools, accessible only to Chinese citizens with non-Chinese passports. CIS incorporates international elements, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) or foreign language learning, to supplement the National Curriculum.

CIS blends national and international perspectives, including teachers, curricula, pedagogy, and management (Poole, 2020). While CISs are often considered a homogeneous group of international schools, Ma (2023) highlights that they represent a loose assemblage of various facets of international and

private schooling, focusing on delivering international curricular elements via English or bilingual instruction. Thus, CISs embody a blended identity across national and international educational institutions. These institutions offer meticulously designed curricula to align with the local language and socio-political environment and encourage favorable instances of bilingualism (Poole, 2024a).

Chinese international schools (CISs) differ from "traditional" international schools in that they implement a bilingual mode of instruction, typically encompassing English and pǔtōnghuà, China's standard dialect. Pǔtōnghuà is given precedence, especially during middle school, with English gaining prominence in the final years of high school (Poole, 2020). Incorporating both pǔtōnghuà and English presents opportunities and challenges for language development and intercultural exchanges. One such opportunity is using pǔtōnghuà to scaffold new ideas or complex concepts that may be unfamiliar in English but known in pǔtōnghuà. However, educators and school administrators express concern that the uniform nature of the student body may affect the opportunities for and evolution of intercultural interaction. It has been observed that national or international schools must now equip students for the realities of a globalized world, necessitating the development of language skills and intercultural competence to navigate culturally diverse contexts (Wang & Lehtomäki, 2022). That said, a homogeneous "Chinese" culture warrants scrutiny.

Chinese international schools have surfaced as a unique educational trend, meeting the increasing need for international curricula among domestic Chinese learners. These institutions, molded by the Chinese Ministry of Education regulations (MOE, 2003), provide a combined Chinese-foreign curriculum in the later years, from 10 to 12 (Cutri, 2022; Poole, 2024a). As China's educational environment experiences substantial changes, it becomes essential to explore the experiences of educators within these distinct educational settings.

Chinese Internationalized School Teachers

Scholarly work has begun to delve into teachers' experiences in international schools in response to the evolving dynamics of international education. Studies have concentrated on comprehending teachers' views on the impact of high student attrition (Hacochen, 2012), experiences of instability (Poole, 2021), unjust termination (Blyth, 2017), micropolitics (Caffyn, 2018), and intercultural adjustment (Savva, 2017). Scholars have also formulated several

typologies of international schoolteachers (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Rey et al., 2020). These classifications distinguish various kinds of global educators and, in certain instances (e.g., Bailey and Cooker, 2019), illuminate the motivations behind teachers' decisions to work in international schools. While typologies of international schools offer a lens to study and understand the complex world of international education, such typologies have centered on the experience of expatriate teachers, with Poole (2021) noting an absence of host country/local teachers' voices.

The literature on international education has explored various aspects of teachers' experiences, including their identities (Bailey & Cooker, 2019), experiences of precarity (Blyth, 2017; Bunnell & Poole, 2023), and intercultural adaptation (Savva, 2017). However, this literature predominantly focuses on Anglo-Western teachers, with a few exceptions (e.g., Bunnell and Poole, 2021; Lai et al., 2016; Poole, 2019). With 70 percent of teachers in CIS being host country teachers, there is still a dearth of studies on host country national teachers (Poole, 2024a) where they have been broadly labeled as "locals" or an anonymous "pool" (Rey et al., 2020). Host national country teachers in CIS differ from expatriate teachers in international schools in four ways: experiences, qualifications, passport status, and cross-cultural capital. Expatriate faculty members often encounter barriers to expressing their knowledge due to the privilege of pǔtōnghuà as the lingua franca of leadership (Poole, 2020).

Exploring the voices of teachers in CIS could shed light on the multifaceted experiences of international educators, thereby enriching our understanding of international education. This study aims to contribute to this underrepresented area by exploring the unique challenges and opportunities of delivering an Australian curriculum in Chinese internationalized schools (CISs). Through informal collaboration, teachers have co-constructed a bilingual immersion model that integrates EAL teaching techniques, Chinese pedagogical and cultural knowledge, and pǔtōnghuà as a medium of instruction. The narratives of these teachers reveal how they negotiate their professional identity and agency as VCE teachers, responding to the opportunities and challenges posed by the cross-cultural Sino-Australian environment. Recognizing the significance of language teacher agencies in supporting EAL learners within Chinese internationalized schools, the study considers the complexities of delivering a foreign curriculum to EAL students. By delving into the experiences of language teachers and their enactments of the VCE curriculum, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experience of language teaching in CIS.

Exploring Sino-Australian VCE Teachers' Identity through Ecological Agency

This chapter explores the complexities and nuances of teacher identity by investigating the agency of a sample of VCE teachers at a Sino-Australian school. Drawing on the ecological perspective of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), this chapter presents how a sample of VCE teachers at a Sino-Australian school negotiates their roles within this particular CIS's socio-cultural and institutional landscape. The VCE teachers' experiences are shaped by their mobility into the environment and the perspectives gained through migration. Tran and Vu (2018) highlight the inseparable link between agency and mobile experiences, underscoring the importance of understanding "international teacher agency" within the context of overlapping local and transnational elements.

Diverse cultural contexts significantly impact international teachers' identity and agency (Everitt, 2020; Mathews et al., 2025). Wang (2022) highlighted that English teachers could positively negotiate with their surroundings and exert their agency to cope with professional and personal pressures. However, it remains to be seen how teachers in CIS perceive their own identities and the influence these identities have in navigating their particular teaching environments. Poole (2024b) highlights that there are several studies on teacher identity and Chinese teachers (e.g., Yuan & Gao, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022; Zhu & Zhu, 2018); however, these studies focused on the public-school context. Thus, this chapter is situated in the context of CIS, with implications for pedagogical practices, teacher professional development, and the broader international education discourse.

Hadar and Benish-Weisman (2019) define agency as intentional actions concerning personal objectives, aspirations, and values. In the case of VCE teachers, this involves adapting to the new work culture within the Sino-Australian school. Lai et al. (2019) highlight that teacher identity is rooted in cultural inheritance and educational norms. Adopting an ecological understanding of teacher agency, drawing on the works of Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Priestley et al. (2015), is central to exploring the agentic actions of VCE teachers at the Sino-Australian school. This perspective appreciates agency as an emergent phenomenon, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between individual agency and the complex ecological conditions in which teachers find themselves.

The ecological framework acknowledges the intricate and reciprocal relationship between individual agency and the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts within which teachers operate. It provides valuable insight

into how teacher agency can be located by considering their histories and beliefs, their abilities to visualize alternative futures, and their interplay with socio-structural and material conditions. Moreover, it engages with critical perspectives on education and decoloniality, challenging Western-centric discourses in international education and incorporating local cultural logic.

Qualitative Investigation

This discussion draws upon a broader study, presenting a qualitative investigation into a curricular innovation devised by VCE educators to facilitate the delivery of an English language curriculum to English as Additional Language Learners (EAL). The research explores teachers' experiences supporting their students' VCE studies through this innovative curriculum at a Sino-Australian school in China. This study utilized semi-structured interviews and class observations with the participating teachers. The primary research question guiding this exploration is, "In what ways is teacher agency shaped through enacting the VCE curriculum for EAL learners at a Sino-Australian school in China?" Data analysis followed a thematic approach involving verbatim transcription of interviews and coding for key themes and patterns. The analysis sought to capture the complexities of teacher agency within the Chinese internationalized school context, shedding light on the affordances and challenges encountered by language teachers in their practice.

Studying the VCE at a Sino-Australian CIS

The Sino-Australian school is a "Non-Traditional" model of international education that falls into the CIS landscape. It provides foreign education credentials in the senior school, delivering the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) to Chinese students and allowing them to enter Australian higher education. This represents what Bunnell (2008, p. 391) calls "a feeder into the English education system at a higher education level." The Chinese school must seek a partner, and the Victorian school seeks a license from the VCAA, involving ongoing inspections to remain accredited. It is crucial to understand that this is an example of China importing international education rather than an example of a foreign school exporting a model to China, as is more the case with traditional types of international schooling. However, not all aspects of a foreign private school can be exported to China in compliance with Chinese regulations (Cutri, 2022).

Meeting the International VCE Teachers

The study's participants are one expatriate teacher, Felix, the Director of VCE, and two local Chinese teachers, Heather and Sophie, with expertise in teaching the VCE curriculum at the Sino-Australian senior school (see Table 7.1). Participants were selected based on their experience delivering the curriculum to EAL learners. These teachers comprise both local and foreign teachers who identify as "international" rather than being defined by their passport country. The accounts of the four teachers selected represent "international" teacher identity in a foreign curriculum-driven setting. Including Chinese teachers in this analysis is paramount; as Poole (2021) highlights, Chinese teachers in *CIS* understand the socio-political conditions of such schools. As a result, I build on Poole's (2021, p. 90) assertion through the accounts presented by Sophie

Table 7.1 The VCE Teachers at the Sino-Australian School

VCE teacher	Background	Experience	Teaching methods
Felix	British national, completed his Masters degree in Natural Sciences in the UK. He relocated to China and worked as an English language tutor	Worked as an English language tutor for Chinese companies. Was employed by the Australian home campus for three years.	EAL and Science (major in chemistry) VCE director
Heather	Studied in both Chinese and Australian education systems. Completed her university studies in China and a Master of Education in Australia	Worked in local Chinese schools then transitioned to the international sector in China. Completed the mandatory six-week training course for all Chinese teachers at the Australian campus	EAL and Chinese
Sophie	Schooling, university, and teaching experiences took place in China. She completed her Bachelor's degree at a reputable Chinese university	She commenced her teaching career in local schools that provided a foreign curriculum—taught the British curriculum to Chinese students—and completed the mandatory six-week training course for all Chinese teachers at the Australian campus	Information technology and physics

and Heather to illuminate the significance of local teachers, moving beyond the retrenchment of existing beliefs and deficit views of China, Chinese education, and Chinese teachers as the "Other." Only three teachers were interviewed to ensure the accounts were personally salient and rich (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This chapter presents how the VCE teachers endeavor to address the challenges, resulting in developing agency and reorienting their views of international teaching for the Chinese demographic.

VCE International Teacher Agency in a Sino-Australian School

Negotiating Professional Agency and Identity: Challenges in Delivering the VCE in a Sino-Australian School

The accounts shared by Felix, Heather, and Sophie challenge prevailing notions within international education, particularly those biased toward Western cultural, curricular, and pedagogical perspectives. Teachers entering the cross-cultural teaching space must recalibrate their expectations, acknowledging the clash of teaching and learning expectations rooted in diverse cultural demographics. These challenges encompass managing professional expectations, linguistic and cultural adjustments, and navigating the complexities of teaching a foreign curriculum to local Chinese students. A prevalent concern is the dissatisfaction arising from unmet expectations of teaching high-level students proficient in English. This misalignment reflects a historically favored Western-centric approach requiring adaptation for success in the CIS environment.

Felix's insights challenge assumptions that international education inherently fosters international-mindedness. He emphasizes the "need to change yourself as a teacher" to "thrive and survive in a school like this." Foreign educators lacking cross-cultural experience may confine themselves to familiar teaching practices, intensifying clashes with culturally different expectations. Kostogriz and Bonar (2019, p. 2) note a "polarisation of Western professionalism in their practice" among foreign educators. Contrary to traditional views, Chinese students at the school seek a pathway to Australia, challenging Western-centric expectations of international education. The experiences of Heather and Sophie, spanning both Chinese and Australian education systems, underscore tensions arising from transitioning between different cultural contexts.

Challenges faced by VCE teachers extend to meeting local expectations while alleviating academic pressure on students. Retaining students in a foreign, bilingual program involves implementing student support strategies that may clash with Chinese administration views. Struggles intensify when students adapting to the VCE program face linguistic barriers and difficulty reconciling customary learning styles with the student-centered approach of VCE teachers. Broader pedagogical and ideological differences between Chinese and Western education systems are evident in the VCE curriculum transition, representing a pedagogical discontinuity and a shift in academic curriculum. Cultural adjustments and navigating Chinese aspects while integrating internationalism contribute to a deflated sense of agency. However, through cultural brokering and cross-cultural adaptation, the VCE teachers developed an understanding of agency, co-constructing "cultural other-awareness" to address student needs effectively.

Sophie and Heather highlight demographic, environmental, and cultural differences posing additional challenges in teaching a foreign curriculum to Chinese students. Due to unfamiliarity with foreign teaching methods, the "culture gap" experienced in Year 10 requires careful bridging. Pedagogical resistance, linked to students' unfamiliarity with a Western-centric approach, prompts Sophie to adopt a more student-centered approach. Cultural brokering practices become essential for cross-cultural adjustment, requiring comprehension of students' cultural and academic expectations.

Students' low self-esteem, shaped by the Chinese meritocratic approach, prompted Sophie and Heather to adapt teaching approaches by building relationships and incorporating familiar Chinese techniques. Cultural brokering, mediating between cultural groups, becomes crucial for international teachers' cross-cultural adjustment, emphasizing collegial support. Parental expectations for a foreign education pathway and conflicting views on teaching methods create tensions. Students enrolled in the VCE program as a last resort, not by choice, which leads to a clash of expectations between teachers and administrators. A nuanced understanding of the local context, incorporating localized practices within foreign educational ideals, is essential.

The marginalization of professional identity among VCE teachers aligns with broader research on international teacher identity, particularly in the Chinese context. Despite administrative challenges and top-down decisions overriding educators' professional knowledge, teachers desire to understand the unique circumstances of the Sino-Australian school. They develop strategies, demonstrating cultural brokering and co-construction of "cultural

other-awareness," aligning with Tran and Vu's (2018) perspective on agency resulting from intercultural change.

Teaching a foreign curriculum to Chinese students introduces unique challenges, particularly the "culture gap" in Year 10, stemming from unfamiliarity with foreign teaching methods. Sophie adopts a student-centered approach, emphasizing cultural brokering practices to facilitate cross-cultural adjustment. Despite feeling devalued, teachers develop agency through struggle and resistance, coping strategies, and finding support in each other. The international teachers employed cultural brokering practices to adjust cross-culturally, emphasizing the importance of collegial support.

The international teachers emphasize the importance of cultural adjustment, urging immersion in Chinese customs and adaptation to idiosyncrasies. Local colleagues play a pivotal role in this adjustment, providing invaluable guidance. The experiences reflect a sense of precarity within the transnational social space, influenced by organizational dynamics, autocratic leadership, and divergent views on international education's purpose. The international teachers highlight the interplay between cultural adaptation, educational objectives, and institutional dynamics in international education.

The theme of cross-cultural pedagogical adjustment for VCE teachers reveals the complexities of navigating cultural, linguistic, and organizational challenges. Teacher agency and identity play a crucial role in this process, requiring constant adaptation, cultural brokering, and collegial support. The teachers' struggles contribute to a nuanced understanding of the transnational social space, emphasizing the importance of a balanced approach that respects local and foreign educational values. The discussion underscores the significance of cultural brokering, collegial support, and developing an international teacher identity in promoting successful cross-cultural adjustment and effective teaching practice.

The Bilingual Immersion Model

The VCE teachers shed light on two critical factors influencing the Chinese students' VCE education: their ability to navigate an English language-oriented curriculum and their socio-emotional needs. The challenges arise from the students attempting to grasp a foreign curriculum through a foreign language, raising concerns about their English language proficiency, which is crucial for success in VCE exams. While bilingual teachers and translation services are helpful, a stronger emphasis on English language development is necessary.

Recognizing that student enrollment in the VCE aims to facilitate studying abroad, teachers express concern about students' English language proficiency required to pass VCE exams. These students must possess the necessary skills to complete the exams successfully. VCE teachers grapple with a dual challenge: not only do VCE students struggle to learn a foreign language at the VCE level, but they also face the additional hurdle of comprehending VCE content in English. The teachers noted that even when academic content was in their native language, pǔtōnghuà, students encountered difficulties.

However, this notion of bilingual instruction presents challenges. Research by Serefini et al. (2020) highlights that successful bilingual development occurs when the first language is supported during second language learning. If students' native language lacks support while acquiring academic content in a foreign language, they may encounter significant difficulties. Moreover, given that the VCE is an Australian examination, its content and exams are exclusively in English—a potential obstacle for monolingual Chinese-speaking students with limited exposure to English. Sophie and Heather provided their colleagues with strategies to help navigate this challenge, and one effective strategy was encouraging teachers to provide a bilingual approach to their teaching. This bilingual approach was observed in all the participant teachers' classes, where students were encouraged to speak pǔtōnghuà and English.

Although the VCE teachers have identified the linguistic challenge that students face when trying to understand VCE content, they also highlighted the limitation of not communicating their concerns to the Chinese Executive Principal due to the hierarchical structure of the administration of Chinese schools (Qian, 2018). While the VCE staff were strictly warned not to modify the curriculum content, they worked collegially and devised a model to support the student's linguistic abilities. Drawing on their unique professional teaching and learning experiences in different contexts, the informants discussed how they contributed to their knowledge to help devise a linguistic model. As the VCE coordinator, Felix took on board the local and foreign teachers' observations of their students and suggested approaches that formulated the bilingual teaching structure specifically teaching the VCE cohort. Providing linguistic support in cross-cultural education is crucial; as Bates (2010) argues, international schools must have a reliable English language support program to meet students' learning needs.

Felix explained that the bilingual teaching framework, which provides explicit English language support, aids the gradual language transition of VCE EAL students. This structure incorporates a variety of local and international

professional elements. Heather and Sophie identified the challenges Chinese students face in their education system. As a result, these students need teachers who comprehend the academic requirements and cultural subtleties of the students' Chinese educational background. With his previous teaching experience in China, Felix has insights into the cultural transition difficulties students and educators face. This bilingual teaching framework allows explicit English language support, easing the language shift for VCE EAL students. The streaming model is at the heart of this framework, concentrating on the language skills of both students and staff. With its multifaceted approach, the bilingual teaching structure is pivotal in equipping students for academic achievement in an increasingly globalized educational landscape.

As the director of VCE studies, Felix led the development of a bilingual teaching structure. This structure involves a phased approach, incorporating *pǔtōnghuà* instruction in Year 10 and gradually transitioning to English for VCE content. Felix met with the former principal, John Fleming, who helped Felix learn about the explicit instruction model, emphasizing the "I do, We do, You do" structure (Fleming & Kleinhenz, 2007), which he integrated into the Bilingual Immersion Model teaching methods component. The model facilitates linguistic progression and attends to students' mental and emotional readiness for English language immersion, aligning with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This approach addresses the challenge of VCE students working simultaneously with the English language and content, referred to as "double duty" work by Walqui (2006).

Transitioning from total immersion to a step-by-step approach posed challenges, necessitating equipping students with essential knowledge within a limited timeframe. The importance of cultural and linguistic considerations was underscored, taking into account students' endurance in English. The convergence of the teaching methods enriched the learning experience, with educators valuing local staff expertise. Chinese teachers adeptly demonstrated the model's effectiveness in catering to student needs. Foreign teachers, however, grappled with aligning their teaching approach with students' needs, necessitating a deep understanding of cultural, linguistic, and contextual factors. This holistic approach led to success, fostering English proficiency and preparing students for higher education in Australia.

Recognizing students' diverse backgrounds, VCE teachers tailored their approach, acknowledging varying proficiency levels and cultural contexts. A significant philosophical shift was observed—from the initial critique of Chinese teachers instructing in Chinese to an appreciation of the bilingual teaching

structure's efficiency. This shift departed from a colonialist approach, with the model's success reflected improved student grades, increased satisfaction levels, and a better cultural fit for both local and international teachers.

Finding Meaning through Educational Agency

Developing and implementing the Bilingual Immersion Model enabled the VCE teachers to find meaning in their teaching practice. International teachers develop a profound agency to cater to student's diverse needs. This agency, born from an acute awareness that transcends linguistic and pedagogical boundaries, is guided by collegial support rooted in local expertise. Their selection of culturally appropriate teaching strategies within a foreign curriculum aligns with Tran and Vu's (2018) concept of "cultural other-awareness," which needs to be nurtured upon arrival due to the teachers' unfamiliarity with the Senior School's specific circumstances. As a leader, Felix acknowledges the importance of setting accurate expectations, benefiting the school and the students.

Professional learning, pivotal in shaping teacher agency (Lai et al., 2016), is characterized by the relationships among international teachers. Felix highlights the absence of external training, viewing it as an attempt to understand the reality of being an international teacher in China rather than a criticism. His advice, "do not blame them … just do your best," addresses Chinese structures such as administration, parental demands, and student expectations, underscoring the complexities of the teaching environment. Adopting a "bilingual" strategy to manage the "cultural gap" aligns with Poole's (2018) study, where Chinese educators teaching a foreign curriculum through Western-centric methods also perceive themselves as international teachers. These "international teachers" prefer a "student-centred" approach, combining local and foreign methods as culturally appropriate practices. This approach, emphasized in Tran and Vu's (2018) research on student transnational mobility, represents a needs-based agency. The "international teachers" adjust their teaching methods to avoid devaluing students' Chinese cultural background, fostering language acquisition, preserving cultural nuances, nurturing student self-efficacy, and contributing to their sense of agency.

Teachers find meaning in their roles through adaptation, cultural awareness, and overcoming biases, leading to a sense of purpose within the Senior School (Savva, 2017). This transformative journey, coupled with the benefits of increased work ethic, motivation, and heightened engagement with teaching (Turner & Thielking, 2019), significantly impacts teachers and extends to students and the

school. However, low teacher morale, a prevalent issue identified in ten teacher interviews, emerges (Hadar & Benish-Weisman, 2019), translating motivations for teacher agency into observable changes in behavior and practice.

When facing cultural challenges, teachers develop coping strategies, forging a sense of agency through struggle and resistance, as Tran and Vu (2018) explored. They voice their struggles regarding culturally different expectations of students, parents, and the school, highlighting mutual support as a vital coping strategy and relying on local colleagues' expertise who understand cultural expectations and pressures, "international teachers" effectively assimilate into the Chinese cultural context of educational expectations. This collaborative effort contributes to a transformative learning experience, recognizing the necessity of integrating the specific educational needs of native students into their teaching methods.

International teachers at the school find emotional support and professional development in confiding in each other, helping them navigate the tensions in the transnational space. Led by Felix's observation, they learn from each other about appropriate teaching strategies to bridge the cultural gap, emphasizing the importance of mutual support. Amid challenges to their self-understanding, they recognize the value of informal support, echoing findings by Dang et al. (2021). These studies highlight the lack of professional learning support for educators teaching in English-medium institutions within an international context, underscoring the instrumental role of informal support among teachers in enhancing their agency. Similar to these findings, the VCE teachers leaned on each other, maintaining professionalism while assimilating into the Chinese cultural context of educational expectations. Instead of resisting the Chinese administration, which they felt compromised their international institutional logic, they reflected on their practices and collaborated for self-improvement.

Conclusion

The experiences of Felix, Heather, and Sophie in a Sino-Australian school highlight the challenges of Western-centric views in international education, revealing cultural transition tensions and the need for recalibration of expectations. The managerial focus in these schools often overlooks the caring and relational aspects of teaching, extending challenges beyond curriculum delivery to meet local expectations and alleviate student pressures.

Differences between Chinese and Western education systems lead to pedagogical discontinuity. However, VCE teachers find agency through cultural brokering and cross-cultural adaptation, contributing to "cultural other-awareness" for student support. The "Bilingual Immersion Model," led by Felix, addresses linguistic challenges and cultural contexts, improving student outcomes and emphasizing the importance of adapting teaching methods to local contexts. Despite the success of the bilingual immersion model, there is room for improvement, urging a more understanding and collaborative approach among teachers while considering cultural differences and students' socio-emotional well-being.

Exploring teacher agency within a Sino-Australian school underscores the importance of an ecological perspective, illuminating the complex interplay of individual agency, cultural nuances, and institutional contexts. This research uncovers the challenges faced by VCE teachers and their adaptive strategies, calling for a re-evaluation of traditional notions of international education. The findings hold implications for pedagogical practices, teacher professional development, and the broader discourse in international education. Future research opportunities include exploring the long-term impact of cross-cultural pedagogical adjustments and institutional support structures for international teachers.

References

Bailey, L., & Cooker, L. (2019). Exploring teacher identity in international schools: Key concepts for research. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *18*(2), 125–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240919865035.

Bates, R. (2010). *Schooling internationally: Globalisation, internationalisation and the future for international schools*. Routledge.

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the life course: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Blyth, C. (2017). *International schools, teaching and governance: An autoethnography of a teacher in conflict*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bunnell, T. (2008). The exporting and franchising of elite English private schools: the emerging "second wave." *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *28*(4), 383–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188790802468997.

Bunnell, T. (2016). Teachers in international schools: A global educational "precariat"? *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *14*(4), 543–59. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-07-2016-0033.

Bunnell, T., & Poole, A. (2021). *Precarity and insecurity in international schooling*: *New realities and new visions*. Emerald Group Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1108/9781800715936.

Bunnell, T., & Poole, A. (2023). International Schools in China and teacher turnover: the need for a more nuanced approach towards precarity reflecting agency. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *43*(2), 463–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2021.194084.

Caffyn, R. (2018). "The shadows are many …" Vampirism in international school leadership: Problems and potential in cultural, political, and psycho-social borderlands. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *93*(5), 500–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/01961956x.2018.1515817.

Cutri, J. E. (2022). *The localisation of Australian elite education within China: A case-study of various social 'actors experiences at a Sino-Australian senior school* [Doctoral thesis, Monash University]. https://doi.org/10.26180/21323604.v1.

Dang, T. K. A., Bonar, G., & Yao, J. (2021). Professional learning for educators teaching in English-medium-instruction in higher education: a systematic review. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(4), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1863350.

Everitt, W. (2020). Non-Peruvian teacher attrition in Lima's international school sector: Power, agency and identity. *Management in Education*, *34*(2), 50–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020619885939.

Fleming, J., & Kleinhenz, E. (2007). *Towards a moving school: Developing a professional learning performance culture*. Camberwell, Victoria: ACER Press.

Hacohen, C. (2012). "The norm is a flux of change": Teachers' experiences in international schools. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *28*(2), 113–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.646092.

Hadar, L. L., & Benish-Weisman, M. (2019). Teachers' agency: Do their values make a difference? *British Educational Research Journal*, *45*(1), 137–60. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3489.

Jin (金津), J., & Chen (陈佳颖), J. (2023). Experimenting With international curricula in Shanghai: Policies, practice, and a network ethnography analysis. *ECNU Review of Education*, *6*(4), 623–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/20965311231201429.

Kostogriz, A., & Bonar, G. (2019). The relational work of international teachers: A case study of a sino-foreign school. *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, *3*(2), 127–44. https://doi.org/10.1386/tjtm_00003_1.

Lai, C., Li, Z., & Gong, Y. (2016). Teacher agency and professional learning in cross-cultural teaching contexts: accounts of Chinese teachers from international schools in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *54*, 12–21.

Lai, C., Li, Z. (2019). Boundary brokering for cross-cultural professional learning in international school contexts. *British Educational Research Journal*, *45*(6), 1105–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3553.

Wang, Y., & Chen, Y. (2022). English language teacher agency in response to curriculum reform in China: An ecological approach. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 935038. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.935038.

Ma, K. (2023). Exploring the changing pathway to cultivating an elite "international" child in China. *SHS Web of Conferences*, *157*, 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202315704008.

Mathews, J., Veliz, L., Gunawardane, R., & Patridge, D. (2025). Mapping professional identities of teachers of English as an additional language from Sri Lanka and Australia: Identifying commonalities across contexts. *Language Teaching Research* (Online First), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688251317247.

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2003). *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools* [in Chinese]. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/gk_gbgg/moe_0/moe_9/moe_35/tnull_96.html.

Poole, A. (2018). "We are a Chinese school": Constructing school identity from the lived experiences of expatriate and Chinese teaching faculty in a type C international school in Shanghai, China. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, *14*(1), 105–21. https://doi.org/10.29329/ijpe.2018.129.8.

Poole, A. (2019). Negotiating intercultural spaces and teacher identity in an internationalised school in Shanghai. *Intercultural Communication Education*, *2*(2), 59–70. https://doi.org/10.29140/ice.v2n2.128.

Poole, A. (2020). Decoupling Chinese internationalised schools from normative constructions of the international school. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *50*(3), 447–54. https://doi.org10.1080/03057925.2019.1682839.

Poole, A. (2021). Mapping the international school landscape: Situating Chinese internationalised schools. In *International teachers' lived experiences. International and development education*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78686-1_2.

Poole, A. (2024a). *Teachers' journeys into international school teaching in China: Exploring motivations and mobilities* (First edition). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003396291.

Poole, A. (2024b). The teacher as designer, scientist and technician: Positioning private school teachers in China as post-performative teachers. *Educational Review*, 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2024.2302414.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G. J. J., & Robinson, S. (2015). Teacher agency: What it is and why it matters. In J. Evers, & R. Kneyber (Eds.), *Flip the system: Changing education from the ground up* (pp. 134–48). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315678573-15.

Qian, H. (2018). School Principalship in China: A collective portrait. In Kennedy, K. J., & Lee, J. C. (Eds.) (2018). *Routledge international handbook of schools and schooling in Asia* (pp. 1015–26). ProQuest Ebook Central. https://ebookcentral-proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/lib/monash/reader.action?docID=5391394.

Rey, J., Bolay, M., & Gez, Y. N. (2020). Precarious privilege: Personal debt, lifestyle aspirations and mobility among international school teachers. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *18*(4), 361–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1732193.

Savva, M. (2017). The personal struggles of "national" educators working in "international" schools: an intercultural perspective, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *15*(5), 576–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2016.1195728.

Serafini, E. J., Rozell, N., & Winsler, A. (2020). Academic and English language outcomes for DLLs as a function of school bilingual education model: The role of two-way immersion and home language support. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *25*(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1707477.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain. *British Journal of Pain*, *9*(1), 41–2. https://doi.org/10.1177/2049463714541642.

Tran, L. T., & Vu, T. T. (2018). "Agency in mobility": Towards a conceptualisation of international student agency in transnational mobility. *Educational Review*, *70*(2), 167–87, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1293615.

Turner, K., & Thielking, M. (2019). How teachers find meaning in their work and effects on their pedagogical practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *44*(9), 70–88. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44n9.5.

Walqui, A. (2006). Scaffolding Instruction for English Language Learners: A Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *9*(2), 159–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050608668639.

Wang, L., & Lehtomäki, E. (2022). Bilingual education and beyond: How school settings shape the Chinese Yi minority's socio-cultural attachments. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *26*(6), 2256–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1905602.

Yuan, G., & Gao, Y. (2023). Factors impacting an overseas continuing professional development programme: Chinese teachers' voices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *43*(1), 270–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2021.1918631.

Zhang, X., Admiraal, W., & Saab, N. (2021). Teachers' motivation to participate in continuous professional development: Relationship with factors at the personal and school level. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *47*(5), 714–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2021.1942804.

Zhu, G., Rice, M., Li, G., & Zhu, J. (2022). EFL student teachers' professional identity construction: A study of student-generated metaphors before and after student teaching. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *21*(2), 83–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1777872.

Zhu, J., & Zhu, G. (2018). Understanding student teachers' professional identity transformation through metaphor: An international perspective. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *44*(4), 500–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1450819.

Part Two

Language Teacher Agency amidst Structural and Cultural Constraints

8

Exercising Teacher Agency in Response to Demands of Practice: Insights from an Australian TESOL Online Placement

Thi Kim Anh Dang and Minh Hue Nguyen

Introduction

Given the rapidly changing educational contexts worldwide, there is a clear need for an agentic teacher workforce to respond to constant changes and complex demands facing the profession, such as increasing learner diversities and constant education reforms. The most recent global disruption to education was undoubtedly the Covid-19 pandemic. Without precedent, "the pandemic has created a 'new normal' in education practices through the shift to remote online learning in place of face-to-face learning" (Dang & Cross, 2023, p. 1685). Online teaching became prevalent worldwide during the pandemic at all levels of education from 2020 to 2022 and has been commonplace in various educational settings post-pandemic (Jin et al., 2021). With rapid digital technological changes and English being an international lingua-franca, online English language teaching programs are growing. Online teaching enables ELT to go beyond the geographical borders and creates a demand for language teachers who can teach online. This results in a need to continue some extent of online language teaching placement to prepare TESOL teachers for this reality.

Against this backdrop, online teaching placement is a nascent area of research. The limited research on online language teaching placement tends to report challenges and benefits presented to teachers. Benefits include the development of teachers' digital and problem-solving skills (Suherman, 2022) and emerging teacher identities (Charbonneau-Gowdy & Cechova, 2020). Challenges include issues in technology and internet access (Shinta & Aprilia, 2020), teacher-student relationships, including lacking student engagement and classroom

interactions (Hansson, 2021), and student concentration and accent (Hansson, 2021). These manifest the complex demands pre-service language teachers face when teaching and learning to teach online, from technological demands to pedagogical demands. Despite rich evidence supporting that teacher agency is essential in teachers' response to challenges in practice, with very few exceptions (e.g., Tao et al., 2024), there is a lack of research examining language teacher agency in online teaching and online teaching placement.

Simultaneously, language teacher agency is an emerging field of research starting from the 2000s (Miller et al., 2018) with "only a few explorations of ESOL teacher agency to date" (Day, 2023, p. ii). The emerging research tends to focus on in-service teachers exercising agency in practice in various contexts (see the volume edited by Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019, and the special issue edited by Miller et al., 2018), or pre-service teacher agency narrated over an extended period during their teacher education programs (e.g., Feryok, 2012; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023). As online teaching/placement is a recent phenomenon driven by the pandemic, empirical research on language teacher agency in online teaching placement has been overlooked. Kayi-Aydar et al. (2019, p. 1) emphasize:

> While this growing body of work on (language) teacher agency helps us better understand what professional teacher agency might look like, there is still much to learn about how different teaching contexts and diverse communities may affect the ways language teachers exercise agency.

By examining pre-service language teacher agency in the context of an online teaching placement, the present study contributes to addressing this gap in the growing body of scholarship on language teacher agency.

Although teacher agency is a burgeoning research issue, it is a complex concept, challenging to define and easily misconceived (Aspbury-Miyanishi, 2022; Edwards, 2017). Aspbury-Miyanishi (2022, p. 2) notes "a perfunctory recognition that social factors both enable and constrain agency, but how this happens is undertheorized in the literature on teacher agency." Human/teacher agency can be briefly defined as "the intention or the capacity of an individual to act, initiate, self-regulate, or make differences or changes to their situation" (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2021, p. 1). Teacher agency has been theorized from different perspectives (e.g., Edwards, 2017; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Nguyen & Dang, 2021; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Dang et al., 2024a, 2024b) with varying levels of engagement with the concept. For example, from an ecological perspective, Aspbury-Miyanishi (2022, p. 1) presents a model of teacher agency "rooted in what teachers perceive and do in their everyday practice." Aspbury-Miyanishi (p. 6) argues for the role of paying "attention" to "affordances in the midst of practice"

to enact agency, which resonates professional/teacher "noticing" in everyday practice. As another relevant example, from an ecological perspective, Tao et al.'s (2024) study examines the interplay of EFL teacher agency and emotions in online teaching environment. They found a close connection between teacher emotions and agency, and that agency enactment transformed teachers' emotional experiences. Given their study was based solely on interview data, they called for future research to generate various data sources to strengthen research rigor.

To address the gaps in the literature, this chapter examines a postgraduate teacher exercising agency in response to demands of practice during an online placement within a Master of TESOL program at an Australian University. Adopting a cultural-historical theoretical (CHT) perspective, to be elaborated in the coming section, this study views teacher agency as "encompass[ing] teachers' subjectivities and deliberate actions to act on new demands, both shaping and being shaped by the environment in which agency unfolds" (Dang et al., 2024a, p. 2).

Theorizing TESOL Teacher Agency in Online Placement: A Cultural-Historical Perspective

Emerging empirical research on language/TESOL teacher agency has drawn on a range of theoretical perspectives, e.g., ecological perspective (Day, 2023; Sanczyk-Cruz & Miller, 2024), and activity theory perspective (Feryok, 2012). These studies emphasize agency is "both personal and contextual as well as dynamic and situational" (Sanczyk-Cruz & Miller, 2024, p. 232), acknowledging "the roles of both the individual and the social" (Feryok, 2012, p. 86) in teacher agency. Miller et al. (2018, p. 2) also highlight the importance of "simultaneous outward- and inward-oriented reflection among language teachers" in "their ongoing development in exercising agency for positive and transformative change in their teaching contexts." Research most relevant to this study draws on activity theory (Feryok, 2012; Nguyen & Ngo, 2023). Notably, activity theory evolved from Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory, commonly referred to as socio-cultural theory in applied linguistics (see Dang et al., 2024a, for an extended discussion on various CHT traditions). Building on the earlier work in teacher agency (Dang et al., 2024a, 2024b) and the recognition of potentials of Vygotsky's work in exploring language teacher agency (Feryok, 2012), this chapter outlines a CHT perspective on theorizing TESOL teacher agency in online placement.

From this cultural-historical perspective, teacher agency is viewed as enabling the dialectic between person/subject and institutional practice (Edwards, 2017),

oriented by the person's motives, driven by demands of practice (Hedegaard, 2012a, 2012b), and capable of transforming both the person and practice (Stetsenko, 2020). This theoretical approach allows the research to analyze both the *dialectic* and *dynamics* between the *subject agency* and structure. The subject with agency here is the TESOL teacher, and the *structure* refers to the situated institutional practice of online teaching with its demands. The framework allows us to examine agency from a teacher's perspective while accounting for their relationships with the world. This subject-centered cultural-historical (or invariably referred to as socio-cultural) perspective on agency "understands individuals as being embedded in and imbued by their socio-cultural contexts; however, they are not seen as passive carriers of their contextual conditions, but rather as capable of transforming these conditions" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 47).

Anchored in a cultural-historical tradition, Edwards (2017) views agency as "a crucial element in the dialectic of person and practice," sometimes "unfold[ing] when actions are taken in activities … located in institutional practices" (p. 273). Because agency enables the dialectic of person and practice, without agency there would be "no dialectic of person and the opportunities and demands of the practices they inhabit" (p. 270). Edwards argues agency is "intertwined" with responsibility and involves intentions and deliberative actions. As people deliberately make choices about the particular cultural practices they identify with, it is necessary to "examine both agency and cultural practice; while recognising that they are dynamically intertwined" (p. 269). Finally, "agency involves engagement and a commitment to taking forward what matters for us, within the demands of practice" (Edwards, 2017, p. 272). It involves the ability to "interpret events or tasks in increasingly informed ways, as well as being able to respond to them" (p. 272), suggesting the need to attend to subject's interpretation of the demands and their capacity to respond to the demands.

Further developing a cultural-historical approach to agency, Stetsenko (2020, p. 5) conceptualizes agency within "a non-dichotomous, dialectical approach that gives full credit to the social roots of agency," emphasizing the transformation of both humans and their social practices:

> Agency is the process that enacts this nexus of ongoing, ceaseless social-individual transformations whereby people simultaneously, in one process, co-create their world and themselves so that each individual person makes a difference and matters in the totality of social practices.

Together with the works of Edwards (2017) and Stetsenko (2020) on agency, Hedegaard's (2012a, 2012b) wholeness approach became helpful to theorize institutional practices and subject's interpretation of and response to demands

of practice, within the dialectic of person and practice, or agency and demands (Edwards, 2020). Although Hedegaard's approach was originally developed to understand how children act intentionally at home and school, it has proved useful for research on professionals' transition to new demands of new practices (Edwards, 2020). For instance, it has shed light on how university teachers exercised agency when transitioning from teaching academic subjects in their L1 to teaching in English in EMI contexts in China and Vietnam (Dang et al., 2024a, 2024b). Central to Hedegaard's approach are the interrelated concepts of motive, motive-orientation, activity settings, demands of practice, and social situation of development. To Hedegaard (2012b, p. 25), "the concept of motive has become related to institutional values and demands, motivation in activity settings, and person's motives and intentions." Further,

> [a] child's motives are related to what is meaningful and important for a child. In a specific situation a child's motive can be seen as an orientation in the activity setting. A child's motive orientation is expressed in his intentional activities and his wishes. (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 134)

Both Edwards and Hedegaard emphasize the need for research designs to follow the subject as they navigate or negotiate demands of practice (Edwards, 2020). This approach "allows the researcher to analyse people's motive orientation by examining how demands are interpreted and agency enacted through either addressing the demands or navigating around them" (Edwards, 2020, p. 3).

Given the theoretical framework and the focus to understand TESOL teachers' agency in online teaching placement, the following questions framed the investigation:

- RQ1. What motives does the TESOL teacher bring to the online teaching placement?
- RQ2. What demands does the teacher recognize when teaching in the online placement?
- RQ3. How does the teacher exercise agency in response to these demands?

Research Design

Method, Setting, and Participant

This study was part of a larger project to explore the experience of twenty-three TESOL teachers in an Australian online teaching placement. It received human research ethics clearance from the authors' university and written consent from

the participants. It investigated how the TESOL teachers exercise agency in response to demands of practice during an online teaching placement lasting three weeks in 2022. The first author was the coordinator of the placement subject and, for ethical reasons, was not involved in data collection. The second author was neither teaching nor having any power relationship with the TESOL teachers. She recruited participants by presenting about the project to potential participants in their class in the absence of the first author. She then conducted the interviews and FGDs with the consented TESOL teachers. The first author involved in data analysis only after the end of the semester and after all the teaching and marking were completed. Each TESOL teacher constituted a case. Using a single case-study design (Yin, 2003), this chapter sought to understand in depth the complexities of one teacher's agency in online placement. Pseudonyms are used for the teacher and institutions throughout this chapter.

The online placement under examination took place in the final semester of the two-year Australia-based Master of TESOL course at an Australian university. The university partnered with Global English Tutoring (GET), who provided placements to the TESOL teachers. This private international education institution based in Australia connected teachers with online English learners from different parts of the world. They assigned each teacher in this study to teach school students based in China and mandated an in-house curriculum and a password-protected software platform to host the online classrooms. All the classes were videorecorded as part of the institution's rule.

Sameera was selected as the focal case in this chapter because she was representative of the cohort in terms of gender, background, prior experience, and length of participation. Like the majority of Master of TESOL students in the cohort, Sameera was an international student and spoke English as an additional language. She was a 39-year-old female teacher from India, with Hindi and Punjabi as her first languages. Prior to the placement, Sameera had had twelve years of teaching experience in India with limited experience in online teaching. She perceived her limited online teaching experience prior to the placement as "mixed," which she did not enjoy, as some students did not engage, and some did not turn on their cameras. Prior to the TESOL course, Sameera taught English language, literature, and social sciences in India to Indian students, who shared her first languages. She had never taught any student who had a different first language to hers. During the placement concerned, she taught six one-on-one lessons to an eight-year-old Chinese primary school girl, Alice (pseudonym), who had been learning English for one year and was at the beginner level. Sameera and Alice did not share the same L1.

Data Collection and Analysis

Guided by the theoretical framework (Edwards, 2017, 2020; Hedegaard, 2012a, 2012b; Stetsenko, 2020), data collection took place after the placement with a focus to understand the teacher's online teaching placement experience from their perspectives. Data included:

- an individual interview with Sameera;
- Sameera's extracts from a focus-group-discussion (FGD) including her and other teachers from the larger study;
- written reflections as part of the course assessment;
- English lesson plans initially provided by the placement host and subsequently modified by the teacher for her classes; and
- other relevant artifacts, including teaching materials, mentor's feedback, reflective journals, and screenshots of online lessons.

The individual interview generated data about Sameera's background, prior teaching experience, and the online placement experience encompassing various topics including:

- Placement settings (e.g., what/who did you teach?)
- Challenges encountered (e.g., did you face any challenges when teaching online? If so, what were they?)
- Response to challenges (e.g., how did you respond to the challenges? What did you do?)

After the interview, a one-hour FGD with Sameera and two other teachers was conducted on Zoom. It explored further the issues raised in the interviews to generate insights into the teachers' placement experience. For the reflection assignment, the teachers reflected on their online placement and identified one key practice issue encountered. They were then asked to discuss this issue in relation to the research literature before developing their own future-oriented pedagogical strategies in response to the issue.

The interview and FGD audio-recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service. For the transcripts and reflections, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) guided by the theoretical framework was employed to examine if and how Sameera exercised agency in the online placement. Adapting the process elaborated by Dang et al. (2024a), the texts were first analyzed line by line, and relevant segments of data were coded using pre-determined coding scheme based on the theoretical concepts, namely *activity settings*, *subject*, *motive*

orientation, *demands of practice* (Hedegaard, 2012a, 2012b) and *response/agency* (Edwards, 2017, 2020; Stetsenko, 2020), and subcategories under each. While existing theory was used to guide the initial coding scheme, new categories were also allowed to emerge through iterative readings of the data. Table 8.1 shows how the theoretical framework was used to analyze the data in response to the research questions (RQs). The pre-designed and modified versions of the lesson plans, together with other artifacts, provided illustrations of how the teacher's pedagogical decisions were materialized in actions.

Table 8.1 Codes Scheme

Codes	Categories	Sub-Categories
Activity settings of online teaching placement	Teaching placement host	– Specific online learning platform – Pre-designed English lesson plans – English-only instruction rule – Mentor
	English learners	– Primary Chinese students in China – Secondary Chinese students in China
Subject	MTESOL teachers	– Education background – Prior exposure to online learning – Prior teaching experience – Prior online teaching experience
Subject's motive-orientation (RQ1)	Fulfilling teaching placement	– Completing satisfactorily the placement
	Learning about teaching English	– Differentiation – Teaching learners with a different L1 from the teacher's – Engaging students in online classroom environment
	Supporting student learning of English	– Students' comprehension of English instruction – Developing students' English for communication – Students' understanding of the world through English
Perceived demands of online teaching placement (RQ2)	Learner-related demands	– Motivation to learn – Online and home distractions – Language barriers
	Teacher-related demands	– Master the technology for online teaching – Deliver the pre-designed lesson plans – Follow the English-only instruction rule – Engage learners in online classroom – Achieve the required duration of teaching placement

Codes	Categories	Sub-Categories
Exercising agency in response to demands (RQ3)	Pedagogical decisions & actions	– Modify the pre-designed lesson plans – Adopt translanguaging strategies – Deliberate use of classroom interactions – Build positive teacher–student relationships – Create a safe and supportive learning environment – Optimize communication strategies
	Teaching materials	– Create materials relevant to learners' interest – Create materials relevant for online classroom – Seek bi-lingual resources
	Professional learning	– Seek support from peers and mentors – Observe peen: from co-leaching opportunities – Learn and trial technology for online learning

Findings

The findings are reported in the sequence of the research questions: motives to online teaching placement, perceived demands of online teaching, and agentic response to the perceived demands. Data analysis revealed Sameera came to the placement with several motives, with the leading motives of supporting student learning while developing herself professionally, and satisfactorily completing the TESOL placement requirements. She reported demands commonly experienced by teachers in online teaching, i.e., demands with technology and engaging students in an online environment (Shinta & Aprilia, 2020). She also perceived demands specific to the activity setting of this placement: teaching English to a young beginner learner without sharing the learner's L1. Sameera exercised agency in response to her perceived demands. Her agentic response was oriented by her leading motives, corresponded to the specific demands perceived, and dependent on the activity setting and resources available to her.

RQ1. Motives to Online Teaching Placement

Motives reflect what the subject perceives as meaningful and important for them, expressed in their intentions and wishes, and can be seen as "an orientation in the activity setting" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 134). Sameera came to the placement

activity setting with several motives, which revealed what appeared to matter most to her in this placement. Firstly, her motives were to teach the lesson, as mandated in the curriculum provided to her, and to support her student's English learning. Sameera emphasized:

> You are given a curriculum and there are targets that you have to achieve by the end of every lesson. So … that was our responsibility to … complete the given target. And also, to facilitate the learner with whatever the needs of the learner are … to take the student to a next level … provides support to them. (FGD)

Secondly, as Sameera had been teaching English only to Indian students, she intended to take this opportunity to learn how to teach English to learners from other language backgrounds. She said:

> I am wanting to make this a career, … teaching English to different background students. So … I aimed to learn how I would teach someone the language that I want to without any use of his first language. … I knew it could be a handicap, but I was sure somehow it can be done … my aim was let me take this handicap as an advantage for myself and teach. That's one reason I decided to enrol for teaching placement and not observation. (Interview)

As she had not had any experience teaching "somebody whose first language was not known to" her, she regarded the TESOL teaching placement as a "really adventurous kind of experience." She deliberately chose a teaching placement, instead of observation, because "I wanted to check myself whether it was an easy job or doable job, teaching someone who is from a different language background" (Interview). She also said "I think I was learning with her as well. I was learning new techniques, new technologies, because I've never used that kind of platform" (Interview).

Thirdly, these motives are intertwined with her motive to complete the placement satisfactorily to meet the TESOL course requirements. This motive did not seem to be the leading motive, but became prominent in her first lesson when she had technical difficulty accessing the online classroom:

> We are going to meet our student for the first time. We know that it is going to count into our degree. What if we miss one hour of our session and we won't be able to complete our hours? (FGD)

As indicated in the quote, Sameera mentioned the need to meet the course requirement for the placement, a common motivation for student teachers on placement (Dang, 2013). Interestingly, the analysis did not show a motive related to online teaching.

RQ2. Perceived Demands of Online Teaching Practice

Sameera recognized several critical demands of teaching English to Alice, the young Chinese primary school student, in the one-on-one online classroom. This recognition reveals her ability to "interpret events or tasks" (Edwards, 2017, p. 272), or her social situation of development (Hedegaard, 2012a). Firstly, she recognized the two demands commonly associated with online teaching: technology and engaging students in an online classroom. With technology, as she was not familiar with the software platform, she found it challenging to access her "virtual classroom." She recalled the "nervous" experience with her first class when the password failed:

> I was not familiar with that platform. So … we had to download that App and, for me, unfortunately it did not work on neither of my laptop nor on my phone and nor on my home's computer …—that was actually a very big challenge, and we panicked in the beginning and … 10 minutes before my lesson I got access to that system. (FGD)

> [The IT person] sent me one of the passwords but that also didn't work. So, I was trying it on my own laptop, but it didn't work three to four times. I tried it on my housemate's laptop. It didn't work … I was so much in stress. (Interview)

Additionally, Sameera recognized the demand of engaging students in the online environment as she had experienced that before. Sameera noted,

> The most demanding thing is … how to engage those students. It is very difficult because they are on their own—they can go offline whenever they want. They can switch off the camera. They are distracted with the activities of the house as well. So … it is actually very demanding. (FGD)

Comparing with the face-to-face classroom, she noted the difference in the social environment, saying,

> Bringing a student back to an online class is much more challenging than bringing them to a [physical] classroom because sometimes students are there, in the classroom for the love of their friends, for the love of the environment. (Interview)

She noticed "in the online learning situation it will be hard for teachers and students to feel each other's emotion" (Interview). She found it "really difficult to keep the students engaged" and "no matter what technology you're using, they are bound to be distracted very soon" (Interview).

However, the biggest demand Sameera encountered arose from teaching English to a young learner at a beginner level of English when not sharing their L1. Sameera was not sure if the student could understand her instruction:

> My biggest challenge was whether my student is completely understanding what I'm saying, in English, whether the student is just repeating what she is reading or actually understanding what she's reading. (FGD)

> There were a few questions in my class when I asked the student, she was either only nodding her head in yes or she was just repeating those questions. They were complicated words like 'contrast', 'Venn diagram' …. I can tell you about what is 'comparing', but I was struggling, how would I tell her what is 'contrasting'? (Interview)

In her reflections, she provided an example of the challenging situation, where she was confused by the student's response (see Figure 8.1).

Sameera also recognized the demand of teaching in a one-on-one class in this online placement. She maintained,

> Teaching one student online is really … let's say the student is very dependent on a lot of things, on the teacher, on the course. It's boring at times … They have the privilege of switching off their camera. (Interview)

All the perceived demands seemed to happen simultaneously leading to the first lesson and made Sameera "stressed." She recalled what was going on in her head at that time:

> I had to teach. I had to remember my lesson. I was like "now what? How will I perform? Will my student turn up? Will I be able to log in?" If I miss one

Sample 1: "We have learnt all the words. Let's learn a comprehension skill—compare and contrast. First, I'll tell you why we compare and contrast and then tell you how."
Sample 2: "While we are reading a book, we can compare and contrast so we can understand it better.
"Now, I'll show you how to compare and contrast day and night using a Venn diagram.

I did not know the Chinese translation of the underlined words in the above samples and as these are from my 1st lesson, I had no idea if my learner would not know the meaning of these words in English. It took me time and several demonstrations to make her understand what I meant. Whenever I asked her questions she either repeated my questions or simply answered in yes. I was confused of whether I was making myself understood to her or not.

Figure 8.1 Sameera's reflection accompanied by teaching materials in course assignment.

> of my class, one hour of learning, I would not be able to complete my full hours of placement. (FGD)

As the quote suggests, what mattered to her was the lesson prescribed by GET, the student's participation, technology, and the placement requirements.

RQ3. Agentic Response to Complex Demands of Online Teaching Placement

Analysis suggests Sameera agentively acted on all the perceived demands. Her strong sense of agency was manifest in her *making deliberate pedagogical decisions and actions*, *developing teaching materials that suit learner's specific needs*, and *mobilizing resources available* to act on the complex demands. Data analysis also shed light on the intricate dynamics of Sameera exercising agency in response to perceived demands of practice, leading to transformation of her teaching practice and herself as a becoming TESOL teacher.

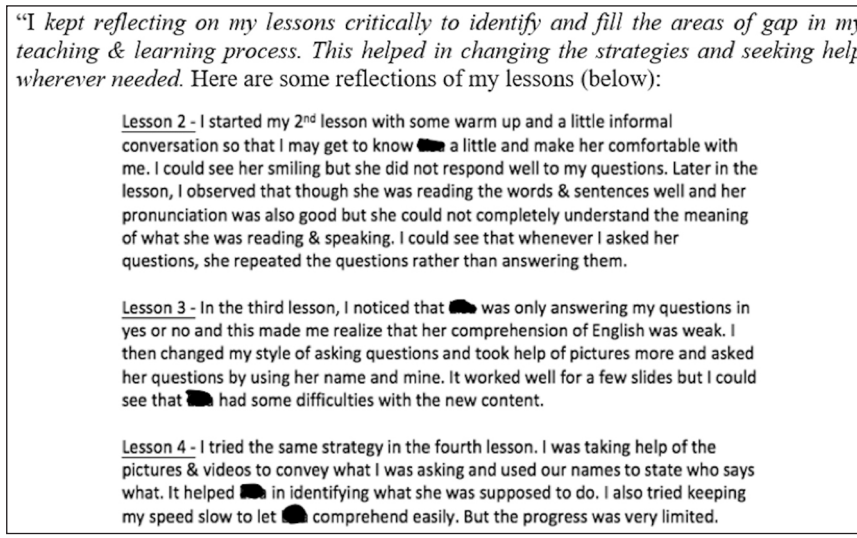
Making Deliberate Pedagogical Decisions and Actions

To respond to the demands of engaging the young learner from a different L1 background in the English-only online classroom, Sameera deliberately made pedagogical decisions and actions responsive to the learner's needs. Her agentic pedagogical response included her deliberate use of simple English and communication strategies, translanguaging, and modification of pre-designed lesson plans, resulting from her critical reflection. When realizing the mandated lesson plan would not suit Alice's level of English, Sameera modified it:

> The curriculum was set for one grade of students, but I could see that she was not at that level. So … I edited some content where I moulded it according to her level. I.. replaced some words with easier words. … I changed it into a simpler form of how it can be made understandable. (Interview)

Furthermore, she added a few activities to several classes, which she "felt … can be done for the kind of student" (Interview). This pedagogical calibration process occurred for every lesson, driven by her ongoing reflection (see Figure 8.2).

Here, her post-lesson reflections, with further insights from interview data, showed a range of pedagogical decisions and actions to respond to specific demands perceived. Sameera deliberately used warm-up activities and informal chat to get to know Alice (Lesson 2). However, after watching the videorecording of Lesson 2, Sameera realized "there is something wrong" with Alice's comprehension of her instruction when noticing Alice keep repeating her questions (Interview) instead of giving a direct answer. This better understanding


"I *kept reflecting on my lessons critically to identify and fill the areas of gap in my teaching & learning process. This helped in changing the strategies and seeking help wherever needed.* Here are some reflections of my lessons (below):

Lesson 2 - I started my 2nd lesson with some warm up and a little informal conversation so that I may get to know [redacted] a little and make her comfortable with me. I could see her smiling but she did not respond well to my questions. Later in the lesson, I observed that though she was reading the words & sentences well and her pronunciation was also good but she could not completely understand the meaning of what she was reading & speaking. I could see that whenever I asked her questions, she repeated the questions rather than answering them.

Lesson 3 - In the third lesson, I noticed that [redacted] was only answering my questions in yes or no and this made me realize that her comprehension of English was weak. I then changed my style of asking questions and took help of pictures more and asked her questions by using her name and mine. It worked well for a few slides but I could see that [redacted] had some difficulties with the new content.

Lesson 4 - I tried the same strategy in the fourth lesson. I was taking help of the pictures & videos to convey what I was asking and used our names to state who says what. It helped [redacted] in identifying what she was supposed to do. I also tried keeping my speed slow to let [redacted] comprehend easily. But the progress was very limited.

Figure 8.2 Sameera's reflection notes submitted in her course assignment.

led to more informed pedagogical actions to use wait time and examples in her instruction. She changed the way she asked questions, intentionally used the learner's name to explain content (Lessons 3 & 4), slowed down her speed (Lesson 4), and used more visual aids (Lessons 3 & 4). As Sameera clearly stated, the reflections helped to increase her understanding of demands ("this made me realize") and inform corresponding agentic response ("I then changed").

The reflection also suggests the role of motives in orienting Sameera's agentic response "to identify and fill the areas of gap in my teaching and learning process"—the teaching practice and her own learning, i.e., her second motive discussed earlier. The incidence also led to Sameera's leading motive being shifted to her first motive of supporting student learning discussed previously: "I should not think of completing my lesson because I had one hour. It's okay even if I leave something. Whatever I teach, it should go into her understanding" (Interview). What used to matter most to her became less important. Motives are dependent on subject's interpretation of demands of practice. As her interpretation changed, the motives also shifted. Through this process, Sameera transformed both her pedagogical knowledge and her practice. The analysis indicates the dynamics and dialectic between her motives, her (increased) understanding of demands, and her increasingly sophisticated agentic response to demands. By enacting her agency to act on the demands, she transformed both her practice and herself.

Developing Teaching Materials to Suit the Learner's Specific Needs

In acting on the demands to engage Alice in the one-on-one online class and to overcome the language barrier when teaching this young learner, Sameera proactively developed teaching materials suitable to Alice's specific needs. For example, because she did not share Alice's L1, Chinese, she used translanguaging (Slaughter & Cross, 2021) and digital translanguaging (Lu & Gu, 2024) via the use of digital technologies, Google translate, and Chinese translation of new vocabulary, in teaching Alice. That way, Sameera "learned how to cooperate with her [student's] proficiency level … to overcome the challenge" (Interview). Her second motive to learn how to teach English to learners from different language backgrounds appeared to orientate her agentic response to the demand of teaching this learner. As another example, Sameera described how she noticed Alice's interest and created an activity based on a children's cartoon to engage Alice in the class:

> One day, I remember, she was wearing this Angry Birds t-shirt. I told her that we'll be playing an Angry Birds game. So we played an Angry Birds game and because I talked about her favourite character …. I could see that she was happy seeing those characters on the screen. (Interview)

This activity is illustrated in the PPT (Figure 8.3):

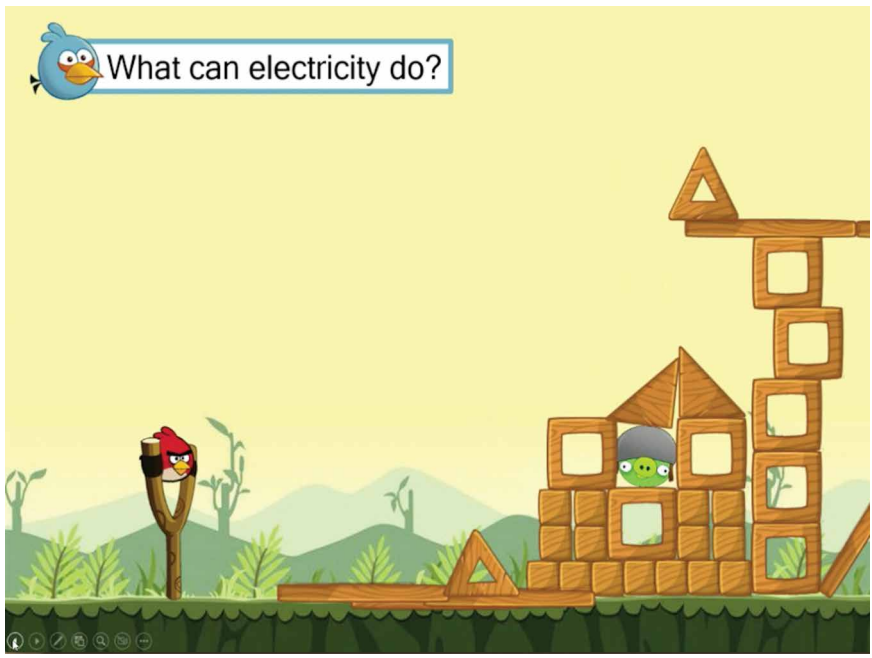


Figure 8.3 Sameera's lesson PPT slide, using Angry Birds game.

Sameera noted that the use of "student-centred activities with content of their interest can make the lessons engaging" and "I can also use more of these types of exercises because when the learner is happy to learn, learning can grow bigger & better" (Reflections). Both she and her student learned and grew from the process.

Mobilizing Resources Available

Sameera agentively mobilized all the available resources to respond to various demands. For example, to address the technology challenge with accessing the online platform for the first lesson, she sought support from the IT staff, housemate, colleagues, and friends. Whilst to her, the experience was "full of anxiety," it also revealed her strong sense of agency to resolve the technical issue, "I was trying to make it work somehow," seemingly linked to her motive to satisfactorily completing the placement.

To act on the demands of teaching English to a learner from a different language background with limited English and driven by her second motive of learning to teach such learners, she continuously reflected on every lesson to understand more about the demand. She also sought support from her university lecturer, mentor, and peers sharing Alice's L1, Chinese. She followed her lecturer's advice to co-teach after all other solutions did not seem effective and "the progress is very limited" (Reflections). Sameera explained clearly how co-teaching with a teacher sharing the same L1 with her student in Lesson 5 helped her learn more about the demand facing her, and overcome the challenge:

> When Jane … [co-teacher] … joined me in the class, I asked her to give the instructions in Chinese so Alice may know what she has to do in one activity … It worked well … why would I say that it was a learning experience? Because I asked Jane to ask Alice what is she going through, what is her problem? What were her problems that she couldn't understand? She told me that sometimes Alice didn't understand my sentences, or sometimes she found me really fast … So, I thought I should work on that and I got to learn. Because otherwise, I wouldn't have got to know what she felt like. (Interview)

> I could see a difference when I had her co-teach with me. Whenever my learner was found struggling with my instructions and with the complex content, she came to rescue the learner in Chinese. (Reflections)

Drawing on students' linguistic repertoires is a desirable response expected for teachers in multilingual classrooms (Slaughter & Cross, 2021). As Sameera enacted agency in seeking the co-teacher's support, she understood the demand

more clearly. She found that her student could not understand the instructions and keep up with the speed. That understanding further informed her decision about how she would act in the next lesson, using more translanguaging strategies by inserting Chinese translation in the PPT, driven by her motive to support student learning. Sameera found it important to seek support and discuss problems in order to resolve them, saying:

> How did I overcome this? Taking help from one of my friends who knew the first language. Talking to my teachers as well. Finding out the solution to what can be done. I think reaching out is very important. Talk about what your problem is, what you're facing in your classrooms, only then the solution can be made. (FGD)

Her agentic response to her biggest challenge of teaching students with a different L1 demonstrated her critical reflection on the demand, her engagement, commitment, actions as well as community support, key elements for teacher learning. She was not only able to address the demand but also grew from the process, clearly oriented by a leading motive to develop herself professionally.

Discussion and Conclusion

"Gaining a clearer and deeper understanding of language teacher agency is never simple, but it is always important work" (Miller et al., 2018, p. 2). Findings have important contributions to research on teacher agency and TESOL, especially in relation to the roles of teachers' emotion, cognition, and motive in shaping teachers' agentic response, and research design. Findings also have implications in fostering TESOL teacher agency through mediational spaces within language teacher education and placement settings to support teachers in navigating complex demands of online teaching placement while developing as teachers.

Firstly, the study contributes to growing research in TESOL that acknowledges the role of *teacher's emotions* in the enactment of teacher agency (Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Tao et al., 2024). It supports Tao et al.'s (2024, p. 9) study in specifying "how emotions of multiple facets may jointly influence agency enactment," and extending this by revealing *the role of motives*, i.e., "what is meaningful and important" (Hedegaard, 1212a, p. 134) to teachers, in understanding their emotions. In this study, driven by a motive to satisfactorily complete the placement, Sameera "panicked" and was "in much stress," and "full of anxiety" when encountering the demand with technology. Also coming to

the placement with a clear motive to learn how to teach learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, she was "confused" when stumbling against the demand of teaching a young beginner learner from a different L1 background. These emotions and associated motives played a role in Sameera's response to the demands. Furthermore, this study extended the previous research by illuminating the role *cognition* also plays in the enactment of agency. Here, Sameera's agentic response to the complex demands of teaching English online was also contingent on her (increased) *understanding of the demands*, as demonstrated clearly in her interpretation of and response to the linguistic challenge in teaching her learner. This illustrates the teacher's ability to "interpret events or tasks in increasingly informed ways, as well as being able to respond to them" (Edwards, 2017, p. 272) and understanding of the circumstance that affects them (Hedegaard, 2012a).

Secondly, regarding the *role of cognition*, the findings support what Aspbury-Miyanishi (2022) referred to as "attention" and "noticing" in teacher's enactment of agency, beyond mere reflection. For example, the present study shows that in exercising her agency, Sameera directed her attention to Alice's response to questions and noticed Alice's difficulty in understanding her English instruction. This enhanced understanding informed her decision to use Google translate and co-teaching. Furthermore, the findings extend on Aspbury-Miyanishi's (2022) work by further showing how *teacher's motives* played a role in "orientating" her "attention" and "noticing." Here, Sameera's attention was oriented to her student learning and her own learning, which she considered "meaningful and important" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 134). Regarding *motives*, findings have shown the dynamics and dialectic between her motives, (increased) understanding of demands, and increasingly sophisticated agentic response to demands drawing on additional artifacts, such as resources. An example of this dynamic is illustrated in her motive-orientation and response to demands from teaching a beginner learner with a different L1. This dialectic enabled by her agency resulted in the transformation of Sameera's student learning, her teaching practice, and her own cognition. This reflects "Vygotsky's point when discussing the dialectic between his own 'subject' of interest—the child—and the artefacts he or she draws on to respond to an object(ive) or problem, resulting in the eventual developmental transformation of that child-subject" (Cross, 2020, p. 40).

Thirdly, the study contributes to the nascent online placement research by reporting on how a TESOL teacher exercised agency to respond to the complexities of online teaching to a young beginner learner from a different language background. Here, it provides empirical evidence to show what "agentic" teacher looks like in this context. Oriented by intertwined motives to learn, to support student learning whilst completing the course requirement,

and in acting on the perceived demands, her agency was enacted through her using deliberate pedagogical strategies and developing teaching materials suitable to the learner's specific needs. To "tak[e] forward what matters for [her], within the demands of practice" (Edwards, 2017. p. 272), Sameera also agentively mobilized available human and material resources to address the interpreted demands. Like in Hansson's (2021) study, the findings showed that for online teaching placement, technology was found to be a subordinate challenge and pedagogy was the main demand perceived and addressed by the teacher.

Fourthly, findings provide implications for fostering teacher agency through enabling mediational spaces within the institutional environment of teacher education and placement settings. Aspbury-Miyanishi (2022, p. 7) maintained "[t]he institutional environment in which agency is achieved or not achieved is … important." The findings indicate two types of *mediational spaces* at play in Sameera's enactment of agency: those that mediated her understanding of the demands, and those that mediated her subsequent response to the demands. First, lesson videorecordings and reflections (both self-initiated and as assignment) appeared to mediate Sameera's interpretation of the demands of practice. Second, mediation spaces enabled by her social environment (co-teacher, mentor, lecture, colleagues, peers) and by material environment (online technology) played a role in the way Sameera addressed the demands. There is a potential for teacher education programs to develop teachers' ability to interpret demands through the use of the first type of mediational space. Placement settings could also be designed to provide the resources, support, and environment safe for TESOL student teachers to learn and enact agency to act on student learning.

Furthermore, this study has addressed Tao et al.'s (2024, p. 10) call for future research on online teaching and teacher agency to "draw on various data sources, such as observational data, to triangulate with self-reported data." Here, although being a single case study, the findings are not generalizable, the rich data generated from a range of artifacts, including lesson plans, reflections, focus-group discussion, feedback from mentor, and teaching materials, in addition to self-reported data from interviews, has provided insights into how a TESOL teacher exercised agency in response to demands from an Australian TESOL online placement.

Finally and most importantly, being the first study that theorized TESOL teacher agency from the cultural-historical perspective drawing on the integrated work of the neo-Vygotskian theorists, Edwards (2017, 2020), Hedegaard (2012a, 2012b), and Stetsenko (2020), it has examined the teacher's individual "subject-centered perspective but also related to his/her multi-level relations with the world" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 54). This has potential to generate new lines of

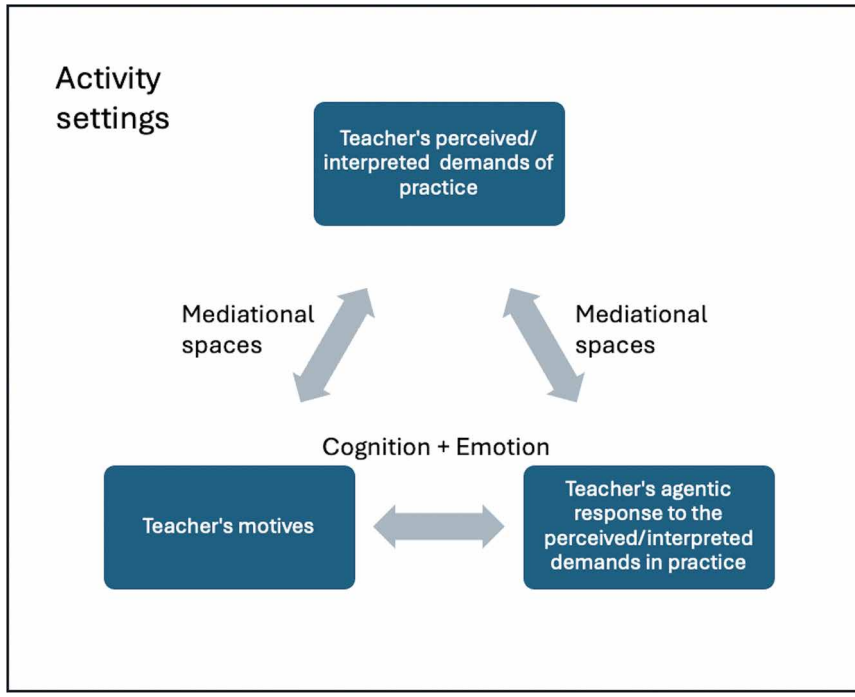


Figure 8.4 A framework for theorizing TESOL teacher agency in response to demands of practice.

inquiry into teacher agency with many implications. These lines could include potential research that draws on this theoretical perspective (see Figure 8.4 for a diagrammatic representation) to examine teacher agency across a broader range of online teaching contexts or the influence of different types of mediational tools and resources, associated with the mediational spaces previously discussed, on teacher agency. Other new lines of research could build on this study to investigate teacher agency when teachers encounter new demands of practice linked to specific education reforms or the recent rise of digital technology.

References

Aspbury-Miyanishi, E. (2022). The affordances beyond what one does: Reconceptualizing teacher agency with Heidegger and ecological psychology. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *113*, 103662. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103662.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Research, 21*(1), 37–47. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360.

Charbonneau-Gowdy, P., & Cechova, I. (2020). *Zoom-ing out: The impact of international online practicum opportunities on pre-service teachers' development*. European Conference on e-Learning. Academic Conferences International Limited.

Cross, R. (2020). The 'subject' of Freeman & Johnson's reconceived knowledge base of second language teacher education. *Language Teaching Research*, *24*(1), 37–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818777521.

Dang, T. K. A. (2013). Identity in activity: Examining teacher professional identity formation in the paired-placement of student teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *30* (February 2013), 47–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.10.006.

Dang, T. K. A., Bohlinger, S., & Cong-Lem, N. (2024a). Teachers' transformative agency in English-medium instruction in higher education in Vietnam: A cultural-historical theory perspective. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (Online First), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2349803.

Dang, T. K. A., Bonar, G., & Yao, J. (2024b). Educators' agency in implementing English-medium-instruction in Chinese higher education: a cultural-historical perspective. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *25*(2), 117–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2023.2255493.

Dang, T. K. A., & Cross, R. (2023). Globalizing teacher education through English as a medium of instruction: A Vygotskian perspective. In Menter, I. (ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of teacher education research* (1st ed). Springer International Publishing, 1685–708.

Day, M. G. (2023). *Teacher agency in the ESOL classroom: the intersection of policy and practice*. Unpublished Master by Research dissertation. York St John University.

Edwards, A. (2017). The dialectic of person and practice: How cultural-historical accounts of agency can inform teacher education. In D. Jean Clandinin, & Jukka Husu (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 269–85). Sage Publications, *2*.

Edwards, A. (2020). Agency, common knowledge and motive orientation: Working with insights from Hedegaard in research on provision for vulnerable children and young people. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 26*(2020), 100224.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, *10*, 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001.

Feryok, A. (2012). Activity theory and language teacher agency. *The Modern Language Journal*, *96*(1), 95–107.

Hansson, P.-O. (2021). Teaching practice online: Challenges in Japan, India and Kenya under pandemic. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, *9*(2), 77–91.

Hedegaard, M. (2012a). Analyzing children's learning and development in everyday settings from a cultural-historical wholeness approach. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, *19*(2), 127–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2012.665560.

Hedegaard, M. (2012b). The dynamic aspects in children's learning and development. In M. Hedegaard, A. Edwards, & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Motives in children's development: Cultural-Historical approaches* (pp. 9–27). Cambridge University Press.

Jin, L. I., Xu, Y., Deifell, E., & Angus, K. (2021). Emergency remote language teaching and US-based college-level world language educators' intention to adopt online

teaching in postpandemic times. *The Modern Language Journal*, *105*(2), 412–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12712.

Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X. A., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.) (2019). *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (Vol. 70). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters.

Liddicoat, A., & Taylor-Leech, K. (2021). Agency in language planning and policy. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *22*(1–2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1791533.

Lu, C., & Gu, M. M. (2024). Review of research on digital translanguaging among teachers and students: A visual analysis through CiteSpace. *System*, *123*, 103314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103314.

Miller, E. R., Kayi-Aydar, H., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (2018). Editors' introduction to interdisciplinarity in language teacher agency: Theoretical and analytical explorations. *System*, *79*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.07.008.

Nguyen, M. H., & Dang, T. K. A. (2021). Exploring teachers' relational agency in content–language teacher collaboration in secondary science education in Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *48*(4), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-020-00413-9.

Nguyen, M. H., & Ngo, X. M. (2023). An activity theory perspective on Vietnamese preservice English teachers' identity construction in relation to tensions, emotion and agency. *Language Teaching Research* (Online First), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221151046.

Sanczyk-Cruz, A., & Miller, E. R. (2024). Language teacher professional values, identity tensions, and agentive actions in the adult ESL setting. In Tajeddin, Z., & Yazan, B. (Eds.), *Language teacher identity tensions: Nexus of agency, emotion, and investment* (1st ed.), (pp. 231–45). Routledge.

Shinta, L. G. B., & Aprilia, N. (2020). EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of online teaching practicum during COVD-19 pandemic. *J-ELLiT (Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching), 4*(2), 58–66. http://dx.doi.org/10.17977/um046v4i22020p%25p.

Slaughter, Y., & Cross, R. (2021). Challenging the monolingual mindset: Understanding plurilingual pedagogies in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classrooms. *Language Teaching Research*, *25*(1), 39–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820938819.

Stetsenko, A. (2020). Critical Challenges in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: The Urgency of Agency. *Cultural-Historical Psychology, 16*(2), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2020160210.

Suherman, N. H. (2022). Opportunities and challenges of EFL preservice teachers in online teaching. *JPGI (Jurnal Penelitian Guru Indonesia)*, *7*(2), 191–9. http://dx.doi.org/10.29210/021128jpgi0005.

Tao, J., Xu, Y., & Gao, X. A. (2024). Teacher emotions and agency enactment in online teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *137*, 104389. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104389.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case-study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

9

Teacher Agency of Synchronous Online One-to-One Language Teachers: An Investigation through Critical Incidents in Teaching

Chujie Dai

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of education, the exploration of teacher agency has gained heightened significance, particularly within the evolving paradigm of online teaching. Despite attracting some attention in recent years, the study of teacher agency remains relatively limited compared to learner agency (White, 2018). As educational practices shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to online settings, teachers encounter both new challenges and opportunities. This transition prompts the need to explore how teachers adeptly navigate and adapt to this evolving landscape. Importantly, teachers do not passively respond to these changes; instead, they actively take ownership of the transition, transforming challenges into opportunities for professional development (Tao & Gao, 2021). This proactive engagement by teachers signifies the emergence and exercise of agency. As the educational environment continues to evolve, understanding how teachers enact agency in online language teaching becomes crucial for shaping effective teaching practices and fostering professional growth.

This study examined how three novice online teachers exercised their agency when confronting challenges within an unfamiliar online teaching context, focusing on their professional development. Critical incidents in teaching were selected as a lens to elucidate the intricate and dynamic interactions between teachers and their environments, revealing how they navigated various dimensions of the teaching landscape.

Literature Review

Teacher Agency

With the advancements in educational technology in recent years, researchers have shifted their attention to teacher agency, realizing that teachers are not merely components of the learning environment for learners but are also reflective and reflexive agents (Kalaja et al., 2016; Tao & Gao, 2021). Agency has been conceptualized through different theoretical frameworks, such as socio-cultural and complexity theory (Ahearn, 2001; Lasky, 2005; Mercer, 2011). In the exercise of agency, context plays a crucial role, as in some situations teachers feel they are more able to achieve agency than in others (Biesta et al., 2017). Although the mentioned theoretical frameworks look into the context, there is a need to examine teacher agency from a more granular view. An ecological approach offers such a theoretical lens. From the ecological perspective, the teaching contexts can be divided from micro-level learner-teacher interactions to macro-level socio-cultural settings, and a chronological level indicating the temporal change (Chong et al., 2023). Drawing on an ecological understanding, agency can be conceptualized as "something that has to be achieved in and through engagement with particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 136). According to this definition, agency is not an attribute of individuals but emerges in the interaction with a particular context-for-action (Van Lier, 2004; White, 2018). Building on the work of Biesta and Tedder (2007) and Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Priestley et al. (2015) propose a model for understanding teacher agency from an ecological perspective. The model comprises three dimensions and various factors within each dimension: (1) the iterational dimension incorporates agents' personal and professional history; (2) the practical-evaluative dimension pertains to the present, encompassing teachers' beliefs, values, and perceptions of affordances and constraints in the teaching environment; (3) the projective dimension suggests that teachers' actions are driven by their short-term or long-term goals. Meanwhile, this model outlines diverse aspects of agency, potentially in conflict or harmony, rather than serving as a straightforward linear model to foster teacher agency development (Ashton, 2022). In this study, informed by this model, teacher agency is framed as emerging through a process wherein teachers perceive, interpret, and evaluate the evolving contexts they are in, drawing upon their past experiences and future aspirations to determine courses of action that respond to or influence the situation.

In empirical studies, teacher agency is closely intertwined with teacher identity, emotions, and relationships with other people, for instance, learners (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Tao et al., 2024). In the studies that explore teachers' engagement in curriculum reform or their teaching in a new context, teacher agency emerges in the process where they try to find ways to deal with the challenges that threaten their professional identity, to resist policies that do not fit their beliefs, or to accept those which fit (Ashton, 2022; Tao & Gao, 2017). Teachers resort to their professional knowledge gained in the past, motivated by their expectations to undertake strategic manoeuvring to construct and negotiate their professional identities (Tao & Gao, 2021). As for emotion, it often serves as both empowering and limiting factors influencing teachers' actions and capacity for change in teaching (Zembylas, 2003). Emotion is considered a central component of agency, providing a fertile ground for the development and transformation of agents (Tao et al., 2024; White & Pham, 2017).

In the context of emergent online teaching, teachers' agentic responses to challenges may be even more salient, particularly among those who ventured into this domain without sufficient preparation (Tao et al., 2024). A growing body of research on online teacher agency has emerged, trying to figure out how teachers enact agency and the factors that shape agency (Ashton, 2022; Chen, 2022; Damşa et al., 2021; Qi & Wang, 2022; Tao et al., 2024). In these investigations, teacher agency is often examined over a certain duration (often in a semester), providing an understanding of how agency is developed throughout this period. However, as Lemke (2002) notes, "developmental trajectories on longer timescales may be envisioned as 'envelopes' of the shorter timescale trajectories" (p. 73). Teaching is inherently contingent, and the emphasis on long-term trajectories may overlook pivotal moments that significantly influence teachers' decisions and actions. Therefore, a more fine-grained understanding of teachers' agentive practices at a micro-level is needed. In this study, critical incidents serve as a lens for scrutinizing teacher agency at specific moments in detail.

Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are commonplace events that often present as dilemmas where teachers have to make choices (Tripp, 1994). These incidents can elicit more profound reflections and help teachers to be more reflective and analytical (Griffin, 2003), and thus, they have been used as a training tool in teacher professional development studies. In previous research, critical incidents are

often documented in written or video formats (Wang et al., 2010), facilitating evidence-based reflective practice and allowing researchers to observe and comprehend the unfolding dynamics of these incidents. The utilization of critical incidents as a tool for investigating teacher agency at a micro-level is particularly valuable, as they can help us locate teachers' decision-making and actions at specific moments within particular contexts. Moreover, given that critical incidents potentially influence teachers' subsequent actions, they offer the opportunity to examine the dynamics of teacher agency on a moment-to-moment basis.

The Study

The present study is a part of a collaborative, research-based online language learning and teaching project conducted jointly by a Chinese university and a university in New Zealand. The overarching goal of the project is to afford Chinese language learners from New Zealand the chance to engage in conversations in Chinese with L1 speakers who are also teachers of the Chinese language, and to provide opportunities for the Chinese teachers to experience online teaching and improve teaching skills. The present study was conducted between 2018 and 2019. The present study aims to investigate two questions:

1. how was teacher agency enacted in critical teaching incidents, and
2. what are the factors (re)shaping teacher agency in the online teaching context?

A qualitative case study approach was adopted in the study. The enactment of agency is in a constant state of flux in response to the interplay in the teaching context, and a qualitative research approach is open and fluid and can capture emergent situations (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 37). The case study approach was chosen to highlight the uniqueness of each teacher as it provides an in-depth examination within a real-life context (Yin, 2008).

Participants

In this study, a convenience sampling strategy was adopted (Dörnyei, 2007). Three teachers, who were PhD candidates in Applied Linguistics from the

Chinese university, joined the study and finished the required ten teaching sessions. Their Chinese language teaching experience varied from one year to ten years and all of them had little online teaching experience. Each of them was paired up with a Chinese language learner from the university in New Zealand. Each participant in this study served as a case, highlighting the distinctiveness of their teaching experience and agency enactment. Ethical approval adhering to the New Zealand university's human ethics guidelines for this research was obtained before the research commenced.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the data were collected through teaching videos, teachers' written reflections, and one-on-one stimulated recall (SR) interviews (Bloom, 1953). Zoom was chosen as the teaching platform for this study, allowing teachers to use the built-in screen recording feature to capture the teaching process. The participants were expected to conduct ten teaching sessions. After each session, they were required to write down their reflections on some incidents that they believed to be important. SR interviews were used to further explore teachers' perspectives on the critical incidents and the reasons behind their actions in their chosen incidents. Before the interview, teacher participants selected video clips for SR. During the interview, the researcher and each teacher watched these clips together, and the teacher reflected on and explained their actions. All three teachers engaged in three SR interviews. With the participants' consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Relevant teaching clips mentioned in the interviews were also transcribed and served as the research data.

When analyzing the data, a robust thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was adopted. In the initial phase of the analysis, the researcher engaged in multiple reviews of the transcripts to ensure a precise understanding, and sought clarification from teachers when necessary. Then, the interview transcriptions detailing critical incidents were juxtaposed with transcripts of specific teaching interactions, aiding the researcher in understanding both the events and the teachers' interpretation of them. The subsequent step entailed coding, utilizing codes to summarize key points for each incident. After revising the codes for consistency, they were further categorized into themes. The following section will present critical incidents for each teacher, illustrating the unique challenges they encountered and the impact of these situations on their teacher agency.

Findings

The findings are presented as individual cases of each teacher.

Teacher Su: Struggling with Teacher Authority

Su has the longest teaching experience among all the participants, and she was confident in teaching. However, she encountered challenges in this particular teaching context that diminished her confidence. One of the reasons was her inability to establish teacher authority as she could in traditional classroom settings. Su's learner was a CEO of a trading company. During the first session, Su noticed the learner joining from his home office, which seemed to accentuate his professional identity over his role as a language learner, as she reported in an SR interview:

> It's a gut feeling, when you talk to him, he was sitting in his office, he was the boss with that kind of aura. …. Sometimes it feels like he was the one giving orders. … I am very confident in the physical classroom, because I know I can control it. But when I teach him, I have to consider his social status. (Su-SR2)

The learner's professional identity not only left a strong impression on her but also impacted how she interpreted the learner's behavior and responded to it. A critical incident arose at the beginning of Session 3, where Su attempted to introduce the topic of the session; however, the learner showed little interest but brought up a new topic in an imperious way. After the session, she reported it as an uncomfortable moment, and she described it as "He threw English at me for five or more minutes. … I was trying to stop him. … I couldn't stop him, he was so insistent and totally ignored my hint." The learner's behavior combined with his professional identity impacted how Su perceived this moment. She sensed an imbalance in power dynamics and felt disadvantaged in such a situation. Su expressed her dissatisfaction about this incident. However, through observing the teaching recording, she concealed her feelings from the learner, maintaining professionalism and a smile during this incident.

Su's discontent stemmed not only from the learner's interruption but also from a perceived challenge to her teacher authority. This incident placed her in a dilemma: follow the learner's lead, risking being unprepared for a new topic, or adhere to her original teaching design, even if the learner displayed little interest. She made a quick decision to follow the learner's lead but suggested subtly that he could explicitly communicate his preferences before future sessions.

This critical incident prompted Su to reconsider how to maintain a balance of upholding her teacher authority while also inspiring the learner to actively contribute to the course. As a result, she incorporated the learner's professional background into the teaching content. For instance, in Session 6, knowing the learner was a part-time taekwondo coach, Su integrated taekwondo-related topics into the lesson. Before the session, she asked the learner to share photos of himself practicing taekwondo to tailor the learning materials accordingly.

During this session, when Su mistakenly referred to a taekwondo move as a "hand strike," the learner corrected her, telling her it should be "one-inch punch." She explicitly expressed her gratitude to him. In this moment, Su empowered the learner to share his professional knowledge, and she viewed their relationship as equal: the learner told her a technical term, and Su taught him other Chinese phrases in this field. She felt satisfied, hoping the learner would gain a sense of achievement from the conversation, while Su herself experienced a sense of reciprocity. She maintained the balance she had hoped for, exerting some authority while sharing power with the learner. Su considered this incident a success, as it helped her regain confidence in her teaching abilities. In the third SR, Su displayed a more positive attitude, expressing a willingness to adapt her teaching approach to accommodate the learner's learning style and needs:

> You need to consider [his social status], his identity as a boss doesn't affect my teaching preparation, but I know he is not used to some practical approaches in the activities, and I wouldn't be very tough or persistent … I think the teaching method has changed due to his [expressive] professional identity. I consider more about his needs or learning style with respect … (Su-SR3)

Su's experiences underscore the profound influence of the learner's social status and expertise on the teacher's perception of his behaviors, highlighting the intricate interplay between external factors and teacher decision-making. Through these incidents, Su exemplified agency by actively adjusting her approach and cultivating a more positive attitude, demonstrating the dynamic exercise of teacher agency in challenging teaching contexts.

Teacher Song: Struggling with Exploring Suitable Pedagogy for the Synchronous Online Setting

In the teaching practice, the biggest challenge for Song was to design learning activities suitable for her learner. According to her, her learner was a mature language learner with advanced Chinese proficiency. The learner began learning

Chinese through communication with the children he taught in a Chinese kindergarten and with local people when he lived in China. After three years of living in China, he returned to New Zealand, enrolling in a local university's Chinese language program to further refine his language skills. Before they began the learning sessions, Song had a chat with him, learning that he wanted to study advanced expressions and showed a strong interest in culture-related topics.

The learner's high language level and diverse learning experience added extra pressure on Song. She worried that he might compare her teaching with other Chinese language teachers he had and critique her. She designed learning activities based on their negotiation, and re-adapted her teaching based on the learner's behaviors. In the first two sessions, she designed communicative activities on the topics named by the learner, and planned to introduce some advanced structures and words when discussing those topics. However, she found it was challenging to engage the learner in the learning process.

In the first session, an incident happened when Song introduced a new structure. Despite her efforts to highlight the structure through repetition, increased volume, and emphasis, the learner displayed limited observable learning behaviors, such as repeating after her demonstration or taking notes. His responses made Song worry about her teaching, as she explained that "I would start to wonder whether I had upset him, or whether he was unwilling to repeat." Despite her teaching uncertainties, Song refrained from imposing a specific learning style on the learner. She clarified that "the learner initiated his Chinese learning through life experiences [prior to joining the language program], rather than through rigorous and dull study." This acknowledgment recognized the potential impact of the learner's unconventional language learning path on his preferences for the learning style. Moreover, she noticed that the learner did not actively engage in the conversation, but rather preferred to be an audience and occasionally raising questions that were merely loosely related to the topic. Song felt the learner's behavior indicated he was not interested in what she had prepared, which made her "panic, and wanted to change the topic, or to do something to make him feel interested." In order to keep the learner engaged in the activities, she chose to respond to the learner's every single request.

In the first two sessions, Song felt dissatisfied with her teaching, as it did not achieve the desired learning outcome. She used the phrase "aimless conversation" to describe what happened in these sessions and to express her feeling of lacking a sense of accountability about the sessions. Influenced by the learner's previous learning experience and her understanding of the learner-centeredness, she

tried to avoid giving direct instructions. However, she did not know how to deal with the situation in an appropriate way. This situation made her feel frustrated. When she mentioned the sessions, she said:

> Those sessions were aimless. I felt very miserable and didn't want to conduct them at all. I didn't know what he would say in the session, didn't know how to control the process, didn't know how long the session would last, didn't know how to integrate key learning content into it. At that time, I really did not want to carry out the sessions, I felt miserable. (Song-SR2)

Despite feeling demotivated at first, she did not surrender to negative emotions; instead, they served as a catalyst for reflection and exploration for a better pedagogical approach. Seeking suggestions from experienced teachers, Song transformed her dissatisfaction into an opportunity for improvement. She designed different learning activities for the following sessions. For instance, for the third session, she used a news-reading and discussion activity. She selected New Zealand-oriented news written in the Chinese language. Through this, she guided the learner to learn some advanced vocabulary used in it and discussed the news. In this session, Song reported that she gained a sense of achievement in her written reflection: "I think I have made an enormous improvement. Now I've gained the sense of teaching as I have found a right teaching approach. The learner and I are both quite satisfied with this approach."

The critical incidents chosen by Song indicate the profound impact of the learner's previous learning experience, leading to her uncertainty in teaching. Initially, she experienced intense negative emotions, prompting her to delve deeper into exploring and adjusting her teaching methods to better cater to the needs of the learner.

Teacher Tan: The Struggle for Adjusting Her Identity and Teaching Approach

When joining the study, Tan only had one-year Chinese language teaching experience. Consequently, compared to other participants, she exhibited lower confidence from the outset. Her learner self-identified as a mature learner with a specific learning objective—passing Chinese language tests. At the beginning, Tan described her idealized way of teaching was "taking a lead from the learner. And in the teacher's scaffolding, the learner would activate his agency to start to speak." This indicates she wanted to call on her expertise to facilitate learning and establish teacher authority, meanwhile recognizing the significance of

fostering learner agency. However, when she commenced teaching, she found age and inexperience of teaching challenged her sense of professionalism and made it difficult for her to establish her teacher identity.

She started the very first session by using the word "mister" to address her learner. When reflecting on this moment, she revealed that she felt uncomfortable about the formal teacher-learner relationship. The first reason was the learner was much older than her. Influenced by Confucian ideology, the younger should always show respect to people who are older (Ho & Ho, 2008). She explained that in her previous teaching, the majority of students were younger than her; therefore, age was never a factor that could impact her teaching until this time. In the one-to-one setting, the learner's personal background, such as age, became more influential than in the classroom. Despite Tan's initial desire to assert agency in establishing teacher identity and taking a lead role, the challenge arose when she was confronted with an older learner and was influenced by Confucian ideology, making it difficult for her to fulfill these intentions.

In addition, Tan showed a tendency toward self-criticism in her early sessions. In her written reflections she often used expressions such as "I feel disappointed about myself," "I don't know how I could explain to help him understand," and "I haven't acquired the expected capabilities of being a professional Chinese language teacher" to convey her internal struggles. She attributed her difficulties to her limited teaching experience, which influenced not only how she perceived teaching moments, but also how she responded to the learner's behaviors. In several sessions, the learner seemed to hold more control in the learning process. For instance, the learner decided when and how to practice, which was contrary to her initial expectations. Tan did not actively reclaim control of the learning activity, as she explained that she was influenced by her own understanding of learner-centeredness. She no longer sought to take a leading role but adjusted her expectations and authored herself as a "facilitator." She explained in an SR that being a facilitator meant "[to help] him correct mistakes, and I am not going to teach much," and "I am a facilitator. As long as I can meet the learner's needs, give him the support he desires, that's enough." Tan's adjustment from aspiring to be a leading teacher to a facilitator indicates that her desired identity was impacted, which further influenced her pedagogical decisions. However, despite seemingly limiting her actions for delivering knowledge to simply helping the learner correct mistakes, Tan managed to explore the affordances available to her to facilitate learning.

There were two incidents to exemplify her development. In Session 1, she guided the learner with a grammatical drill, which required the learner to

reorder some phrases and make them into a sentence. However, the learner did not understand her instruction but turned to his study material, trying to find an explanation. This left Tan frustrated with her teaching, which she attributed to the technological environment, "to teach behind a screen, I am constrained in the distance [teaching context]."

This incident prompted Tan to reflect on the limitations of her teaching in the new context, ultimately leading to a transformation in her pedagogical approach. Subsequent sessions witnessed her attempts to explore the affordances of the technology to better support the learning activity. For instance, in Session 9, when the learner produced an incorrect sentence, she provided an explicit verbal correction; in addition, she used the screen-sharing function to illustrate both correct and incorrect sentences and cross out the mistake made by the learner (see Figure 9.1).

The screenshot shows that the learner was paying close attention to the words on the screen. He repeated the correct sentence, demonstrating that his attention focused on the language form and he comprehended the teacher's correction.

After the session, Tan reported this incident in her written reflection. She mentioned that her previous corrections did not seem to be successful because she did not know how to provide feedback "accord with situations." However, this time, she tailored her feedback based on the immediate context, which, in this case, was the slight difference in the two forms and the learner's language capacity to notice or understand it. This reflection demonstrates an improvement in her teaching, contrasting with her frustration when she was self-criticizing and unable to find solutions when explaining grammar rules in

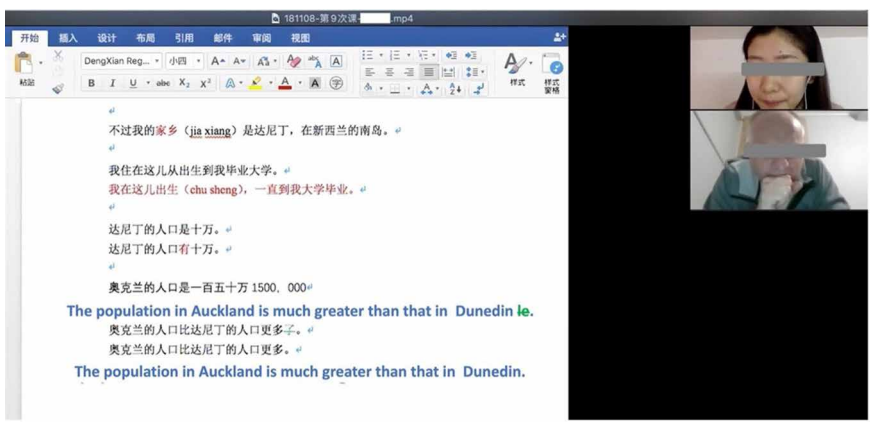


Figure 9.1 Screenshot of correction in Session 9.

the initial sessions. At this moment, job satisfaction emerged when she realized the reason for the unsuccessful feedback and knew how to make improvements.

In this case, Tan's experiences illustrate the dynamic exercise of teacher agency amidst challenges posed by the learner's age, traditional norms, and her own understanding of learner-centered approaches, alongside her limited teaching experience. In response, Tan demonstrated agency by adapting her role from aspiring to taking a leading position to embracing a facilitator identity. This reconstruction of her identity empowered Tan to actively shape her approach to supporting the language learning process.

Discussion

The three cases mentioned above exemplify the intricate process by which teachers exercise their agency, influenced by various factors, during critical incidents in teaching. In these scenarios, teachers demonstrated agency in navigating the dynamic interplay between the external environment and their internal cognitive processes.

These cases collectively demonstrate the dynamic and multifaceted nature of teacher agency, shaped by a myriad of factors. Firstly, the study illustrates the bidirectional nature of how teachers exercise agency. When facing a situation, they observed how it unfolded, and meanwhile, they utilized existing knowledge, such as the socio-cultural norms, information about the learner, personal experience gained from the past, desires for the future to interpret and evaluate the situation, attaching unique significance to it (Scarino, 2022). This process shows how the contexts could impact teacher agents. Then, based on their appraisal of the situation, the teachers would take some actions. Conversely, teachers' actions reciprocally reshaped the context, exerting influences on the teachers in subsequent situations. In this study, the teachers took agentive actions mainly in their reconstructing identity, cultivating a positive attitude, designing learning materials, and exploring a more suitable pedagogical approach.

Secondly, the study identifies different types of factors that impact teacher agency, to be more specific, impact how teachers interpret the situation and how they take actions. The first type is socio-cultural influences, including learners' professional identity and age, Confucian ideology, the notion of learner-centered teaching approach. In Su's case, her learner's professional identity led her to interpret his interruption as being imperious, which made her feel her teacher authority was being challenged. As a response, she tried to

restore her authority and found ways to maintain a balance between upholding teacher authority and fostering learner empowerment. Song was impacted by the learner's learning experience, and her understanding of learner-centeredness, which stimulated her to explore different learning activities. Tan was influenced by Confucian ideology, the learner's age, and her own limited teaching experience, finding it was difficult for her to establish teacher identity, which prompted her to renegotiate her identity, shifting toward adopting the role of a facilitator.

The second factor identified in the study is the online one-to-one teaching context. This study illustrates that the particular context could highlight learners' personal background, thereby amplifying their role in the educational process. In this study, learners' age, social status, previous learning experience became more salient in this particular context, which impacted teachers' exercise of agency. Teachers cannot merely rely on their classroom teaching experience in online teaching context (White, 2006); rather, they need to develop different approaches that suit the technological context as well as the individual learner's needs. Furthermore, the challenges faced by teachers underscore the lack of support from a broader socio-cultural context. Initially trained for classroom instruction with groups of learners, teachers entered the research project with expectations of assuming a leading role in learning activities. However, the absence of adequate support and training for one-to-one and culturally responsive teaching (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020) presented challenges, necessitating teachers to enact agency in exploring suitable approaches within their specific contexts independently. Furthermore, in line with Chen's study (2022), the current study identifies the digital environment as a contextual factor that fosters teachers' reflective teaching and pedagogical growth.

The third factor is the interpersonal relationship. Previous studies show that the power relationship between teachers and the learners is more equal in online context than in classroom settings (Kozar, 2018). Instances have been observed where learners wielded greater influence, guiding interactions with their teachers, presenting both challenges and opportunities for teachers to adapt their teaching methods to better suit the online environment and meet the needs of learners. Moreover, this study presents teachers' emotional experiences surfaced through the interplay of teacher agency with the external environment, encompassing their perceptions, interpretations of current circumstances, and expectations. Within the enactment of agency, emotions served as catalysts, compelling teachers to take actions aimed at changing the ongoing situations (Tao et al., 2024).

This study reveals the significance of employing critical incidents as a lens to facilitate the exploration of teacher agency at the micro-time scale. The teachers selected these incidents, viewing them as particularly meaningful, often perceived as challenges, and using them as reflective points in their online teaching journey. For researchers, these incidents provided insights into the interconnection of various factors and their role in shaping teachers' perception and action, and thus it helps gain a deeper understanding of agency in a particular context-for-action (White, 2018).

Conclusion

Through focusing on critical incidents, this study examined teacher agency in response to the unfamiliar online teaching context. The study advanced our understanding of teacher agency, encompassing both theoretical and practical applications. Theoretically, the ecological approach deepened the understanding of how teacher agency emerged from individual teachers' interactions with specific teaching contexts. In addition, through closely scrutinizing teachers' decision-making and actions, this study reveals the bidirectional nature of agency enactment, and various factors impacting agency. Practically, the study indicates there is a need for teacher training programs to prepare teachers for diverse teaching environment, supporting them in exploring suitable pedagogical approaches in various contexts, dealing with different power and relationship dynamics (Ashton, 2022), and alleviate negative emotions. This study further supports using critical incidents as a tool to foster reflective teaching practice. While this study provides valuable insights into agency, the limitations of the study should be acknowledged. As the study was conducted prior to Covid-19, the teaching context faced by the teachers was different from that during and after the pandemic. Therefore, some potential influences from social and institutional level were not explored in the study. While online one-to-many teaching is a more prevalent setting, this study highlights the uniqueness of the one-to-one teaching context. Therefore, the findings of the study may not fully capture the nuances of teaching dynamics in larger online classes. By shedding light on the effectiveness of online language learning and delving into critical moments experienced by language teachers, despite its limitations, the study proves valuable in advancing both teacher education and the broader domain of language teaching.

References

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30(1), 109–37.

Ashton, K. (2022). Language teacher agency in emergency online teaching. *System*, *105*, 102713. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102713.

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2017). Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teachers' talk for teacher agency. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 49(1), 38–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2016.1205143.

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Bloom, B. S. (1953). Thought-processes in lectures and discussions. *The Journal of General Education*, *7*(3), 160–69.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004.

Chen, M. (2022). Digital affordances and teacher agency in the context of teaching Chinese as a second language during COVID-19. *System*, *105*, 102710. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102710.

Chong, S. W., Isaacs, T., & McKinley, J. (2023). Ecological systems theory and second language research. *Language Teaching*, *56*(3), 333–48. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444822000283.

Damşa, C., Langford, M., Uehara, D., & Scherer, R. (2021). Teachers' agency and online education in times of crisis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *121*, 106793. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106793.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294.

Griffin, M. L. (2003). Using critical incidents to promote and assess reflective thinking in preservice teachers. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Education*, 4(2), 207–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940308274

Ho, D. Y. F., & Ho, R. T. H. (2008). Knowledge is a dangerous thing: Authority relations, ideological conservatism, and creativity in Confucian-heritage cultures. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *38*(1), 67–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14685914.2008.00357.x.

Hutchison, L., & McAlister-Shields, L. (2020). Culturally responsive teaching: Its application in higher education environments. *Education Sciences*, *10*(5), 124. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10050124.

Kalaja, P., Ferreira, A. M., Aro, M., & Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2016). Key issue relevant to the studies to be reported: Beliefs, agency and identity. In P. Kalaja, A. M. Ferreira, M. Aro, & M. Ruohotie-Lyhty (Eds.), *Beliefs, agency and identity in foreign language learning and teaching*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Multiple identities, negotiations, and agency across time and space: A narrative inquiry of a foreign language teacher candidate. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *12*(2), 137–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2015.1032076.

Kozar, O. (2018). Teaching conversational English to adult learners via Skype: A Russian perspective. In A. Burns, & J. Siegel (Eds.), *International perspectives on teaching the four skills in ELT: Listening, speaking, reading, writing* (pp. 125–37). Springer International Publishing.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*(8), 899–916. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003.

Lemke, J. L. (2002). Language development and identity: Multiple timescales in the social ecology of learning. In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language acquisition and language socialisation: Ecological perspectives* (pp. 68–87). Continuum.

Mercer, S. (2011). Understanding learner agency as a complex dynamic system. *System*, *39*(4), 427–36.

Priestley, A., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Qi, G., & Wang, Y. (2022). Challenges and responses: A complex dynamic systems approach to exploring language teacher agency in a blended classroom. *The JALT CALL Journal*, *18*(1), 54–82. https://doi.org/10.29140/jaltcall.v18n1.569.

Scarino, A. (2022). Language teacher education in diversity—a consideration of the mediating role of languages and cultures in student learning. *Language and Education*, *36*(2), 152–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2021.1991370.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. A. (2017). Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *63*, 346–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.010.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. A. (2021). *Language teacher agency* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108916943.

Tao, J., Xu, Y., & Gao, X. A. (2024). Teacher emotions and agency enactment in online teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *137*, 104389. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104389.

Tripp, D. (1994). Teachers' lives, critical incidents, and professional practice. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *7*(1), 65–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839940070105.

Van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Kluwer Academic.

Wang, Y., Chen, N. S., & Levy, M. (2010). The design and implementation of a holistic training model for language teacher education in a cyber face-to-face learning environment. *Computers & Education*, *55*, 777–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.03.010.

White, C. (2006). Distance learning of foreign languages. *Language Teaching*, *39*(4), 247–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444806003727.

White, C. (2018). Language teacher agency. In S. Mercer, & A. Kostoulas (Eds.), *Psychology in language teaching* (pp. 196–210). Multilingual Matters.

White, C., & Pham, C. (2017). Time in the experience of agency and emotion in English language learning in rural Vietnam. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *11*(3), 207–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2017.1317256.

Yin, R. K. (2008). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Zembylas, M. (2003). Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective. *Teachers and Teaching*, *9*(3), 213–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600309378.

10

Challenging Monolingual Discourses for Agentic Spaces: Constraints and Opportunities for Language Educators in the Chilean Education System

Leonardo Veliz, Yvette Slaughter, and Finex Ndhlovu

Introduction

Chile's long-standing aspiration to become a bilingual country, and the privileging of English language education, stems from the 1980s, when the adoption of neoliberal policies was strongly embraced by the Chilean government as a key driver for economic prosperity during rule by the military government. While English holds prominence and popularity as an "equalizing measure to combat socioeconomic inequality that has plagued this country since Spanish colonization" (Miranda-Plaza, 2018, p. 1), Western-centric ideologies in English language teaching have arguably perpetuated and exacerbated systemic inequalities and biases within the education system (e.g., Chisholm et al., 2019; Hoang & Truong, 2016; Veliz, 2021). Monolingual ideologies, or a monolingual mindset which tends to diminish the place of minority languages, have also contributed to the marginalization of multilingualism and diversity and reinforced linguistic hierarchies. As a result, language teachers often find themselves constrained by these dominant ideologies, facing limited autonomy and agency in their professional practice (Barahona et al., 2021; Slaughter & Cross, 2021; Veliz & Chen, 2024).

More broadly, neoconservative, neoliberal, capitalist ideologies have permeated almost all facets of education in Latin America and beyond (Aviles & Simons, 2013; Stromquist & Sanyal, 2013), with the massification of private tertiary institutions, teacher evaluation systems, teacher accountability

and performativity mechanisms, and standardization measures of student achievement strongly impacting on language teacher training, and language teaching and learning (Lewis & Young, 2013; Smith & Rowley, 2005; Towers et al., 2022). The imposition of these normative perspectives and practices within educational institutions can restrict teachers' ability to incorporate diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives into their teaching, undermining their agency to enact pedagogical approaches that align with the needs and realities of their students. Additional forces that constrain English language teachers' capacity to assert and enact their agency pertain to a range of structural, spatial, and temporal factors (Biesta & Tedder, 2007) that intertwine with institutional hierarchies, curricular constraints, availability of resources, and societal expectations (Chisholm et al., 2019). Within and across these dimensions, English language teachers often find themselves balancing the demands of standardized assessments, rigid schedules, and limited resources, further complicating their ability to innovate and adapt pedagogical approaches (Chisholm et al., 2019; González & Calle-Díaz, 2023; Wei & De Costa, 2019).

Despite this growing body of research into language teacher agency, in a systematic review of literature on teacher agency, Cong-Lem (2021) found a significantly restricted percentage of research on teacher agency in Latin America (0.96 percent) compared with a growing trend in the study of agency in North American (30.77 percent), European (25 percent), Asian (23.08 percent), and Australian and New Zealand (12.5 percent) contexts. In the midst of ongoing tensions around English language education around the globe, and the complex cultural and socio-political environment that influences English language teacher education programs and teachers' practices in Chilean schools, it is vital to examine the impact of education policy, curriculum, assessment, and teacher training processes on teachers' ability to enact and effect change in languages education in the Chilean education system.

This study involved in-depth interviews with twelve teachers of English at the primary and secondary level in English, to answer the question as to how English language teachers understand contextual, material, and socio-political opportunities and constraints on their autonomy and agency in the Chilean education system. Interview questions were informed by the Douglas Fir Group framework (2016) and focused on the opportunities and constraints on teacher agency. A thematic analysis involving multiple rounds of coding and the use of a concept map informed the identification of three themes relating to ideological frictions in English language education, mono-epistemic (Ndhlovu, 2015) framing of the curriculum, and the role of the environment in teacher agency.

The findings shed light on the ways Western-centric ideologies shape curriculum, teacher training, teaching, and resourcing, but also illustrate the circumstances in which teachers claim agency to resist Western, monoglossic narratives and to acknowledge and integrate local knowledge systems and experiences.

Language Teacher Agency

In recent decades, the naturalization of monolingualism in many dimensions of life has been firmly resisted by arguments for the recognition and acceptance of multilingualism as a "permanent fact of public life" (Lo Bianco, 2014, p. xv). Although many countries worldwide have had to struggle with the competing demands of colonization, decolonization, and the loss or subjugation of minority languages, many nations, particularly those in the Global South, have readily adopted Western, Euro-centric, monoglossic language and language teaching ideologies in the name of globalization (Aviles & Simons, 2013; Barahona et al., 2021; Bodis, 2023; Peters, 2012; Stromquist & Sanyal, 2013). These ideologies not only shape educational policies and practices but also have a profound impact on teacher agency, and more specifically, for this research project, language teacher agency (Ahearn, 2001; Banegas & Gerlach, 2021).

We acknowledge that teacher agency has been theorized from multiple perspectives and theoretical lenses (see, e.g., Tao & Gao, 2021), and while we concur with definitions of agency which view it as "the capacity of people [teachers] to act purposefully and reflectively on their world" (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63), in this study we champion an ecological stance that recognizes the interplay of relational, social, and contextual factors around agency development. To this end, Toom et al. (2015) point out that agency "is constructed situationally in relation to the current context" (p. 616). Further to this, it is important to note that agency is in a constant state of interaction with a range of contextual-educational discourses (Kayi-Aydar, 2015) that facilitate or limit teachers' agentic actions. A growing body of research is demonstrating how language teachers navigate changing and challenging situations, and meet institutional expectations and requirements, as they encounter a range of complexities that shape their agency in nuanced ways (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019).

In the context of China, for example, Wei and De Costa (2019) investigated the ways in which a Chinese English language teacher negotiated and enacted his agency in a context characterized by a range of social, contextual, and political constraints. Despite the strong impetus for, and perceived failure

of, the communicative language teaching approach in China, the study recognizes pervasive teaching practices that continue to focus predominantly on the teaching and learning of grammatical knowledge. Against this backdrop, the teacher—Mr. Ding—identified himself as a "rule breaker" as he carved out an innovative teaching approach more context-sensitive to his learners in the midst of societal and political constraints. In rural Vietnam, Hoang and Truong's (2016) study recognized the government's profound intention to improve English language abilities in young graduates to foster Vietnam's socio-economic development. However, findings from the study showed that pressures relating to "restandardization" efforts and practices not only threatened the job security of many teachers but also severely limited their ability to exercise their agency or resist the imposed policies.

In the Indonesian school context, Farmasari (2020) investigated the enabling and constraining factors that influenced English language teachers' capacity to exercise their agency in a primary school setting. As teachers navigated the challenges relating to the development and implementation of school-based assessments—understood as high-stake assessments developed and implemented by individual schools (Farmasari, 2020)—their agency was informed by their individual beliefs about assessment and facilitated by teacher collaboration, availability of school resources, and a heightened awareness of students' individual needs. Some reported barriers to teachers' exercise of their agency included insufficient opportunities for professional development, lack of school guidelines for the implementation of school-based assessments, and not enough oversight of these assessment practices. Situated in the context of Colombia, and in response to national policy mandates in English language teaching, González and Calle-Díaz (2023) analyzed the experiences, professional trajectories, and actions of three English language teachers who found agentic ways of adapting, adjusting, and implementing the Colombian national suggested curriculum for English in high school. While each teacher navigated different paths of action, overall findings from the study revealed incongruence between content in English language textbooks provided by the government and the actual needs of students, which required teachers' material design and adaptation. It was also found that teacher collaboration was a positive avenue for agentic action, and that teachers challenged context-irrelevant teaching practices that valued the learning of grammatical knowledge over meaningful use of the language.

Despite the unique characteristics of each of the above contexts of study, a common element that holds salience is the presence, influence, and interference of "forces" pertaining to a wider societal architecture and educational

apparatus on teachers' agency. This is particularly evident in the fact that teachers' work is increasingly influenced and restricted by educational policies that demand standardized teaching methods and measurable outcomes (Chisholm et al., 2019).

English Language Teacher Education in Chile

This research project moves the focus on language teacher agency into the Chilean context where English is considered a foreign language or, in Graves' (2008) terms, a language used in a target-language removed context. That is, English is not a medium of instruction in education, the language of communication in the wider community, or the dominant language in society. Despite this, English holds prominence and popularity as an "equalizing measure to combat socioeconomic inequality that has plagued this country since Spanish colonization" (Miranda-Plaza, 2018, p. 1). This privileging of English stems from the 1980s, when the adoption of neoliberal policies was strongly embraced by the Chilean government as a key driver for economic prosperity during rule by the military government [1973–90] (Inzunza et al., 2011; Veliz et al., 2024). In practice, these policies accelerated inequality across many aspects of daily life, which, amongst other prevalent forms of militarization such as gender, ethnic, and religious oppression, led to increasing socio-economic segregation through the creation and establishment of private universities (Cruz-Coke, 2004).

Almost two decades later, in the late 1990s, and due, in part, to the neoliberal ideologies driving most of the socio-political activity in the country, Chile began to articulate aspirations to become a bilingual nation to help the country become a member of a globalized world. One of these initiatives was the nation-wide introduction of English as a compulsory foreign language in schools from grades 5 to 12 (Barahona, 2016). Since this time, there has been an increasing need and preoccupation with preparing teachers of English that possess the pedagogical and linguistic knowledge and skills for English as a Foreign Language practice but also a call for the implementation of social-justice-oriented practices (Barahona & Ibaceta-Quijanes, 2022; Chubbuck, 2010) and socially and culturally relevant pedagogies to meet the diverse needs of all students.

English teachers in Chile encounter a range of challenges, many reflected in the research presented above into teacher agency, that significantly impact their professional landscape and sense of agency. For example, one of the pressing issues is the concerningly low salaries (Toledo-Sandoval & González-Hermosilla,

2016), which may lead to demotivation and hinder the recruitment of qualified educators (Barahona, 2014; Barahona & Ibaceta-Quijanes, 2022). In addition, crowded classrooms pose another formidable challenge. The number of students in a class—generally around or over 45—often surpasses the manageable limit, making it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention and support. This hampers the effectiveness of language instruction and impedes the learning experience for students, although the education system also contributes to the learning experience. While poorly resourced schools have struggled to engage and build student capabilities in English, elite and bilingual schools have accelerated the capabilities of students in English, reinforcing the profound structural inequalities that permeate the broader Chilean educational model (Barahona et al., 2024; Veliz & Véliz-Campos, 2019). Teachers of English in Chile have also reported facing increasing challenges when attempting to embrace more innovative or critical pedagogical practices due to a strong prevalent testing culture in schools (Veliz, 2019, 2021). Within this small but growing body of research from the Chilean context, further research is needed into the impact of contextual, material, and socio-political opportunities and constraints on language teacher agency, a gap this research seeks to address.

Conceptual Framework

The analysis to follow rests on a two-pronged conceptual framework that draws on insights from Southern perspectives and from the Douglas Fir Group (2016) to understand language teacher agency in the Chilean context. The first pillar of our framework is that of Southern perspectives, which refers to ways of knowing from the Global South. The Global South is a geopolitical and epistemological concept and "a metaphor for human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance that seeks to overcome or minimize such suffering" (de Sousa Santos, 2011, p. 39). Our analysis specifically draws on the quite contemporary scholarship on Southern multilingualisms (e.g., Heugh et al., 2021; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). Southern perspectives posit that a persistent problem with mainstream approaches to multilingualism and language diversity is one about following a mono-epistemic paradigm that exclusively focuses on standard countable language-things while turning a blind eye to several other ways of speaking about people's diverse language and communicative practices (Ndhlovu, 2015). At the heart of the matter are questions of language

conceptualizations and epistemologies. The focus should not be just about the number of "language" things or objects that are being recognized and validated in language and literacy education programs. Rather, the focus must also be on how we conceive or conceptualize the "lingual." What is our concept of the "lingual" in "monolingualism" and "multilingualism"?

We use insights from Southern multilingualisms to shed new light on the experiences of teachers of English in Chile in relation to (a) the "multilinguality" of multilingualism as understood by the participants and (b) how teachers' agency is constrained or attained when working toward a more socially realistic second language education experience for students. The overall goal is to understand the environmental factors which shape teacher agency and teachers' understandings of and enactment of language teaching and learning and multilingualism in their various contexts within the education system in Chile.

The second pillar of our framework draws on the work of the Douglas Fir Group (2016) whose framework conceptualizes the "multifaceted nature of language learning and teaching" (p. 25), grounded in the "social-local worlds of L2 learners" (p. 20), with a key goal to help multilingual students thrive with and through their very multilinguality and to understand how language teachers could support them achieve this goal. This is essentially a call to center into language and literacy education those elements of fluidity and boundary crossing that are intrinsic to the real communicative practices of real people in their real everyday lives—also known as translanguaging (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2014; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021).

The Douglas Fir Group's (2016) transdisciplinary framework distinguishes three levels of mutually dependent influences on language learning and teaching—macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of social activity. The macro-level encompasses broad ideological structures, including, for example, cultural, political, religious, and economic beliefs and values; the meso-level includes socio-cultural communities and institutions that are found in places of work, social clubs, online forums, unions, teacher networks, and so forth, while the micro-level of activity concerns individuals themselves, their engagement with others, and their cognitive and emotional capacities that allow for multifaceted interactions in diverse contexts. Each level shapes and is iteratively shaped by the social practices at each level. In developing our research project, we have integrated concepts from both the Douglas Fir Group framework and southern perspectives and repurposed them to inform the design of the interview questions and to serve as an analytical lens to speak to the question of teacher agency in the Global South context of Chile.

Research Method

This research project involved twelve English language teachers teaching at either the primary or the secondary school level in Chile. Participants were identified through purposive sampling and recruited through an online expression of interest that was emailed to a total of thirty-six teachers via personal and professional networks in Chile. Fifteen teachers responded to the expression of interest, with twelve teachers committing to taking part in the research. Ethics approval was gained through the principal researcher's home institution in Australia and signed consent forms were received from all participants before arrangements were made for interviews.

The interviews were scheduled at times appropriate for the participants, taking into consideration their long working hours, with most interviews taking place in the evenings. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews, each taking approximately one hour, consisted of twelve open-ended questions which were sent to participants beforehand. While the sharing of questions before an interview can carry a degree of risk such as "participant bias, and predetermined answers" (Haukås & Tishakov, 2024, p. 54), this practice can also minimize perceptions of power asymmetry between interviewer and interviewee, allow for reflexivity on the part of the interviewee, and reduce interview anxiety. Having the opportunity to prepare for the interview can therefore lead to enhanced engagement and considered responses during the interview (Haukås & Tishakov, 2024), and as the questions were all open-ended, the risk of largely predetermined questions was mitigated by additional prompts and opportunities for clarification or elaboration.

The questions, informed by the Douglas Fir Group framework (2016, p. 25), focused on the contextual, material, and socio-political opportunities and constraints in relation to agency for English language teachers in Chilean schools. At the macro-level, the research questions sought to situate teacher agency within the broader context of global political, educational, and policy discourses on second language teaching and professional development of educators. Questions focused on the meso-level sought to capture the dynamic of second language learning and teacher agency within the socio-cultural context of institutions and local communities, while at the micro-level, the aim was to capture the dynamic of those mundane interactional activities in specific communities of practice. The topics addressed across the questions included policy and ideologies, curriculum, resourcing, leadership, collaboration, and agency.

The twelve teachers have varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from two to eleven years of teaching in schools, with the participant cohort including teachers working in private schools as well as public schools, and teachers working at the primary school level, as well as the secondary school level (see Table 10.1. All names used in the study are pseudonyms to protect teachers' privacy and confidentiality).

Just over 16,000 words of data were collected through the interviews and once transcribed, a thematic data analysis was undertaken involving multiple rounds of coding. The first round of coding involved a combination of structural coding, which involves "a content-based or conceptual phrase" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 130) intended to link the interview data with specific research questions, and concept coding, which involves identifying a label that "symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action-a 'bigger picture' beyond the tangible and apparent" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 152). The use of both coding methods allowed the researchers to explore how best to capture nuanced responses to the same questions across the participant data.

The second round of coding involved pattern coding which identified conceptual labels to organize the data and to "attribute meaning to that organization" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 321). From there, a top ten list was created, and the researchers created a concept map with the driving idea of "agency" at the center of the map. Each theme was then placed closer or further away

Table 10.1 Participants' Profiles

Pseudonym	Teaching experience	Sector	School level
Pablo	6 years	Private	Secondary
Juan	8 years	Public	Secondary
Emma	5.5 years	Public	Primary
Daniela	9 years	Private	Secondary
Ricardo	6.5 years	Public	Secondary
Eduardo	4 years	Public	Secondary
Juan Pablo	10 years	Public	Secondary
Maria Jose	7 years	Private	Secondary
Miguel	4 years	Private	Primary
Cristian	6 years	Public	Secondary
Hector	11 years	Private	Secondary
Ana Maria	2 years	Public	Primary

from the center depending on its impact on teacher agency, and also aligned concentrically with other themes with overlap. This concentric placement of themes allowed the researchers to identify the three major themes which spoke most directly to the idea of agency, while also mapping the interconnections between the complex variables that impact the experiences of English language teachers in Chile.

Three main themes are reported on in this chapter. The first theme, *Ideological frictions in English language education*, focuses on the impact of ideology on the conceptualization and implementation of English language teaching and learning in Chile. The second theme, *Curriculum as deconstructed and mono-epistemic*, elaborates on the teacher agency as constrained through curriculum, while the third theme, *Agency and environment*, focuses on teachers' sense of agency in interaction with varying educational environments.

Findings

Ideological Frictions in English Language Education

The first theme from the analysis relates to the complex interplay between ideological influences and the development of policy, curriculum, and pedagogy for English language education in Chile. As noted above, compulsory English language study was introduced from grades 5 to 12 in the 1990s, due, in part, to the influence of neoliberal ideologies and the positioning of English as key to Chile's economic success (Inzunza et al., 2011). The drive to become a member of the globalized world through the English language was strongly influenced by Western ideologies in particular and is evident as a key theme across interviews with all twelve participants. The prevalent influence of North American and British ideologies and histories was noted from the tertiary level through to the teaching of English in school classrooms. Participant interviews identified these influences in the emphasis on Western academic literature in tertiary pre-service teacher education programs, in the focus on North American and British English pronunciation styles at the tertiary and school levels, in the Western literature given preference in universities and schools, and in the Western cultural norms privileged and perpetuated through the use of Western-centric teaching resources. As argued by Juan,

> It's like all the pedagogies for teaching are influenced by the American or British authors or important researchers, like Krashen, Chomsky, John Wells

> in pronunciation, and people like that. We don't read local authors. Not sure if we have many but we are having more now. All these things influence the way we teach, the kind of English we teach, the accent we take, and try to follow. So, it's an identity shaped by the Americans or the British English.

Some participants also spoke to the danger of prevailing Western ideological influences in the teaching of English in Chile due to the mono-epistemic paradigm (Ndhlovu, 2015) that it brings to English language teaching. This lens relates both to the locating of English as a global language within an American and British bubble, neglecting other accents and cultures across the English-speaking world, and to the neglect of the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of Chile. Participants in the research reflected on the omission of the lived experiences of teachers and students and the challenge in disrupting the privileging of a narrow, monoglossic understanding of the English language. As Emma comments,

> The only way to find diversity being addressed is through the texts we use. The problem is, and this is a big problem, because most of the texts we use are produced in America, I mean in the US. So, it's an American view of life and of the world. In my class, I have mostly Chilean students, one from Peru, two from Colombia, two Venezuelan, and … so, all from Spanish speaking countries but they all have different opinions about the US, and English, and obviously different skills, and interests so I find it a bit difficult to work with these American-US texts with all these students.

However, across all twelve interviews, participants shared diverse views as to the affordances and constraints of ideological influences in English language teaching. For some, this involved the need to challenge the prevailing conditions, while for others, the focus on Northern American culture was seen as motivating for learners. For example, Maria Jose argued that there was a clear need for more inclusive resources and perspectives in English teaching, including local content and diverse English language accents, stating, "I use technology a lot, I create images, lots of visuals to give my students ideas about different cultures, places in the world so they understand that English is not only in the US or England but in so many other places, India, for example." Daniela, on the other hand, claimed a greater sense of autonomy and freedom in relation to language and teaching choices, arguing,

> In my private school, this is not really a big topic of conversation. Each teacher has preferences, and styles, and accents, and different experiences and holidays in different English-speaking countries that they use in their lessons, so not

> really a big thing … I don't really have a preference for an accent, or a country or culture, or ideology but because American movies and music is everywhere, that's what drives students most of the time.

Other teachers actively disengaged from concerns around ideology and the broader socio-political context, instead focusing on disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge, with Eduardo, for example, arguing,

> In the teaching of English, we have ideologies about all kinds of things. If we resist them, do we go anywhere? What do we get? I mean, not that we have to swallow them, but I see very little point in resisting issues around accent, or how important native speakers are, or that we don't have 'the validity' or 'recognition' as non-native speakers. I don't really care too much about that. I just focus on my teaching.

Curriculum as Decontextualized and Mono-Epistemic

The second theme from the analysis relates to the disconnect between the curriculum, its ambitious goals for bilingualism, and the realities of classroom practices. A majority of participants commented on the high-level abstraction of the English curriculum in Chile or a sense of inaccessibility. However, there was also a general recognition that a curriculum is intended to be a broad framework and that it is the work of the school and teacher to interpret and elaborate the curriculum at the classroom level. As argued by Maria Jose,

> I think all curriculum in all countries are just frameworks, just like the framework of a house. If you only have the framework, you can't live in it. You need to put the walls, the doors, the windows, and many other things. The curriculum is like that. For me as a teacher, I have to do the work as a teacher, with my students, with other teachers, to give life to that framework, so it's a lot of responsibility for us.

Despite the limitations of the curriculum, a majority of teachers felt that they had autonomy and agency in interpreting and implementing it in the classroom. However, a major concern amongst participants was the rigidity of the curriculum and its lack of guidance or recognition of the changing social dynamics in Chile. They felt that the curriculum's narrow focus on Western language norms provides limited support for differentiation and inclusiveness, and recognition of the various cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds of students. As a result, they emphasized the importance of developing their own strategies, resources, and approaches to promote inclusivity and meet the needs of all

learners, including those with special needs or from immigrant communities. This belief is illustrated in Hector's comments on the curriculum,

> The curriculum is not a magic wand. It doesn't give you everything you need and given that our times are changing so quickly, the curriculum is not catching up with these rapid changes. There's a lot of migration, a lot of diversity in education in Chile, and we don't know how to deal with this. The curriculum does not talk about multiculturalism, or plurilingualism, or other things that are happening every day in most countries in the world. This is what I think of the curriculum. The curriculum is broad, ambitious, vague and not realistic for the needs of today's world.

Some participants called for curriculum reform but ultimately recognized that the responsibility for addressing diversity and inclusion lies with the teacher, and that each teacher must create opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. As Maria Jose argued,

> The school curriculum is not designed for diversity. It's designed for the ideal student that does not exist in any class, and also the ideal teacher … It's not just implementing the curriculum, it's adjusting it, adapting it, finding ways that are meaningful to the students, the specific context because the curriculum does not apply to every context.

Closely connected to concerns with the curriculum was the impact of the pervasive assessment culture in Chilean education. Participants identified the assessment regime as contributing to feelings of constraint and pressure, limiting teachers' and students' flexibility and innovation in English teaching and learning, and to enact the curriculum beyond a narrow focus on language. This concern is illustrated by Pablo who commented,

> Well, the testing culture is everywhere. I think students get really stressed out because we do a lot of testing in Chile. Our education system is like a military system, rigid, not flexible, with a lot of drills, tests, practice, and things like that. This is not … like … this doesn't give you a lot of flexibility to improve your teaching in an innovative way.

Agency and Positioning

As noted in the literature review, in this chapter, we view teacher agency as a facility that is achieved by an individual in interaction with the educational environment within which they teach (Priestley et al., 2015). In a school context, agency is co-constructed by both teachers and their colleagues and/or school

leadership, constrained or enabled by the environment. Across the twelve research interviews, despite some challenges such as workload and lack of resources, the research participants generally perceived a degree of autonomy in their teaching practices, that is, the ability for teachers to drive their own teaching within the constraints of curriculum and resourcing. However, there was a clear distinction between teachers working in public schools and those working in private schools, as well as a distinction between how teachers achieved a sense of autonomy and agency. As an example, Eduardo, who is working in a public school, argued,

> We have very inflexible leaders in our school so our capacity to do things differently is kind of limited by that … I think it's hard to exercise our autonomy in any school context but it's harder in public schools. Our system is, I mean the public school system, is very … how can I say it? Very strict and rigid, like not much flexibility.

In comparison, teachers working in private schools reported open and flexible relationships with leadership, built on trust and collaboration, with Maria Jose, for example, stating,

> They are always open to talk to us, but also our English head of department. Very supportive and very encouraging. So, all this makes us feel more empowered about our teaching, the ideas, and how we see the teaching and learning of English in our classrooms.

A sense of autonomy was also achieved outside of leadership support. Not having close communication or guidance from leadership, or being required to follow close direction, enables teachers to work autonomously, to think creatively, and to use different perspectives to create engaging content for students. Colleagues and good networking play a key role in this process. For example, Juan Pablo, who works at a public secondary school, argued,

> Well, even though we don't have a lot of support from principals, I have support from my colleagues, but I think that's because I've made good friends, good networks in the school. So, if I need support, or advice or ask for help, I can ask my colleagues. That's really important when you want to make a change in your students, because someone needs to be with you. It's hard when you do it alone.

Empowerment for many teachers, therefore, is achieved through professional learning, collaboration, and exchange of ideas, including exchanging teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and approaches to address student needs, and diversity in the classroom. Engaging in collaborative networks, both

within schools and through broader professional communities, also enables teachers to build supportive relationships, access resources, and stay updated on current practices and research in English language teaching. In addition, these networks foster a sense of community among teachers, providing emotional and professional support and enhancing morale. It is important to note, however, that for some teachers, organizational structures and a lack of support from leadership created barriers to collaboration and networking, creating a sense of isolation.

Discussion

The key question underpinning this research seeks to understand the ways English language teachers perceive the contextual, material, and socio-political opportunities and constraints on their autonomy and agency within the Chilean education system. Many of the issues raised by the research participants, such as the challenges and affordances of resourcing, curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy, reflect previous studies into language teacher agency (e.g., Chisholm et al., 2019; Tao & Gao, 2021; Veliz, 2021). However, situating the discussion within the socio-political context of Chile is critical for analyses when agency is positioned as a dynamic and ever-changing outcome of the interaction between teachers and their educational environment. That is, the complex interplay of factors that impact on agency, as identified across the three themes, must be situated within the broader architecture that shapes educational policy and practice.

As noted in the introduction, neoliberal policies and a push to become part of the global economy from the 1980s led to the introduction of bilingual education in Chile in the late 1990s. Extending from this imperative, one of the key issues problematized by the teachers in the research interviews and synthesized in the first theme is the impact of ideology on English language teaching and learning in Chile or the ideological frictions in English language education. Specifically, teachers referred to the Western-centric ideological influences which drive English language teaching and learning in Chile, and the mono-epistemic paradigm (Ndhlovu, 2015) that determines the curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and teaching and learning materials.

Two concerns exemplify this issue from the teachers' perspective. The first is a curriculum focused on an "ideal" student and an "ideal" teacher, reflecting a narrow Western-centric view of language, culture, and knowledge. This static

socio-cultural perspective in the language education fails to acknowledge the cultures and lived experiences of other English-speaking communities beyond the United States of America and Britain, such as English majority and English as a global or foreign language contexts. The second is the argument that the curriculum fails to recognize and value the rapidly changing linguistic repertoires of students themselves and fails to privilege voices and knowledge systems from across Chile and South America more broadly. From a Southern perspective, a persistent problem with mainstream approaches to multilingualism and language diversity is mono-epistemic paradigms that exclusively focus on a narrow privileging of language and language varieties, which are viewed as standard countable language-things (Ndhlovu, 2015). Doing so turns a blind eye to other lived experiences and other ways of speaking about people's diverse language and communicative practices (Ndhlovu, 2015).

A useful Southern multilingualism concept for addressing issues of diversity and inclusion in relation to teacher agency is that of *ignored lingualism* (Ndhlovu, 2015; Ndhlovu & Makalela, 2021). The concept of ignored lingualism suggests diversification of conceptual discourses on language diversity and multilingualism by recognizing those philosophies and bodies of thought that proceed from perspectives other than normative Western-centric epistemologies. While a key imperative is the need to write into the professional practice of language teachers those multiple and competing, yet equally legitimate ways of talking about linguistic diversity, in the absence of these possibilities in the curriculum, agency to teach about diverse languages, cultures, and histories, tailored to the various cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds of students, is varied. Some teachers claim agency to attend to these issues through resource development and pedagogy, often drawing on collaboration with colleagues to support their efforts. For others, particularly for participants working in the public-school sector, rigid expectations from school leadership constrain or even mute autonomy and agency in their professional practices. For those who were able to find a sense of agency under these inflexible circumstances, professional learning, collaboration, and exchange of ideas with colleagues inside and outside of their school were seen as key to empowerment.

The disparities identified between the experiences of teachers working in public and private schools are concerning given the socio-economic divide that Ramos Leiva et al. (2021) argue has been exacerbated by the education system. With students in private schools learning English from a much younger age than those in public schools, and in smaller, well-resourced classes, the academic gap in education is due in part to economic disparities, but also, drawing on the

evidence from this research project, the lack of resourcing for teachers and their lack of agency in teaching to the varied backgrounds of their students.

Concluding Comments

Language teacher agency in the Chilean context is limited by Western-centric ideologies driving curriculum, teaching, and resourcing. However, it is also strongly shaped by socio-cultural contexts, individual and collective identities, local knowledge systems, and the resistance to dominant power structures within educational environments.

Considering the distinctive contextual and socio-political attributes and nuances inherent to the Chilean context, it becomes imperative to advance more scholarly work that examines the ways in which English language teachers and educators, spanning various stages of their professional journey, develop, assert, and enact their agency. While an overall growing body of research on language teacher agency is much needed in contexts of the Global South (e.g., Chile), several specific interrelated lines of inquiry could be further pursued. For instance, given the disparities and entrenched inequalities in the Chilean educational system between public and private education, it is crucial to examine how teachers' agency is exercised and constrained differently across these settings. Additionally, a more nuanced understanding of language teacher agency in Chile may be yielded through an examination of how it intertwines with teachers' identity, their professional learning journeys, and their unique situatedness in private or public-school settings.

References

Ahearn, L. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *30*, 109–37.

Aviles, E., & Simons, M. (2013). To be accountable in Neoliberal times: An exploration of educational policy in Ecuador. *Policy Futures in Education*, *11*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2013.11.1.1.

Banegas, D., & Gerlach, D. (2021). Critical language teacher education: A duoethnography of teacher educators' identities and agency. *System*, *98*, 102474. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102474

Barahona, M. (2014). Exploring the curriculum of second language teacher education (SLTE) in Chile: a case study. Perspectiva Educacional. *Formación de Profesores*, *53*(2), 45–67. DOI: 10.4151/07189729-Vol.53-Iss.2-Art.261.

Barahona, M. (2016). *English language teacher education in Chile: A cultural historical activity theory perspective*. Routledge.

Barahona, M., Delaporte-Raurich, C., & Ibaceta-Quijanes, X. (2021). "It is impossible to teach English in English": Preservice teachers' struggles to facilitate L2 comprehensibility in English. *TESOL Journal*, *12*(2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.578.

Barahona, M., & Ibaceta-Quijanes, X. (2022). Chilean EFL student teachers and social justice: Ambiguity and uncertainties in understanding their professional pedagogical responsibility. *Teachers and Teaching, 30*(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2062726.

Barahona, M., Veliz, L., & Darwin, S. (2024). Navigating the challenges and opportunities for equipping pre-service English language teachers for diverse contexts. In L. Veliz, M. Barahona, & S. Darwin (Eds.), *Critiquing the teaching and learning of English in Chile: Challenges and opportunities for transformative practice* (pp. 57–71). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003482550-6

Biesta, G. J. J., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*, 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Bodis, A. (2023). Gatekeeping v. marketing: English language proficiency as a university admission requirement in Australia. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *42*(7), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2174082.

Chisholm, J. S., Alford, J., Halliday, L. M., & Cox, F. M. (2019). Teacher agency in English language arts teaching: A scoping review of the literature. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, *18*(2), 124–52. https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-05-2019-0080

Chubbuck, S. M. (2010). Individual and structural orientations in socially just teaching: Conceptualization, implementation, and collaborative effort. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *61*(3), 197–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109359777.

Cong-Lem, N. (2021). Teacher agency: A systematic review of international literature. *Issues in Educational Research*, *31*(3), 718–38. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/cong-lem.pdf

Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(10), 103–15. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00986.x.

Cruz-Coke, R. (2004). The evolution of Chilean universities from 1981 to 2004. *Revista médica de Chile*, *132*(12), 1543–49. https://doi.org/10.4067/s0034-98872004001200014.

de Sousa Santos, B. (2011), Épistémologies du Sud. *Etudes rurales, 187*, 21–49.

Douglas Fir Group (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, *S1*(100), 19–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12301.

Farmasari, S. (2020). Exploring teacher agency through English language school-based assessment: A case study in an Indonesian primary school [Professional doctorate thesis, Queensland University of Technology].

García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

González, C., & Calle-Díaz, L. (2023). Teachers' agency development when adapting the Colombian English suggested curriculum for high school. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *25*(2), 201–16. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v25n2.104627.

Graves, K. (2008). The language curriculum: A social contextual perspective. *Language Teaching*, *41*(2), 147–81. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444807004867.

Haukås, Å, & Tishakov, T. (2024). Sharing interview questions in advance: Methodological considerations in applied linguistics research. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *12*(1), 54–68. https://doi.org/10.1515/eujal-2023-0045

Heugh, K., Stroud, C., Taylor-Leech, K., & De Costa, P. I. (Eds.) (2021). *A sociolinguistics of the South*. Routledge.

Hoang, H., & Truong, L. B. (2016). Teacher agency and autonomy in rural Vietnam. In P. C. L. Ng, & E. F. Boucher-Yip (Eds.), *Teacher agency and policy response in English language teaching* (pp. 188–202). Routledge.

Inzunza, J., Assaél, J., & Scherping, V. (2011). Formación docente inicial y en servicio en Chile. *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, *16*(48), 267–92.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *45*, 94–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009.

Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (2019). Introduction. In H. Kayi-Aydar, X. Gao, E. R. Miller, M. Varghese, & G. Vitanova (Eds.), *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (pp. 1–9). Multilingual Matters.

Lewis, W., & Young, T. (2013). The politics of accountability: Teacher education policy. *Educational Policy*, *27*(2), 190–216. https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048124 72725.

Lo Bianco, J. (2014). Foreword: Natualising the multilingual turn. In J. Conteh, & G. Meier (Eds.), *The multilingual turn in languages education: Opportunities and challenges* (pp. xv–xvi). Multilingual Matters.

Miranda-Plaza, D. (2018). Chilean language learners' beliefs about learning English as a foreign language [Master's thesis, Universidad de Chile]. https://repositorio.uchile.cl/bitstream/handle/2250/171017/Chilean-language-learners-beliefs-about-learning-english-as-a-foreign-language.pdf?sequence=1.

Ndhlovu, F. (2015). Ignored lingualism: Another resource for overcoming the monolingual mindset in educational linguistics. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, *35*(4), 398–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2015.1087365.

Ndhlovu, F., & Makalela, L. (2021). *Decolonising multilingualism in Africa*. Multilingual Matters.

Pennycook, A., & Makoni, S. (2020). *Innovations and challenges in applied linguistics from the Global South*. Routledge.

Peters, M. (2012). Neoliberalism, education and the crisis of Western capitalism. *Policy Futures in Education*, *10*(2), 134–41. http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2012.10.2.134.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Ramos Leiva, L., Pérez Miranda, L., & Riquelme-Sanderson, M. (2021). Social justice in the preparation of English language teachers. *MEXTESOL Journal*, *45*(2), 1–14. http://dx.doi.org/10.61871/mj.v45n2-4.

Rogers, R., & Wetzel, M. M. (2013). Studying agency in literacy teacher education: A layered approach to positive discourse analysis. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *10*(1), 62–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2013.753845.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.

Slaughter, Y., & Cross, R. (2021). Challenging the monolingual mindset: Understanding plurilingual pedagogies in English as an additional language classrooms. *Language Teaching Research*, *25*(1), 39–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820938819.

Smith, T., & Rowley, K. (2005). Enhancing commitment or tightening control: The function of teacher professional development in an era of accountability. *Educational Policy*, *19*(1), 126–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904804270773.

Stromquist, N., & Sanyal, A. (2013). Student resistance to neoliberalism in Chile. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *23*(2), 152–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2013.790662.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge.

The Douglas Fir Group (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, *100* (S1), 19–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12301.

Toledo-Sandoval, F., & González-Hermosilla, A. (2016). El aprendizaje del idioma Inglés y desigualdad: Formación inicial docente y propuestas curriculares para primero básico. *Revista Némesis*, *13*, 2–22. https://revistanemesis.uchile.cl/index.php/RN/article/view/66197.

Toom, A., Pyhältö, K., & Rust, F. O. C. (2015). Teachers' professional agency in contradictory times. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), 615–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044334.

Towers, E., Gewirtz, S., Maguire, M., & Neumann, E. (2022). A profession in crisis? Teachers' responses to England's high-stakes accountability reforms in secondary education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *117*, 103778. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103778.

Veliz, L. (2019). An interrogation of the role of critical thinking in English language teaching pedagogy in Chile. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *24*(1), 47–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1456424.

Veliz, L. (2021). In-service teachers' challenges to implementing an approach to critical thinking and critical reading in Chile. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, *4*(3), 161–73. https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v4i3.3733.

Veliz, L., Barahona, M., & Darwin, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Critiquing the teaching and learning of English in Chile: Challenges and opportunities for transformative practice*. Routledge.

Veliz, L., & Chen, J. (2024). Challenging the monolingual mindset: language teachers' pushback and enactment of critical multilingual language awareness in Australian schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (Online First), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2352161.

Veliz, L., & Veliz-Campos, M. (2019). An interrogation of the role of critical thinking in English language teaching pedagogy in Chile. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *24*(1), 47–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1456424.

Wei, L., & De Costa, P. (2019). Problematizing English language teaching in China through a local English teacher agency lens. In H. Kayi-Aydar, X. Gao, E. R. Miller, M. Varghese, & G. Vitanova (Eds.), Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency (pp. 182–202). Multilingual Matters.

11

Teacher Agency in Practice during a National Educational Reform: A Case Study of Primary English Teachers in Vietnam

Lan Anh Nguyen

The Changing Paradigm of English Language Education in Vietnam

Vietnam's English language education has undergone significant changes for the last decade, reflecting a global trend of integrating English as a core curriculum component in non-English-speaking nations (Liddicoat, 2018; Ng & Boucher-Yip, 2016; Wedell & Grassick, 2018). The National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) 2008–20, introduced to enhance English language proficiency and support Vietnam's integration into the global economy, marked a crucial policy shift. One of the key changes was advancing the start of English education to grade 3 from the previously established grade 6, necessitating innovative adaptations in curriculum, teaching methodologies, and educational materials (Baldauf Jr & Nguyen, 2012; Van Van, 2018). However, the initial targets of the NFLP were not met by 2020, prompting an extension to 2025.

The reform mandated adherence to a standardized benchmark for language proficiency and led to the development of curricula and textbooks based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Van Van, 2018) and a competency-based curriculum. Confronted with these changes, Vietnamese teachers experienced heightened pressure to reconcile societal respect for their profession with new language proficiency standards and teaching methodologies. This transitional period emphasized a shift from the traditional teacher-centred paradigm to a learner-centered approach, presenting significant professional challenges (Canh, 2015; Mai & Hall, 2017). In Vietnam, teachers, including

English teachers, have traditionally been highly respected and regarded as sources of knowledge and wisdom (Mai & Hall, 2017). These expectations have become a source of stress for Vietnamese teachers, as living in a society that values collectivism and community attachment makes them sensitive to social judgment if they fail to meet the community's rules and expectations (Phan & Locke, 2016).

Despite the increased expectations placed on teachers, the professional development support provided was perceived as inadequate, often limited to short workshops that did not sufficiently enable teachers to adapt to the new educational requirements (Canh, 2015; Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). This lack of proper support has exacerbated the challenges faced by teachers in navigating the constantly evolving educational landscape.

In 2018, the implementation of competency-based curricula across all subjects and levels set the stage for the "one national core curriculum, many textbooks" policy, which came into effect in the 2019–20 academic year, marking a significant departure from a single government designed textbook since 1970 (Hoang et al., 2020). Under this new policy, teachers have increased authority over teaching materials, instructional methods, and assessment formats that suit their specific contexts, provided that these align with the national core curriculum directions. However, the rapid rollout of the policy caused confusion among primary English teachers, who are the ultimate policy implementers, regarding how to effectively exercise this new autonomy as intended by the policymakers. This scenario reflects broader trends in educational reform, which often follow a top-down, hierarchical structure, leading to challenges in policy adoption and implementation at the classroom level (Wedell & Grassick, 2018).

As if the challenges posed by the new policy were not sufficient, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 further complicated an already challenging situation. In the next school year, a sudden and unprecedented shift to online education in the 2020–1 academic year presented yet another hurdle for teachers to overcome. In this dynamic context, the agency exercised by teachers, particularly those in primary education who were at the sole forefront of change in the academic year 2019–20, became a central focus of interest. Although previous research has highlighted the various ways in which teachers navigate policy changes, ranging from adaptation and compliance to resistance within their teaching practices (Le et al., 2021; Ollerhead & Burns, 2016; Phan & Hamid, 2018; Robinson, 2012; Yang & Clarke, 2018), the unique challenges posed by the language education reform since 2008, the new "one national core curriculum, many textbooks" policy, and the pandemic in Vietnam underscore

the importance of examining how primary English teachers have leveraged their agency to navigate these concurrent and challenging changes.

A Life-Course Socio-Cultural Perspective of Teacher Agency

Teacher agency, characterized by teachers' capacity for intentional actions that significantly impact their educational environment (Lasky, 2005; Toom et al., 2015), is a complex and multifaceted construct. It has been explored through various theoretical lenses, each offering unique insights into its nature and manifestation (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Tao & Gao, 2021).

From a psychological standpoint, Bandura (2001) social cognitive theory presents agency as a personal capacity, emphasizing its purposeful and self-directed nature. This individual-focused view posits that agency is crucial for personal development, change, and self-renewal, and is underpinned by one's belief in their self-efficacy. In the teaching context, self-efficacy refers to teachers' confidence in their ability to positively influence student outcomes through instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement (Pajares, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Under this perspective, there are three forms of agency: direct, proxy, and collective. When individuals cannot exert direct personal influence, they may resort to proxy agency, relying on authoritative figures, or collective agency, utilizing group strength to achieve their goals.

In contrast, the socio-cultural perspective shifts the focus from individual capacity to the dynamic interplay between individual actions and the structural and cultural features of society and school cultures. This view emphasizes the relational nature of agency, highlighting how it is mediated by tools such as language, technology, policy mandates, and new curricula, as well as interactions with others (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004; Kayi-Aydar, 2019).

The ecological approach, which integrates life-course and socio-cultural perspectives, conceptualizes agency as an emergent phenomenon rather than an inherent capacity. It suggests that agency is an achievement resulting from the confluence of past experiences, present cultural structures and resources, and future projections (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). This temporal dimension of agency is exercised through interactional, projective, and practical-evaluative dimensions (Biesta et al., 2015).

Similarly, the subject-centered socio-cultural framework also combines life-course and socio-cultural views, but focuses on the enactment of agency

through the process of "subjectivity" development. This approach highlights the intertwined nature of identity and agency, and how they are shaped by the constraints and affordances of the context (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

The post-structuralist perspective also views agency in relation with agents' social contexts where individuals engage with society through the roles afforded to them and exercise agency through their positional moves (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Positioning theory offers an analytical lens to understand the distribution of rights and duties in conversations or narratives, and it is through the process of positioning that rights and duties are distributed (Davies & Harré, 1999).

To comprehensively examine how teachers navigate their agency within their local context, it is crucial to consider the relational and pedagogical dimensions of teacher agency. Teacher relational agency underscores the importance of collaborative relationships among teachers (Eteläpelto et al., 2015), while pedagogical agency focuses on the teacher-student relationship and the choices made regarding teaching materials, methodologies, and classroom management (Pappa et al., 2017).

In the context of this study, which focuses on the evolving process of teacher agency within the period of language education changes spanning from 2008 to 2025 with the primary focus on the period from 2019 to 2022, a blend of life-course and socio-cultural perspectives is deemed most appropriate. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of how teacher agency dynamically interacts with changing contexts over time, setting it apart from the developmental focus of the subject-centred socio-cultural perspective and the emergent nature of agency emphasized in the ecological approach.

Within the framework of this study, agency is conceptualized as an evolving construct, shaped by the interplay of past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations within a specific educational setting as shown in Figure 11.1. The exercise of agency is considered an ongoing process, mediated by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Internal factors encompass elements such as current professional identity, self-efficacy, and professional knowledge and skills, while external factors include school and district cultures, mandated tasks, available resources, colleagues, leadership, and students.

In the context of shifting curricula and pedagogy, teacher agency manifests in three interconnected forms: identity, pedagogical, and relational. Identity agency plays a pivotal role in shaping and reshaping teachers' professional self-conceptions by drawing upon personal experiences and engaging with

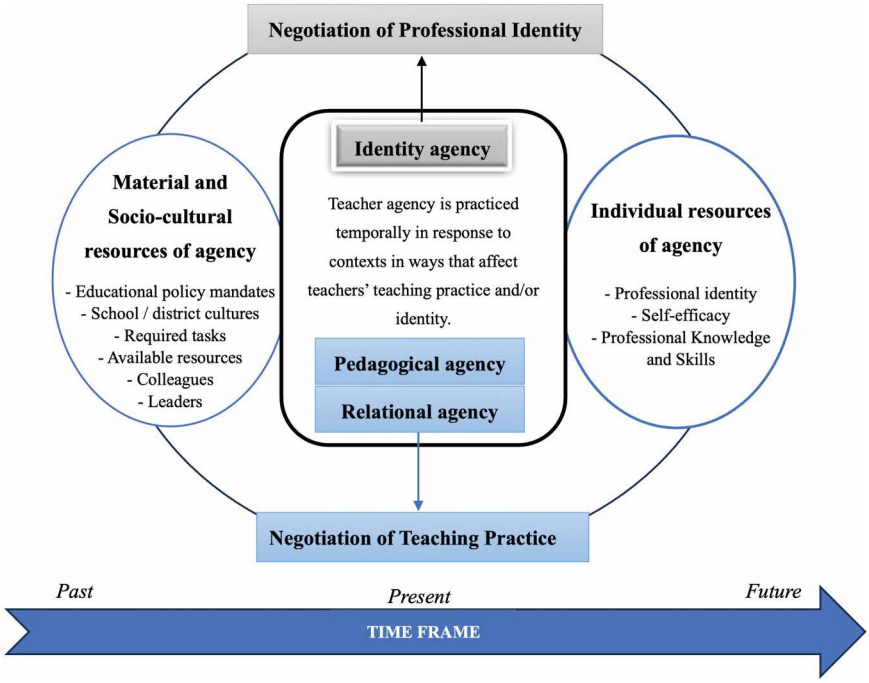


Figure 11.1 A life-course socio-cultural perspective of language teacher agency.

professional communities (Eteläpelto et al., 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). The fluid and intertwined nature of professional identity and agency is central to this study, as teachers' exercise of identity agency not only molds their self-perceptions as professionals but also influences their pedagogical choices and practices (Pappa et al., 2017).

Pedagogical and relational agency are intricately linked, collectively contributing to professional growth in terms of teaching methods. This interplay underscores the necessity for negotiation within the micro-context of the classroom and the macro-context of professional interactions and educational standards. Pedagogical agency is exercised when teachers' choices and decisions impact their instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Relational agency, on the other hand, is enacted through interactions with others, leading to changes in classroom practices and, at times, influencing the teaching practices or norms of their professional communities. The interrelated nature of these forms of agency highlights the complex dynamics at play in teachers' professional development and their ability to navigate and shape their professional landscapes in systemic changes.

Research Questions

Taking the lens of the life-course socio-cultural approach, this study seeks to investigate how EFL primary teachers exercise agency amidst the policy changes by answering two questions:

1. How did primary English teachers negotiate and reshape their professional identities (identity agency) throughout the different stages of the national language education reforms?
2. In what ways did primary English teachers exercise pedagogical and relational agency to adapt and transform their teaching practices in response to the shifting curricula and pedagogy during the period of changes, particularly from 2019 to 2022?

Methodology

A qualitative case study, incorporating narrative inquiry, seemed to be the most suitable to gain a nuanced understanding of primary English teachers' experiences in implementing the national reform and "one national core curriculum, many textbooks" policy in an urban setting in Vietnam (Duff, 2008; Yin, 2014). The study explored how teachers exercised three forms of agency as they navigated the opportunities and challenges that arose during the policy implementation process. To capture the richness and complexity of teachers' experiences, narrative inquiry was incorporated as a complementary methodological approach. Semi-structured interviews about their career history, attitudes toward the changes, and responses over time were used to elicit teachers' stories and perspectives on their lived experiences during the policy implementation. These narratives provided valuable insights into teachers' past experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008) and how these experiences shaped their future orientations and actions (Hänninen, 2004).

The Research Sites and Participants

While curriculum reform implementation is often stereotyped as facing more challenges in economically underdeveloped regions (Le et al., 2021; Nguyen & Bui, 2016), there is also a noticeable gap in research concerning the enactment of reforms and the "one national core curriculum, many textbooks" policy in urban

areas, where the dynamics of integration may differ significantly. This research focuses on one of the five municipalities in Vietnam to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language education reform implementation across diverse contexts.

The research was conducted in six primary schools situated across five urban districts in a central Vietnamese city. Within Vietnam's education system, these schools are managed by the district-level Bureau of Education and Training (BoET). Seven teachers from these schools participated in the study, with their educational background, teaching experience, and position status provided in Table 11.1. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants, pseudonyms are used instead of their real names as well as their schools and the districts where their schools are located.

According to educational regulations, teachers are required to conduct twenty-three teaching periods per week. In situations where there are insufficient English language classes to meet this requirement, teachers are mandated to instruct other subjects for which they may not have received formal training. These subjects can include, but are not limited to, crafting, technology, and morality.

The researcher had no prior association with the participants or research sites. To account for the varying activeness of English teacher communities across the city's seven districts, schools were selected from different districts. Principals were contacted for permission, and they connected the researcher with teachers. The teachers' participation in the study was purely voluntary.

Data Types and Analysis

The study spanned two phases, focusing on the policy's implementation in the 2019–20 and 2022–23 academic years. In the first phase, classroom observations and follow-up informal conversations were conducted to capture teachers' pedagogical choices and decisions, while interviews provided insights into their career histories and beliefs. The combination of interviews and observations shed light on how the teachers applied their beliefs in practice, aligning with the teaching guidelines proposed by the NFLP 2008–25. The second phase revisited the teachers to examine how their teaching strategies and attitudes had evolved, especially after the pandemic-induced shift to online teaching and the direct impact of the new curriculum policy in their classes.

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations served as the primary data sources. The study employed a longitudinal approach to investigate

Table 11.1 Information about the Participants and their Schools

Dist.	School (no. of English teachers)	Teacher (pseudominized)	Educational background	Years of experience	Had experienced curriculum and textbook changes up to 2020
1	A (3)	K	BA in English teaching (secondary level) MA in English teaching methodology (2019–21)	15	Numerous times
1	B (7)	Th	BA in English teaching (secondary level) MA in applied linguistics	6	Not yet
1	B (7)	Tr	BA in primary English teaching	6	Not yet
2	C (3)	L	BA in English teaching (secondary level)	20 (Currently being the head of English teacher groups)	Numerous times
3	D (3)	Tra	BA in primary English teaching	4 (including 2 years on short-term contract at a private school)	Not yet
4	E (3)	P	BA in primary English teaching MA in applied linguistics	7 (including 3 years on short-term contract at a private school)	Not yet
5	F (2)	M	BA in English teaching (at secondary level) MA in applied linguistics	9	Once

the trajectories of teachers' identity agency and the sustained impact of the reform on their pedagogical practices, illuminating how teachers actively navigated and shaped their teaching within the context of change. Thematic analysis was employed, focusing on internal factors (professional identity, self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills) and external factors (policies, resources, school culture, and colleagues) that influenced the exercise of the three agency forms. Pedagogical practices were inspected in terms of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement.

Findings

The study explores how three forms of agency navigated Vietnamese primary English teachers' professional identity and teaching practices in response to the national language education reform. Through the lens of the life-course socio-cultural perspective, the three facets of agency were expressed under the influence of both internal and external factors.

Teachers in Negotiation of Their Professional Identities

The interviews on teachers' career history revealed that four participating teachers, initially trained for secondary levels, faced unexpected challenges when assigned to primary classrooms due to the scarcity of available positions in their preferred setting. L and M found themselves unable to "secure themselves a place in secondary schools," while Th and K noted that there were "barely available position[s] while in primary schools, the vacant positions were a few." Although this transition was described as "challenging" (L, K, & M, interview data), they managed to "make it work" (L & K, interview data) through individual efforts and determination.

Their journey of self-training to become primary English teachers was marked by moments of doubt and the inclination to "give up" (K, interview data) when faced with insufficient skills and knowledge. However, they persevered, drawing strength from "accumulated learning from colleagues and other resources" (L & K, interview data). This process enhanced their teaching self-efficacy and fostered a sense of identity as competent primary English teachers.

At the inception of their careers, these teachers grappled with a lack of formal training and "instability" (L & K, interview data) due to limited opportunities for long-term contracts. The introduction of the NFLP opened doors to further

professional development and permanent positions. Participating in training programs nurtured their teaching efficacy and reinforced their self-perception as English teachers at the primary level.

However, the trajectory of identity development is seldom straightforward. Despite their self-awareness of their competence as primary English educators, some harbored aspirations to teach at secondary levels (M & L, interview data), believing it would "help to sharpen" their "language proficiency" (P, M, & L, interview data), influencing their professional image. The interviews also unveiled tensions when teachers were required to teach subjects outside their formal training. Tr's experience of teaching morality without professional support led to uncertainty about her roles:

> Normally, I just go to the morality class and engage the students in activities that feel more like time-fillers. […] Sometimes I feel like I am a babysitter instead of a language teacher. (Tr, interview data)

Yet, despite these challenges and negotiations, the teachers' dedication remained unwavering and was reinforced after the Covid-19 pandemic when they had "reflections on [their] roles and the job" (Th & P, interview data). Realizing that "hav[ing] a job to do" was "a blessing" (P, interview data) demonstrated gratitude toward their profession and professional selves.

Overall, while tensions and negotiations were evident in their identity agency, the intensity appears moderate, as teachers navigated their professional development without severe conflicts or crises.

Adapting Instructional Practices to Changing Realities

Adapting instructional practices to align with pedagogical requirements outlined by educational reforms and teachers' beliefs was central to teachers' pedagogical agency, as evidenced by classroom observations in 2020 and 2023.

During the first stage of the NFLP, two teachers participated in training sessions led by British Council experts. The training had a "transformative power" (K, interview data) on their professional development, boosting efficacy in classroom management and reshaping their "pedagogical mindset" (K, interview data). "Interactions with native educators" (L, interview data) enhanced their teaching skills, resulting in deep-seated satisfaction with their career choice.

The reform's pedagogical requirements included changes in practices, such as increased emphasis on oral skills, limited use of L1, more active roles

for students, and a shift from exam-oriented to communicative competence-oriented teaching. Each teacher interpreted and translated these requirements into their teaching behaviors through various techniques and strategies. Although the new curriculum significantly changed testing and assessment, L still chose to include exercises to help students "familiarize with tasks commonly found in tests or English contests" (L, interview data). Furthermore, teachers adopted careful contextual settings and interactive games to "minimize the use of first language" (Tr, interview data) and engage students in "communication for meaning" (Th, interview data).

Contrary to recommendations to limit explicit grammar instruction, Th preferred to "explicitly teach students grammar terms and rules" to help older students in grades 4 and 5 transition to grade 6, where grammar instruction becomes more explicit (Th, interview data). Seeing songs as a learning tool, M creatively adapted textbook melodies to familiar tunes to "aid students' memory," reinforcing vocabulary and target structures (M, interview data). Believing in peer learning, P paired stronger and weaker students to "handle a class with students of diverse language abilities" (P, interview data).

A significant number of teachers held the belief that "teaching at the primary level, classroom management was the most important skill" (Th, Tr, K, L, Tra, interview data). K initially struggled with classroom management due to overusing games and activities but refined her teaching after "consulting with senior colleagues" (K, interview data).

The shift to online teaching in 2020 and 2021 introduced new challenges, prompting teachers to seek innovative methods to engage students. L stated, "The transition to complete online [teaching] with no sign of the termination date worried me at first. Then, I observed the applications and tools used by my children's high school teachers and adapted them" (L, interview data). Some teachers increased hands-on or written tasks to minimize screen fatigue, such as "dictation" (P, interview data) or "listening and coloring" (Tr, interview data).

The autonomy promised by new textbook selection policies felt limited. In the first two years, teachers seemed indifferent due to minimal involvement with lower grades and lack of detailed information about approved textbooks. Most claimed that "the school informed [them] of the policy" and they "were introduced [to] the new textbooks online via Zoom by some publishers," but they "did not receive any copies of many textbooks" (K, L, Tr, Th, P, M, interview data).

> I received the textbooks from 3 out of 6 publishers. Each publisher also organized online workshops to introduce the textbooks. I and my colleagues were interested in one of the textbook. However, the textbook which are using now was not what we chose. (P, interview data)

Teachers were not fully aware of the introduction of the official document for the core national English curriculum issued in 2018, which addressed themes, topics, and core competencies for each grade. When selecting textbooks, teachers were guided by "some common criteria such as cost, appearance, and content" (K, L, Tr, Th, P, M, Tra, interview data). Their limited awareness suggests a potential disconnect between the intended curriculum and actual practices in textbook selection.

In the third year, the "passive manner" (L, K, Tr, interview data) of exercising autonomy in textbook selection became "a norm" (K, interview data). Teachers gravitated toward textbooks they were already familiar with, influenced by several factors. First, their comfort level with these textbooks was high due to their "familiarity" (Th, Tra, M, Tr, interview data) and "the abundance of resources in terms of ready-made lesson plans, PowerPoint slides, tests, and additional materials" (L, P, Tr, interview data). Second, the perceived "suitability" (M, interview data) of these textbooks for their teaching context played a role in their decision-making. Finally, teachers were swayed by the "preferred options implicitly suggested by the school board or BoET" (L, Th, P, Tr, interview data), indicating the influence of higher authorities on their textbook choices. They were mindful of constraints on their decision-making power, as captured by L's reflection:

> Theoretically, we have a selection procedure […] However, we also receive clues … about the textbooks they [school leaders and district officer] are taking into consideration […] It's not entirely from our hearts, yet it is still our choice. Ironic, isn't it? (L, interview data)

The findings demonstrate that teacher agency is in constant negotiation with institutional structures and policies. Teachers exercise agency by adapting instructional practices to align with reform requirements and their own beliefs, but their agency is also constrained by factors such as limited autonomy in textbook selection.

Relational Influence in the Time of Changes

The collaborative aspect of teaching was enriched by communities of practice, professional dialogue, cooperation, experience sharing, support networks, and peer learning. The extent of teacher engagement with these communities was influenced by the district's professional culture and their own motivation.

L's experience highlights the impact of district-level policies on teacher engagement. She noted,

> Being different from other districts, the officer in charge of English subject at the district office organized many classroom observations in classes of novice teachers. In my first year of teaching at the school in District 5, I just had classes observed twice. When I moved to District 2, classroom observation was more regular and occasionally without notice in advance. This made me always in a state of readiness. It was tiring and stressful at that time; however, looking back, I was thankful for the tough regulations. (L, interview data)

The consistent professional meetings and observations in District 2 helped build strong connections among colleagues, with L stating, "The school now is my second home" (L, interview data).

K actively sought opportunities to establish her place within the professional community by "proactively conducted model classes or shared teaching experiences" (K, interview data) to find opportunities to secure long-term contractual positions. When the notice about the training for core teachers for NFLP implementation was delivered to the BoET, the officer "recommended me [her]." This recommendation reinforced K's sense of belonging and professional self-efficacy.

P's case illustrates the importance of relational agency in establishing credibility within the school community. When she was assigned to the current school, although she was "confident about [her] teaching," she recognized the need to "proactively set a credibility [for herself] by coordinating extracurricular activities such as organizing English club events or contests" (P, interview data). By working with other teachers, not limited to English teachers, P was able to amplify her voice in professional activities and reinforce her identity as a teacher at the school.

However, the exercise of relational agency was not always positive. K recounted a negative experience with direct criticism from a senior colleague about her model class, challenging her flexible approach to teaching. The colleague stated, "What you did was wrong. You must follow the procedure of teaching. You should have told the class the meaning of the structure" (K, interview data).

Thanks to her high self-efficacy, K "believed that I [she] was doing right because it was what I [she] was instructed by the British Council experts and implicit and inductive instruction proved effective to young learners," so she chose to ignore the harsh feedback (but she still remembered it).

Relational agency was also exercised through proxy agency, as exemplified by L's experience of discussing issues and potential changes with the school board (Bandura, 2001). She explained, "I am quite close with the school leaders. Therefore, in case I would like to express a constructive opinion or ask for support, I would approach them personally to have a conversation. This way, I can understand their perspectives and make a suitable decision" (L, interview data). This form of agency allowed teachers to indirectly influence decision-making processes through negotiation and dialogue.

The pandemic period marked an intensification of professional sharing across various platforms, driven by the urgent need to adapt to online teaching for young learners. P noted, "Most of us did not know what to do to teach online to young kids effectively. Whenever I got a tip, I forwarded it to others. But it was more urgent at the beginning" (P, interview data). While teachers appreciated the community support during the crisis, they acknowledged that navigating such challenges ultimately depended on individual adaptability. Tr reflected, "I was thankful that we had a community of practice to share … However, I suppose that how to overcome difficulties depended on the level of adaptation of each individual" (Tr, interview data).

The exercise of relational agency plays a crucial role in teachers' professional growth and their ability to navigate changes in their educational context. However, the effectiveness of relational agency in supporting teachers' adaptation to change depends on a combination of individual adaptability and the quality of the professional community.

Discussion

The NFLP 2008–25's initial five years provided long-lasting benefits for the participating teachers, securing them permanent positions and offering a stable career pathway. This stability fostered their professional identity and commitment, highlighting the interplay between the reform's external resources and teachers' internal sense of self. The in-service teachers benefited from high-quality professional development, better aligning their teaching strategies with reform demands, thus enhancing teaching self-efficacy and adapting to

the educational shifts. This demonstrates how the reform's external resources and teachers' internal factors, such as self-efficacy, interacted to shape their pedagogical agency and professional identity. Despite educational planning often being hierarchical and top-down (Wedell & Grassick, 2018), reforms grounded in thorough preparation and executed by well-(re)trained individuals can closely achieve intended outcomes (Fullan, 2016), as seen in the NFLP. The reform's external resources eased teachers' negotiation challenges between teaching practices and professional identities, boosting their agency.

However, the swift enactment of the new textbook policy presented a stark contrast to the more measured approach of the NFLP, revealing the complex interplay between teachers' agency and the socio-cultural context. In a culture of compliance, where subordinates adhere to leaders' mandates (Hallinger, 2010), the abrupt changes left teachers unprepared with superficial information, leading to widespread uncertainty. By the 2022–3 academic year, teachers felt compelled to conform to the widely accepted selections, influenced by higher stakeholders' preferences, their comfort, and continuity concerns. This situation underscores how practical constraints and rapid policy execution can significantly constrain the realization of greater pedagogical agency, providing further evidence for the limited impact of a superficially adopted reform (Melville, 2008). The interplay between the external policy environment and teachers' internal factors, such as their desire for comfort and continuity, shaped their exercise of agency in textbook selection.

During ongoing educational reforms, the unexpected arrival of Covid-19 marked a profound transformation in teaching and learning, testing teacher resilience and highlighting the intertwined nature of different forms of agency. Teachers demonstrated relational agency by establishing supportive networks and sharing resources to collectively navigate the new teaching landscape. The exercise of pedagogical agency became evident as teachers effectively adapted their instructional strategies to the virtual classroom, despite some degree of negotiation initially due to limited resources. These adaptive efforts underscored teachers' commitment to their professional identity as competent educators, showcasing the interaction between their identity agency and pedagogical agency. Central to these expressions of agency was the teachers' self-efficacy, an internal factor that influenced their ability to exercise agency in the face of adversity.

In summary, the chapter highlights the complex interrelation of identity agency, pedagogical agency, and relational agency, as well as the intertwined nature of agency and internal and external factors in the context of educational reform. The NFLP's external resources and teachers' internal factors, such as

self-efficacy, interacted to shape their professional identity and pedagogical agency. The swift enactment of the new textbook policy revealed the constraints on pedagogical agency posed by the socio-cultural context and teachers' internal desires for comfort and continuity. The Covid-19 pandemic tested teacher resilience and highlighted the interplay between relational and pedagogical agency, as well as the central role of self-efficacy in enabling teachers to navigate challenges. The findings also underscore the dynamic and context-dependent nature of teacher agency, shaped by the intricate interplay of internal and external factors, and the importance of considering these complexities in the planning and implementation of educational reforms.

Conclusion

A thorough examination of teacher agency over time reveals that intense identity negotiations occur primarily due to the disparity between teachers' aspirations or insufficient background knowledge and their actual experiences, rather than being directly caused by reforms. Notably, teaching self-efficacy served as a source for many teachers to practice relational agency by contributing to shared experiences of professional learning. The presence of communities of practice facilitated relational agency in a limited number of cases, indicating that while teachers are aware of professional communities, the minimal constraints on exercising pedagogical agency led to a perceived lack of necessity for more active engagement in relational agency within their teaching practices.

The findings of this study have significant implications for both theory and practice. In terms of theory, the study highlights the importance of examining teacher agency in different forms, such as identity, relational, and pedagogical agency, to clearly illustrate teachers' development in their assigned roles, desired roles, relational roles, and daily professional practice. The interconnectedness of these forms of agency is evident; however, they influence different aspects of teachers as professionals. The findings also demonstrate that agency is not a fixed capacity or trait but rather a type of timely response that individuals choose to depict when navigating their realities. At times, agency may be constrained by individuals' comfort zones or unfavorable external factors, while in challenging times, it can elevate the current self or practice to better and more responsive versions.

In terms of practice, the study suggests that changes should not be viewed as inherently negative phenomena, and a "top-down" approach is not always

detrimental if it is well-prepared. Educational policymakers and administrators should consider the complex interplay between teachers' internal factors and the external resources provided by reforms when designing and implementing educational changes. By offering targeted professional development opportunities and fostering a supportive environment for teacher collaboration, reforms can enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy and promote the exercise of agency in various forms.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the insights gained from this study may be influenced by the participating teachers' high self-confidence and language skills, potentially leading to a portrayal of teacher agency that may not fully represent the broader educator population. This limitation highlights the need for future research to include a wider range of teacher experiences and competencies, aiming for a more comprehensive understanding of teacher agency in the context of educational reforms.

References

Baldauf, R. B., & Nguyen, H. T. M. (2012). Language policy in Asia and the Pacific. In B. Spolsky (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy* (pp. 617–38). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511979026.036.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1.

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), 624–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325.

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Canh, L. V. (2015). 182 English language education innovation for the vietnamese secondary school: The Project 2020. In *Secondary School English Education in Asia: From Policy to Practice* (pp. 182–200). Routledge.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action* (pp. 32–52). Blackwell.

Duff, P. (2008). *Case study research in applied linguistics*. Routledge.

Edwards, A., & D'arcy, C. (2004). Relational agency and disposition in sociocultural accounts of learning to teach. *Educational Review*, *56*(2), 147–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031910410001693236.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031910410001693236.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., & Hökkä, P. (2015). How do novice teachers in Finland perceive their professional agency? *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), 660–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044327.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational Research Review*, *10*, 45–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001.

Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Hallinger, P. (2010). Making education reform happen: is there an 'Asian'way? *School Leadership and Management*, *30*(5), 401–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2010.502524.

Hamid, M. O., & Nguyen, H. T. M. (2016). Globalization, English language policy, and teacher agency: Focus on Asia. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *15*(1), 26–43. https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/IEJ/article/view/10442.

Hänninen, V. (2004). A model of narrative circulation. *Narrative Inquiry*, *14*(1), 69–85.

Hoang, A.-D., Pham, H.-H., Nguyen, Y.-C., Nguyen, L.-K.-N., Vuong, Q.-H., Dam, M. Q., Tran, T., & Nguyen, T.-T. (2020). Introducing a tool to gauge curriculum quality under Sustainable Development Goal 4: The case of primary schools in Vietnam. *International Review of Education*, *66*(4), 457–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09850-1.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *45*, 94–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019). Language teacher agency: Major theoretical considerations, conceptualizations and methodological choices. In K.-A. Hayriye, G. Xuesong, R. M. Elizabeth, V. Manka, & V. Gergana (Eds.), *Theorizing and Analyzing Language Teacher Agency* (pp. 10–22). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/doi:10.21832/9781788923927-004.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*(8), 899–916. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003.

Le, M. D., Nguyen, H. T. M., & Burns, A. (2021). English primary teacher agency in implementing teaching methods in response to language policy reform: A Vietnamese case study. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *22*(1–2), 199–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1741209.

Liddicoat, A. (2018). *Constraints on agency in micro-language policy and planning in schools: A case study of curriculum change*. Routledge.

Mai, H. N. T., & Hall, C. (2017). Changing views of teachers and teaching in Vietnam. *Teaching Education*, *28*(3), 244–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2016.1252742.

Melville, W. (2008). Mandated curriculum change and a science department: A superficial language convergence? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*(5), 1185–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.03.004.

Ng, P. C., & Boucher-Yip, E. F. (2016). *Teacher agency and policy response in English language teaching*. Routledge.

Nguyen, H. T. M., & Bui, T. (2016). Teachers' agency and the enactment of educational reform in Vietnam. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *17*(1), 88–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2016.1125664.

Ollerhead, S., & Burns, A. (2016). Teacher agency and policy response in the Australian adult ESL literacy classroom: A multisite case study. In P. C. L. Ng, & E. F. Boucher-Yip (Eds.),*Teacher agency and policy response in English language teaching* (pp. 105–19). Routledge.

Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research*, *66*(4), 543–78.

Pappa, S., Moate, J., Ruohotie-Lyhty, M., & Eteläpelto, A. (2017). Teachers' pedagogical and relational identity negotiation in the Finnish CLIL context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *65*, 61–70. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.03.008.

Phan, N. T. T., & Locke, T. (2016). Vietnamese teachers' self-efficacy in teaching English as a Foreign Language: Does culture matter? *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, *15*(1), 105–28. https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-04-2015-0033.

Phan, T. H., & Hamid, M. O. (2018). Learner autonomy in foreign language policies in Vietnamese universities: An exploration of teacher agency from a sociocultural perspective. *Language policy and planning in universities* (pp. 222–39). Routledge.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch, & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (5th ed., pp. 5–23). Routledge.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.

Robinson, S. (2012). Constructing teacher agency in response to the constraints of education policy: Adoption and adaptation. *Curriculum Journal*, *23*(2), 231–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2012.678702.

Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2018). Identity-Agency in Progress: Teachers Authoring Their Identities. *Research on teacher identity* (pp. 25–36). Springer.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. A. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Toom, A., Pyhältö, K., & Rust, F. O. C. (2015). Teachers' professional agency in contradictory times. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), 615–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044334.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *17*(7), 783–805. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00036-1.

Van Van, H. (2018). MOET's three pilot English language communicational curricula for schools in Vietnam: rationale, design and implementation. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *34*(2), 1–25.

Wedell, M., & Grassick, L. (2018). *International perspectives on teachers living with curriculum change*. Springer.

Yang, H., & Clarke, M. (2018). Spaces of agency within contextual constraints: A case study of teacher's response to EFL reform in a Chinese university. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *38*(2), 187–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2018.1460252.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research*. Sage.

12

Not Another Paper about Problems We Can't Solve: EL Practitioners' Agency in Times of the Impossible

Chloe Le, Anita Dubroc, and Kim Skinner

Introduction

Public education in the United States has been flooded with accountability discourses since the policy initiatives of the 1990s, following *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In what Buchanan (2015) called the "policy era," or "20 years of standardization, tight coupling, and ubiquitous testing practices," teachers were driven to see themselves in the instrumentalist view of judging their worth based on their students' test scores (p. 700). However, with any force comes a counterforce. Teachers have reportedly responded to the policy and accountability discourses with creative measures to form and re-form their professional identities through individual and collective agency (Robinson, 2012; Sloan, 2006; Verger & Parcerisa, 2017). Along with the growing tendency to recognize teacher agency as one of the driving forces in curriculum development (Balgopal, 2020; Poulton, 2020; Priestley et al., 2015) comes the need to examine the factors that support and hinder teachers' agency through the daily circumstances of their ecological network. While there has been extensive research on teacher agency and curriculum reforms, many studies focused on teachers in the traditional content subjects rather than those who work across the curriculum such as teachers of English Learners (ELs), hereby referred to as EL teachers.

This chapter addresses this problem through a collaborative autoethnography of three researchers who played different roles in the EL context. Spiky is an EL teacher in a public high school. Buttercup is a school district EL coach. Professor Prac teaches pre-service teachers in a teacher education program at a large public

university in the United States, one of the main components of which includes EL education. Their positions brought critical perspectives to the table, and the three discussants aimed to unpack the following question through this chapter: *How was agency enacted within the spaces of representation, representations of space, and spatial practices in which the authors were engaged?* In other words, the authors looked at EL practitioners' agency through the spatial production that takes place within their daily professional life.

For the privacy of the individuals and organizations mentioned in this autoethnography, all names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

Background: A Look into EL Education in the United States

As the number of migrant children entering the US public school system increases, teaching new EL has become a topic of importance for many school districts, school administrators, and classroom teachers. As of May 2023, the Center for Education Statistics reports that there are 5 million (10.3 percent) EL in the US public schools (para. 1). The Center also shows that over 67 percent of teachers reported teaching at least one EL student, while only 10 percent of those teachers held EL certification, a state-issued official document that certifies teachers to be specifically trained in working with students as speakers of languages other than English.

In the United States, traditions and practices of English language classes differ vastly according to regions and the percentage of EL students within the regions. Since EL classes are not federally mandated, the state and ultimately the school district are left with total control over how EL programming is executed. Several studies examine how content and EL teachers disjoin or come together to meet students' English language development needs. Arkourdis (2006) explains, "Within the institutional context of the secondary school, EL is positioned as strategy-driven" (p. 417). This viewpoint puts EL as a subject matter that is "less-than" within the school institution and culture. EL teachers often find themselves stuck mainly because of how EL classes are established within the school or district (Dove and Honigsfeld, 2020). Norton (2020) describes the process of creating a district-wide co-teaching program, which would eliminate the need for separate EL classes in schools.

Most literature on EL teaching focuses on the classroom experiences of EL teachers or mainstream/content area teachers. Barr and Clark's (2012) research explicated an EL teacher's self-reflection in his journey to be an excellent educator

of EL students, highlighting the necessity for EL teachers to become self-reflective educators to provide professional development and rigorous instruction to their students. Whiting's (2017) study exemplifies the conflicting positions of the EL teacher, whether to assist the lead teacher in general education classes and coordinate with content teachers to help EL students keep up with subject matters, or to provide more intensive teaching by pulling EL students out of their classroom to work on their specific English language skills. McGriff and Protacio's (2015) article compares several middle school EL teachers' roles and how they position themselves in their schools as leaders and advocates for their students.

Overall, research demonstrates that increased knowledge of EL teachers' roles by all school community members and stakeholders would be greatly beneficial to EL teachers and students (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2020; Harvey & Teemant, 2012; McGriff & Protacio, 2015; Norton, 2020; Whiting, 2017). A co-teaching strategy would encourage the co-planning between EL and mainstream teachers, wherein both teachers would co-instruct in the classroom, thus reducing the feeling of EL teachers' inferior status. When teachers, administrators, and EL staff come together with a clear vision of EL teachers' role and expertise, students are better served in EL and mainstream classes.

Spatial Production and Agency

This section captures the essence of two theories employed by the authors—spatial production and agency—to lay out the framework for data collection and analysis.

Spatial Production

Lefebvre's (1974/1991) theory of spatial production pivots around the idea that space is socially produced and that social relationships are always embodied in space: "(Social) space is a (social) product" (p. 26). To produce space, however, is different from producing other objects in the economy.

> (Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products; rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their relationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. (p. 73)

Space, as theorized by Lefebvre, shapes and is shaped by a series of interactions and operations between subjects, "both individual and collective, who are born and who die, who suffer and who act" (p. 33). Social space results from past actions, while it also has the producing power in materializing the intricate webs of connections between social beings in specific circumstances, from which knowledge is constructed, regulated, and sustained. There is no knowledge outside of social space, although each individual has his or her own system of formulating knowledge based on his or her spatiality as a result of being spatialized, located, or experienced in or as space. From the point of view of knowing, then, "social space works as a tool for the analysis of society" (p. 34).

Lefebvre distinguished three ways of understanding space by proposing the triad of spatiality, including "spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 33), which could be understood alternatively as "the perceived, the conceived, the lived" (p. 39). The first component, spatial practice, takes space "as physical form, real space, space that is generated and used" (Elden, 2004, p. 190). Through specific social practices at particular spaces, human beings achieve certain spatial competence and conduct certain spatial performances accordingly over time, which results in continuity and cohesion. Spatial practice is the perceived space, and it highlights people's perceptions of the world.

The second component, representations of space, "is tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 33). Space in this sense is seen as a mental construct imagined as "what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (p. 38). According to Lefebvre, representations of space are intellectually worked-out systems of verbal signs and are "the most dominant space in any society" (p. 39). Human beings' conceptualizations and abstractions about the world influence the ways they negotiate living and order their individual worlds.

The last component, representational spaces, "embod[ies] complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 33). Contrary to representations of space which have an abstract notion, space of representation is "directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of inhabitants and users" (p. 39). Space here is seen "as produced and modified over time," "invested with symbolism and meaning" (Elden, 2004, p. 190).

Agency

In their seminal work, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) elaborated on three dimensions of human agency, namely the iterational, the projective, and the practical—evaluative elements. Bandura (2018) shifted the focus in theorizing and research from "almost exclusively on agency exercised individually" to include three different modes of human agency: individual, proxy, and collective. The two latter modes indicate circumstances when individuals influence others "who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to obtain the outcomes they desire"; and when a group of individuals "pool their knowledge, skills, and resources and act in concert to shape their future" and "achieve unity of effort for common purpose" (p. 131).

Priestley et al. (2015) argued for teacher agency to move beyond a personal capacity or something inherent to an individual and saw it rather as an "emergent phenomenon" (p. 19) which arises through "the interaction of individual 'capacity' with environing 'conditions'" (p. 22). This view has been well received by others (Castañeda et al., 2022; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017), emphasizing the temporal and ecological nature of teacher agency.

It is important to emphasize that agency does not always have positive values or lead to ideal improvement. Faced with change, teachers can adapt, ignore, or adopt reforms. Teacher agency may mean rejecting change and continuing with existing behaviors and strategies. Buchanan (2015) distinguishes between two types of teacher agency: "stepping up" and "pushing back" (p. 710). The former refers to a teacher "going above and beyond the perceived expectations of her role" whilst *pushing back* is about resisting change (Buchanan, 2015, p. 710). Therefore, teacher agency should be viewed from complex aspects rather than from the simplistic stance of teachers continually bringing profound influence and moving mountains.

Collaborative Autoethnography

Curriculum and research are embodied knowledge—knowledge which can be reflexively captured in text through "the back-and-forth motion of the autoethnographic gaze" (Jewett, 2008, p. 4). Through autoethnography, Denzin (2014) explains, "The storied performances of life experiences move outward from the selves of the person and inward to the persons and groups that give them meaning and structure" (p. 4). As a form of socially conscious research,

autoethnography "should engage in processes of information, formation, and transformation, seeking insight, using that new-found knowledge as a means of deepening positive convictions for purposes of transforming self and society" (Alexander, 2023, p. 66). Moving beyond documenting events and people's lives, a critical lens interrogates the impact of local, national, and global power structures on people's lives (Bhattacharya, 2023).

Collaborative autoethnography, coined and popularized by Chang (2013), refers to autoethnographic inquiry conducted by two or more researchers. One advantage of collaborative autoethnography, writes Lapadat (2017), is "to broaden the gaze from the lonely traumas of the self to locate them within categories of experience shared by many. Shared experiences reveal systematic oppression and cultural scripts" (p. 599). Like all ethnographic inquiry, our autoethnographic explorations derive from long-term interaction and thick descriptions of distinct social, cultural, and political contexts. Multi-voiced and multi-faceted, the autoethnographic collaboration for this chapter includes data from personal narratives, observations, visuals, and conversations.

The primary data for this collaborative autoethnography were the three personal narratives produced by the authors. After writing, we added our narratives to a shared online document for written feedback, including comments, questions, and challenges from each member of the group. The authors met multiple times in an online platform, as the personal narratives were revised by the individual authors based on the feedback given. Weekly online conversations and multiple re-readings by all authors continued during the data analysis and interpretation phase as patterns within and across the data were identified, discussed, and represented by themes. With distinct positions as classroom EL teacher, EL specialist, and university professor in teacher education, Spiky and Buttercup contributed more reflections from the practitioner standpoint, while Professor Prac's outsider view shed light on the topic from interconnecting angles, all of which are crucial to the overall significance of the research.

Authors' Positionality

The district's school system, where Spiky and Buttercup worked, was organized into many departments, with EL being a proportionally small and new one. Following a district-wide systemic restructuring process in the 2022–3 school year, the number of EL specialists were reduced from approximately 200 to 20, as many were re-classified as EL teachers or EL coaches. The shift in roles was

accompanied by a change in responsibilities. Spiky declined a coach position for EL teachers. Buttercup decided to leave the classroom and become an EL coach. Professor Prac returned with pre-service teachers to an elementary school where the EL specialist was now an EL teacher. It was in this context that the three authors experienced and exerted their agency.

Spiky

I held an endearing attachment to Roary High, the place that I first entered when landing a job after attaining a terminal degree, and the same place I returned to after spending one year in an elementary school where I had co-taught with Buttercup. The EL population at Roary High comprised mostly Spanish-speaking students, with a few exceptions of those who spoke Portuguese. As an EL teacher, I was assigned a class with mixed English proficiency level students. I worked along another EL teacher, who was a native Spanish speaker and had a much longer work experience in the district. Although we had separate lists of students, we closely cooperated with each other in overseeing roughly 360 ELs in the school, who we both refer to as "our kids."

Buttercup

Prior to becoming an EL teacher, I had limited experience with learning a second language. French was spoken around me as a child, but never to me; it was a language of mystery with very little translated. I did not fully accept and enjoy my bilingualism until I became an EL teacher. When Spiky became an EL co-teacher with me at an elementary school, I was relieved to have a kindred spirit who understood the many forces against us as public educators. We came together over small group teaching, standardized test preparation, preschool screenings, and field day. The next year, we were split when I became an EL coach, and she became a high school EL teacher. Despite our varied roles, we still exchanged daily life happenings as well as frustration over the district's systemic restructuring and the many conflicts it caused.

Professor Prac

In my role as an associate professor at a large public university, I spent ten hours per week supervising undergraduate field experience students in a public elementary school with a 40 percent EL student population. The university

students were placed in English Language Arts classrooms across the school campus, but they also regularly observed and participated in the EL Welcome class. Located in the main hall, the EL Welcome class was the only remaining newcomers' classroom in the school district. The children in this self-contained classroom were not just new to the school, but also new US arrivals; this was their first experience in a US classroom. Reminiscent of the one-room schoolhouse of yesteryear, the children in this newcomer class ranged from ages five to twelve. The teacher, Ms. Nurture, had taught elementary-age children for fifty-two years, including twenty-seven years as an EL teacher/specialist.

Agency Enacted within the Spatial Triads

The authors examined agency within the spaces of representation, representations of space, and spatial practice through their own reflections on the EL teaching environment.

Spaces of Representation: School—Manipulated and Teacher—Manipulated Spaces

Spiky described the spaces in her school as being "heavily policed by school admins" to "keep students in check." She recalled details of her daily route from the parking lot into the school campus:

> There is always one man on each side of the door, normally a first sergeant or a colonel or a coach waving the metal detector at each body from top to toes and front to back. He then sends the student off or pulls him/her by the side to deal with such issues as missing student ID, inappropriate outfit, or wrong backpack—meaning anything that is not made of clear plastic. […] There comes a hint of fleeting serenity before the principal's stentorian voice breaks it: "Move it move it guys, go straight to the cafeteria, do not stop, do not go where you're not supposed to go! Don't let me see you acting like a clown, or you will be in TOR (Time-Out-Room)."

Claiming her agency in making a conscious choice of going through the school's main entrance to witness the daily process of receiving students instead of going through the back door with easier access to her room, she explained "the need to come through these guarded doors and re-live the welcoming procedure as a teacher, a student, a parent, or a visitor to the place":

> The metal detectors first hit me with quite a shock. The fact that they exist in that school and not the ones I used to visit during my graduate program nor in any coursebook about education in the US, the militarization of the screening process, the zero-tolerance nature of the principal's megaphone monologues, and the gated spaces within this place—everything was an eye-opening experience. It sends loud and clear messages about who owns the space of the school, what is prioritized, and how education is conducted.

From Spiky's perspective, the school was guarded by the adults, and there was a clear imbalance of power between the educators and the educated. Freedom was not free; it could easily disappear if students were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Movement was a privilege; students were moved, retained, and always supervised on the campus:

> From the panopticon look of the multiple cameras that transferred live data to the front office, the principal, the dean, or other admins would get on PA to say that some students were straying during class time and needed to return to their classroom. There were strict rules to dictate movements in the school building. Certain bathrooms were locked during class time, and if they needed to go, students would have to go to the "main" ones located near the head quarter that was the front office.

As she tried to understand why access to such a basic human need as using the restroom was controlled through space, Spiky learned that the purpose was to discourage students from skipping class "and hide in there to fool around," although it caused unwanted disadvantages for her students. A new EL with limited proficiency in her class was denied bathroom access for not having the handbook hall pass on his first day of school, and she had to personally bring him to the restroom. For her, the trivial rules over bathroom usage obstructed instructional time and "manifested the adults' desire to exert control over the children"; therefore, she came to "detest such micromanagement on the students' bodies through the manipulation of space."

In contrast to how school manipulated the space to control students' bodies, Spiky described her own classroom as a secluded space that she designed to invite more autonomy in students. She exchanged the perfect façade of a classroom for ongoing student-centered projects doubled as classroom decorations; for example, students' colorful handmade stencils of their arms all pointing to a Martin Luther King's quote on the classroom door, a bulletin board of monthly exemplary students, class rules written and signed by students, or "students-led anchor texts and enlarged examples of the vocabulary techniques propagandized

by the district's EL department as must-haves in the new program." Admitting that the room was not heavily decorated, she showed immense pride in how that setup worked for her students' benefits:

> Aesthetically speaking, my room is below average and could use a good dose of Instagram-worthy premade décor items. That is not the intention. If everything in display is neat and requires no further changes, students would be entering a museum where touching is forbidden. I want them to take ownership of the little space of my classroom to tell the world that they exist.

Spiky had students make posters with their photos and details about who they were, where they came from, their favorite foods or people, and what they dreamt of doing or becoming, and put up the "poster wall." This became a landmark for other EL students to drop by and read, comment, and joke over, usually in their first language. As can be seen, students were represented differently within the space of Roary High. While the school's common space was utilized to decentralize the students, Spiky's classroom was intentionally crafted to put them in the spotlight.

Representations of Space: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Views on EL in Accountability Talks

Although accountability never went out of fashion, the district's systemic restructuring seemed to exert even more pressure on the individual EL teachers over their students' test scores. Professor Prac reported how the change in title affected the rights of a former EL specialist, now turned EL teacher, Ms. Nurture:

> Now, she must stipulate student learning targets (SLTs) for all students in her multi-age and multi-grade newcomers' class. Keep in mind the difficulty of writing individual SLTs for every subject area in different grade levels. Adding to the complexity, the children had varying mastery of English depending on the primary language spoken at home, number of people at home who spoke any English, out-of-school exposure to English, and length of time in the US.

Ms. Nurture was required to prove her effectiveness through completing the SLTs for her students. Similarly, Spiky struggled with submitting a lesson plan that would hold her accountable for teaching English to students whose proficiency spanned across the spectrum from newcomer to almost exiting the program in the same room, using the same materials prescribed and reinforced by the district. Taking control of their capacity as teachers, both Ms. Nurture

and Spiky decided to do what was best for their students, which was not always inherent in the accountability talks. In one situation, a teacher expressed concern to Ms. Nurture about a second-grade child in a regular classroom who couldn't read in English or Spanish but did not meet the "new to US" requirement to be a member of the ESL Welcome class. Ms. Nurture appealed to the principal for permission to pull the girl from her regular classroom for extra ELA instruction each morning, which vastly improved her language skills by the middle of the year.

On the other side of the school wall, Buttercup was floating between different schools to meet with their supervisors of federal programs to discuss their progress in being compliant with the EL department's requirements regarding identifying, screening, and documenting accommodations for their ELs. Throughout her reflection, this compliance task took more time than supporting teachers in the classrooms.

> I spent the beginning of the school year at one charter school in a conference room screening kindergarteners for days on end. I had very little interaction with teachers except when I walked the halls trying to find the students I was meant to screen. When I finally did make my way upstairs into classrooms in early November, I was confronted by an administrator a few days later, stating that I didn't have permission to be in classrooms.

Meanwhile, Spiky pointed out a space "where EL students existed and were moved, shifted, displaced, replaced, erased," which was in the district's data. That same space, she said, was resided by the EL coach, who "was solely a data collector."

> He spent so much time making, in his own words, "beautiful and colorful charts" of the ELPT scores. He informed us teachers of how many students needed to exist the program for our school to be in good standing. He told us to focus on the bubble kids instead of the newcomers because "no matter what you do they will be where they are for quite a while." So the students who were already progressing received more attention during the test prep time than those who were clueless about what's going on in their class. To him, students were simply names and numbers on the spreadsheets.

Spiky was frustrated trying to catch her coach in-between his meetings to ask for modeling of the materials handed down by the district. She was trying to teach students while he was trying to move data; she was trying to help humans, and he was trying to compare numbers. Tormented by the same task that made a fellow coach contented, Buttercup felt bitter going from "a valued teacher" to

"being a data clerk." Her days centered on meetings and administrative tasks, while supporting teachers was always secondary and optional:

> In the fall semester, coaches were called into monthly meetings wherein we discussed a particular school, the school's EL data, and what the coach had in mind to shift the students and the data into proficiency. The coaches who listened to the presentation then graded and commented on what they liked and what the coaches could improve.

The representations of space depicted by the authors revealed the intricate power relations between EL students, EL teachers, EL coaches, and the district. This EL space was constantly conceptualized by two contrasting viewpoints: one sees students as numbers and the other sees students as anything but numbers.

Spatial Practices: Teaching EL While Navigating the Impossible

Source language and target language: Like any other foreign language teacher, Spiky was faced with the age-old conundrum of whether to teach in the students' language or in the target language.

> Despite the trends to glorify native-like English teaching elsewhere, here in this school it was a disadvantage to speak only the target language in teaching. Since most of the EL population was Hispanic, students expected me to speak Spanish fluently. One time, a student told me that he wanted to move to the other EL teacher's class "because she speaks Spanish, and you don't."

Although in the district-led professional development sessions, EL teachers were encouraged to teach in English, Spiky's EL co-teacher admitted that she spoke Spanish "to save time," and she regularly read aloud the translated version of a text to students so they could answer the comprehension questions in their English Language Arts class. Accepting the mismatch in their teaching approaches, Spiky encouraged her students to step out of the comfort zone provided by Google Translate and human interpreters, while also challenging herself to think like a language learner:

> One student said: "But Miss, think about going to my country and learn Math and Chemistry with your Spanish. It's hard!" That reminded me that I always needed to think like a foreign language learner. So I started a Spanish course on Duo Lingo and told them all about the my progress. They found it amusing that I was struggling, or my Spanish sounded funny, and eagerly offered help.

Through that, Spiky built confidence and showed her students that every language learner starts somewhere. She spent parts of her lesson planning

periods researching the key concepts she was going to teach in Spanish to activate students' prior knowledge. By embracing students' native language, Spiky applied translanguaging, "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds" (Garcia, 2009, p. 45) in her teaching, to co-construct her identity and students' identities through linguistic interactions.

Lack of attendance: One of the accountability discourses that appeared throughout Spiky's reflection was that of tracking students' attendance, which "was a tricky part of the teaching and never my favorite." Teachers were required to report students' absences during the first thirty minutes of their class. As her school was in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood, Spiky described her struggle in retaining students' attendance and participation:

> In this part of town, students had so many concerns other than going to class every day. The school used many incentive and punitive actions to improve it, but the classes were always at 70-80% capacity. […] Just when I managed to crack the code to their heart and finally celebrated the small joys of learning, they stopped going for many days and made me wonder what was going on.

Her coping strategy was to have students leave all their learning materials in her room and never to assign homework, so that students were pushed to fully participate through hands-on activities during class time and had "the optimal preparation for learning" whenever they showed up. She advocated for emphasis on factors other than attendance:

> Having perfect attendance does not translate to many observable improvements in learning, unfortunately, we don't track kindness, perseverance, or obstacles outside the school gate. Therefore, I chose to let them in whenever they could.

It was her survival skill to acknowledge students' presence and any efforts they made while being with her, instead of "fight[ing] the losing battle" and putting them on a guilt trip that "wastes more time and leads to nowhere." She hoped to make students feel "welcome, cherished, and supported" by offering them the "safe space of no-question-asked."

Teachers as collaborative agents: As the coach could not support them as much as expected from the title, Spiky and her co-teacher relied on each other for making engaging lessons that could get their students "hooked."

> As a result, I constantly touched base with the other EL teacher in what we were doing in our classroom. It turned out that she was not trying to strictly follow the requirements, either. Therefore, we were pretty much in sync on the major activities and content areas.

Spiky felt a sense of agency from the teamwork with her EL co-teachers because "we were maximizing our flexibility and collaboration to cover the most bases within the limit of our work hours."

Buttercup was also trying to establish this collegial solidarity in her EL coach position by the restless attempts to push-in to the content classrooms at her different school sites.

> Teaching was not emphasized, but I came to co-teach at all campuses. I was particularly enthused that teachers came to trust me to become part of their classroom. One teacher and I had a hybrid approach to co-teaching in which I would sometimes co-teach with her, but also have a small group working with me during instruction so I could give more guidance.

Claiming the students she worked with as "my students," Buttercup shared the excitement of having one of them exit the EL program by the end of the school year. Although she was not identified as a teacher, she built teacherly collaborations with people at different school sites and tried to support them pedagogically whenever she was in the space.

Connecting borders, crossing territories: Throughout her assignment of being an EL coach, Buttercup pushed herself through the classroom doors multiple times and offered help in every way other than screening students and checking the school's compliance. Her support was met with certain levels of resistance:

> Given that the majority of EL in our district are Spanish speakers, I was met with questions as to why the district would send an EL coach who was could not speak Spanish. At a professional development session, a teacher insisted that they already knew about EL accommodations and modifications as outlined by the state's EL handbook, they wanted to know how the school district intended to support them, although that was my intended role.

Admitting that she was not able to effectively support teachers as described in the coach description because her schedule was spread between many different schools, Buttercup felt that coaching made her physically force herself into spaces "where I was tolerated but not truly wanted." Still, she connected the borders and gained some acceptance from the teachers, who needed her support and were finally afforded some.

Meanwhile, Spiky thought of a vulnerable moment when she could not fight the system successfully, and her agency was disrupted by "the stigma of the power structure pre-existing in the space," for which she felt "fully ashamed."

> That early morning, I was in the other EL teacher's room helping her set up a state examination. Her next-door teacher came in with three of our students and asked her to let them stay for the coming period because he was having a formal observation and they "didn't seem ready to learn." Before walking away, he shook his head at them: "I asked them very easy questions and they didn't say a word."—as if to justify why these students ended up outside his formally observed classroom. They were the undesirable group that slowed him down and made him look bad to the evaluators.

Astonished by the incident and her own inability to act, Spiky relentlessly replayed the scenario in her head while asking herself what she would have said or could have done. She questioned herself: "What did I even get a PhD for, when I couldn't stand up for them in that case?" She admitted that she herself was the problem and contemplated a moment of truth in teaching ELs:

> Sadly, such action taken by teachers to the EL students, or any other groups deemed special, was not uncommon. Similarly, such action as mine was popular—we ignored the confrontation that was uncomfortable yet much needed. I am not proud of my non-action, but I want it to always stay on the back of my mind as I continue to advocate for my students.

Spiky earnestly reflected on a push-back moment from her teaching practice, which also depicted a socio-political factor interfering with the exercise of agency in the language classroom. It is not possible to win all the times, but that impossibility itself makes teaching a fascinating sport.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how agency was enacted within spatial production through a collaborative autoethnography of three EL researchers. In their different roles as teacher, coach, and researcher, the authors observed, acted, and struggled through the challenges of educating EL learners from a small scale of a classroom to a larger context of EL education in the district and the state. A common thread reported in all three accounts was a mismatch between the sudden, unsolicited changes made by the district regarding the staffing structure and the curriculum for EL education, and the amount of training provided to teachers and specialists to accommodate such changes. Nevertheless, each individual practitioner showed various agentic efforts in response to the needs

of their environment within the spaces of representation, representations of space, and the spatial practice in their daily practice.

Although the EL research community has voiced a growing need for more teacher-centered approaches to curriculum and instruction, a large gap is left open for authentic practitioner voices to be raised, heard, and taken into consideration for policy changes. As illustrated by the authors, program and curriculum changes were made arbitrarily by the district and imposed on the teachers and specialists without any prior survey of opinions among these stakeholders who were working directly on the ground to see what would work and what would not. Through this chapter, the authors showcased the authentic narratives of language teachers and practitioners through their daily struggles and successes, which in turn provide an avenue for teacher-researchers to contemplate their own practice and share their lived experiences with a wider community. This autoethnography also contributes to what Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2019) called the "stock of knowledge"—knowledge not *for* teachers generated elsewhere but *of* teachers, gained from "teachers' ongoing engagement with the practice of teaching itself" (p. 38). It is crucial for EL program administrators to consider a variety of programming, classroom, and engagement strategies to make EL learners and EL teachers a greater part of their schools' cultures and classrooms and, most importantly, in their decision-making process.

References

Alexander, B. K. (2023). Critical auto (-/) ethnography in everyday and educational research for social justice. In M. D. Young, & S. Diem (Eds.), *Handbook of critical education research: Qualitative, quantitative, and emerging approaches*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/97810031411464-17.

Anzaldua, G. (2022). *Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza* (5th ed.). Aunt Lute Books.

Arkoudis, S. (2006). Negotiating the rough ground between ESL and mainstream teachers. *The International Journal of Bilingual Educational and Bilingualism*, *9*(4), 415–19. https://doi.org/10.2167/beb337.0.

Balgopal, M. M. (2020). STEM teacher agency: A case study of initiating and implementing curricular reform. *Science Education*, *104*(4), 762–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21578.

Bandura, A. (2018). Toward a psychology of human agency: Pathways and reflections. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *13*(2), 130–6. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617699280.

Barr, S., & Clark, M. C. (2012). In pursuit of excellence in teaching: An EL educator's narrative. *Journal of Educational Change*, *13*, 41–66. DOI: 10.1007/s10833-011-9168-8.

Bhattacharya, K. (2023). What does this moment ask of me? *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, 12*(2), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2023.12.2.1.

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2019). Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teachers' talk for teacher agency. In *Teachers Matter–But How?* (pp. 38–54). Routledge.

Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teachers and teaching*, *21*(6), 700–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044329.

Castañeda, L., Esteve-Mon, F. M., Adell, J., & Prestridge, S. (2022). International insights about a holistic model of teaching competence for a digital era: The digital teacher framework reviewed. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *45*(4), 493–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2021.1991304.

Chang, H. (2013). *Individual and collaborative autoethnography as method*. Holman.

Denzin, N. K. (2014). *Interpretive autoethnography* (2nd ed.). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506374697.

Dove, M.G., & Honigsfeld, A. (Eds.) (2020). *Co-teaching for English learners: Evidence-based practices and research-informed outcomes*. Information Age.

Elden, S. (2004). Between Marx and Heidegger: Politics, philosophy and Lefebvre's The production of space. *Antipode*, *36*(1), 86–105.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294.

García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century. A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Harvey, L., & Teemant, A. (2012). Who does what an why?: ESL administrators' perspectives on the roles of ESL specialists and mainstream teachers. *INTESOL Journal*, *9*(1).

Jewett, L. M. (2008). *A delicate dance: Autoethnography, curriculum, and the semblance of intimacy*. Peter Lang.

Lapadat, J. (2017). Ethics in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *23*(8), 589–603. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704462.

Lefbvre, H. (1974/1991). *The production of space*. (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell.

McGriff, M., & Protacio, M.S. (2015). Similar settings, different story lines: The positioning of EL teachers in two middle schools. *Reading Horizons*, *54*(1), 1–23.

National Center for Education Statistics (July 2022). *Table 209.42: Percentage of public and private school teachers who teach English learner students and students with disabilities and percentage with selected qualifications or coursework, by selected teacher and school characteristics: 2020–2021. Digest of education statistics.* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov.

National Center for Education Statistics (May 2023). *English learners in public schools*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf/english-learners.

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. *The Elementary School Journal*, *84*(2), 113–30.

Norton, J. C. (2020) Redefining borders through co-teaching: ESL/ELD teachers as change-agents in K-5 classrooms. In M. G. Dove, & A. Honigsfeld (Eds.), *Co-teaching for English learners: Evidence-based practices and research-informed outcomes* (pp. 3–12). Information Age.

Oolbekkink-Marchand, H. W., Hadar, L. L., Smith, K., Helleve, I., & Ulvik, M. (2017). Teachers' perceived professional space and their agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *62*, 37–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.11.005.

Poulton, P. (2020). Teacher agency in curriculum reform: The role of assessment in enabling and constraining primary teachers' agency. *Curriculum Perspectives*, *40*(1), 35–48. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-020-00100-w.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., Philippou, S., & Robinson, S. (2015). The teacher and the curriculum: Exploring teacher agency. In D. Wyse, L. Hayward, & J. Pandya (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (pp. 187–201). SAGE.

Robinson, S. (2012). Constructing teacher agency in response to the constraints of education policy: Adoption and adaptation. *Curriculum Journal*, *23*(2), 231–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2012.678702.

Sloan, K. (2006). Teacher identity and agency in school worlds: Beyond the all-good/all-bad discourse on accountability-explicit curriculum policies. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *36*(2), 119–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2006.00350.x.

Verger, A., & Parcerisa, L. (2017). A difficult relationship: accountability policies and teachers—International Evidence and Premises for Future Research. In M. Akiba & G. K. LeTenre (Eds.), *International handbook of teacher quality and policy, 1* (pp. 241–54). Routledge.

Whiting, C. (2017). Caught between the push and the pull: Perceptions of mainstreaming and ESOL teaching. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice, 8*(1), 9–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/26390043.2017.12067793.

Part Three

Language Teacher Agency for Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Responsibility

13

Language Teacher Agency for Social Justice: Meaningful Experiences during Teacher Education

Priscila Leal

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of language education since Pennycook's 1990 call for critical applied linguistics, issues of domination, discrimination, and social inequalities persist in our "uneven world" (Pennycook, 2022). Deficit views of multilingualism prevail globally, underscoring the need for interventions addressing these disparities. Critical language pedagogy, influenced by Freire's critical pedagogy, is one such strategy as it confronts unequal social relations in local and global contexts. Critical language pedagogy aims to promote social justice by teaching languages for equality, freedom, and solidarity, based on democratic values (Crookes, 2021). Central to critical pedagogy is conscientização[1] (Freire, 2014), further defined below as one's ability to "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions" and take action "against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). The action component of conscientização is closely related to the concept of agency for social justice. While conscientização fosters the development of agency by empowering individuals to critically engage with their social environment and take action to address injustice, agency, on the other hand, enhances the process of conscientização by encouraging individuals to actively participate in critical reflection and transformative action. Both

[1] The term has been translated into English as critical consciousness, particularly in the Freirean sense and associated with liberatory pedagogy. However, Freire (2014) argued for the adoption of the word conscientização into English without alteration. (In alignment with Freire's preference, I use the term conscientização throughout this chapter.)

are further discussed below. Developing conscientização among critical language teachers is intricately connected to promoting their agency for social justice. Nonetheless, there is a significant gap in our understanding of these transformative processes of agency and conscientização (Crookes, 2015).

To explore how critical language teachers develop conscientização and agency, this chapter examines the experiences language teachers interpret and derive meaning from in developing conscientização and agency for social justice during teacher education programs (TEPs). Focusing on TEPs allows a nuanced understanding of such transformative process, crucial for designing programs that support educators in teaching language for social justice. This chapter draws on data from an interview-based cross-sectional study. It begins with a discussion of key concepts—agency, conscientização, and teaching for social justice. The study and the use of Positioning Analysis (Bamberg, 1997) for narrative data analysis are then detailed. Excerpts from four critical language teachers' narratives during TEPs illuminate their experiences, followed by a report on data analysis and findings. The chapter concludes by addressing pedagogical implications for TEPs aiming to encourage conscientização and agency for social justice among language teachers.

Language Teacher Agency for Social Justice and Conscientização

Agency and Conscientização

From a sociological standpoint, agency is defined as the "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 12) being achieved through social interactions (Priestley et al., 2012). In the context of teachers' practice, agency is conceptualized within the school environment, emphasizing educators' ability to purposefully and constructively guide their professional development and influence their teaching practices (Biesta et al., 2015). Teacher agency for social justice involves intentional actions by educators to foster equity, inclusivity, and justice in their classrooms. The concept of language teacher agency, which has garnered attention in recent years (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Leal & Crookes, 2018; Li & De Costa, 2019), encompasses educators actively addressing social inequalities, discrimination, and systemic issues within language education. Some issues studied include linguistic discrimination (Dovchin, 2019), the neutrality myth overlooking power dynamics in language teaching (Canagarajah,

2008; Pennycook, 1990), monolingual principles enforcing exclusive use of the target language (L2) (Cook, 2001), and native speakerism favoring "native speakers" over "non-native speakers"[2] (Holliday, 2006).

Language teacher agency for social justice is intertwined with conscientização and the promotion of socially just educational practices as it empowers teachers to recognize their positionality and challenges them to reflect critically on their beliefs and teaching practices. Conscientização, which underscores education's role in social change, is noted by Freire's translator in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014) as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). In other words, it is a critical understanding of one's reality, which allows for the perception and analysis of the structures of oppression to take action against them. Freire (1985) highlights that conscientização is "brought about … through praxis—the authentic union of action and reflection" (Freire, 1985, p. 87). Yet, neither reflection nor action is solely an individual process but a social, collective, and interactively developed matter but "a joint project in that it takes place in a [individual] among other [individuals], [individuals] united by their action and by their reflection upon that action and upon the world" (Freire, 1985, p. 85). Thus, conscientização is guided by continuous reflection of how our actions, individual as well as collective, affect the world around us. Conscientização is an ongoing process, not meant to be "a progression through a finite series of steps with a fixed set of attitudes and behaviors to be achieved" (Roberts, 2000, p. 145), and evolves as individuals grapple with different social justice issues. However, the field of language teacher education lacks understanding regarding the development of conscientização and agency for social justice, a point that will be revisited later.

Teaching for Social Justice

While conscientização originated in Brazil, the idea of teaching for social justice is not new in the United States. Nearly a century ago, Counts (1932, as cited in Head, 2008) advocated that teachers have both the right and duty to confront

[2] I am acutely aware of the ideologies the terms "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" carry (see Canagarajah, 1999). Several alternative terms have been suggested (e.g., "multicompetent speaker" by Cook, 1999; "language expert" by Rampton, 1990); however, the field does not seem to have reached a consensus or adopted any of them (Selvi, 2011). I use these terms purposefully to invoke the ideologies carried in them.

oppressive forces. Building on Counts's perspective, Brown (1938) emphasized the responsibility of TEPs to cultivate educators well-versed in societal issues, capable of instilling critical thinking in students.

> The duty of the teachers' college is thus clear. They must furnish … a staff of workers of the public schools who thoroughly understand the social, economic, and political problems with which this country is faced, who are zealous in the improvement of present conditions and who are capable of educating citizens disposed to study social problems earnestly, think critically about them, and act in accord with their nobelist impulses. (p. 328)

Brown's (1938) insight remains relevant today, particularly amidst pressures from state and federal governments compelling TEPs to align with licensure standards and prioritize test-centric instruction.

To empower language teachers to resist non-educational policies impacting educators and students, fostering conscientização and agency for social justice is imperative. While most empirical research in language teacher development concentrates on pre-service and early-career teachers (e.g., Bartolomé, 2004; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Milner, 2003; but see Farrell, 2012), a recent body of work in applied linguistics has examined the development of conscientização and agency for social justice of experienced language teachers (Leal, 2023; Leal & Crookes, 2018; Li & De Costa, 2019; Peña-Pincheira & De Costa, 2021). To answer the question as to what social, cultural, historical, and political aspects lead a teacher to position herself as a language teacher for social justice, I (2023) previously focused on the analysis of narratives from the period before the teacher's formal training. Together with Crookes (2018), I explored how Jackson's, an American LGBTQ+ English language teacher, central driving force was their identification of contradictions between their sense of purpose and the educational structure in which their work was located, and thus their sense of purpose and identity as pedagogy changed based on their context. Li and De Costa (2019) examined agency of an English as a Foreign language teacher in China, which emerged through negotiations with contextual limitations and available resources. Peña-Pincheira and De Costa (2021) emphasized the multilayered complexity of a Chilean English as a Foreign language teacher's agency for social justice. However, despite these valuable contributions, there remains a gap in understanding how language teachers develop conscientização and agency for social justice, particularly in diverse educational contexts. This present study seeks to address this gap by exploring the experiences of language

teachers specifically committed to social justice, thereby identifying essential insights needed to advance the field and promote more inclusive and equitable language education practices.

The Study

While the aforementioned studies used a single case study method, this study is distinctive because it draws data from interviews with twenty-nine in-service English language teachers from fifteen countries. Such a large sample provides a cross-sectional study reflecting diverse backgrounds. The multinational study utilized mixed methods, including the creation of a new instrument, the Teacher Attitudes to Discrimination in Language Education Scale (TADLES) (Leal, 2021), to assess conscientização among in-service English language teachers. Results guided purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009) of participants for the qualitative method, exploring how these educators made sense of their processes of developing conscientização and agency for social justice during their life span through autobiographical narratives.

Participants were given the option to be interviewed either synchronously or asynchronously, and through various modes of communication, including web-based platforms or in-person meetings. Twenty-two participants chose synchronous interviews (sixteen web-based and six on-site), while seven opted for asynchronous interviews. Synchronous interviews averaged seventy-five minutes, with options for continuation if needed, while three participants chose to complete their interviews asynchronously. Most interviews were in English, with translanguaging practices present in a few.

The interview guide, designed for self-reflection, followed Gorski and Dalton's (2020) transformative principles. It aimed to capture unique perspectives, delving into experiences participants identified shaping their journeys toward becoming critical language teachers. Thus, the interview was structured and purposeful, went beyond superficial notions of multiculturalism, provoked "deep reflection about power and oppression, especially around forms of injustice associated with their privileged identities" (p. 366), pushed teachers "to examine their preparedness to be agents of change for educational justice" (p. 365), encouraged teachers "to examine their participation in, and role in eliminating, injustice" (p. 365), and drove teachers "to connect school justice concerns to bigger societal justice concerns" (p. 365).

Analyzing interviews employed Bamberg's (1997) positioning analysis, examining narrative content, interview dynamics, and broader social, cultural, political, and economic contexts within which the narrative takes shape. As I argued elsewhere (Leal, 2023), positioning analysis can be a valuable analytical approach to comprehending teachers' development into critical language teachers.

Positioning analysis was implemented across three distinct positioning levels (Bamberg, 1997). Level 1, the content, scrutinized how narrators situated themselves to other characters in the story world, and conversely, how the narrator positions other characters to each other. Level 2 explored micro-level interactions, or how the narrator positions themselves concerning their interlocutors, within the storytelling world (i.e., interview, research setting). Level 3 addressed macro-level connections of how the narrator positions a sense of self in connection with the broader social, cultural, economic, historical, and political discourses embedded within the narrative.

While these three levels are intertwined, isolating each positioning level for analysis allows the researcher to bring to light the linguistic, communicative, and interactional methods (Deppermann, 2013) through which the narrator positions themselves and others at the story level (Level 1), how the narrator situates themselves concerning their interlocutors at the interactional level (Level 2), and how the narrator establishes their position within dominant discourses (Level 3; see Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), though the latter two levels are not the focus of this chapter.

This process resulted in 210 narratives, categorized into *becoming* and *being* critical language teacher, the former further categorized into *narratives of childhood* and *narratives of adulthood*. While exploring *narratives of childhood* in a separate work (Leal, 2023), this chapter shifts focus to participants' *narratives of adulthood* during TEP. This chapter delves into exemplar narratives from four participants during TEPs.

Data and Analysis: Narratives of Being Exposed to Alternative Perspectives and Experiencing Different Ways of Schooling

The following narratives are constructed by the four language teachers as they reflect on the experiences they credit playing a pivotal role in fostering, supporting, and sustaining their development of conscientização and sense of agency for social justice during their TEPs.

Alternative Perspectives: Being Knowledgeable and Engaged in One Area While Still Having Much to Learn in Another

Amanda[3] is a cis-gender woman and English language teacher originally from the Philippines who grew up in Canada. She identifies as Asian and holds a master's degree. At the time of interview, she had approximately eight years of teaching experience. Amanda's narrative is compelling as she reflects on her journey of developing conscientização and a sense of agency for social justice—she acknowledges the contradiction that, while she already had an understanding of feminism, it wasn't until college that she became aware of the issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community. This realization marked a milestone in her journey of social awareness and understanding. She explained,

> [My college] had a very open, strong LGBT rights culture. It was there that I attended more events, got to talk to more people, had a close friend who was gay. Then that increased my consciousness about that issue more, whereas feminism has always been with me because of my all-female schooling since childhood.

Amanda's account demonstrates how her college experience facilitated a deeper understanding of LGBTQ+ issues, moving beyond surface-level awareness to a more nuanced comprehension of the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. Amanda explicitly mentions that attending events and talking to more people at her college increased her consciousness about LGBTQ+ issues. This suggests that her exposure to diverse perspectives and conversations contributed to a broader understanding beyond her previous knowledge. In addition, she specifically notes forming a close friendship with a gay individual during her time at college. This personal connection likely provided her with personal insights into the challenges and experiences faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, going beyond theoretical knowledge to a deeper empathetic understanding. Lastly, Amanda contrasts her prior understanding of feminism, which she attributes to her all-female schooling since childhood, with her newfound awareness of LGBTQ+ issues gained through her college experience. This implies that her exposure to a college environment with a strong LGBTQ+ rights culture significantly broadened her understanding and perspective.

It is important to note that feminism and LGBTQ+ rights are interconnected. Both movements aim to challenge and dismantle systems of oppression, and share common goals of achieving equality, inclusivity, and justice for all

[3] The participants self-selected their pseudonyms, and the ethnicity information presented here is verbatim as provided in response to open-ended questions.

individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Amanda's meaning-making process of her college experience allowed her to recognize and appreciate the intersectionality of these issues, and it has since influenced her language teaching and support for both feminism and LGBTQ+ rights.

Amanda's narrative provides a broader perspective of the multifaceted nature of conscientização and the continuous journey of learning and understanding across diverse social contexts. It challenges the common perception of conscientização as a singular competency. She highlights the fact that one can be knowledgeable and engaged in one domain while still having much to learn in another. In her case, she was well-versed in feminism but had limited awareness of LGBTQ+ issues. This realization prompts us to reconsider the multifaceted nature of conscientização and the lifelong journey of learning and understanding across various social contexts.

Another narrative that challenges the common view of conscientização as a single competency is Jessica's. Jessica is a cis-gender woman and English language teacher from the United States. She identifies as White/European-American and holds a master's degree. At the time of interview, she had approximately seven and a half years of teaching experience. Her story also highlights the contradiction that individuals can be knowledgeable and engaged in one area while still having much to learn in another. In her interview, she shared that—while before her TEP she was already aware of certain discourses of native speakerism—being exposed to alternative perspectives and ways of thinking during her TEP helped her broaden her perspective on the topic. She explained,

> I also remember reading a number of texts as a student that emphasized the value of the L1 in learning the L2. Although I can't remember specific articles, the general concept sunk in. One book I do remember is Keith Folse's Vocabulary Myths—I believe he claims that translation of a word can be an efficient and effective way to encourage learning. He writes that, given the complexity of the English lexicon, any and all tools that can help should be embraced—and I agree!

For Jessica, her path to developing conscientização and agency for social justice during her TEP prompted a critical examination of the contradiction between her awareness of the pitfalls of native speakerism (Holliday, 2006) and her support of monolingual principles (Cook, 2001), specifically the belief that allowing her students to use their L1 in the L2 classroom would hinder their L2 development. This contradiction is not uncommon and highlights the complexity of developing a conscientização and agency for social change. It shows that even teachers who possess certain levels of awareness and understanding in

one area may still hold onto misconceptions or biases in another. Her evolving understanding and willingness to question and re-evaluate her beliefs in language teaching and learning exemplify the ongoing nature of the journey toward a more comprehensive conscientização. Jessica's story serves as a reminder that developing a conscientização is a dynamic process that requires exposure to new perspectives, openness, and continual reflection.

Different Ways of Schooling: Inspirational Figures and Recognizing Contradictions in Education Practices

In addition to being introduced to alternative perspectives and ways of thinking during TEP, some educators also shared experiences of being exposed to and experiencing different ways of schooling.

Pepper, a cis-gender male and English language teacher from Thailand, holds a master's degree and had around ten years of teaching experience at the time of interview. He shared experiences of being exposed to a unique professor during his academic journey. This professor stood out from others as they approached teaching differently. Recalling this moment, he shared,

> I took a class with a Thai professor. But he was DIFFERENT from other professors. I remember it was American Literature class. And we had to read a lot and we had to write a lot. But he couldn't care less about, you know, the grammatical errors that we may have made, but he was very OPEN and he seemed to be really INTERESTED in what we had to say about our life in relation to the reading, the novel or the literature. And that was a life changing experience for me. Because I felt so GOOD in that class. And so I wanted to use the language to communicate with him. And I thought I wanted to BE LIKE him.

In an American literature class, the professor emphasized the importance of reading and writing but did not focus on grammatical errors. Instead, they showed genuine interest in hearing students' perspectives and reflections on their lives in relation to the literature being studied. Showing genuine interest in hearing students' perspectives and reflections on their lives in relation to the literature being studied is closely related to both social justice and conscientização in education. It affirms students' voices and identities, promotes conscientização, and empowers students to engage meaningfully with literature as a tool for understanding, empathy, and social transformation.

A genuine interest in students' perspectives reflects a commitment to equity and inclusivity within the educational context because social justice in education

entails recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and voices of students. By actively listening to students and creating opportunities for them to share their reflections, educators acknowledge and validate the lived realities of their students, regardless of their social identities or backgrounds. This fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among students, affirming their right to be heard and respected within the learning environment.

In addition, incorporating students' perspectives into the study of literature aligns with the principles of conscientização in that it fosters awareness through dialogue and reflection. By engaging students in critical discussions about the literature they study and inviting them to relate it to their own lives and experiences, educators promote critical thinking, self-reflection, and social awareness. This process enables students to interrogate power dynamics, challenge dominant narratives, and develop agency for social change. By connecting the literature to their lived experiences, students deepen their understanding of social justice issues and become active agents in advocating for equity and inclusion. This experience had a profound impact on Pepper, making him feel good and inspiring him to aspire to be like that professor.

For Pepper, his journey in developing conscientização and agency for social justice during his TEP is marked by the contradiction of how students should feel in the classroom. While he felt good and valued in that particular class, he recognized that this should not be an anomaly but rather the standard. Students should feel good, and supported, and have a sense of belonging in the classroom. Pepper also draws attention to the contradiction in the expectations placed on educators. Should they primarily focus on correcting grammatical errors, or should they prioritize caring about students' thoughts and reflections on their own lives? Pepper's experience throughout his education was primarily centered around grammar, but it was the professor who genuinely cared about his perspectives and life experiences that had a significant impact on him.

Pepper's experience of a pedagogy that humanizes students, where connections are made between the content, theory, and students' lives, resonated deeply with him. He wishes to perpetuate this approach, encouraging his students to apply what they learn to their own experiences and empowering them to make meaningful connections. Pepper's exposure to different ways of schooling challenged his preconceived notions and beliefs about effective teaching and learning. It opened his eyes to the power of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that values students' voices, and their experiences are recognized as valuable resources for learning.

Like the previous participants, Alex, a cis-gender male and English language teacher from Mexico (who holds a master's degree and had about two years

of teaching experience at the time of interview), credits a particular event in his TEP that supported his journey in developing conscientização and agency for social justice. Like Pepper's professor, Alex's professor also fostered an environment that encouraged students to establish meaningful connections between the content and their lives. After assigning a book for the class to read, Alex's professor takes an extra step by inviting the book author to be a guest speaker. While Alex can't recall the book's title,[4] he vividly recollects the context and the lessons from this experience. Alex explained,

> I can't remember the title right now, but one of the books was about working in Cabrini-Green, which used to be the public housing in Chicago … my professor was friends with him [the author] so that he just invited him. He came over and so, he was sharing a lot more details than what was in the book because he would tell us about how, at the beginning, he struggled with getting that going with his principal and other teachers, but then little by little, they all started buying into it and stuff like that. So, that was a big thing for me to see … and really early in my education classes because it really showed that there was potential in doing advocacy through education and empowering the communities through education. And education not being just this thing that you sit down, you take notes, and you learn and memorize, but rather it gives you the tools so that you are empowered to make change happen.

Alex's experience with the guest speaker in his TEP had a profound impact on his awareness, the first component needed for one to develop conscientização and agency for social justice. While the book provided a context for understanding the struggles and successes of advocating for change through education, having the author speak to the class offered a deeper understanding of the author's experiences and insights beyond what was in the book.

This event challenged Alex's lived experiences of education as a passive process of memorization and showcased the potential for education to be a powerful tool for advocacy and community empowerment. It highlighted the contradiction between the traditional approach to education, which focuses on memorization, and the possibilities and opportunities that lie beyond, through real-life applications and empowering students. By recognizing this contradiction, Alex approached his role as a language teacher with a deeper

[4] The book Alex is referring to is *Spectacular Things Happen along the Way: Lesson from an Urban Classroom* by Schultz (2018). It focuses on the experiences of the author teaching at Cabrini-Green, a public housing project in Chicago. It details how a group of fifth-grade students attempted to replace their dilapidated school building through a year-long project developed collaboratively with their teacher (and author of the book).

understanding of the potential for education to go beyond rote learning and to empower students to create positive change in their communities.

Findings and Discussion: Narratives of Being Exposed to Alternative Perspectives and Experiencing Different Ways of Schooling

I return now to my point about the field of language teacher education not knowing much about how conscientização and agency for social justice develop. The narratives shared by the twenty-nine individuals I had the privilege of interviewing, including Amanda, Jessica, Pepper, and Alex, provide rich insights into this process during their TEPs. I discuss three of these main insights next.

First, these narratives collectively demonstrate that the development of conscientização and agency for social justice in TEP is a multifaceted, ongoing process. It is guided by continuous reflection of how our actions, individual as well as collective, affect the world around us and presupposes changes in the individual and societal levels. At the individual level, it requires teachers to continually challenge their assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and taken-for-granted understandings of themselves and of the world. At the societal level, together with others in the spirit of discovery, teachers must challenge each other's assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and together analyze the world, its power relations, and their consequences.

Amanda's narrative, for instance, underscores her recognition of a gap in her understanding of the obstacles encountered by the LGBTQ+ community. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of feminist and LGBTQ+ concerns, highlighting the importance of acknowledging and confronting various facets of oppression. This intersectionality challenges the notion of conscientização as a singular competency and emphasizes the need for educators to engage with various social justice issues simultaneously. Jessica's story reveals the contradictions within individuals' beliefs and practices. On the one hand, she is aware of native speakerism's pitfalls (Holliday, 2006), yet on the other, she supports monolingual principles (Cook, 2001). The evolving nature of Jessica's understanding emphasizes that even well-informed teachers may harbor misconceptions or biases. This finding aligns with Roberts's (2000) argument that the development of conscientização does not adhere to a linear advancement through a predetermined sequence of stages with a fixed set of attitudes and behaviors to attain.

Second, the development of conscientização and agency for social justice in TEP is "brought about, not through an intellectual effort alone, but through praxis—the authentic union of action and reflection" (Freire, 1985, p. 87). Both Pepper and Alex share experiences of exposure to humanistic pedagogies that prioritize students' voices and connections between content and real-life experiences which contradict traditional educational practices, such as an emphasis on grammatical correctness. While Pepper addresses the contradiction of how students should feel in class and what aspects teachers should prioritize, Alex delves into the contradiction between traditional views of education centered on memorization and the possibilities of applying knowledge to real-life situations. These recognitions prompt a re-evaluation of teaching priorities (reflection) and a commitment to creating supportive and inclusive learning environments (action).

Third, it is not surprising the profound impact of various influencers—including professors and friends—on the participants' journeys as evidenced in their narratives. After all, agency is the "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 12) and conscientização is "a joint project in that it takes place in [an individual] among other [individuals]" (Freire, 1985, p. 85), both embedded in a relational understanding of human beings. Both Pepper and Alex attribute their shifts in perspective to influential professors who not only taught *about* alternative teaching approaches but also *modeled* them. Pepper felt good and inspired to become like his professor; Alex discovered the potential for education to empower individuals and communities for advocacy and change. These experiences challenge traditional views of education, emphasizing the potential for advocacy, empowerment, and positive change through alternative teaching methods. These mentors served as catalysts for re-evaluating traditional practices, highlighting the transformative power of education in going beyond rote learning and fostering conscientização that leads to tangible, positive impacts.

Noteworthy is that, while crucial, these influences were not the sole determinants of success on the teachers' transformative path. There exists a set of attributes, perhaps best described as skills, abilities, or dispositions, shared by these individuals—i.e., the ability to notice contradictions, engage in reflective practices, and navigate the potential actions needed for equitable education. These attributes serve as pillars that not only encourage but also sustain these teachers as they navigate the complexities of this journey toward conscientização and agency for social justice. As these teachers continue their journey, these attributes serve as guiding lights, shaping their commitment to fostering social justice in education.

Concluding Thoughts and Implications

One fundamental attribute that resonates across all the critical language teachers interviewed, and exemplified in the narratives shared here, is that agency for social justice is intertwined with conscientização as it empowers teachers to recognize their positionality and challenges them to reflect critically on their beliefs and teaching practices. These findings provide valuable insights for integrating conscientização and agency for social justice into language TEPs, particularly for pre-service language teachers. The interviews conducted with language teachers revealed specific instances during TEP where engagement with conscientização principles and the cultivation of agency for social justice positively impacted their awareness and future teacher identity. By providing the necessary support, professional learning, and training, teacher educators can help language teachers cultivate agency for social justice in their teaching practices, leading to a more equitable educational environment.

Consider, for example, the notion of noticing contradictions as a learnable skill. Educators can seamlessly incorporate exercises that prompt teachers to observe and articulate contradictions, regardless of the course content. Encouraging them to question answers rather than passively responding to questions can serve as a simple yet powerful starting point. With practice, this skill becomes more intuitive, fostering a habit of critical inquiry and reflection. Purposeful reflective practices (Gorski & Dalton, 2020) can enable pre-service teachers to delve into their personal values and align them with social justice principles. Exposing language teachers to real-life examples of advocacy and empowerment through education is another way that educators can inspire and nurture the development of conscientização and agency for social justice among future teachers.

By embracing and integrating these insights, TEPs have the potential to cultivate a new generation of educators who are not only aware of social injustices but are also equipped to bring about positive change. However, teacher educators need not wait for institutional policies to embrace these insights. Instead, educators can proactively integrate them into their courses. Just as the professors mentioned in these narratives, who were not only teaching *about* social justice but also *modeling* social justice in language education, teacher educators can actively engage in social justice practices within language education. By incorporating these insights into the curriculum, educators can empower teachers to develop conscientização and agency for social justice.

As future studies delve into the development of conscientização and agency for social justice among language teachers, it is essential that they not only identify successful strategies employed by certain TEPs and professors but also explore the adaptability of these strategies to diverse global contexts. Understanding how language teachers manifest conscientização and agency for social justice in the classroom, and how they infuse their teaching practices with personal values related to social justice principles, is paramount if our goal as educators is to cultivate a new generation of educators

> who thoroughly understand the social, economic, and political problems with which this country is faced, who are zealous in the improvement of present conditions and who are capable of educating citizens disposed to study social problems earnestly, think critically about them, and act in accord with their nobelist impulses. (Brown, 1938, p. 328)

And thus bring more balance into this "uneven world" (Pennycook, 2022) in which we live, learn, and teach.

References

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *30*, 109–37. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109.

Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, *7* (1–4), 335–42. https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.7.42pos.

Bamberg, M., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, *28*(3), 377–96. https://doi.org/10.1515/TEXT.2008.018.

Bartolomé, L. I. (2004). Critical pedagogy and teacher education: Radicalizing prospective teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *31*(1), 97–122. https://doi.org/10.2307/23478420.

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), 624–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325.

Brown, H. (1938). A challenge to teachers colleges. *The Social Frontier*, *4*(37), 327–9.

Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). Interrogating the "native speaker fallacy": Non-linguistic roots, non-pedagogical results. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 77–92). Routledge.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2008). The politics of English language teaching. In S. May & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1 (pp. 213–27). Springer.

Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, *33*(2), 185–209. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587717.

Cook, V. (2001). Using the first language in the classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *57*(3), 402–23. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.57.3.402.

Crookes, G. V. (2015). Redrawing the boundaries on theory, research, and practice concerning language teachers' philosophies and language teacher cognition: Toward a critical perspective. *The Modern Language Journal*, *99*(3), 485–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12237.

Crookes, G. V. (2021). Critical language pedagogy: An introduction to principles and values. *ELT Journal*, *75*(3), 247–55. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab020.

De Costa, P. I. (2020). Linguistic racism: Its negative effects and why we need to contest it. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *23*(7), 833–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1783638.

Deppermann, A. (2013). Editorial: Positioning in narrative interaction. *Narrative Inquiry*, *23*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.23.1.01dep.

Dovchin, S. (2019). The politics of injustice in translingualism: Linguistic discrimination. In T. Barrett & S. Dovchin (Eds.), *Critical Inquiries in the Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (pp. 84–101). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788922852-008.

Farrell, T. S. (2012). Novice-service language teacher development: Bridging the gap between preservice and in-service education and development. *TESOL Quarterly*, *46*, 435–49. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.36.

Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation*. Bergin and Garvey Publishers.

Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gorski, P. C., & Dalton, K. (2020). Striving for critical reflection in multicultural and social justice teacher education: Introducing a typology of reflection approaches. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *71*(3), 357–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119883545.

Head, A. H. (2008). *Ripples of hope: Rethinking how we prepare teachers to work for equity, diversity and social justice*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO. (Publication No. 3315798).

Hill-Jackson, V. (2007). Wrestling whiteness: Three stages of shifting multicultural perspectives among white pre-service teachers. *Multicultural Perspectives*, *9*(2), 29–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960701386285.

Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT Journal*, *60*(4), 385–7. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl030.

Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.) (2019), *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788923927.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, *34*(3), 159–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675

Leal, P. (2021). The development of the teacher attitudes to discrimination in language education scale: A measurement tool of critical consciousness for language teachers. *Education Sciences*, *11*(5), 200. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11050200.

Leal, P. (2023). Emily is an egg: An example of a narrative analysis approach to identifying the antecedents of critical language teacher cognition. *TESL-EJ, 27*(2), https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27106s1.

Leal, P., & Crookes, G. V. (2018). "Most of my students kept saying,'I never met a gay person'": A queer English language teacher's agency for social justice. *System*, *79*, 38–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.06.005.

Li, W., & De Costa, P. I. (2019). Problematizing English language teaching in China through a non-native English teacher agency lens. In H. Kayi-Aydar, X. Gao, E. R. Miller, M. Varghese, & G. Vitanova (Eds.), *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (pp. 160–79). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788923927.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Milner, H. R. (2003). Reflection, racial competence, and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare pre-service teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *6*(2), 193–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320308200.

Peña-Pincheira, R. S., & De Costa, P. I. (2021). Language teacher agency for educational justice-oriented work: An ecological model. *TESOL Journal*, *12*(2), e561. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.561.

Pennycook, A. (1990). Towards a critical applied linguistics for the 1990s. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, *1*(1), 8–28. http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/L411004991.

Pennycook, A. (2022). Critical applied linguistics in the 2020s. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *19*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2022.2030232.

Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A., & Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: Agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *42*(2), 191–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2012.00588.x.

Rampton, B. (1990). Displacing the "native speaker": Expertise, affiliation, and inheritance. *ELT Journal*, *44*(2), 97–101. https://doi.org/10.1093/eltj/44.2.97

Roberts, P. (2000). *Education, literacy, and humanization: Exploring the work of Paulo Freire*. Bergin & Garvey.

Schultz, B. D. (2018). *Spectacular things happen along the way: Lessons from an urban classroom*. Teachers College Press.

Selvi, A. F. (2011). The non-native speaker teacher. *ELT Journal*, *65*(2), 187–9. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq092.

14

The Visible Invisibility of Black Educators in ELT

Olive Nabukeera

Introduction

Research on the identities of teachers of color in TESOL, EAP, and international language education remains understudied (Han et al., 2018; Kubota, 2019; Motha, 2014; Niemann, 2016; Settles et al., 2019). Even more, limited attention has been given to how race and linguistic identities shape the professional lives of Black English language educators (Bryan et al., 2022; Charles, 2019; Griffin, 2016). This historical reluctance within the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes) to discuss race contributes to this gap, as well as the stigmatization attached to the term, often associated with overt bigotry rather than systemic inequalities (Kubota, 2018; Mirza, 2006; Penn, 2017). Therefore, despite attempts to broaden discourse, racialization persists in teaching materials and the professional experiences of teachers of color all over the globe (Bhopal, 2022; Jenkins, 2018; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kim 2017). The native speaker ideology has undoubtedly exacerbated this issue, as it perpetuates a hierarchy favoring white speakers and fostering accent discrimination against non-native English-speaking teachers, and those from visible ethnic backgrounds (Baratta, 2018; Holliday, 2015; Ramjattan, 2014). Historically marginalized, Black educators face global challenges due to racial perceptions (Cooper & Bryan, 2020; Jenkins, 2018; Motha, 2014). Nonetheless, in TESOL and EAP scholarship, little attention has been accorded to understanding Black teacher identities (Charles, 2019; Settles et al., 2019).

My 2020 doctoral thesis explored how racial and linguistic positioning affects Black ESL educators in the United States. Drawing on positioning theory (Davies

& Harré, 1990) and Sellers et al. (1998) model of African American racial identity, the study showed that although racial identity matters, teachers' practices are largely shaped by multiple identities. Participants positioned themselves as positive Black representations, despite facing microaggressions. This book chapter builds on those findings but adopts a different perspective by focusing on the invisibility paradox explored in studies by Settles et al. (2019) and Mirza (2006). The researchers argue that the limited faculty of color in institutions of higher education in the United States and United Kingdom are tokenized but without the necessary agency to create any meaningful impact within their work environments. This renders them effectively invisible. Thus, this chapter investigates visibility, hypervisibility, and invisibility in ESL/EAP workplaces, in particular, through the narratives of seven Black educators, examining how the (in)visibility dynamics either reinforce or restrict Black teacher agency.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the nuanced experiences of Black educators within academia, various theoretical perspectives were employed. Critical race theory (CRT) serves as the foundational framework, as it posits that racism extends beyond overt acts of hostility to encompass more subtle forms of exclusion (Crenshaw, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Research within ELT indicates that Black teachers often experience microaggressions, both verbal and non-verbal, where they are singled out based on perceived otherness (Charles, 2019; Kim, 2017; Penn, 2017). The (in)visibility framework further contextualizes this discourse for the purposes of this chapter. Visibility is defined as the recognition individuals receive within any organizational context and the empowerment derived from having a voice and controlling one's perceptions (Buchanan & Settles, 2019). However excessive visibility can also lead to constraints and disempowerment, as people of color working in predominantly white institutions also face heightened scrutiny and are unable to control how they are perceived. Visibility can also be framed as a form of mistreatment often perpetuated by those in the dominant group. Settles et al. (2019) revealed that teachers experience hypervisibility as tokens of diversity but remain invisible in terms of professional recognition. Mirza's (2006) study on Black women faculty in British higher education also highlighted the paradoxical relationship between presence and absence, noting the scarcity of Black women in senior academic positions. Positioning theory, a social

constructionist approach (Davies & Harré, 1990), also underpins the theoretical knowledge of the issues presented in this chapter. This framework allowed for an examination of how individuals perceived themselves (reflective positioning) and how they interpreted their positioning in relation to others (interactive positioning). Finally, narrative inquiry was primarily used as the methodological tool to analyze participants' language within the social milieu in which workplace interactions take place (Bell, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

Participants

Seven Black educators, comprising two males and five females, were chosen for the original study. They form the focus of this chapter. Participants were required to: (a) have English language teaching experience in the United States and (b) self-identify as Black. The small sample size ensured a depth of analysis and aligns with qualitative studies focusing on Black teacher perspectives (Charles, 2019; Daniel, 2018; Kim, 2017). To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in place of actual participant names, especially because most were affiliated with prominent institutions in the States. The rest of the participant details presented below are authentic.

1. Sabrina, thirty, Black American, female, speaks Spanish, with BA, MA, EdD qualifications, one year teaching in an IEP (Intensive English Program) at a university in Texas.
2. Francine, thirty-four, Black American, female, speaks Spanish, with BA, MA, EdD qualifications, four years teaching in IEP/EAP at universities in New York and California.
3. Talia, thirty-six, Black American (Afro-Hispanic), female, speaks French, Spanish, Arabic, with BA, MA qualifications, ten years teaching in adult education in New York, IEP in Washington, DC, and EFL (English as a foreign language) in Senegal.
4. Akunna, thirty-six, Black African (Nigerian), male, speaks Spanish and Igbo, with BA and MA qualifications, fifteen years of teaching in IEP/EAP at a university in California.
5. Khadijah, forty, Black American, female, speaks Arabic and French, with BA, MA, and PhD qualifications, sixteen years of teaching in adult education in New York, EAP at a university in Virginia, and EFL in Turkey.

6. Craig, sixty-three, Black American, male, speaks Spanish, with BA, MA, EdD qualifications, thirty years of teaching EFL in the US Navy and two years in IEP at a university in California.
7. Sherry, sixty-four, Black American, female, speaks French, Spanish, German, and Farsi, with BA, MA, MA, MA, and PhD qualifications, forty years of teaching in IEP/EAP and adult education at universities in California, Florida, Texas, and Spain.

Methods and Analysis

Participants were recruited via professional networks such as LinkedIn and online communities on TESOL international.org. An online questionnaire collected biographical data and assessed participant's prior knowledge. A pilot interview was conducted before the study commenced to refine questions. Then, ninety-minute semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom and Skype. An interview guide with open-ended questions explored race, ethnic background, language proficiency, and language teaching. Discussions began with participants' language teaching backgrounds, followed by an exploration of how their racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities influenced perceptions in work environments. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using online transcription software. Thematic narrative analysis was conducted to extract prominent themes from participants' narratives to capture both individual experiences and collective insights. The initial analysis involved multiple readings of individual transcripts, followed by paragraph-level coding to identify connecting threads and emerging categories. Interpretation was informed by the theoretical frames previously discussed as well as my own positioning as a researcher.

Researcher Positionality

As a Black African immigrant to the United States, I recognize my outsider perspective on the Black American experience. Unlike in my home country, where race was not central to my identity, US history and treatment of Black individuals meant that I have had to confront and identify with a Blackness that was previously unfamiliar to me, as well as the implicit hegemonic discourses surrounding Blackness regardless of one's origin. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's reflection, "I only became Black when I came to America," resonated with

my personal and professional experiences (Adichie, 2013, p. 359). Therefore, although we might share similar experiences based on the perceptions of skin color, individual interpretations differ as they are informed by one's cultural background and upbringing. Acknowledging this fact, I approached participants with an open mind, valuing their perspectives over my own interpretations.

Findings and Discussion

Visibility: A Pseudo-Diversity

> *"Diversity is skin deep." Black people are celebrated in colorful brochures with smiling "brown" faces—like a box of chocolates, there is one from every continent and one of every color.*
>
> (Mirza, 2006; pp. 150–1)

In the United States, "a diverse faculty is rare … And a faculty that includes Black English language teachers is even more unusual, especially in higher education" (Bryan et al., 2022, p. 5). And in this study, all seven participants reported being the only Black teacher in their institutions. Sherry noted a stark imbalance: an 80 percent Hispanic student population contrasted with only 1 percent faculty of color. Sabrina, Khadijah, Akunna, and Craig, the sole Black faculty, also shared similar experiences. Talia and Francine recounted incidents when they were informed that they were diversity hires, illustrating systemic issues of representation and perception. This underscores the prevailing perspective that diversity is about numerical representation while overlooking the nuanced contributions of Black educators beyond their racial or cultural backgrounds as was highlighted in Mirza's (2006) quote above. Hiring practices often prioritize surface-level diversity, emphasizing ethnic and racial representation without addressing underlying systemic issues that may deter Black applicants from applying for these positions or remaining in these institutions in the first place (Blell et al., 2022; Han et al., 2018). Consequently, teachers are collected like tokens, fostering an illusion of inclusivity that amplifies racial differences and perpetuates stereotypical representations of Blackness (Bryan et al., 2022). Essentially, Black teachers are reduced to symbols of their racial identity rather than recognized for their individual capabilities (Niemann, 2016).

This study highlighted instances of tokenism experienced by Black educators, such as Craig's experience organizing a university event for Black History month. As the only Black faculty, other staff members suggested that only Black speakers

should speak at the end since it was a Black event. His subsequent appointment as the diversity representative at the university during the accreditation process further solidified Craig's tokenization. This practice places undue burdens on Black faculty, expecting them to represent the entire minority community. It is worth noting that a non-Black person might presume a Black colleague possesses a deeper understanding of Blackness or Black history. However, the assumption that a white teacher would be more knowledgeable about whiteness or white culture is less common and almost unlikely. This homogeneity misconception is further illustrated in Talia's account. In a job interview, while she explained her bi-cultural background to the hiring manager, he interrupted her by stating, *"Well, all of my other first-generation American friends have told me this."* The assumption overlooks the diversity within cultural backgrounds and reinforces stereotypes. In other words, if one has heard from one Black, you've heard from them all. The question then arises; if Black people enter work environments where preconceived notions about their identity have already been established, then to what extent do they have genuine agency, and the ability to control how they are perceived in and outside of the classroom? This predicament highlights the delicate balance between diversity and tokenism, wherein Black identity is erased while simultaneously leading to a heightened visibility (Cooper and Bryan 2020; Daniel, 2018; Mirza, 2006; Settles et al., 2019).

Hypervisibility: The Price for Inclusion

> *Tokens capture a larger share of awareness due to numerical proportions. The smaller the proportions, the greater the awareness.*
>
> (Niemann, 2016, p. 452)

The price of inclusion for the few Black educators in TESOL workplaces is in their hypervisibility, as illustrated in Niemann's (2016) quote above. However, being a racial or ethnic minority in TESOL extends beyond being visible to focus on differences, which leads to increased scrutiny in the workplace (Bryan et al., 2022). In this study, excessive scrutiny took different forms of Othering, such as linguistic profiling and racial pigeonholing.

Profiling

A form of racial discrimination, linguistic profiling is linked to accent or speech mannerisms (Baratta, 2018; Javier, 2014). Participants recounted instances where

they were perceived differently in terms of their own proficiency in English. Most experienced profiling, with remarks such as "*You speak well for someone Black*" to Sabrina or questioning why Sherry does not have *"a Black accent,"* or Craig being told he *"sounds white."* These findings align with prior research on Black teachers being labeled articulate or well-spoken by peers, supervisors, or employers (Cooper & Bryan, 2020; Javier, 2014; Ramjattan, 2014). These comments are generally inappropriate but when directed toward an English language professional are downright deeming. They imply that these teachers' accents are incongruent with stereotypical notions of Black speech, reinforcing the expectation for conformity. Also, *sounding white* suggests a perceived necessity of assimilating to white cultural norms and acceptance within the English-speaking community.

Even those participants like Talia and Francine, who claimed to have not received any comments about their speech at work, attributed it to their ability to codeswitch. As Francine stated, *"that's my way of keeping a professional persona because I really don't want them to see me."* The deliberate choice to switch accents at work is a form of performative behavior that straddles between professionalism and one's authenticity, the ability to be one's true self at work. It could be argued that in any working environment, individuals are expected to conform to certain norms, including speech. However the counter here is that the expectations placed on Black individuals in such settings often extend beyond mere adherence to professional standards and may carry racial undertones. Thus, the teachers in this study are aware of how they will be perceived and as such choose to modify their speech to avoid reinforcing stereotypical representations. Emphasis on a Black teacher's accent or manner of speech, whether intentional or not, draws attention to embodied otherness rather than their individuality, which perpetuates the notion that they do not belong in these professional spaces.

Pigeonholing

In this study, teachers reported racial pigeonholing as another aspect of hypervisibility. This occurs when a Black person's racial identity is stereotyped, limiting opportunities (Mirza, 2006; Motha, 2014; Niemann, 2016). Pigeonholing can misidentify or mislabel one's racial identity (Manara, 2018) and although all participants self-identified as Black American or Black African, they were often thought to belong to other cultural or ethnic identities. For instance, Talia considered changing her last name, Rodriguez, due to perceived discrimination,

and Khadijah felt the need to explain her Arab-sounding name. On the other hand, Craig and Sabrina's lighter skin complexion prompted presumptions of non-Black racial heritage. The perception is that Black people look alike. The tension between individual racial self-identification and an external assignment of race to those that do not conform to a predetermined idea of Blackness is exemplified in Talia, the only participant who identified as Afro-Latino, due to her Ugandan mother and Cuban father. In Senegal, as an African American, she was not accepted as a true African, but while teaching Cuban migrants in the States, she felt welcomed. Her identity and cultural loyalties were also frequently questioned in DC's Latino community. Describing her interactions in an ESL class primarily comprised of Hispanic-speaking students, she recalled times when they asked "*Are you one of them, or are you one of us*" about her interactions with her Black students in the other courses she taught on campus. Being perceived as either not Black enough or too Black reflects a broader societal problem, as discussed by scholars across various ELT contexts (Charles, 2019; Daniel, 2018; Kim, 2017).

Another form of racial pigeonholing is infantilization (Mirza, 2006; Niemann, 2016) which involves questioning Black teachers' skills to align with societal stereotypes of Blackness. It is not just assumed diversity hiring; it is a deliberate attempt to undermine qualifications and contributions and may include disparate treatment, challenged authority, and undermined leadership in the workplace (Settles et al., 2019). Consequently, teachers may feel undervalued, overlooked in favor of less-qualified colleagues or face a presumption of incompetence (Bryan et al., 2022; Cooper & Bryan, 2020). Sherry's forty-year career in the field of English language teaching included this form of hypervisibility. Being the only Black faculty member in a senior teaching position, she was questioned about her academic credentials via an anonymous email. Also, despite her extensive qualifications and achievements, decisions to cancel the ESL program she had started were made without her input, noting that "*it was strange that everywhere else people would listen to me but not the people in my own campus who did not have enough respect to think about what I thought was right or wrong*." The lack of respect exemplifies some systemic challenges that people of color in leadership positions may encounter. When asked about the motivations behind her colleagues' actions, Sherry was uncertain whether the actions were racially motivated or simply unfair treatment. This ambiguity reflects the complexity of the challenges faced by Black professionals, where racial bias and discrimination may be intertwined with broader issues of professional respect and recognition (Blell, 2022; Bryan et al., 2022; Griffin, 2016; Ramjattan, 2014). These instances,

often unnoticed by non-Black individuals, expose the marginalization and dismissive treatment Black professionals encounter in the workplace.

Khadijah faced similar challenges in her administrative role. As the youngest on the team, but also the Assistant Dean of the ESL program, she felt undermined by her colleagues and encountered resistance when attempting to revise curriculum and institutional practices. The overt resistance she encountered left her unsure about the potential factors, including her race, age, or gender that may have contributed to her challenging experience and minimal collaboration with colleagues. Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, disagreements with colleagues about grading and juggling work with her responsibilities as a mother of two led to perceptions of incompetence. She concluded, "*I think race does play a part in where they feel like, oh, she's kind of a lenient instructor. She's not vigorous. She's gonna keep on passing the whole class.*" While the role of race in her colleagues' assumption of incompetence remains unclear, Khadijah's acknowledgment of this possibility alludes to pervasive presumptions about Black people as unprofessional or lazy. These perceptions align with documented biases against African Americans in the workplace and Black educators in the United States (Milner, 2012; Ritter, 2016). The central point in both narratives is that infantilization breeds a sense of unbelonging, inevitably creating feelings of invisibility.

Invisibility: The Insider-Outsider

> *The world I inhabit as an academic is a white world. I am a freshwater fish that swims in sea water. I feel the weight of the water on my body.*
>
> (Simmonds, 1997, cited in Mirza, 2006, p. 136)

In academia and other professional settings, Black instructors may face invisibility, leading to feelings of isolation and voicelessness in academia (Bhopal, 2022; Cooper & Bryan, 2020; Daniel, 2018; Han et al., 2018). Participants recounted examples of exclusion mostly in their relationships and interactions with non-Black peers, co-workers, and supervisors. Sabrina mentioned instances when her supervisor questioned her racial identity, as well as feeling excluded. She said: "*Other teachers in terms of like leaving me out of conversations or emails. No one texts me now. They don't include me in things.*" Likewise, Talia articulated experiences of marginalization at work, such as being "*left out of team bonding activities*" while working in Senegal. In her current role in the United States, she felt intentionally ignored and unacknowledged by colleagues in a staff meeting on

her first day of work. While not deliberate, this behavior intensified her sense of isolation, particularly considering her minority status as one of only three Black individuals in that organization. This feeling of marginalization is reinforced by systemic assumptions of belonging that designate certain bodies as rightful occupants of specific spaces. Although Akunna did not report experiencing racial discrimination from colleagues, he mentioned feeling occasionally awkward when he is asked to pronounce his Nigerian name or is expected to discuss African or Black issues in the workplace. He also expressed the complexities of working in a predominantly white environment below, which adequately encapsulates Simmonds (1997) metaphor of being *a freshwater fish in sea water*, when he said:

> I have great coworkers. I get along with them, we connect, but still sometimes I feel like I'm on an island. Like I always imagine if I worked around all Black people how that would feel. Like how much we have to change. And I know that there are people say you don't have to change, be yourself. That's good in theory but there's certain ways I could talk to somebody, and they will not understand me. But I feel like I could talk to a Black person and there will be no need to explain myself.

Invisibility extends to teaching materials where the perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups are often overlooked, contributing to a distorted image of the demographics of English language users (Cooper & Bryan, 2020; Penn, 2017). The underrepresentation of Black English language teachers perpetuates narrow perceptions of English language norms and limits students' exposure to diverse linguistic models (Charles, 2019; Ritter, 2016). In this study, participants shared insights on how their racial identity influenced their pedagogical decisions as a way of affirming their agency. For more on the contributions of Black ESL teachers, refer to my article published in the special issue of the CATESOL Journal's Anti-racist Perspectives, Practices, and Policies in TESOL (Nabukeera, 2022).

Agency within Marginality

Identities are shaped by the social structures of teachers' work environments and the level of autonomy granted within these spaces (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). In other words, a Black educator or academic is only able to exert varying degrees of agency depending on perceived positioning. Harré and Slocum (2003) state that the three actions that demonstrate agency are: what "someone has done … is permitted to do; and is capable of doing" (as cited in Kayi-Aydar,

2015, p. 278). Therefore, considering the visible invisibility dynamic that has been highlighted in participants' experiences so far, the following section highlights the complex interplay between perceived and actual agency.

Strategic Visibility

In response to the challenges posed by invisibility and exclusion, some participants in this study resorted to intensified efforts to generate positive visibility and counter marginalization within their professional spheres. They utilized their leadership positions to advocate for inclusivity and acceptance of diverse racialized identities in their institutions. Sherry exemplified personal advocacy by addressing workplace grievances proactively. Initially, when she found herself excluded from decisions regarding the ESL program she'd established, she did not immediately assume racial bias. Rather, she confronted the issue with the president and vice president at the university where she worked. It was only after her concerns were dismissed that she proceeded to file a formal grievance. Despite potential damage to her reputation or even job loss, Sherry even went ahead and wrote about her experiences in an academic article that was published in a reputable journal, where she outlined the challenges of a program coordinator. In this way, she empowered other professionals of color facing similar obstacles. As the only Black faculty member involved in hiring new staff, she also voiced concerns regarding the lack of racial diversity within her department. Having participated in the last three hiring committees where white women were consistently selected, she emphasizes the need for more Black professionals to apply. She said, "*So, I have recently been bringing that up to people's attention … because race is never really discussed. But all of a sudden, I'm putting my voice in there and now it's a big concern.*"

Khadijah's experiences as Assistant Dean of the ESL department underscore the challenges she faced in navigating her professional relationships, as previously discussed. Feeling consistently undermined, Khadijah said: "*It was never really clear, but there was always sort of a challenge, and the underlying assumption was she doesn't know what she is doing, or she doesn't know what she's talking about. I don't know if it was age or race, but there is less definitely this feeling of oh, she's less competent.*" Despite these obstacles, she persisted in her efforts to enact change with minimal support from staff members. In both narratives, despite encountering significant obstacles in their leadership roles, being in positions of authority enabled Sherry and Khadijah to advocate for themselves. And despite having no support, their temperaments empowered them to speak

out. This aligns with Harré and Moghaddam (2003) argument regarding agency positioning, which posits that genuine agency can be achieved in the relationship between an individual's perceived entitlements or constraints in performing certain actions vis-à-vis the subsequent actions they undertake considering those perceptions. Craig, as the only Black faculty member, also advocated for a televised Black History event at the university, which ultimately elevated his profile as a valued member of the institution. Despite having worked there for a year, he was nominated as the person who was best suited to organizing the event. But instead of feeling tokenized, he asserted his identity in pursuit of greater inclusivity: "*As an African American. for me personally, that was an asset, that was an opportunity for me. It propelled me to position that I wouldn't have had because as an African American it's about my heritage about my race, about my culture*." By embracing the margins, a radical strategy for redefining one's identity and asserting agency emerged.

Selective Invisibility

This involves concealment, where marginalized individuals deliberately minimize their presence or visibility within the workplace (Ramjattan, 2014; Settles et al., 2019). This detachment serves as a means of maintaining a safe distance from potential microaggressions that have been reported by Black teachers in work environments all over the world (Blell et al., 2022; Charles, 2019; Javier, 2014). In this study, most participants chose silence. Despite recognizing the importance of addressing instances of identity devaluation at work, most refrained from speaking out. Sabrina endured racial comments from her supervisor but chose not to voice her concerns. In reflecting on the cost of that silence she said, "*Because I didn't say anything I feel like his treatment of me continues to decline*." Similarly, Talia did not report discrimination, while Craig avoided discussing race-related issues except with his students. Some, like Francine, feared being seen as overly sensitive or confrontational, while Talia prioritized avoiding conflict stating: "*I do believe in picking your battles. My job is a means to an end, it is not my all*." Akunna, seemed resigned, and pondered the energy to confront such challenges when he stated: "*Sometimes I just listen and smile and [wonder] how much brain power and energy do I have to deal with this. Is it bad enough that I can contain it, or it all depends?*" This reluctance to speak out against bias or microaggressions experienced in the workplace aligns with broader research findings (Javier, 2014; Lin et al., 2004; Ramjattan, 2014) which noted that Black professionals often felt muzzled in discussing

experiences of discrimination in the workplace which can exacerbate feelings of isolation, potentially contributing to high turnover rates in ELT (Cooper & Bryan, 2020; Jenkins, 2018). In this study, leadership positions seemed to afford greater agency for educators to assert their identities. Otherwise, the ability to advocate for oneself within ELT environments is contingent upon one's level of investment, and non-engagement is often perceived as the safer choice.

In response to the limited options that Black educators seem to have in asserting their identities, the need to find or create spaces where alternative discourses can flourish is paramount. Drawing from the insights gleaned from participant experiences, it is evident that teachers often may encounter isolation not only because of their underrepresentation in educational settings but also due to the limited opportunities to interact with fellow Black educators within educational settings. Four participants expressed their willingness to participate in this study as an opportunity to share experiences, mainly for the benefit of other Black educators. And as Talia articulated here: "*There's a lot of things that I have seen, and because I don't have other Black ESL professionals to reach out to who are actually in the field*." As Cooper and Bryan (2020) put it, "people tend to notice when they are not represented, perhaps subconsciously questioning the absence of people who look like them and how it affects their sense of belonging" (p. 135). Creating supportive spaces where Black educators can voice oppositional narratives, without the fear of repercussion, is crucial for reclaiming their agency within the field.

Conclusion

The chapter explored the visibility paradox for Black English language educators, where numerical representation masks exclusionary dynamics in predominantly white institutions. I believe that addressing hypervisibility may require non-Black colleagues to acknowledge their contribution to the invisibility that Black educators deal with, and then actively work together to foster genuine inclusion in the field of English language teaching. Institutions also play a critical role, because discussions of racial issues in EDI scholarship and discourse often lag behind other diversity topics. Thus, providing meaningful opportunities for Black faculty to share their experiences and engage in scholarship on race can be a practical first step. In the meantime, Black educators continue to exemplify excellence, resilience, and fortitude, even as we navigate the walls of invisibility in academia. Our visible presence is a reminder … that we are here!

References

Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah* (6th ed.). Alfred A. Knopf.

Baratta, A. (2018). "I speak how I speak:" A discussion of accent and identity within teachers of ELT. In B. Yazan & N. Rudolph (Eds.), *Criticality, teacher identity, and (in)equity in English language teaching: Issues and implications* (pp. 163–78). Springer Nature. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-72920-6_9

Bell, J. S. (2011). Reporting and publishing narrative inquiry in TESOL: Challenges and rewards. *TESOL Quarterly*, *45*(3), 575–84. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2011.256792.

Bhopal, K. (2022). Academics of colour in elite universities in the UK and the USA: The "unspoken system of exclusion". *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*(11), 2127–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.2020746.

Blell, M., Liu, S. S., & Verma, A. (2022). Working in unprecedented times: Intersectionality and women of color in UK higher education in and beyond the pandemic. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *30*(2). https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12907.

Bryan, K., Romney-Schaab, M., & Cooper, A. (2022). The illusion of inclusion: Blackness in ELT. *The CATESOL Journal*, *33*(1), 1–13. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1365708.pdf.

Buchanan, N. T., & Settles, I. H. (2019). Managing (in)visibility and hypervisibility in the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *113*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.11.001.

Charles, Q. D. (2019). Black teachers of English in South Korea: Constructing identities as a native English speaker and English language teaching professional. *TESOL Journal*, *10*(4). https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.478.

Chung Constant, T. M., & Cao, H. (2018). *English, identity and the privileging and marginalizing of transculturality* (B. Yazan, & N. Rudolph, Eds.). Springer Link; Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/hz9w.

Clandinin, J. D., & Connelly, M. (2004). *Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.

Cooper, A. C., & Bryan, K. C. (2020). Reading, writing, and race sharing the narratives of Black TESOL professionals. In B. Yazan, & K. Lindahl (Eds.), Language *teacher identity in TESOL: Teacher education and practice as identity work* (pp. 18–22). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429342875-11/reading-writing-race-ayanna-cooper-kisha-bryan.

Crenshaw, K. W. (2011). Twenty years of critical race theory: Looking back to move forward. *Connecticut Law Review*, *43*(5), 1253–352.

Daniel, B. J. (2018). Teaching while Black: Racial dynamics, evaluations, and the role of white females in the Canadian academy in carrying the racism torch. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *22*(1), 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1468745.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *20*(1), 43–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x.

Griffin, R. A. (2016). Black female faculty, resilient grit, and determined grace or "Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed." *The Journal of Negro Education*, *85*(3), 365. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.3.0365.

Han, K. T., Scull, W. R., Nganga, L., & Kambutu, J. (2018). Voices from the red states: challenging racial positioning in some of the most conservative communities in America. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *23*(1), 74–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1468751.

Harré, R., & Moghaddam, F. M. (2003). *The self and others: Positioning individuals and groups in personal, political, and cultural contexts*. Praeger Publishers.

Holliday, A. (2015). Native-speakerism: Taking the concept forward and achieving cultural belief. In A. Swan, P. Aboshiha, and A. Holliday (Eds.), *Encountering native-speakerism* (pp. 11–25). Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137463500_2.

Javier, E. A. (2014). *Narratively performed role identities of visible ethnic minority, native English-speaking teachers in TESOL* [Doctoral thesis, The University of Manchester]. https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/54566449/FULL_TEXT.PDF.

Jenkins, S. (2018, August 5). *Non-white, "native speaking," and academic; my voyage in the field of ELT as a black professional*. Turnkey Educational Group. https://www.turnkeyeducationalgroup.org/researchandactivism/nonwhite-nativespeaker.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *45*, 94–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009.

Kim, H. (2017). Understanding Blackness in South Korea: Experiences of one Black teacher and one Black student understanding Blackness in South Korea: Experiences of one Black teacher and one Black student. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Sociology & Culture*, *17*(1). https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume17/5-Understanding-Blackness-in-South-Korea.pdf.

Kubota, R. (2018). Racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes in teaching English. In J. I. Liontas (Ed.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1–7). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0298.

Kubota, R. (2019). Confronting epistemological racism, decolonizing scholarly knowledge: Race and gender in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, *41*(5). https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amz033.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical race theory- What it is not! In *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 34–47). Routledge.

Lin, A., Grant, R., Kubota, R., Motha, S., Sachs, G. T., Vandrick, S., & Wong, S. (2004). Women faculty of color in TESOL: Theorizing our lived experiences. *TESOL Quarterly*, *38*(3), 487. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588350.

Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. Routledge.

Manara, C. (2018). "What should I call myself? Does it matter?" Questioning the "labeling" practice in ELT profession. In B. Yazan, & N. Rudolph, (Eds.), *Criticality, teacher identity, and (in)equity in English language teaching* (pp. 125–40). Springer. https://doi.org/hz95

Milner, H. R. (2012). Challenging negative perceptions of Black teachers. *Educational Foundations*, *26*(1), 27–46.

Mirza, H. S. (2006). The in/visible journey: Black women's lifelong lessons in higher education. In C. Leathwood, & B. Francis (Eds.), *Gender and lifelong learning: Critical feminist engagements* (pp. 139–52). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9780203969533-21/visible-journey-black-women-lifelong-lessons-higher-education-heidi-safia-mirza.

Motha, S. (2014). *Race, empire, and English language teaching: Creating responsible and ethical anti-racist practice*. Teachers College Press.

Nabukeera O. (2022). The positioning of Black ESL teachers in the United States: Teacher perspectives. *The CATESOL Journal*, *33*(1), 1–20. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1365710.pdf.

Niemann, Y. F. (2016). The social ecology of tokenism in higher education. *Peace Review*, *28*(4), 451–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2016.1237098.

Penn, C. M. (2017). *Thriving and surviving: The counternarratives of Black women teachers of English to speakers of other languages* [Doctoral thesis, Ohio State University]. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=osu1495467541318935.

Ramjattan, A. V. (2014). *Excuse me, are you the teacher? The experiences of racialized ESOL teachers in private-language schools in Toronto*. [Master's thesis, University of Toronto]. https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/68508.

Ritter, Z. S. (2016). International students' perceptions of race and socio-economic status in an American higher education landscape. *Journal of International Students*, *6*(2), 367–93. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i2.362.

Sellers, R. M., Smith, M. A., Shelton, J. N., Rowley, S. A., & Chavous, T. M. (1998). Multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *2*(1), 18–39. https://doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr0201_2.

Settles, I. H., Buchanan, N. T., & Dotson, K. (2019). Scrutinized but not recognized: (In)visibility and hypervisibility experiences of faculty of color. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *113*, 62–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.003.

Simmonds, N. F. (1997). My Body, Myself: How Does a Black Woman Do Sociology? In H. S. Mirza (Ed.), *Black British Feminism* (pp. 226–39). Routledge.

15

The Negotiation of Plurilingualism by Teachers in a Finnish Heritage Language School

Johanna M. Tigert

Introduction

This chapter focuses on teacher agency regarding plurilingualism as exhibited at a Finnish heritage language school in the United States. Heritage languages (HLs) are minority languages that usually exist within macro-systems of societal language policies that marginalize the HL as compared to the dominant language. This situation is especially pronounced in the United States, where English-only practices and policies in education run counter to the plurilingual realities of the nation's large HL-speaking population (Hopkins, 2016; Kircher & Kutlu, 2023; Wiley & García, 2016).

HL schools have been established by immigrant communities to ensure the transmission of the HL to the next generation as a deliberate countermeasure to the influence of the dominant language. HL students are often directed by their teachers to only speak the HL. However, it is not realistic to expect that HL students, who are multilingual by definition, behave as monolinguals even within the walls of the HL school. Moreover, plurilingualism, or the competence in multiple languages and the tendency to value other languages and language varieties (European Council definition as cited by García & Otheguy, 2020), is both a rich resource for global engagement and an important part of an individual's identity.

Teachers at HL schools must negotiate instructional and language policy decisions within these multilayered ideological spaces, which make them an interesting research context for examining language teacher agency. Teacher agency, which can be defined as the "freedom to accomplish what teachers see as valued and valuable tasks" (Molla & Nolan, 2020, p. 69), served as the

main theoretical lens for this study. Li and Shen (2024) argue that research has so far focused on individuals' agency around language planning in more traditional language acquisition contexts, i.e., public schools, and that it has yet to be closely examined in HL educational contexts. This chapter responds to this gap by examining Finnish HL teachers' enactment of their agency regarding plurilingualism in an HL school. The research question guiding the study was, *How do Finnish heritage language teachers enact their agency while negotiating plurilingualism within an HL school located in the United States?*

Literature Background

The term heritage language (HL) has varying definitions in the literature, but most scholars agree it is a refugee, immigrant, or indigenous language that a multilingual individual develops through "linguistic interaction with family members who speak it," which leads to "any variable degree of minority-language proficiency" (Ortega, 2020, p. 18), and that the HL exists in a "hierarchical minority-majority relation" (p. 19) to the dominant language(s) of the society. Further, Valdés (2014) defined HL learners in the United States as "raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken; who speak or only understand the heritage language, and who have some proficiency in English and the heritage language" (pp. 27–8).

A subset of research has focused on HL schools as a context in which HLs are intentionally developed (e.g., Alsahafi, 2019; Creese & Blackledge, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2016; Tigert, 2019). HL schools are community organizations that aim to preserve and develop HL proficiency by organizing language classes for the members of the community, particularly children. Because these schools are community-run, decisions about instructional practices and language policies may be distributed among parents, teachers, and even students (Liu et al., 2011; Tigert, 2017; Wu et al., 2011). However, when it comes to instruction, HL teachers are the "people with expertise" (Li & Shen, 2024, p. 137) who exert agency over how to apply the wider school community's language policies and ideologies in practice. Often, teachers expect students to use only the HL (Blackledge & Creese, 2008; Dávila, 2017; Lytra, 2012). This is done to erect a bastion against the pervasive effect of the dominant language in HL students' lives outside of the HL school and to offer a space for ample practice of the HL. However, teachers' adherence to the sole use of the HL varies, influenced by factors such as the learning task at hand (Tigert, 2017).

Additionally, there is no denying that HL speakers are multilingual, which is acknowledged in the teaching practices of many HL schools, as research in these contexts demonstrates. For example, Creese and Blackledge (2011) studied community HL schools in the United Kingdom and found that translanguaging, or the fluid shifting between languages, was practiced by teachers as a pedagogical strategy. Similarly, Li and Zhu's (2013) study in a Cantonese HL classroom for university students found widespread pedagogical use of translanguaging in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese. As Hornberger (2005) notes, "bi/multilinguals' learning is maximized when they are allowed and enabled to draw from across all their existing language skills (in two+ languages), rather than being constrained and inhibited from doing so by monolingual instructional assumptions and practices" (p. 607). The same serves as an argument for promoting plurilingualism in HL contexts.

These varying contextual factors, motivations, and even tensions over plurilingualism in HL schools serve to complicate the manifestations of HL teachers' agency. Research has highlighted the ways HL teachers' agency draws on the teachers' pedagogical beliefs and identity on the one hand and their professional relationships on the other (Bao et al., 2020). In this study, I examine these and other factors at play among three teachers in a Finnish HL school located in the United States.

Theoretical Framing

Second language research has come to accept and promote plurilingual spaces and practices as both a socio-cultural norm and a best practice for the learning of multilingual students (Hornberger, 2005; Marshall & Moore, 2018). However, while truly plurilingual educational spaces are potentially empowering and identity-affirming for learners, they are often wrought with tensions related to languages' status and legitimacy within the wider sociocultural context (García, 2013; Hornberger & Link, 2012). In the case of HLs, which often have no official standing in society in terms of educational institutions or policies, "the actors from grassroots and non-official forces are crucial in determining the outcomes of the teaching and learning" (Li & Shen, 2024, p. 138).

Among these actors are teachers, whom Cong-Lem (2021) explains "agentively adopt, adapt or even resist newly implemented policies and programs" (p. 718) to continuously make meaningful changes in their practice. Priestley and

colleagues (2013) further define teacher agency as action that can both resist and be limited by contextual constraints—or in the words of Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 137), "actors always act *by means* of an environment rather than simply in an environment" (emphasis in the original). Agency can be understood as an individual's choices in relation to the affordances present in the environment (Van Lier, 2002); for teachers, this means interpreting the complexities of classroom environments and responding to these with deliberate agency (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). Agency should therefore be understood as dynamic rather than static, and as "constructed relationally in interaction within a cultural context, involving ongoing transformations of both the community and the self" (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 813). In the United States, HL education takes place within a socio-cultural context where minority languages exist within a heavily English-dominant linguistic landscape. In this context, while the wider society constrains HL teachers' agency around language by positioning English monolingualism as the norm, HL schools offer "pockets of hope" (de los Reyes & Gozemba, 2002) where HL teachers can act agentively to create an alternative space in which the HL, and by extension, plurilingualism, can thrive.

One way language teacher agency manifests is in the creation and enforcement of classroom language policies. According to Spolsky (2004), language policy can be conceptualized as being composed of three dimensions. These are language ideology, or beliefs about language; language practices, or the habitual uses of language; and language management decisions over classroom language use. Teacher agency in HL schools operates across these multiple layers. Li and Shen (2024) further note that HL teachers exert agency over language policy by determining, interpreting, and self-regulating language choices during instruction. According to Tsang (2021), teachers as micro-level language-policy makers have a heightened role in contexts with low regulation and high teacher autonomy. HL schools, especially the kind run by a small immigrant community such as the Finnish School examined in this study, are characteristic of such low-regulation, high-autonomy contexts. Teacher agency around language policies in HL schools is often shaped by the teachers' explicit goals of developing students' HL proficiency and identity (Cho, 2014; Creese et al., 2006). A particular act of language management that this chapter illuminates is teachers' response to students' translanguaging, or the fluid shuttling between languages (Canagarajah, 2011). The chapter will also examine the ways HL teacher agency in this particular school interacted with the schools' institutional language policies and the students' agency, reflecting relational and social aspects of agency (Tao & Gao, 2021).

Study Design

This chapter utilizes ethnographic and autoethnographic methods to examine the formation of plurilingual spaces in a Finnish HL community school located in the Mid-Atlantic United States. This school was partially funded by the Finnish government and partially with tuition and grant monies. At the time of data collection, there were seven teachers and about forty students at the school, with a governing board comprised of volunteer parents. To answer the research question, *How do Finnish heritage language teachers enact their agency while negotiating plurilingualism within a HL school located in the United States?* I draw on my own experiences as a parent of two Finnish HL speakers who, for a time, were students at the school; my reflections as a founder and former teacher of the school; as well as rich transcriptions of classroom discourse, interviews, and field notes collected at the school over nine months.

In this chapter, I focus on three of the school's teachers: Anna, Hannele, and Jonna. Table 15.1 provides background information on each of them. All three focal teachers had Master's degrees from universities in Finland (Jonna, Hannele) or Sweden (Anna), and their own children were enrolled as students in the school.

In total, the data set for this study consists of seven hours and fifty minutes of in-person observations in the three classrooms, two thirty-minute interviews with each of the focal teachers, conducted before and after the classroom observation, and a twenty-minute interview with the school's President. All

Table 15.1 Teachers' Backgrounds

Teacher	Student group taught	Teaching credentials	Teaching experience	Years at Finnish school
Anna	5-year-olds	Bilingual education	Finnish to adults in the US	Less than a year
Hannele	8-9-year-olds	Mathematics education	Math to middle and high school students in Finland	Less than a year
Jonna	10-11-year-olds	General education	No teaching experience except for teaching practicum	Less than a year

Table 15.2 Final Codes and Themes

Code	Theme
Official language policy	The construction of a plurilingual space
Language use at school-wide events	
Adult stakeholders' use of language	
Explicit messages about HL during instruction	Explicit and implicit messages about language
Implicit messages about HL during instruction	
Maximizing time spent on using the HL	Pedagogical beliefs related to language
Language choice as related to student proficiency	

data were collected in the 2015–16 school year. Observations were documented with transcriptions of audio recordings and detailed field notes, and interviews were likewise audio recorded and transcribed for coding. In the findings, excerpts from interviews and observations have been translated to English. The interviews mainly focused on the teachers' perceptions of the use of multiple languages for literacy learning in the school (for the teacher interview protocol see Tigert, 2017). The first interview protocol was constructed based on previous literature on multilingual literacy practices and focused more generally on the teachers' perceptions, the second included clarifying questions about language and literacy practices the author had observed in the classroom. In addition, personal journal entries and memos from my time as a teacher at the school from 2010 to 2016 served as autoethnographic data.

Coding was an iterative process, focusing on salient moments when data revealed aspects of teacher agency around plurilingualism, and employed both deductive and inductive initial codes (Saldaña, 2021). Three themes emerged from the data, which were drawn from the final codes as explained in Table 15.2. The three themes were the construction of a plurilingual space, explicit and implicit messages about language, and pedagogical beliefs related to language.

Findings

In HL education taking place in English-dominant contexts, teachers often grapple with decisions related to differing ideas of the goals of HL education among the adult stakeholders of the HL school, as well as the pervasiveness of English in student discourse. The findings demonstrate how the Finnish

HL school was institutionally constructed as a plurilingual space, while in the classrooms, teachers practiced their agency over language policy and practices by curbing students' English use.

Construction of the HL School as a Plurilingual Space

That the HL school existed as a plurilingual space and not an HL-only oasis was clear from the documents and discourses constructed institutionally by the adults of the community—the teachers, parents, and board members. For example, the school's website, maintained by the school's volunteer Board, was almost entirely in English. Names of student groups—named after forest animals—were the only words appearing monolingually in Finnish. In addition, the following note on the landing page was given both in English and in Finnish, briefly stating the official language policy of the school:

> P.S. We use English when communicating administrative matters since we have some parents who are not fluent in Finnish. However, at school, we aim to use only Finnish with the children.
>
> *P.S. Osaamme suomea erinomaisesti, vaikka nettisivumme ovatkin englanniksi. Englanti on koulumme virallinen viestintäkieli, jotta voimme palvella myös suomea taitamattomia vanhempia. Koulutiloissa pyrimme käyttämään pelkästään suomen kieltä.*

During family events such as the Christmas pageant and Mother's Day celebration, this institutional policy was clearly visible. Printed programs, speeches, and announcements were in English, while children's performances such as songs and skits were in Finnish. As these were designed by the teachers, they provided evidence of teachers' agency in separating the uses of each language at the school by their purpose and audience. Structural elements of the events, such as English programs, offered family members a way to understand them, while the students continued to be expected to use Finnish for their performances.

Among parents, including the three focal teachers, interactions were in Finnish unless a non-Finnish parent was present; in that case, they were in English. Ethnographic memos written after whole-school events and board meetings revealed that parents' opinions on the importance of Finnish in the school varied: some wanted their children to speak only Finnish, while one Finnish father said he hoped his daughter was having fun regardless of learning the language. However, parents rarely expressed such notions to teachers, leaving instructional and language policy decisions to them. This mirrored

the wider socio-cultural background of the public school culture in Finland, where teachers enjoy broad pedagogical freedom and responsibilities (Toom & Husu, 2016).

During an interview with Salima, the school's volunteer president, I asked what she thought the school's mission was. Salima stressed the importance of Finnish language input in her response:

> The school is definitely for […] letting children hear Finnish from more than one person […] so that it wouldn't appear so extraordinary. And of course I hope that the Finnish School is a joyful place to learn […] so that it would be a fun place to go learn and play in Finnish. [At the Finnish School] children can be around Finns more so that they hear more of the language.

Salima's response reflected the desire to offer as much Finnish language input as possible, and she did not acknowledge the existence, purpose, or importance of other languages in the HL students' lives in this or her other interview responses. Salima's answer, compared to the father's comment described above, reflects the complex notions around language policy held by different actors within the school. The fact that teachers participated in the construction of plurilingualism through such practices as hosting family events bilingually showed evidence of them acknowledging the reality of the HL existing within wider societal structures where English was the dominant language. However, in their interactions with students, particularly during instruction, teachers enacted their agency by offering as fully immersive an HL environment as possible, as the following section demonstrates.

Teachers' Agency through Implicit and Explicit Messages during Instruction

During the teachers' instruction, implicit messages about language were often delivered to students by teachers in two ways, both of which promoted the use of Finnish as the only language at the HL school. The first of these was the so-called "minimal grasp" strategy (Lanza, 1992) whereby teachers pretended not to understand what their students were saying unless students used Finnish. The second, more frequent strategy was recasting English or "Finglish" (anglicized Finnish) words and phrases used by students by providing the correct Finnish version. These recasts were particularly frequent during instructional discourse rather than during other tasks such as clean-up or lunch time.

An example of this in the data appeared in Hannele's class, where one of the students started talking about her plans for later in the day, using the Finglish word *sliipouveri* (the English word sleepover, pronounced in a Finnish manner, with the addition of an i-suffix as is typical for loan words ending in a consonant). The recast is bolded in the excerpt below.

Iina: *Tänään mulla aikoo olla sliipouveri.*
(Today I'm gonna have a sleepover.)
Hannele: *Sää meet **yökylään**, niinkö, vai tulleeks joku sun luo?*
(You are going to a **sleepover,** is that right, or is somebody coming over?)
Iina: *Joo, Sofia, minä en oo nähny häntä pitkään aikaan.*
(Yes, Sofia, I haven't seen her in such a long time.)

Here, Hannele conveyed an implicit message about which language was to be used in the classroom, as she modeled back to Iina how to say "sleepover" in Finnish (*meet yökylään*, literally "go for a night visit"). This was an example of a teacher enacting their agency around language use in a subtle way, communicating implicitly that Finglish was not acceptable for the HL school, while also providing continuous Finnish input for language development purposes.

At times, teachers stated their language policy more directly by asking students to speak only Finnish. An example of this took place in Anna's class, where students were starting a drawing activity on small whiteboards. While waiting for Anna's directions for the drawing, the five-year-olds were getting restless and started singing in English. In response, Anna stated her language policy (see bolded).

Anna: *Laittakaa oma nimi kulmaan, vielä ei piirretä mitään.*
(Put your name in the corner, and don't draw anything yet.)

The students start spontaneously singing "happy birthday to you, cha cha cha" while they're waiting for directions.

Anna: *Mulla on teille uutisia, me ollaan suomikoulussa, niin **eihän me silloin lauleta englanniksi mitään paljon onnea vaan.***
(I have news for you, we're at the Finnish School, so **we don't sing happy birthday in English**.)

The students sing the song again but this time in Finnish.

Anna: *No niin hyvä, osaattehan te sen.*
Well good, you do know it.

While students were often the ones to switch to English or Finglish, thereby asserting their plurilingual identities in the HL space, at times they also supported teachers in enacting their HL-only language policies. One example was students simply complying with teachers' policies, as in the excerpt above with Anna's students switching to Finnish. Other times, the students' support was more pronounced. The following instance occurred during an observation in Hannele's class:

> Eelis comes in and asks if they can watch a YouTube Minecraft video. Hannele asks what language it is in. When the boys say it is in English, she says she can look for one in Finnish and maybe they can watch that some day. As they sit down, the boys continue talking about Minecraft in English. Iina says loudly, ***Puhukaa suomea, puhukaa suomea pojat, puhukaa suomea!*** **(Speak Finnish, speak Finnish boys, speak Finnish!)**

However, this type of explicit siding with the teachers' language policy happened much less frequently than students using English in the classroom. Typically, teachers were the main agents pushing for Finnish use. This agency, in part, was based on their pedagogical beliefs regarding language acquisition, as described in the next section.

Pedagogical Beliefs as the Underpinnings of Teacher Agency

In the interviews, I deliberately asked teachers about having observed them asking students to speak only Finnish. A pattern across teachers' answers reflected the belief that since the school only met for three hours every other week for the duration of the school year, there was no room for languages other than Finnish. Teachers strongly equated time spent solely on Finnish use, without interference from English, with the students learning a maximum amount of the HL. For example, Anna stated:

> I try to use Finnish the whole time, because I want the children to understand that speaking Finnish goes with attending the Finnish School. While they're living here (in the United States), they have such few opportunities for hearing Finnish in real life situations, so I think we need to take advantage of every opportunity.

Similarly, Hannele stated that since the school was in session for only three hours at a time, it was necessary to use only Finnish during that time. It is clear that the school's instructional time was limited—approximately forty-eight hours across the whole school year, minus time spent on lunch for all and short outside recess for the youngest students. What is less clear is how much instructional time

would have been sufficient in the teachers' minds to open up a space for more plurilingual practices such as translanguaging.

The teachers also felt that their students' Finnish proficiency was such that they were able to accomplish their pedagogical goals without having to resort to using English themselves. For example, Jonna, who taught the oldest and most advanced students, responded:

> Because I have the most advanced group, it's been fairly natural to use only Finnish. It's been possible to explain even difficult words in Finnish to them, or use synonyms for example. I have not used English to help them because it might lead to them using more English in the classroom.

Similarly, Hannele felt that her students' proficiency in Finnish aided her in exerting her agency over HL use:

> If someone doesn't understand a word, I can explain it in Finnish using other words. Students in my group understand Finnish well, so I have not felt it necessary to explain words in English when I can do it in Finnish.

What remains unclear based on these responses is what proficiency level, in the teachers' minds, would have justified the use of languages other than Finnish. A feature of the school that allowed teachers not to have to grapple with that question was the fact that students were fairly clearly divided into groups: the so-called "total beginners" group, which contained multiple ages, and the groups of emerging Finnish proficient students who were divided by age. During my time at the school, I taught the beginner group, and the students often conversed in English because, while most of them understood Finnish, their productive skills were not as strong. Personally, I allowed the use of English in that group as an aid to comprehension, though I also encouraged students to use as much Finnish as possible through activities such as choral reading and singing.

I also asked teachers what they thought about research that has presented translanguaging as a way to develop bilingual competence in the classroom (e.g. Martínez, 2010; Reyes, 2004; Sayer, 2013). Anna, who had a degree in bilingual education, stated that she had heard about these theories but felt that translanguaging was more useful for students who were older than her five-year-olds: "I believe this type of simultaneous learning (of two languages) works well especially with older students when you're dealing with more abstract concepts." However, Jonna, who taught the oldest students, felt translanguaging was unnecessary for her students as well. She posited that limiting language use to Finnish made "learning language more authentic and deeper. It makes the student construct word meanings in their mind rather than being given a ready translation." Interestingly, Hannele referred to the English-only practices in the

students' weekday schools as a parallel to emulate: "After all, the students don't get translation of words into Finnish in their regular schools; rather, words are explained using alternative words so that they'll understand it." Teachers believed that when students did not understand a word, it presented an opportunity for further Finnish input in the form of synonyms and explanations rather than an occasion for drawing on the students' English knowledge.

It was clear that teachers held fast beliefs about the benefits of maximizing the amount of time Finnish was used in the classroom and using only Finnish to explain new words and concepts to students. These beliefs then shaped the way teachers enacted their agency through the enforcement of certain classroom language policies and the enactment of instructional practices.

Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates the way Finnish HL school teachers negotiated a complex sociolinguistic landscape in which the HL was being developed within a system where English dominated students' lives outside of the school and even permeated the school during school-wide events and through students' own language use. Teachers enacted their agency in the HL school flexibly, by allowing plurilingualism in limited cases while adhering to their Finnish-only policies most of the time. The construction of the HL school as a plurilingual space was mostly done by teachers in instances where they deliberately catered to non-Finnish-speaking parents' needs by switching to English during both formal events and informal chats. At all other times, teachers attempted to adhere to their HL-only policy, particularly during instruction, and communicated this policy continuously to the students both explicitly and implicitly. This was at times supported by the students' actions around HL use, at other times somewhat constrained by it. However, teachers possessed strong pedagogical beliefs about HL development, which undergirded their agency in implementing teaching practices that aimed for the maximization of the use of Finnish within the walls of the school. These practices matched the school's official language policy of using English with those who were not proficient in Finnish while maintaining Finnish as the main language of instruction.

The study demonstrates how strongly HL teachers were able to enact their agency over decisions regarding language policy and pedagogy in the HL school, even while the school formed only a small Finnish-speaking oasis within the wider English-dominated society. The study demonstrates how teachers were able

to enact their relational agency by continuously interpreting their sociocultural context of the HL school, and in particular, by responding to its institutional language policy through their own construction of what constituted best practice in HL education. This agency was likely shaped by a few different factors, each of which would deserve further study. First, the teachers were all trained in the Nordic (Finnish and Swedish) teacher education programs, where teachers are guided toward independent decision-making and broad pedagogical freedom (Toom & Husu, 2016), and therefore trusted themselves to make language policy and instructional decisions independent of parents' or students' influence. Adhering to the same culture of teacher independence, the school's parents and board members left such decisions to the teachers. Second, while language education research has demonstrated the usefulness of translanguaging and other plurilingual practices for language development even in HL contexts (e.g. Creese & Blackledge, 2011; Creese et al., 2006; Dávila, 2017), the three teachers in this study held firmer beliefs about the effectiveness of providing the maximum amount of HL input possible within the constraints of the HL school schedule.

Without such teacher education, firmly held pedagogical beliefs, or an HL school culture where teachers trust themselves and are trusted to make independent decisions regarding instruction, the tensions regarding plurilingualism vs. HL use might be greater, and the teachers' opportunities to enact their agency reduced. Research has demonstrated that HL teachers are often constrained in their agency by such influences as parents' role in HL school decision-making, inadequate pedagogical preparation, lack of curricular materials, and weak professional identities (Kondo-Brown, 2010; Li, 2005; Wu et al., 2011). There are some things teachers can do on their own to agentively take on tasks that are "valued and valuable" (Molla & Nolan, 2020, p. 69), such as collaborate with others to implement effective practices for HL school management, organization, and instruction. However, more structural changes are also needed. I agree with Carreira and Kagan (2018), who recommend that the fairly young field of HL education make concerted efforts to institutionalize HLs within the educational systems of dominant language contexts and thereby improve such aspects of HL education as teacher preparation, curriculum development, instructional materials, and teaching practices. In particular, this study points to the need to establish HL teacher education systems which are based on current research on the development of plurilingualism and grounded in the realities of HL schools. With better structures in place, I believe plurilingualism will no longer be seen as a threat, but a strength in HL schools by teachers, students, and parents alike.

References

Alsahafi, M. (2019). Language maintenance and heritage language education: The case of a weekend Arabic school in New Zealand. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *8*(2), 21–9. https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/5601.

Bao, M., Ren, W., & Wang, D. (2020). Understanding the professional practice of teachers of Chinese as an additional language through the lens of teacher agency. *Sustainability*, *12*(18), 7493. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187493. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545.

Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *39*(2), 132–49.

Blackledge, A., Creese, A., Baraç, T., Bhatt, A., Hamid, S., Wei, L., Lytra, V., Martin, P., Wu, C.-J., & Yağcioğlu, D. (2008). Contesting "language" as "heritage": Negotiation of identities in late modernity. *Applied Linguistics, 29*(4), 533–54. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amn024.

Canagarajah, S. (2011). Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *2* (2011), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110239331.1.

Carreira, M., & Kagan, O. (2018). Heritage language education: A proposal for the next 50 years. *Foreign Language Annals*, *51*(1), 152–68. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12331.

Cho, H. (2014). "It's very complicated": Exploring heritage language identity with heritage language teachers in a teacher preparation program. *Language and Education*, *28*(2), 181–95. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2013.804835.

Cong-Lem, N. (2021). Teacher agency: A systematic review of international literature. *Issues in Educational Research*, *31*(3), 718–38. https://www.iier.org.au/iier31/cong-lem.pdf.

Creese, A., Bhatt, A., Bhojani, N., & Martin, P. (2006). Multicultural, heritage and learner identities in complementary schools. *Language and Education*, *20*(1), 23–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780608668708.

Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2011). Separate and flexible bilingualism in complementary schools: Multiple language practices in interrelationship. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *43*(5), 1196–208. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.10.006.

Dávila, L. T. (2017). Ecologies of heritage language learning in a multilingual Swedish school. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *16*(6), 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1385025.

de Los Reyes, E., & Gozemba, P. A. (2002). *Pockets of hope: How students and teachers change the world. Series in language and ideology*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Edwards, A., & D'Arcy, C. (2004). Relational agency and disposition in sociocultural accounts of learning to teach. *Educational Review*, *56*(2), 147–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031910410001693236.

García, O. (2013). From diglossia to transglossia: Bilingual and multilingual classrooms in the 21st century. In C. Abello-Contesse, M. D. López-Jiménez, P. M. Chandler, & R. Chacón-Beltrán (Eds.), *Bilingual and multilingual education in the 21st century: Building on experience* (pp. 155–78). Channel View Publications.

García, O., & Otheguy, R. (2020). Plurilingualism and translanguaging: Commonalities and divergences. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *23*(1), 17–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1598932.

Hopkins, M. (2016). Beliefs in context: Understanding language policy implementation at a systems level. *Educational Policy*, *30*(4), 573–605. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904814550073.

Hornberger, N. H. (2005). Opening and filling up implementational and ideological spaces in heritage language education. *The Modern Language Journal*, *89*(4), 605–9.

Hornberger, N. H., & Link, H. (2012). Translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms: A biliteracy lens. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *15*(3), 261–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.658016.

Kim, J. I., & Kim, M. (2016). Three Korean heritage language teachers' identities, their identification of their students, and their instructional practices. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *15*(6), 361–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2016.1218281.

Kircher, R., & Kutlu, E. (2023). Multilingual realities, monolingual ideologies: Social media representations of Spanish as a heritage language in the United States. *Applied Linguistics*, *44*(6), 1077–99. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amac076.

Kondo-Brown, K. (2010). Curriculum development for advancing heritage language competence: Recent research, current practices, and future agenda. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *30*, 24–41. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190510000012.

Lanza, E. (1992). Can bilingual two-year-olds code-switch? *Journal of Child Language*, *19*(3), 633–58. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000900011600.

Li, M. (2005). The role of parents in Chinese heritage-language schools. *Bilingual Research Journal, 29*(1), 197–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2005.10162831.

Li, W., & Zhu, H. (2013). Translanguaging identities: Creating transnational space through flexible multilingual practices amongst Chinese university students in the UK. *Applied Linguistics*, *34*(5), 516–35. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amt022.

Li, X., & Shen, Q. (2024). Individual agency in language-in-education policy: A story of Chinese heritage language schools in multilingual Brussels. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *25*(2), 137–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2023.2259154.

Lipponen, L., & Kumpulainen, K. (2011). Acting as accountable authors: Creating interactional spaces for agency work in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *27*(5), 812–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.01.001.

Liu, N., Musica, A., Koscak, S., Vinogradova, P., & López, J. (2011). Challenges and needs of community-based heritage language programs and how they are addressed. *Heritage Briefs*, 1–18. https://www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/challenges-and%20needs-of-community-based-heritage-language-programs.pdf.

Lytra, V. (2012). Discursive constructions of language and identity: Parents' competing perspectives in London Turkish complementary schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *33*(1), 85–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.638076.

Marshall, S., & Moore, D. (2018). Plurilingualism amid the panoply of lingualisms: Addressing critiques and misconceptions in education. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *15*(1), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2016.1253699.

Martínez, R. A. (2010). "Spanglish" as literacy tool: Toward an understanding of the potential role of Spanish-English code-switching in the development of academic literacy. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *45*(2), 124–49. https://doi.org/10.58680/rte201012743.

Molla, T., & Nolan, A. (2020). Teacher agency and professional practice. *Teachers and Teaching*, *26*(1), 67–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1740196.

Ortega, L. (2020). The study of heritage language development from a bilingualism and social justice perspective. *Language Learning*, *70* (S1), 15–53. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12347.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2013). Teachers as agents of change: Teacher agency and emerging models of curriculum. In M. Priestly & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Reinventing the Curriculum: New Trends in Curriculum Policy and Practice*, *1* (pp. 187–206). Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472553195.ch-010.

Reyes, I. (2004). Functions of code switching in schoolchildren's conversations. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *28*(1), 77–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2004.10162613.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, 2nd ed. Sage.

Sayer, P. (2013). Translanguaging, TexMex, and bilingual pedagogy: Emergent bilinguals learning through the vernacular. *TESOL Quarterly*, *47*(1), 63–88. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.53.

Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Tigert, J. M. (2017). *Building block of the world, building block of your identity: multilingual literacy socialization of heritage language learners* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park).

Tigert, J. M. (2019). Vanilla sauce and songs: Literacies in a heritage language school. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *33*(1), 100–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2019.1569021.

Toom, A., & Husu, J. (2016). Finnish teachers as "makers of the many": Balancing between broad pedagogical freedom and responsibility. In H. Niemi, A. Toom, & A. Kallioniemi (Eds.), *Miracle of education: The principles and practices of teaching and learning in Finnish schools* (pp. 41–55). Brill.

Tsang, S. C. (2021). An exploratory study of Chinese-as-an-additional-language teachers' agency in post-1997 Hong Kong: An ecological perspective. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *22*(1–2), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1725331.

Valdés, G. (2014). Heritage language students: Profiles and possibilities. In T. Wiley, J. Peyton, D. Christian, S. Moore, & N. Liu, (Eds.), *Handbook of heritage, community, and native American languages in the United States* (pp. 27–35). Routledge.

Van Lier, L. (2002). An ecological-semiotic perspective on language and linguistics. In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language acquisition and language socialization: Ecological perspectives* (pp. 140–64). Continuum.

Wiley, T. G., & García, O. (2016). Language policy and planning in language education: Legacies, consequences, and possibilities. *The Modern Language Journal*, *100*(S1), 48–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12303.

Wu, H. P., Palmer, D. K., & Field, S. L. (2011). Understanding teachers' professional identity and beliefs in the Chinese heritage language school in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *24*(1), 47–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2010.545413.

Forging New Paths for Language Teacher Agency: Concluding Remarks

Yvette Slaughter, Leonardo Veliz, Gary Bonar, and Minh Hue Nguyen

The aim of this volume was to explore language teacher agency by examining how teachers assert agency amidst systemic socio-cultural and socio-political pressures to not only advocate for their students, but also innovate pedagogically and sustain their passion and commitment in complex and evolving educational landscapes. The volume has been structured around three interconnected themes of language teacher agency and identity, language teacher agency and practice, and language teacher agency and social justice. Chapters addressing teacher agency and identity have focused on how teachers' sense of identity interacts with capacity for agency, presenting a dynamic imagining against a backdrop of institutional demands, personal aspirations, and cultural norms. The second theme for this volume has focused on agency and practice, exploring the multifaceted strategies employed by language teachers as they shape, adapt, and refine their practices to meet pedagogical challenges, both anticipated and unexpected. The third and final theme, focused on agency and social justice, illustrates language teaching as an intrinsically political act—one that can either perpetuate established hierarchies or inspire critical consciousness and transformative action. The narratives here traverse critical pedagogy, racial and linguistic identities, and educational equity, demonstrating both how language teachers are influenced by socio-economic and political milieus, but also how teachers can be supported to develop the agency to question and alter these realities.

Importantly, the chapters employ a range of research methodologies that have moved beyond the interview process (Tao & Gao, 2021) including, for example, narrative positioning theory and the invisibility framework (Nabukeera, this volume), sociograms (focusing on the ego and alters) combined with narratives (Hennebry-Leung, this volume), visual-spatial methodologies (body

portraits) (Slaughter & Choi, this volume), narrative inquiry combined with the development of a new data collection tool (Teacher Attitudes to Discrimination in Language Education Scale) (Leal, this volume), narrative frames (Nguyen & Ngo, this volume), and ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methodologies (Le & Dubroc, this volume; Tigert, this volume), among others. Research also focused on agency for teachers at the individual level and at the collective level (Tao & Gao, this volume).

Research into language teacher agency continues to be of critical importance, given, as we noted in the introduction, that teachers continue to face diverse and often conflicting demands and constraints ranging from constant educational reforms to rapid capacity development of digital technology competencies as AI tools proliferate (e.g., Bonar et al., 2025; De Costa & Uştuk, 2023; Edmett et al., 2023; Moser et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2022). The impact of AI on language education will be seismic over time. There are many affordances for teachers in the use of AI to support language teachers for dozens of languages including quick resource development, tailored to different learning levels and ages, assessment and feedback on work, and the ability to integrate with other apps and programs. Given the ongoing challenges of working with the mono-epistemic (Ndhlovu, 2015) framing of curriculum which privileges British and US Englishes, AI tools may also offer the possibility of quickly and easily accessing linguistic, phonological, and cultural knowledge of other Englishes in the world, and producing resources for teachers, offering greater agency for language teachers seeking to broaden the epistemes shaping language education.

AI could also potentially constrain teacher agency as many question whether AI spells the end of language learning, and as universities, already suffering due to the Covid-19 pandemic, begin to reduce their language offerings (e.g., Miller & Neigert, 2024; O'Mullane, 2024; Palmer, 2024). However, there is very little research into how AI interacts with teacher agency (e.g., Godwin-Jones, 2024). In such a rapidly changing space, within the dynamic space of language education, it is vital that we build a research body into the relationships between AI and language teacher agency.

Research also needs to constantly return to how teachers gain and regain agency over time given the dynamic and changing social, economic, and political contexts globally. As Veliz et al. (this volume) assert, "normative perspectives and practices within educational institutions can restrict teachers' ability to incorporate diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives" (p. 190) into pedagogical practice. How do teachers withstand the push-and-pull factors of market-driven approaches to language education that can diminish motivation,

limit pedagogical innovation, and reduce language learning to a gatekeeping tool for educational advancement? This includes agency at the individual level, from the pre-service stage and across teachers' careers, and at the collective level where teachers across languages and contexts should be given the opportunities to "identify joint enterprises and make complementary contributions using their own linguistic and research expertise; this is particularly important in today's multilingual world" (Tao & Gao, this volume, p. 67). In the same vein, multilingual learners and teachers can jointly develop and leverage linguistic resources to facilitate language learning and teaching in multilingual classrooms (Turner et al., 2022). Furthermore, language teachers are increasingly working with other content area teachers in the whole-school education of language learners. In this climate, how language teachers (re)develop relational agency is fundamental to understanding the work of language teachers. That is, teachers' ability to recognize the diverse skills, knowledge, and perspectives that colleagues bring to the shared endeavour of teaching, and their ability to collaborate effectively, are significant factors when understanding teaching environments and notions of agency (Edwards, 2005; Nguyen & Dang, 2021).

Given the prevalent tension between an increasing multilingual reality across the globe and a dominant "monolingualist ideology" (Strani, 2020), it is vital that further research avenues be explored at the intersection of teacher agency and linguistic pluralism. Such an endeavor should not only entail recognition of a more balanced approach to the status and power of majority and minority languages but, equally important, a concerted effort to destabilize homogenous forms of knowing (Phyak, 2021) that foster heterogeneous epistemologies that deem multilingual teacher agency a norm and not a barrier to education and society.

Finally, with full awareness of the interconnected relationship between agency and identity, we feel the imperative to encourage future research that elevates the centrality of such social categories as race, gender, and ethnicity in the process of language teachers' navigation, negotiation, and construction of their agentic selves (Vitanova, 2018). It is crucial to recognize that these social categories are not merely peripheral aspects of a teacher's identity but are deeply embedded in their everyday experiences and professional practices. We feel that it is important to recognize that language teaching is an emotionally charged endeavor (Nguyen, 2018), particularly amidst the constraints, tensions, and power dynamics mentioned elsewhere. Research in this area can be significantly enriched by adopting an intersectional lens, which acknowledges the multiple, overlapping, and interdependent systems

of discrimination and marginalization that teachers and educators face (Veliz et al., 2024), the emotions they experience, and how such emotions interact with language teacher agency and identity in shaping their practice and professional development (Nguyen & Ngo, 2023; Uzum et al., this volume). An intersectional approach can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how teacher emotions, various social identities, and categories interact to influence language teacher agency.

References

Bonar, G., Slaughter, Y., Keary, A., & Alderton, T. (2025). Supporting students from linguistically diverse backgrounds during remote learning: A Q methodology study. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *52*, 1065–86. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00753-w

De Costa, P., & Uştuk, Ö. (Eds.). (2023). *A sociopolitical agenda for TESOL teacher education*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Edmett, A., Ichaporia, N., Crompton, H., & Crichton, R. (2023). *Artificial intelligence and English language teaching: Preparing for the future*. British Council. https://doi.org/10.57884/78EA-3C69.

Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *43*(3), 168–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2006.06.010.

Godwin-Jones, R. (2024). Distributed agency in language learning and teaching through generative AI. *Language Learning & Technology*, *28*(2), 5–30. https://doi.org/10125/73570.

Miller, G., & Neigert, M. (2024). *Lost in translation: The geopolitical risks of declining foreign language learning in Australia and NZ*, March 15. https://theconversation.com/lost-in-translation-the-geopolitical-risks-of-declining-foreign-language-learning-in-australia-and-nz-225787.

Moser, K. M., Wei, T., Brenner, D. (2021). Remote teaching during COVID-19: Implications from a national survey of language educators. *System*, *97*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102431.

Ndhlovu, F. (2015). Ignored lingualism: Another resource for overcoming the monolingual mindset in educational linguistics. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, *35*(4), 398–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2015.1087365.

Nguyen, M. H. (2018). ESL teachers' emotional experiences, responses and challenges in professional relationships with the school community: Implications for teacher education. In J. D. D. M. Agudo (Ed.), *Emotions in second language teaching: Theory, research and teacher education* (pp. 243–57). Springer.

Nguyen, M. H., & Dang, T. K. A. (2021). Exploring teachers' relational agency in content–language teacher collaboration in secondary science education in Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *48*(4), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-020-00413-9.

Nguyen, M. H., & Ngo, X. M. (2023). An activity theory perspective on Vietnamese preservice English teachers' identity construction in relation to tensions, emotion and agency. *Language Teaching Research* (Online First). https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221151046.

O'Mullane, E. (2024). *Aberdeen University to shut down language courses: The language learning crisis facing the UK today*, February 9. https://www.thebubble.org.uk/uncategorized/aberdeen-university-to-shut-down-language-courses-the-language-learning-crisis-facing-the-uk-today/.

Palmer, K. (2024). *Defense department cuts 13 of its language flagship programs*, May 15. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/global/study-abroad/2024/05/15/defense-department-cuts-13-its-language-flagship-programs.

Pennycook, A. (2022). Critical applied linguistics in the 2020s. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *19*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2022.2030232.

Phyak, P. (2021). Epistemicide, deficit language ideology, and (de)coloniality in language education policy. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *2021*, 219–33. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-0104.

Strani, K. (2020). Introduction. In K. Strani (Ed.), *Multilingualism and Politics* (pp. 1–14). Palgrave Macmillan.

Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2021). *Language teacher agency*. Cambridge.

Turner, M., Nguyen, M. H., & Premier, J. (2022). Embedding a multilingual stance in secondary teacher education: An exploration of learning as an affordance. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *111*, 103608. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103608.

Veliz, L., Gao, X., & Veliz-Campos, M. (2024). Racialised identities of multilingual teachers: Stories, experiences and agentic action of Indonesian teachers in Australian schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (Online First), 1–12. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2361718.

Veliz, L., Slaughter, I., & Ndhlouvu, F. (2025). Challenging monolingual discourse for agentic space: Constraints and opportunities for language educators in the Chilean education system. In L. Veliz, M. H. Nguyen, I. Slaughter, & G. Bonar (Eds.), *Language teacher agency: Navigating complex and diverse educational contexts* (pp. 189–209). Bloomsbury Academic.

Vitanova, G. (2018). "Just treat me as a teacher!" Mapping language teacher agency through gender, race, and professional discourses. *System*, *79*, 28–37. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.05.013.

Index

A

agency 4–12, 17–19, 28–32, 35–42, 46–9, 65–73, 76–90, 123–5, 150–3, 169–74, 182–7, 189–93, 200–5, 212–16, 224–9, 251–8, 260–5, 286–9, 291–7, 300–3
agency and emotions 32, 69–70, 76, 84, 170, 305
agency and identity 5, 17, 53, 72, 79, 82, 132, 143, 186, 214, 303
agency development 6, 191, 251
agency enactment 18–19, 21, 68, 78, 151, 166, 170, 174–5, 183–4, 186, 213
agentic choices 45–6, 53, 56
agentic orientations 7, 39–40
agentic response 18, 157, 161–3, 165–6, 173
autonomy 5, 8, 110, 112, 115, 190, 200, 202–3, 207, 221, 239
awareness 10, 26, 75, 87–8, 258, 260–1, 264, 274, 303

B

beliefs 71–2, 76, 78–9, 88, 90, 133, 135, 172–3, 186, 217, 220–2, 258–60, 262, 264–5, 294
bilingual education 12, 104–5, 126, 129, 145, 203, 247, 266, 295, 298–9, 311
bilingual immersion model 129, 131, 137, 140, 142
bilingualism 12, 104–5, 126, 130, 145, 200, 207, 237, 246, 266, 298–300
Black teachers 270, 273, 275–6, 282–4
Blackness 272–4, 276, 282

C

Chilean education system 8, 189–90, 203, 305
Chinese students 100, 133–7
Chinese teachers 132, 134–5, 139, 143, 145, 174
Chinese university 6, 52, 54, 174–5, 229
classroom management 213–15, 219–21
classroom observations 217, 220, 223, 289
collaborative autoethnography 231, 235–6, 245, 247
collective agency 6, 51–68, 213, 231
collective identity 52, 54, 56–7, 59–60, 62–6, 205
community of practice (CoP) 6, 54, 57, 106, 116, 224
competence, intercultural 71, 73, 85, 130
critical incidents 8, 171, 173–7, 179, 182, 184–6
critical language pedagogy 251, 266
critical pedagogy 49, 251, 267, 301
critical perspectives 2, 104, 133, 232, 266
critical race theory 270, 282–3
curriculum changes 228–9, 246
curriculum development 231, 297, 299, 310
curriculum reforms 3, 91, 143, 173, 201, 231, 248

D

degrees of agency 46, 123–5, 278
developing conscientização 252, 255, 257–8, 260–1
Douglas Fir Group 190, 194–6, 206, 208

E

EAL (English as an Additional Language) 27, 44, 133–4, 144, 154, 170, 208, 310
EAL learners 131, 133–4
ecological approach 14, 49, 72–3, 75, 77, 82, 85, 184, 186, 208, 213–14
ecological perspective 4, 6–7, 17, 19, 39, 52–3, 71–2, 142, 150–1, 172, 185–6, 298, 300
educational policies 12, 91, 191, 193, 203, 205, 207–8, 298
educational practices 4, 125, 253
educational reforms 212, 220, 225–8, 248, 302

emotional experiences 4, 32, 70, 82–3, 151, 183, 304
English language proficiency 137–8, 206, 211
English language teacher education 13, 22, 31–2, 311
exercise of agency 9, 31, 110, 112, 171–2, 183, 214, 225, 227, 245
experienced identities 6, 17, 21, 23–30

F
Finnish heritage language school 10, 285
Finnish School 288, 292–4, 300
foreign language learning 129, 186, 304
foreign languages 12, 45, 49, 79, 137–8, 187, 193, 207, 229, 271, 311

H
heritage language education 10, 298–9

I
identity tensions 6, 18–21, 23, 25–6, 29–30, 33, 170
identity work 19, 33, 69–70, 72, 100, 282
ideologies
  dominant xiv, 189
  monolingual 189, 299
individual agency 6–7, 57, 60, 65, 121, 132, 142, 299
institutional practices 151–2, 277
intercultural communication 56, 63, 85

L
language and agency 11, 83, 103, 125, 185, 205, 265
language and identity 88, 91, 94, 102, 299
language diversity 48, 87, 194, 204
language ideologies xii, 87, 91, 93, 100, 102, 288
language policy 62, 99, 102–3, 227, 286, 288, 291–4, 297, 300
language portraits 91–3, 96–7, 99, 101, 104–5
language teacher agency xiv, 2–11, 17–30, 35–48, 51–67, 69–83, 87–103, 107–125, 129–142, 147, 150–168, 171–184, 189–205, 212, 214–16, 220–227, 231–246, 251–265, 269–281, 285–297
language teachers
  critical 252, 255–6, 264
  early career 6, 36, 38, 47–8
  foreign 22, 53, 74, 242
  in-service 9, 40–1
  pre-service 7, 36, 48, 89, 150, 264
languages
  diverse 6, 37, 194, 204
  dominant 82, 193, 285–6, 292
  first 23, 35, 96, 138, 154, 158, 165, 221, 240, 266
  minority 4, 90, 189, 191, 285, 288, 303
  multiple 97, 100, 285, 290
languages education 36, 46, 104, 190, 207, 312
linguistic repertoires 7, 88–9, 91–3, 95, 99–105, 164

M
monolingual discourses 8, 189, 305
monolingual mindset xvi, 3, 12, 14, 35, 48, 170, 189, 207–9, 304, 312
multilingual classrooms 8, 164, 298–9, 303, 309
multilingual identities 14, 33, 48, 62
multiple identities 12, 31, 186, 270

N
narrative frames 22–3, 25, 29–30, 73, 302
narrative inquiry 12, 31, 186, 216, 228, 266, 271, 282, 302, 311
native speakers 43, 45, 90, 253, 266–7

O
online classroom 8, 67, 154, 156–9, 161
online environment 157, 159, 183
online placement 8, 151, 153–5, 160
online teaching 68, 149–50, 152, 154–9, 166–7, 170–1, 186, 217, 221, 224

P
pedagogical agency 214–15, 220, 225–6
pedagogical approaches 38, 121, 181–2, 184, 190, 311
  sociocultural 68, 186, 228
  student-centered 120, 136–7
pedagogical beliefs 287, 290, 294, 297

pedagogical knowledge 28–9, 46, 162, 200
pedagogical practices 14, 51, 132, 142, 145, 219, 302
plurilingual practices 295, 297
plurilingual spaces 10, 287, 289–91, 296
plurilingualism 10–11, 89, 104–5, 201, 285–99, 309
professional agency 31, 49, 67, 169, 208, 228–9
professional community 51, 53–4, 57, 59–60, 65, 215, 223–4, 226
professional development 17, 33, 47, 132, 141–2, 171, 192, 196, 208, 215, 220
professional identity 7, 53–4, 56–7, 63, 66, 125, 127, 173, 176–7, 182, 215–16, 219, 224–6
professional knowledge 27–30, 136, 173, 177, 214, 310
professional learning 21, 26, 29, 46, 140, 143, 202, 204, 226, 264, 310

R
racial identity 270, 273, 275, 277–8, 284
racism, linguistic 4, 12–13, 90, 104–5, 266
relational agency 12, 84, 170, 214–16, 223–6, 297, 303–5

S
second language teacher education (SLTE) 12, 29, 169, 205
second language teaching 32, 196, 304
sense of agency 28, 88, 90, 107, 140–1, 193, 198, 204, 244
Sino-Australian school 132–6, 142
social justice xiv, 5, 9–10, 12, 49, 84–5, 206, 208, 246, 251–67, 301
social practices 17, 19, 152, 195, 234

T
teacher agency 4–5, 7–9, 11, 18–19, 52, 68–9, 72, 77–9, 108, 132–3, 150–1, 167–9, 171–5, 182–6, 190–1, 195–6, 206–8, 213–14, 226–9, 235
teacher authority 176–7, 179, 182
teacher identity 19–21, 69, 72, 77, 80–3, 132, 180, 183, 187, 282, 284
translanguaging 12, 89, 105, 161, 163, 206–7, 287–8, 295, 297–8, 300

V
VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) 133–5, 138–9
VCE curriculum 131, 133–4

Contributors

Anh Thi Lan Nguyen is Lecturer in Foreign Language Teacher Education at the University of Danang—University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam. Her teaching and research focus on teacher training and education, teacher agency, self-efficacy, and intercultural competence.

Anita Dubroc graduated with a doctorate in Curriculum & Instruction with an emphasis in English education from Louisiana State University. Her research interests center on young adult literature, English as a second language, digital media and literacy, and reading communities. She is working as an EL coach in the Louisiana public school system. Her goal is to aid ESL and general education teachers through co-teaching and pragmatic resources and strategies that can help all students learn language through content.

Baburhan Uzum is Associate Professor of Bilingual/ESL Education in the School of Teaching and Learning at Sam Houston State University. He has taught English at secondary level in Turkey and is currently preparing teacher candidates in the United States to teach emergent bilingual students in content area classrooms. His research focuses on teacher identity, teacher agency, technology-enhanced teacher education, and immersive and innovative pedagogical strategies to prepare teacher candidates for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Bedrettin Yazan is Associate Professor in the Department of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He has served TESOL and AAAL in various roles (e.g., conference strand coordinator, nominating committee, interest section chair, conference connections). His research focuses on language teacher learning and identity, collaboration between ESL and content teachers, language policy and planning, and world Englishes. He is currently serving as the co-editor of *TESOL Journal* and associate editor of *International Multilingual Research Journal*.

Chau Le earned her PhD in Curriculum & Instruction from Louisiana State University. Her research interests involve spatial production and nomadic

subjectivities in immigrant communities, out-of-school learning opportunities, and translingual pedagogy. She is working as an ESL teacher in the Louisiana public school system. Her goal is to study the ever-changing realities in public schools during the post-Covid era while contributing to the field of Teacher Education through practice-informed research and ethnographic observations.

Chujie Dai is a PhD from Massey University in New Zealand and has previously worked as a Chinese language lecturer in both traditional face-to-face and online settings in Southeast Asia and New Zealand. Her research interests stem from her teaching experience and are centered around the teaching of Chinese as an additional language, online language education, and language teachers' development of agency.

Finex Ndhlovu is Associate Professor of Language in Society at the University of New England, and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Graduate Centre, City University of New York and at the University of South Africa. Finex's research interests sit at the cutting edge of contemporary linguistic and socio-cultural theories around language, identity, and sociality in relation to transnational migrant, diaspora, and refugee communities. Finex's most recent publications include *Decolonising Multilingualism in Africa: Recentering Silenced Voices from the Global South, Critical Language & Literacy Studies Series, Multilingual Matters* (2021), and *Pan-African Identities and Literacies: The Orthographic Harmonization Debate Revisited* in the *South African Journal of African Languages*.

Gary Bonar is Lecturer in the Language Specialization and Master of TESOL courses in the Education Faculty at Monash University. His previous work in secondary education included the leadership role of Curriculum Coordinator, as well teacher of Japanese and Italian. His research interests include language teacher education, educator agency in English Medium of Instruction (EMI) contexts, translanguaging in international education contexts, and Asia-related learning in Australian schools.

Jennifer Cutri is Lecturer in the Department of Education at the Swinburne University of Technology, in Melbourne, Australia. Her experience as a former international teacher and researcher in Hong Kong informs her current research focus on teacher and learner identity, and agency within intercultural contexts. Jennifer's doctoral thesis builds upon her interest in Chinese-based

international teaching and learning by examining the transnational flow of educational discourses between China and Australia, focusing on curriculum, teacher, and student mobility. Further research interests involve engagement with autoethnographic methodology, doctoral student well-being, and the impact of the imposter phenomenon on academic identity.

Jian Tao is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics in School of Foreign Studies at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. Her research interests center around language teacher agency, identity, and emotions in educational change, and her work has appeared in *Teaching and Teacher Education, English for Specific Purposes, System, and Applied Linguistics Review*. She also serves on the editorial board of *System*.

Johanna Tigert, PhD, is Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at University of Massachusetts Lowell, where she prepares teachers to serve multilingual learners in grades PK-12. She is a Finnish immigrant to the United States and a former ESL and Finnish teacher. Her research explores issues related to language education, including the development of teachers' skills, knowledge, and dispositions for working in multilingual classrooms. She examines ways language and culture can be brought to the forefront of instruction, drawing on rich qualitative data gathered from classrooms and participants. Her recent publications have appeared in *TESOL Quarterly and TESOL Journal*.

John Turnbull is a PhD student in the Department of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He holds the MA TESOL from Northern Illinois University and has previously taught English in Colombia, Lithuania, Cape Verde, and Thailand. His research interests include telecollaboration, mobile-assisted language learning, and technology-infused language pedagogies.

Julie Choi is Associate Professor in Education (Additional Languages) in Languages and Literacies Education at the University of Melbourne. She is co-editor of the books *Language and Culture: Reflective Narratives* and the *Emergence of Identity, Plurilingualism in Teaching and Learning: Complexities across Contexts*, co-author of *Clarity and Coherence in Academic Writing: Using Language as a Resource*, and author of *Creating a Multivocal Self: Autoethnography as Method*.

Leonardo Veliz is Associate Professor in Language and Literacy Education at the University of New England. His research centers on broad issues of languages and literacy education in Australia and overseas. Leonardo has edited several volumes on multilingualism, multiculturalism, language teaching in Chile, multiliteracies, and language teacher agency.

Mairin Hennebry-Leung qualified as a Modern Languages' teacher in the UK and worked in the secondary school and adult sectors before taking up her first academic post. She is Senior Lecturer in Languages and TESOL at the University of Tasmania. She has worked as a language teacher educator in Australia, Hong Kong, Scotland and England. Mairin's current research focuses spans motivation in language teaching and learning, language teacher education, and trauma-informed language teaching practice. Mairin is Co-Editor-in-Chief of System and sits on various editorial boards.

Meihui Wang is Chinese language teacher and English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher in a secondary school in Melbourne. She has over ten years' teaching experience in diverse schools in Victoria. In addition, she takes a leading role in the language faculty in her current school. She joined the Faculty of Education at Monash University in 2019, working on a range of international professional development programs and teaching language units. Her research interests are EAL writing as well as language learning and teaching.

Minh Hue Nguyen is Senior Lecturer in TESOL/EAL Education at Monash University. She has been involved in TESOL/EAL education, curriculum development, and research in Asian and Australian institutions for about twenty years. Minh Hue has published in the areas of EAL teachers' professional learning focusing on professional knowledge, identity, emotion, agency, beliefs, practices, and collaboration with content area teachers.

Olive Nabukeera is ESL Lecturer at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Education, English and Literature, a Master of Arts in TESOL, a Master of Arts in International Education Management and a Doctorate in TESOL.

Özgehan Uştuk is a postdoctoral researcher and language teacher educator at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests include language teacher learning, identity, emotions, practitioner inquiry, and

drama-in-education. He is the chair of TESOL International Association's Research Professional Council (2023–4).

Priscila Leal is Lecturer in the College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Priscila's research investigates the development of critical consciousness in applied linguistics—i.e., how language teachers become and act as educators with a social justice orientation. Much of her current work focuses on culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy for multilingual learners. Her work, often in collaboration with other educator-researchers, has appeared in *System*, *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *Narrative Inquiry*, and *Reading in a Foreign Language*.

Ruth Fielding is Associate Professor at Monash University and researches multilingualism, identity, and interculturality in language education. Her research has appeared in journals such as the *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *Foreign Language Annals*, *Language Learning Journal*, *Language and Education*, *Babel*, and in a number of edited volumes. Ruth's books include *Multilingualism in the Australian Suburbs* (2015) and *Multilingualism Identity and Interculturality in Education* (2022).

Sedat Akayoğlu is Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Language Education at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in Turkey. He has been teaching pre-service teachers of English for almost twenty years. His research interests include Computer Assisted Language Learning, English Language Teacher Education, Culture in English Language Teaching, and Discourse Analysis. His current projects include designing and implementing telecollaboration initiatives to enhance preservice teachers' intercultural communicative competence.

Serdar Şen is a graduate student at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, specializing in computer-assisted language learning. With a deep passion for education and technology, Serdar's research focuses on exploring the dynamic interplay between teacher identity, multicultural learning environments, and technology implementation. He is particularly interested in understanding how teachers' identities shape their pedagogical approaches and how multicultural contexts influence language learning outcomes. He aims to contribute to the field by developing effective strategies that promote inclusive education and empower language learners in diverse settings by bridging the gap between technology and language learning.

Sultan Maviş is an MA student in the department of English Language Teaching at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University. She got a BA degree in English Language Teaching from Gazi University in 2017. She has been teaching English at a secondary level MoNE (Ministry of National Education) school in Turkey for four years. Her research interests include intercultural communicative competence, language teacher identity, and telecollaboration studies.

Thi Kim Anh Dang is Senior Lecturer in TESOL and Languages Education at the Faculty of Education, Monash University. Her research interests include English-Medium Instruction, TESOL teacher collaborative learning, teacher agency, professional identity, globalization in teacher education, Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, and activity theory. She has published in high-impact international journals, including *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Critical Studies in Education*, and *Current Issues in Language Planning*.

Xuan Minh Ngo is a PhD student at the University of Queensland, Australia. Minh's research interests lie in the intersection of language assessment, language policy, and teacher education. His works have appeared in *System, Language Teaching Research*, *English Today*, *Asian Englishes, Asian EFL Journal*, and *Journal of World Languages* as well as in edited volumes.

Xuesong (Andy) Gao is Professor of Language and Literacy Education in the School of Education, the University of New South Wales, Australia. His research interests include language learner autonomy, language education policy, and language teacher education.

Yvette Slaughter is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. Her teaching and research focus on advancing theoretical and pedagogical innovations for languages education. She is co-editor of *Challenging the monolingual mindset*, and Reframing language in teaching and learning, a special edition for *Language Teaching Research*, and also publishes in *TESOL Quarterly*, *ReCALL*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, and *History of Education Quarterly*.