Constructing Identity: Insights from Second Language Teachers' Biographies

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate and evolving nature of language teacher identity (LTI) through a narrative inquiry into the life stories of four Mexican English language teachers. LTI plays a pivotal role in shaping educators' self-perceptions, pedagogical decisions, and classroom interactions. Using a qualitative narrative approach, the research delves into the participants' biographies to reveal how their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and professional contexts influence the formation of their identities. The findings highlight three central identity frames: instructional, disciplinary, and professional. Instructional identities are molded by classroom practices and student interactions, while disciplinary identities are shaped by the teachers' knowledge and beliefs about language education. Professional identities, on the other hand, emerge from a blend of experiences, motivations, and aspirations. Notably, the study uncovers the significant role of caring practices in resolving identity tensions, aligning with ethics of care theory. These insights enhance the understanding of LTI as a dynamic and continually negotiated construct, influenced by various educational contexts. The study underscores the importance of reflective and caring practices in teacher education programs to support the comprehensive development of teacher identity.

Keywords: biographies, identity frames, language teacher identity, México, narrative inquiry

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Construyendo identidad: perspectivas desde las biografías de profesores de segunda lengua

Resumen

Este estudio explora la naturaleza intrincada y en evolución de la identidad del profesor de idiomas (LTI) a través de una investigación narrativa de las historias de vida de cuatro profesores de inglés mexicanos. La LTI desempeña un papel fundamental en la configuración de las percepciones que los educadores tienen de sí mismos, en sus decisiones pedagógicas y en sus interacciones en el aula. Utilizando un enfoque narrativo cualitativo, la investigación profundiza en las biografías de los participantes para revelar cómo sus experiencias personales, contextos culturales y entornos profesionales influyen en la formación de sus identidades. Los hallazgos destacan tres marcos de identidad centrales: instruccional, disciplinario y profesional. Las identidades instruccionales se moldean a través de las prácticas en el aula y las interacciones con los estudiantes, mientras que las identidades disciplinarias se forman a partir del conocimiento y las creencias de los profesores sobre la enseñanza de idiomas. Por otro lado, las identidades profesionales emergen de una combinación de experiencias, motivaciones y aspiraciones. Notablemente, el estudio descubre el papel significativo de las prácticas de cuidado en la resolución de tensiones de identidad, alineándose con la teoría de la ética del cuidado. Estos conocimientos mejoran la comprensión de la LTI como un constructo dinámico y continuamente negociado, influenciado por diversos contextos educativos. El estudio subraya la importancia de las prácticas reflexivas y de cuidado en los programas de formación docente para apoyar el desarrollo integral de la identidad del profesor.

Palabras clave: biografías, marcos de identidad, identidad de profesores de inglés, México, investigación narrativa

Introduction

The formation of teachers' professional identities is deeply influenced by their personal stories and life experiences (Peercy, 2012). These biographies occur within personal and institutional contexts and involve interactions with family, students, colleagues, and community members, which shape their beliefs about teaching and learning (Freeman, 2016). From these narratives, teachers develop lay theories—beliefs formed naturally over time without formal instruction (Holt-Reynolds, 1992). These lay theories represent tacit knowledge gained through life and classroom experiences, often remaining unexamined. While teaching identities start with individual personalities, they are shaped by factors such as family, apprenticeship of observation, unusual teaching episodes, policies, traditions, and cultural understandings (Sugrue, 1997). Teachers' biographies are essential in forming their professional identities (Beijaard et al., 2004) and serve as a frame guiding how teachers interpret their teaching experiences (Yazan, 2015). This study explores language teachers' professional identity formation through their life stories, aiming to uncover the interaction between their experiences, beliefs, and teaching practices.

Identity

Identity can be understood as the unique set of attributes associated with an individual, perceived in relation to others (Pennington, 2015). These perceptions arise from differences that hold social significance within a given culture, including physical traits, abilities, skills, societal roles, and group affiliations (Gee, 2001; Cummins, 2011). However, identity involves more than just a catalog of specific characteristics; it is also influenced by the context or activity in which the individual is situated (Pennington, 2015). Consequently, the perception and expression of individuals' identities can vary depending on the specific situation or environment (Pennington & Richards, 2016). The development of identity is a fundamental aspect of human growth and plays a critical role in one's place within society. As individuals navigate different environments, they continuously negotiate their identities and position, often interacting with and sometimes conflicting with the roles and perceptions of others. This negotiation involves accepting, reinforcing, minimizing, or challenging the classifications and categories they encounter or are assigned. Thus, identity formation is not a static or straightforward process; rather, it is a dynamic and intricate journey that evolves through social and cultural interactions (Block, 2008; Norton, 1997; Varghese et al., 2005).

Language teacher identity

Language teacher identity (LTI) is a multifaceted concept that shapes how educators perceive and enact their roles. Influenced by personal experiences, teaching specializations, and broader social and cultural contexts (Johnson, 1996), LTI plays a key role in shaping teachers' self-perceptions, instructional decisions, and interactions with students and colleagues. It is socially constructed and evolves through classroom experiences (Sachs, 2005; Olsen, 2008). As a result, it is dynamic rather than fixed, being continuously influenced by immediate environments, past self-concepts, social positioning, and ongoing interactions. This complexity allows teachers to engage differently with their roles over time, revising their identities through learning and teacher education (Norton, 2000; Yazan, 2018a).

The construction of LTI is an ongoing process that involves the negotiation and enactment of professional selves across various ecological spheres (Singh & Richards, 2006). These spheres refer to socially and culturally structured environments, particularly within teacher education settings, where identity is continuously shaped. In these contexts, teacher-learners engage in meaningful practices, interact with peers and mentors, and use pedagogical tools that influence their professional development. LTI does not emerge in isolation but through active participation in dynamic and socially situated learning environments that support reflection, positioning, and transformation.

The development of LTI is closely linked to professional growth, influencing how teachers approach teaching practices and make decisions regarding instructional behaviors (Hammerness et al., 2005). LTI encompasses a dynamic self-conception and vision of educators that shifts as they engage with different communities (Yazan, 2018a). This identity impacts numerous aspects of their professional lives, including learning how to fulfill their roles, apply theoretical knowledge, educate students, and collaborate with colleagues. It is inherently relational and evolves through continuous interactions within social contexts (Gee, 2001). The professional landscape metaphor (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) highlights the importance of context in shaping professional identity. Indeed, teachers operate

within a broader landscape that includes researchers, policymakers, school administrators, and teacher educators, all influencing what is considered professional within teachers' identities. This interconnectedness emphasizes the need for dialogue among stakeholders to better understand LTI. Analyzing LTI offers valuable insights into the challenges educators face throughout their careers. It significantly influences their teaching methods, professional development, and responses to educational changes (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). LTI is continuously formed throughout a career and influenced by personal, professional, and political dimensions (Mockler, 2011). In second language teaching contexts, LTI refers to L2 educators' perceptions of their professional roles, which can vary over time (Sadeghi & Bahari, 2022). LTI has been examined from various theoretical perspectives including sociocultural and poststructuralist frameworks viewing identities as fluid and shaped by personal agency and external influences (Aneja, 2016; Norton, 2013). Key components of LTI include understanding work contexts, perceptions in teaching, decision-making based on personal values and knowledge, and ongoing reflection in response to changes (Miller, 2009). Recent research has recognized the significance of transcultural identities in highlighting the fluidity of LTI beyond static categories (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). Ultimately, the concept of LTI provides a framework for theorizing how teachers learn to become educators and navigate their practices within sociohistorical contexts. This perspective captures the interplay between personal and professional dimensions of being a language teacher, encompassing knowledge, beliefs, values, priorities, and aspirations (Kalaja et al., 2016; Olsen, 2016).

Literature Review

The literature review is organized into three sections: empirical research studies, major works on language teacher identity, and methodological approaches to language teacher identity (LTI). This review provides a comprehensive overview of the current understanding and research in the field of LTI.

Empirical Research Studies

The following summary of studies is by no means exhaustive; it is intended to highlight some of the most recent studies addressing teacher identity. Empirical research on language teacher identity offers valuable insights into the lived experiences and identity development processes of language teachers.

Across recent empirical studies, the development of language teacher identity emerges as a dynamic, multifaceted process shaped by reflection, emotional experience, and sociocultural context. Several studies emphasize reflective practice as central to identity formation. Alsup (2018) shows how Teresa, a pre-service teacher, uses self-assessment and feedback to balance authority and vulnerability. Yazan (2018b) finds ESOL candidates revise priorities and test imagined identities through reflection during coursework and internships. Kahveci (2021) links EFL teachers' self-perception and future outlooks to motivation and task engagement. Emotions and beliefs also shape identity: Li (2020) highlights how emotions and support foster security and growth in two Chinese teachers. Weng et al. (2024) present *perezhivanie*, emotional experience impacting teaching identity across cultures.

Sociocultural and contextual influences also feature prominently in the research as well. Yazan and Keles (2024), employing an autoethnographic approach, illustrate how socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural factors shape identity trajectories, as seen in Ufuk Keles's journey from student to teacher and researcher. The transformative role of education and social context is further explored in Kahveci (2021), which examines how Turkish EFL teachers' self-image and motivation are shaped by broader cultural and institutional settings. Montgomery et al. (2024) extend this perspective by investigating the impact of caring practices on teacher well-being and identity tensions, finding that building personal connections with students not only supports student well-being but also helps teachers resolve internal identity conflicts.

The negotiation of multiple and intersecting identities emerges as a recurring theme across these studies. Weng et al. (2024) and Yazan (2018b) both demonstrate how teachers navigate and adapt their identities in response to local and global demands, whether through emotional engagement or through participation in communities of practice. The importance of external support, whether from mentors, communities, or institutional structures, is

underscored in both Li (2020) and Alsup (2018), who point to the challenges teachers face in building relationships and the value of supportive environments for professional development.

Together, these studies highlight that language teacher identity is not static but continually negotiated through reflective practice, emotional engagement, and the ongoing interplay of personal, professional, and contextual factors. Research on the subject underscores the necessity of addressing the complexities of teacher identity through an integrative lens that accounts for reflection, emotion, context, and the negotiation of multiple identities.

Major Works on Language Teacher Identity

Recent major works in LTI research underscore the field's growing recognition of the dynamic, multifaceted, and context-dependent nature of teacher identities. Central to many of these studies is the idea that LTI is constructed, negotiated, and continually evolving through discourse, socialization, and professional engagement (Cheung *et al*., 2015; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020; Sang, 2022). Across the literature, identity is framed as multiple and shifting, with teachers' professional selves influenced by their participation in communities of practice and their responses to changing educational and sociopolitical environments (Cheung *et al*., 2015; Tajeddin & Yazan, 2024).

The role of agency and emotion emerges as a recurring theme. Hong *et al*. (2018) emphasize that agency is not static but is shaped by context, experience, and emotional states, which directly affect teachers' self-perception, effectiveness, and identity development. Yazan and Lindahl (2020) similarly highlight the emotionally charged nature of identity work, arguing that agency and investment are integral to teachers' professional learning and negotiation of their roles. This is echoed in Tajeddin and Yazan (2024), who discuss how teachers' decisions and identities are influenced by policy, school culture, and community needs, often resulting in tensions that require emotional and professional navigation.

Sociocultural perspectives and the process of socialization are also foregrounded. Kayi-Aydar (2019) notes a shift since 2010 toward exploring sociocultural dimensions and non-native speaker identities, with identity now understood as deeply entwined with classroom practices, professional development, and interactional dynamics. Sang (2022) and Sadeghi and Bahari (2022) underscore the significance of socialization processes in L2 teacher identity formation. In particular, Sadeghi and Bahari's review delineates multiple diverse identity categories, including linguistic, professional, bi/multilingual, and gendered identities, and calls for further research into how pre-service teachers' identities are shaped through social and professional experiences.

Methodologically, the literature demonstrates a move toward narrative, process-oriented, and constructivist approaches, often advocating for examining identity through multiple theoretical lenses to capture its complexity (Cheung *et al*., 2015; Sang, 2022). Narrative and discourse-based methodologies are valued for their ability to reveal how teachers make sense of their experiences and negotiate professional selves.

Collectively, these works show that language teacher identity is not a fixed attribute but a processual, contextually situated phenomenon. The literature points to the central role of identity work in teachers' professional growth, advocating for nuanced, context-sensitive research that continues to expand the boundaries of LTI scholarship.

Methodological Approaches to LTI

Methodological approaches and theoretical models provide conceptual frameworks for understanding and researching language teacher identity, highlighting its multifaceted and evolving nature. Pennington and Richards (2016) and Richards (2012) identify ten core areas essential for expertise in language teaching, illustrating how teacher identity evolves. These areas encompass language proficiency, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, language teacher identity, learner-focused teaching, pedagogical reasoning skills, theorizing from practice, community membership, and professionalism. They categorize these competencies into foundational and advanced levels, emphasizing the dynamic nature of language teacher identity shaped by personal experience and professional development.

Pennington (2015) models TESOL teacher identity through practice-centered and contextual frames. Practice-centered frames encompass instructional, disciplinary, professional, vocational, and economic identities, whereas contextual frames explore global, local, and sociocultural identities. This model highlights the complex nature of TESOL teacher identity by integrating both practice-centered and contextual elements. De Costa and Norton (2017) employ a transdisciplinary framework to examine language teacher identity, considering macro (societal), meso (school), and micro (classroom) pressures. This framework aids teachers in navigating dominant ideologies and institutional constraints while emphasizing the interconnectedness of these pressures in shaping legitimate teacher identities. Kelchtermans (2009) presents a personal interpretive framework with five key elements contributing to understanding teachers' professional identities: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective. These components enhance self-awareness and reflective practice among teachers.

Together, these methodological approaches underscore the necessity for comprehensive methods to capture the complexity of language teacher identity. They highlight the interplay between personal experiences, contextual factors, and professional development in shaping identities. The literature consistently portrays language teacher identity as dynamic, multifaceted, and context-dependent. Empirical studies emphasize reflective practices' importance along with emotional dimensions and sociocultural contexts in identity formation. Major reviews highlight the evolving focus of LTI research on agency, emotions, and contextual influences. Collectively, this body of work advances understanding of language teacher identity while providing valuable insights for teacher education and professional development.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a narrative inquiry approach to investigate the teaching identities of four Mexican English language teachers through their life stories. As noted by Dörnyei (2007), qualitative research is inherently interpretative, with outcomes shaped by the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe qualitative research as an activity that situates the observer within the world, making it visible through various representations such as field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos. They emphasize that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, interpreting them based on the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. Hesse-Biber (2010) asserts that an interpretative approach aligns with qualitative research, distinguished not by the methods employed but by the ontological and epistemological perspectives adopted by the researcher. This approach rejects the notion of an "objective reality" inherent in positivistic research, viewing social reality as constructed through individuals' interactions with their surroundings.

Narrative Inquiry Approach

Narrative inquiry offers a concise, context-sensitive approach to understanding how teachers construct their professional identities through lived experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe humans as natural storytellers who make sense of the world through narratives. In education, this perspective highlights that teaching and learning are embedded in the evolving stories teachers tell and reflect upon.

More than a method, narrative inquiry represents an epistemological stance emphasizing subjectivity and context. Bolívar (2002) argues it challenges positivist paradigms by centering lived experience, what Dilthey called *Erlebnis*, and interpreting it through reflective storytelling. This biographical-narrative framework draws on five dimensions: it is narrative, constructivist, contextual, interactionist, and dynamic, reflecting the evolving and relational nature of identity (Bolívar & Domingo, 2006).

In this study, narrative inquiry functions both as a method and as a process of meaning-making. Bruner (1988) notes that narrative is not just a mode of communication, but a way of thinking that shapes how individuals interpret their identities and actions.

As part of the narrative inquiry process, participants were asked to write autobiographical accounts (life stories) detailing their language learning and teaching experiences. Due to time constraints, only two sessions, each lasting

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two hours, were held in which participants met with the researcher to discuss and develop their narratives. The researcher conducted individual one-hour interviews with each participant to further explore and expand upon the information provided in their autobiographical accounts.

These life stories incorporated personal, academic, and professional dimensions, including interactions with family members, students, parents, fellow teachers, and community stakeholders. The narratives served as data sources and foundational elements for shaping semi-structured interviews. For example, when a participant noted their mother significantly influenced their teaching decision, this was used to develop interview questions prompting elaboration on that influence. This enabled deeper exploration of how familial and social relationships shape teacher identity.

By adopting narrative inquiry, this research explores language teacher identity as a socially situated, dynamic, and interpretive process.

Participants and Data Collection

This study draws on the autobiographies of four in-service language teachers who were not enrolled in any teacher preparation program at the time of participation. The participants were selected through convenience sampling, as they were former colleagues. Each teacher contributed a distinct personal and professional perspective to the study. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in place of their real names.

Joel, one of the participants, has eighteen years of teaching experience. He previously worked in religious communities in Africa, an experience that significantly shapes his worldview. Joel is highly critical of educational policies in Mexico and often dedicates time in his classes to raise students' awareness about the challenges they may face in the labor market. Drawing on his international experiences, having lived not only in Africa but also in Europe, he frequently contrasts the educational and professional contexts of Mexico, Africa, and Europe to provide his students with a broader perspective.

Pedro holds a bachelor's degree in business administration and has been teaching English for four years. For much of his life, he worked as a sales agent in several businesses. After losing his job, he encountered significant challenges reentering the workforce, which eventually led him to pursue teaching English as a second language. This transition was difficult for Pedro, but it provided new opportunities and a fresh professional path.

Karina holds a graduate degree in engineering and has been teaching English for two years. From a young age, she was exposed to the field of education, which has given her a deep connection to teaching and shaped her professional aspirations.

Gabriel has an engineering degree in computer science and has been teaching English for five years. His academic background in both engineering and language education enables him to bring interdisciplinary insights to his teaching practice.

The autobiographies, originally written in Spanish, are presented in the findings section in their English-translated form. In these life stories, participants reflected on their language learning and teaching experiences. These autobiographical narratives served as the foundation for semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008, as cited in Brinkmann, 2013), in order to deepen and expand on the experiences described.

To analyze the collected narratives and interviews, I employed Pennington's (2015) frames model, which offers a structured yet flexible lens for exploring the multifaceted nature of language teacher identity. The analysis began with a close reading of each participant's life story and interview transcript to identify key themes, experiences, and self-perceptions related to teaching. I then coded segments of the data using the model's two main categories: **practice-centered frames** and **contextual frames**:

Table 1. *Frames model*

FRAME / CATEGORY	DEFINITION
Practice-Centered Frames	Orientations and practices involved in TESOL work.
Instructional identity	How a teacher approaches and enacts teaching, including classroom roles and methods.
Disciplinary identity	The teacher's link to fields of knowledge (linguistics, education), academic background, and research.
Professional identity	Involvement with professional standards, organizations, colleagues, and development.
Vocational identity	Commitment to teaching as a calling, intrinsic motivation, and service to students.
Economic identity	Perspectives on compensation, job security, and professional value in TESOL.
Contextual Frames	Contexts that influence TESOL work and teacher identity.
Global identity	Awareness of and engagement with international trends, English varieties, and multiculturalism.
Local identity	Orientation to the immediate institutional, community, or national context.
Sociocultural identity	Social and cultural background (e.g., language, ethnicity, gender) and approach to diversity.

Note. Pennington (2015).

This process involved iterative cycles of reading, coding, and comparison, with particular attention to how each teacher expressed their orientations, motivations, and experiences within these different frames. I then compared and contrasted the coded data across participants to identify commonalities, divergences, and unique features in their language teacher identities. By applying Pennington's frames model, I was able to map out how personal, professional, and contextual factors interacted in each teacher's narrative.

Findings

Practice-Centered Frames

Instructional Identities

Instructional identity comprises classroom persona and roles, interactional practices and approaches, teacher-student relationships, and the teacher's conceptualization of teaching acts.

Classroom Persona and Roles

Pedro recalls a strict teacher who emphasized discipline:
I remember a teacher, short… he would say, look, either you pay attention or you take a lap around the field, he would say… look, you have to pay attention to the details, he would say, either you are here, or you leave… (Ped SUI1)

This memory shows the teacher's strict rule enforcement and attention to detail. Pedro views discipline as key to effective teaching.

Instructional Practices and Approaches

Karla describes one of her best teachers as follows: "The best teacher I had would first teach the structure and end with a fun activity... but he would make you practice when you felt confident enough to participate…" (Kar SUI2). Karla values a teaching style that balances clear theory with engaging activities and lets students practice when ready, boosting their confidence. She supports using this approach in her own teaching.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Gabriel shares a challenge with a student:
…one time a girl challenged me in class, and I spoke to her sternly… at the end of the class, I talked to her and tried to harmonize the situation with her and explained that when she did certain things, it bothered me. When I get upset, I later reflect and say, it shouldn't have been that way. (Gab SUI3)

This comment shows Gabriel's awareness of the complexities in teacher-student relationships. He balances firm authority with empathy by later discussing issues to restore harmony, demonstrating his commitment to relationship repair and personal growth.

Teacher's Conceptualization of Teaching Acts

Pedro reflects on his former professors, stating: "I have learned because I have taken the good from each teacher and the bad, simply not to do it…" (Ped SUI1). Pedro views teaching as learning from experience, applying positive lessons and avoiding past mistakes. He says these experiences shape his teaching approach.

These comments reveal that teachers' instructional identities are shaped by their experiences, methods, and student interactions, developing through a mix of personal reflection and practice.

Disciplinary Identity

Disciplinary identity centers on the teacher's link to fields like linguistics, applied linguistics, education, and their role in research and academic credibility.

Karina comments on her teaching approach, "I put in practice the theory that helps me in my class… it depends on the necessities of my students and the resources that I have to do my job" (Kar SUI2). This comment shows Karina's commitment to applying theory in her teaching. Drawing from TESOL certifications, she stresses adapting theory to students' needs and resources, linking disciplinary knowledge to practical instruction.

Professional Identities

Professional identity includes integrating disciplinary knowledge and standards into teaching, engaging with professional networks, and evolving through ongoing experiences.

Integration of Disciplinary Knowledge, Standards, and Practices

Pedro reflects on his learning from past teachers:
… I have learned because I have taken the good from each teacher and the bad, simply not to do it… (Ped SU1I)

This comment shows Pedro shapes his teaching by learning from others' strengths and weaknesses, integrating effective methods and professional standards into his practice.

Engagement with Professional Bodies and Networks

Karina reflects on the influences in her teaching career:
… something that has greatly influenced my career as a teacher is that I have always been surrounded by teachers. My parents are teachers… I remember when I was going to give my first demo class, my mom helped me prepare the class and told me what I had to do and what I had to pay attention to… (Kar SUI2)

Karina's experience shows that being part of a network of teachers, even within her family, has offered valuable support and advice. This informal engagement helps her learn about teaching practices and professional expectations, similar to the role of professional bodies and networks.

Evolution of Professional Identity Through Experience

Pedro recalls an influential teacher from his own time as a student:

I was fortunate to have a teacher who motivated the group and me especially. Personally, the teacher influenced my learning in such a way that I liked studying, she made me see characteristics that I didn't know I had and resulted in me earning a diploma as the second place in my group, and I still remember it as if it were yesterday. (Ped LS1)

This comment highlights how a positive teaching experience can have lasting effects on teachers' development. Pedro explains that the motivation and support from this teacher still influence his approach, showing how meaningful mentorship shapes professional identity growth.

Vocational Identities

These comments are grouped by their focus on commitment to teaching, intrinsic satisfaction, and a service-oriented approach. Pedro recalls an experience as a teacher:

I remember one day there were graduations and I was at the ceremony… a student approached me and thanked me. I barely remembered her, but the fact that you see that your work is useful, it encourages you to keep doing your job. (Ped SUI1)

This comment shows how appreciation from a former student gave Pedro a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Such experiences strengthen his commitment to teaching and highlight the service-oriented nature of vocational identities.

In the following comment, Karina shares a personal reflection: "Every time I see one of my students who doesn't understand, he/she is my reflection, and I try to help them as I would have liked to be helped" (Kar SUI2). Karina's empathy and commitment to supporting students are evident here, grounded in her own learning experiences. Her desire to help students as she was helped highlights her service orientation and fulfillment in making a difference.

These comments show how the teachers' vocational identities have developed through experience. They reveal strong commitment, intrinsic satisfaction, dedication, adaptability, and a humanistic, service-oriented approach focused on empathy, support, and growth. These reflections illustrate how personal experience and commitment shape vocational identity.

Economic Identities

Economic identities relate to the participants' experiences and reflections on their economic motivations, rewards, and concerns within the TESOL field.

Pedro reflects on one of his first teaching experiences: "Upon arriving at a new school … I suffered rejection from my students for not knowing anyone and also due to my economic condition. The rejection was such that I didn't want to go to school" (Ped SUI1).

This comment highlights how Pedro's economic situation affected his sense of belonging and job satisfaction. Working in a private school and public university, financial challenges influenced his professional experience, including not following dress codes. Economic factors shape teachers' acceptance, satisfaction, and well-being, impacting TESOL educators' identities.

Contextual Frames

Global Identities

Global identities reflect teachers' international outlook, knowledge of global trends, and awareness of various scapes (ethnoscape, financescape, technoscape, infospace, ideoscape, linguascape) and global issues, as described by Appadurai (1996) and Pennington and Hoekje (2010).

Joel, who has studied in Europe and taught as a missionary in Africa, shares his perspective:
I shared my knowledge at first, always with the idea of impacting the student's life, but I faced a different reality. When I first came back from Europe, I started to observe that our educational system is lagging behind. In Mexico, they don't teach you to learn, but to repeat, imitate, and do everything very superficially… there is no passion for studying. (Joe LS3)

This comment shows Joel's global perspective, comparing Mexican education to practices abroad. His experiences in Europe and Africa led him to critique local limitations and adopt international teaching standards. Joel's view reflects an international orientation and a wish to apply global best practices.

Local Identities

The local identity of TESOL teachers reflects their place within departmental, institutional, community, and national contexts, showing awareness of constraints and priorities that shape their instructional and professional identities.

Pedro describes a teaching method that he uses:
The teacher begins by telling students about the topic they will be covering today (Simple present and frequency adverbs). The teacher tries to contextualize the topic by telling his students what he usually does. He writes a formula: subject + frequency adverb + verb. He asks students to write sentences using the simple present and advises them to rely on the formula to write their sentences. (Ped LS1)

Pedro's teaching adapts to his university's expectations and norms. By contextualizing grammar and offering clear formulas, he meets students' needs and aligns with institutional practices, showing how local context shapes instructional and professional identity.

Joel reflects on his experience teaching at two different institutions:
I work in two schools, one private and one public. In one, the students arrive having already eaten breakfast and in the other, they only have enough for the bus… Some have been in contact with the language since childhood and here (in the public school) the students do not have access to that… depending on the students, I prepare my classes… (Joe LS4)

This comment reveals that Joel's teaching adapts to each school's context. He modifies lessons based on students' socio-economic backgrounds and language exposure. His flexibility shows how local contexts influence instructional decisions and professional identity in TESOL.

Pedro shares a formative experience as a student after moving to a new city
When I arrived in Irapuato, I joined the school halfway through the semester, and the teacher didn't like it because she already had her own system. She kept pushing me aside, you're not part of them, and what happened… you simply didn't exist. (Ped LS1)

This experience of exclusion highlights challenges in adapting to institutional norms and personal limits. Pedro now consciously avoids excluding students, motivated by empathy and legal awareness. His past marginalization shapes his teaching and local professional identity, showing how context influences inclusive practices.

Sociocultural Identities

Sociocultural identities involve how teachers' linguistic, ethnic, racial, and gender traits shape their interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational community.

Joel reflects on his teaching in two schools:
I work in two schools, one private and one public. In one, the students arrive already having breakfast, and in the other, they only have enough for the bus… some have been in contact with the language since childhood, and here the students do not have access to that… depending on the students, I prepare my classes… (Joe LS4)

In this comment, Joel shows awareness of his students' diverse linguistic and social backgrounds. He adjusts his teaching to different language proficiencies and socio-economic levels, demonstrating sensitivity to each classroom's sociocultural context.

Karina recalls an experience with a former teacher:
Another unforgettable teacher was … He used to say that women had no reason to study. He would say, 'they only want the certificate to get married… (Kar SUI2)

Karina's experience with gender bias highlights how societal and cultural attitudes influence education. She actively rejects discrimination in her teaching, emphasizing inclusivity and diversity in TESOL.

The findings show that TESOL teachers' identities are shaped by personal experiences, instructional methods, professional involvement, and contextual factors. Teachers draw on past influences, adapt to local and global settings, and navigate economic and sociocultural realities, informing their teaching and continual development.

Discussion

This study investigated the development of language teacher identity among participants, with particular attention to how their experiences as both students and teachers shape the integration of practice-centered and contextual frames. To clarify and strengthen the discussion, the findings are discussed in two distinct parts: (1) experiences and influences from participants' time as students, and (2) participants' reflections and practices as teachers. A third section is added that addresses the affective factor involved in language teacher identity.

Experiences as students: Foundations for identity formation

Participants' recollections of their time as students provided a foundational lens for understanding the evolution of their professional identities. These formative experiences shaped not only participants' instructional choices but also their broader beliefs about inclusion, motivation, and classroom relationships. For instance, Pedro states the following: "I have learned because I have taken the good from each teacher and the bad, simply not to do it" (Ped SUI1). His reflection captures a process of critical integration, as described in Pennington's (2015) framework, where disciplinary knowledge, standards, and professional practices are selectively adopted or avoided. Such reflections resonate with Alsup's (2018) assertion that teacher identity is forged through a dynamic interplay between personal experiences and professional aspirations, and with Yazan (2018b), who highlights how imagined and real identities are continually tested and revised through reflection.

Similarly, Karina's account of gender bias in her early educational experiences, where a teacher openly questioned the value of women's education, demonstrates how sociocultural attitudes and structural inequalities can leave a lasting imprint. These experiences later inform her commitment to inclusivity and equity in her own teaching practice, echoing the sociocultural perspectives highlighted by Kayi-Aydar (2019) and Sadeghi and Bahari (2022). Pedro's experience of exclusion upon entering a new school environment further underscores the importance of belonging and inclusion, aligning with Yazan and Lindahl's (2020) recognition of the affective and social dimensions of professional identity work. These findings illustrate that teachers' professional selves are rooted in their earlier encounters with institutional norms, peer dynamics, and moments of affirmation or marginalization.

Teachers' practices and identities: Ongoing negotiation and adaptation

As teachers, participants demonstrated an active, ongoing negotiation of multiple professional identities, often directly informed by their formative student experiences. The transition from student to teacher was characterized by a conscious effort to integrate positive models and reject negative influences from the past, in line with Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice and Pennington's (2015) notion of practice-centered frames. For instance, Gabriel's balancing of discipline and empathy in the classroom mirrors the authority-vulnerability

duality that Alsup (2018) describes as central to the teaching role. His reflections on conflict resolution and relationship-building with students illustrate how professional identity is continuously constructed through practice, self-assessment, and adjustment.

Karina's engagement with professional networks, both formal and informal, such as the support received from her family of educators, demonstrates the value of collaborative learning and mentorship, reflecting Wenger's (1998) and Li's (2020) emphasis on professional communities. The ongoing adaptation to institutional expectations and student needs, as seen in Pedro's contextualized grammar lessons or Joel's adjustments across private and public schools, highlights how local and global contexts intersect in shaping instructional and professional identities (Cheung *et al.*, 2015; Tajeddin & Yazan, 2024).

Emotions, Caring Practices, and Intersectionality

Emotional experiences and caring practices emerged as especially salient in the development and expression of teacher identity. Participants' accounts were replete with moments where emotion and empathy played a decisive role in instructional decisions and relationships with students. For instance, Pedro's sense of fulfillment upon receiving gratitude from a former student underscores the vocational and service-oriented dimensions of teaching, as discussed by Montgomery *et al.* (2024) and Noddings' (2015) ethics of care. Karina's empathetic response to students who struggle, shaped by her own past as a learner, demonstrates the centrality of affective engagement and personalized support.

The findings of this study resonate strongly with Weng *et al.* (2024), who identify *perezhivanie*, the deep emotional impact of lived experience, as a key mediating factor in the negotiation of multiple, intersecting identities. Like Mark in Weng's study, teachers in the present research are seen to adapt and re-envision their identities in response to the emotional realities of their classrooms, as well as broader institutional and cultural pressures. This underscores the importance of examining identity through the lens of emotion and intersectionality, revealing how professional agency, self-concept, and instructional practice are shaped by the interplay of personal history, social context, and lived emotional experience.

Implications for Second Language Teacher Education

The findings of this study suggest several implications for second language teacher education. Teacher education programs could incorporate reflective practices, such as life story narratives and semi-structured interviews, to help teachers better understand and develop their professional identities (Farrell, 2018). Professional development should be flexible and ongoing, supporting teachers' evolving identities through self-reflection and collaborative environments, as recommended by Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory. Programs should also address the emotional aspects of teaching by including training on emotional regulation and resilience (Cheung *et al.*, 2015; Hong *et al.*, 2018). Finally, ensuring financial support and job security is crucial, as economic stability enhances teachers' commitment and well-being. By integrating these elements, teacher education programs can better foster strong and adaptable professional identities in language teachers.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the expanding field of language teacher identity by foregrounding the central role of reflective practice, the impact of caring relationships, and the value of narrative methodologies in understanding and supporting teacher development. By separating and closely examining teachers' experiences as both students and educators, the research demonstrates how personal history, emotional experience, and professional context intertwine to shape evolving professional identities. The findings underscore that effective teacher education and professional development must address not only pedagogical skills but also emotional resilience, collaborative learning, and inclusivity, fostering environments in which teachers can continuously reflect, adapt, and grow.

Furthermore, this study draws attention to the influence of local, global, and economic contexts on teachers' professional trajectories, highlighting the need to account for greater attention to social, cultural, and financial realities in both policy and practice. Future research should adopt holistic, mixed-methods approaches that capture the dynamic interplay between individual agency and contextual forces, as well as the intersectionality and emotional complexity of teachers' lives. Such comprehensive understanding is vital for building robust support systems and sustainable practices that empower language teachers and ultimately elevate the quality of language education.

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