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Negotiating Professional Identity Under Institutional Constraints: Emotional Experiences of Novice EFL Teachers at A Private University in Hanoi

Bui Thi Khanh Huyen[1], Tran Nho Huong[2]

[1,2]Dai Nam University, Hanoi

ABSTRACT: Despite a growing body of research on teacher identity, the role of emotion in shaping identity construction remains insufficiently theorized, particularly in higher education contexts where institutional pressures are increasingly intensified. This study addresses this gap by examining how novice EFL teachers negotiate their professional identity through emotionally mediated experiences within a Vietnamese university setting. Adopting a qualitative multiple case study design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with six novice teachers and employs a theoretically informed thematic analysis grounded in sociocultural perspectives on identity and emotion. The findings reveal that identity construction is not a linear developmental process but an ongoing negotiation shaped by three interrelated dynamics: emotionally charged tensions between personal beliefs and institutional demands, relational positioning within institutional and classroom interactions, and strategic identity work under structural constraints. This study makes two key contributions. First, it reconceptualizes teacher identity as fundamentally emotionally mediated, challenging approaches that privilege cognitive or developmental perspectives. Second, it demonstrates how institutional conditions actively configure the emotional landscapes through which identity is negotiated. By foregrounding the emotion–identity nexus, the study calls for a reorientation of teacher development frameworks toward more contextually grounded and affectively responsive models.

KEYWORDS: professional identity, institutional constraints, novice EFL teachers, emotional experiences, qualitative research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely recognized as an emotional practice (Hargreaves, 1998), yet this fundamental dimension is often overshadowed in reform-driven educational contexts where teachers are primarily positioned as implementers of policy. As a result, the complex emotional and professional realities through which teachers make sense of their work—and of themselves—tend to remain underexplored.

Within the Vietnamese context, ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of English language education have further intensified expectations placed on teachers. National policy initiatives have consistently emphasized the need for pedagogical innovation and continuous professional development, positioning English as a strategic resource for global integration. However, despite these ambitions, a growing body of research has pointed to persistent tensions between policy aspirations and classroom realities (Le & Barnard, 2009; Nguyen, 2017). In this respect, teachers are not simply enacting reform but are required to interpret, adapt, and often negotiate its demands within specific institutional conditions.

These tensions are particularly salient for novice EFL teachers. At a stage where their professional identities are still emerging, they are required to navigate competing expectations while simultaneously making sense of their roles as teachers. Importantly, such processes are not merely cognitive or technical; rather, they are deeply emotional, involving uncertainty, vulnerability, and ongoing self-positioning. It is precisely through these emotionally charged experiences that novice teachers begin to construct and reconstruct their professional identities.

Against this backdrop, professional development (PD) has long been regarded as a key mechanism for supporting teacher learning (Desimone, 2009). In practice, however, formal PD initiatives in Vietnam are often perceived as insufficiently responsive to teachers' immediate needs and contextual realities. Consequently, novice teachers tend to rely more heavily on informal, self-directed, and collaborative forms of learning. While this shift reflects teachers' agency, it simultaneously reveals the limitations of institutional support structures in addressing the complexities of early career development.

Nevertheless, although teacher identity and professional development have been widely examined, these strands of research have often developed in parallel rather than in dialogue. More critically, this limitation constrains our understanding of how teachers actually experience reform in practice, where identity is not simply developed but negotiated through emotionally charged encounters with institutional demands.

Drawing on sociocultural perspectives on identity (Norton, 2013; Beijaard et al., 2004) and emotion (Zembylas, 2003; Hargreaves, 1998), this study conceptualizes teacher identity as an ongoing, contextually embedded process of negotiation shaped through emotionally mediated interactions. Rather than positioning professional development as the primary site of identity construction, the study foregrounds emotional experiences as central to how novice teachers interpret their professional worlds and position themselves within them.

Situated in a private university in Hanoi, this study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design to explore how novice EFL teachers engage with and make sense of their emotional experiences in the process of constructing their professional identities, and how these processes are mediated by institutional conditions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher Identity as a Process of Negotiation

Teacher identity is no longer viewed as a stable or predetermined attribute, but rather as a dynamic, contextually situated process that evolves over time. From a sociocultural perspective, identity reflects how individuals understand their relationship to the world, how they position themselves within specific social and institutional contexts, and how they imagine their future trajectories (Norton, 2013). In this sense, identity is not something teachers possess; instead, it is continuously constructed, interpreted, and renegotiated through engagement with their professional environments.

However, to conceptualize teacher identity merely as "dynamic" risks oversimplifying the complexity of how it is actually formed. What is critical here is not only its fluidity, but the inherently negotiated nature of this process. As Beijaard et al. (2004) argue, identity emerges through ongoing processes of interpretation and reinterpretation, while Varghese et al. (2005) further emphasize that it is socially mediated and discursively constructed. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that identity development is shaped through a constant interplay between individual agency and contextual constraints, rather than unfolding as a linear trajectory.

This process of negotiation becomes particularly pronounced in the case of novice teachers. Entering the profession with pre-existing beliefs, expectations, and imagined professional selves, they are quickly confronted with the realities of institutional life. Such encounters often generate tensions between what teachers believe they should do and what they are expected—or able—to do in practice. As a result, identity construction at this stage is not simply a matter of development, but one of adjustment, resistance, and reconfiguration.

Importantly, this negotiation is not a purely cognitive process. Rather, it is deeply relational, shaped through interactions with students, colleagues, and institutional structures, as well as through engagement with broader discourses surrounding teaching and professionalism. Teachers do not passively internalize these influences; instead, they actively position themselves in relation to them, sometimes aligning with dominant expectations, sometimes resisting them, and often navigating a space in between. It is within this space of tension that identity is most actively constructed. Nevertheless, while existing scholarship has made significant progress in conceptualizing teacher identity as processual and contextually embedded, comparatively less attention has been paid to how this negotiation is experienced and mediated emotionally. In practice, teachers' responses to institutional demands and professional challenges are rarely neutral; they are shaped by feelings of uncertainty, frustration, commitment, or aspiration. These emotional experiences do not simply accompany identity construction—they actively shape how teachers interpret their experiences and how they position themselves within their professional worlds.

Building on this line of argument, the present study approaches teacher identity not only as a process of negotiation but as one that is fundamentally emotionally mediated. Such a perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how novice teachers, particularly within reform-oriented higher education contexts, construct and reconstruct their professional identities in response to the complex and often competing demands of their work.

2.2 Emotions as Central to Teaching and Identity

If teacher identity is understood as a process of ongoing negotiation, then emotion can be seen as the very medium through which this negotiation is experienced and enacted. Teaching, as Hargreaves (1998) compellingly argues, is not simply an intellectual or technical activity; it is fundamentally an emotional practice, shaped by relationships, expectations, and moral commitments. In this sense, emotions are not peripheral to teaching—they are embedded at its core.

From a sociocultural perspective, emotions are neither purely individual nor purely internal. Rather, they are socially constructed and contextually mediated, shaped by the institutional, cultural, and political environments in which teachers work (Zembylas, 2003). This perspective shifts the focus from viewing emotions as personal reactions to understanding them as situated experiences that both reflect and reproduce broader power relations. In other words, what teachers feel—and how they are able to express or suppress those feelings—is deeply influenced by the contexts in which they are positioned.

Such an understanding is particularly important in educational settings characterized by strong institutional expectations and accountability pressures. Within these environments, teachers' emotional experiences are often shaped by tensions between personal values and externally imposed demands. Feelings such as frustration, anxiety, or even fulfillment are not simply responses to isolated

events; rather, they emerge from teachers' ongoing engagement with institutional norms, professional discourses, and relational dynamics.

Importantly, emotions do more than accompany teaching; they actively shape how teachers interpret their experiences and, consequently, how they construct their professional identities. As Schutz et al. (2006) suggest, emotions influence teachers' decision-making, their sense of agency, and their engagement with their work. Similarly, Zembylas (2003) emphasizes that emotions are deeply intertwined with identity and power, playing a critical role in how teachers position themselves within institutional structures.

For novice teachers, this emotional dimension becomes even more pronounced. Entering unfamiliar professional environments, they are required to navigate uncertainty, establish relationships, and respond to multiple, and often competing, expectations. These experiences are inherently emotional, and it is through these emotional encounters that novice teachers begin to make sense of their roles and develop a sense of professional self. Emotions, therefore, function not only as responses to teaching experiences but also as driving forces that shape how identity is formed, negotiated, and transformed.

Nevertheless, despite the growing recognition of emotions in teaching, research has often treated them as secondary to cognitive or pedagogical processes. Such a tendency risks underestimating the extent to which emotions are constitutive of professional practice rather than merely accompanying it. In particular, the role of emotion as a mediating and shaping force in identity construction remains insufficiently explored, especially in higher education contexts where institutional cultures and performance regimes introduce additional layers of complexity.

Building on these perspectives, this study positions emotion as central to understanding teacher identity. Rather than viewing emotions as individual psychological states, it conceptualizes them as socially and institutionally embedded experiences that both mediate and drive identity negotiation. This perspective provides a critical lens for examining how novice teachers interpret their professional experiences and position themselves within the broader structures in which they work.

2.3 Emotion–Identity Nexus in Novice Teachers

While teacher identity has been conceptualized as a process of ongoing negotiation and emotions have been recognized as central to teaching, an emerging body of research suggests that these two dimensions are not merely related but fundamentally intertwined. Rather than operating as separate constructs, emotion and identity exist in a reciprocal relationship, where each continuously shapes and is shaped by the other.

On the one hand, emotional experiences play a mediating role in identity construction. As teachers engage with their professional environments, emotions influence how they interpret events, make sense of challenges, and position themselves within institutional contexts. Feelings such as frustration, uncertainty, or satisfaction are not simply reactions to teaching situations; they actively shape how teachers understand who they are and who they are becoming. In this sense, identity is emotionally mediated, as teachers' interpretations of their experiences are filtered through their emotional responses (Zembylas, 2003; Schutz et al., 2006).

On the other hand, identity itself shapes how emotions are experienced and expressed. Teachers' beliefs about their roles, their sense of professional competence, and their imagined future selves influence what they perceive as emotionally significant and how they respond to particular situations. For instance, a teacher who strongly identifies with student-centered pedagogy may experience institutional constraints as particularly frustrating, whereas others may interpret similar constraints differently. This suggests that identity not only emerges from emotional experiences but also actively configures the emotional landscape of teaching (Norton, 2013; Beijaard et al., 2004).

Taken together, these perspectives point to a bidirectional relationship between emotion and identity, where the two are mutually constitutive. Emotions mediate how identity is constructed, while identity shapes how emotions are experienced, interpreted, and acted upon. Importantly, this relationship does not occur in isolation; rather, it is situated within broader institutional and sociocultural contexts that both enable and constrain teachers' experiences.

In reform-oriented educational environments, such as those found in Vietnam, this bidirectional process becomes particularly salient. Institutional expectations, performance pressures, and policy demands create conditions in which teachers are required to continuously negotiate their professional identities. At the same time, these conditions also shape the emotional experiences through which such negotiation takes place. As a result, identity construction can be understood as emerging from the dynamic interplay between individual agency, emotional experience, and contextual constraints.

Building on this understanding, the present study proposes a conceptualization of the emotion–identity nexus as a contextually mediated and dynamically negotiated process. Specifically, it views identity construction as arising from the interaction of three interrelated dimensions: (1) emotionally mediated experiences that shape how teachers interpret their professional worlds, (2) identity positioning through relational and institutional interactions, and (3) contextual conditions that both constrain and enable these processes. Within this framework, emotion is not treated as a by-product of teaching but as a central mechanism through which identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed.

Such a conceptualization provides a more integrated and process-oriented understanding of teacher development, particularly for novice teachers operating within complex and demanding institutional environments. By foregrounding the bidirectional

relationship between emotion and identity, this study contributes to a growing body of research that seeks to move beyond fragmented approaches and toward a more holistic understanding of teaching as both an emotional and identity- forming practice. The conceptual framework applied in this study is illustrated in the figure below.

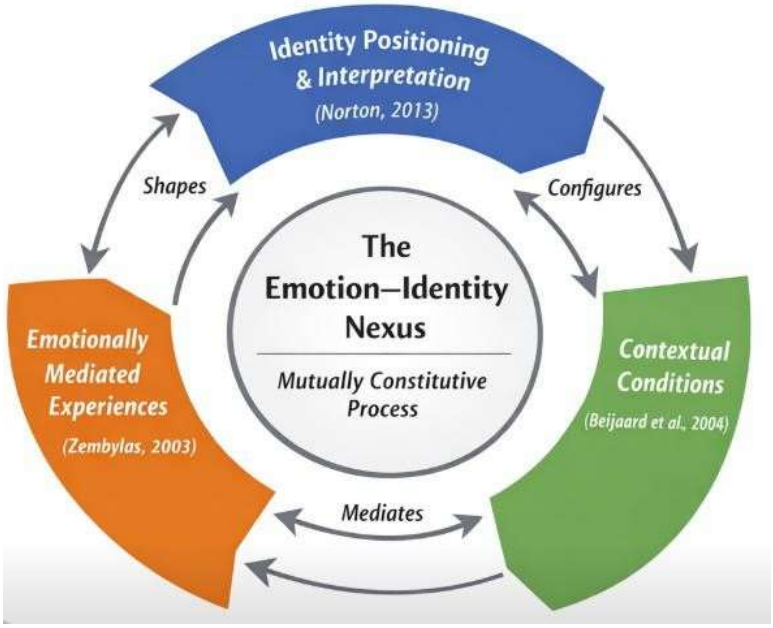


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the Emotion–Identity Nexus in Novice EFL Teachers' Professional Development

Note. *Adapted from Zembylas (2003), Norton (2013), and Beijaard et al. (2004).* Despite increasing recognition of the interrelationship between emotion and identity, existing research has tended to examine these constructs in relative isolation or to prioritize one over the other. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to how this relationship unfolds in higher-education contexts, particularly among novice EFL teachers working in reform-oriented environments.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a conceptual framework that views teacher identity as an emotionally mediated and contextually negotiated process. As illustrated in Figure 1, identity construction is understood as emerging from the dynamic interaction between emotionally mediated experiences, identity positioning, and contextual conditions. This framework provides the analytical lens through which the study examines how novice teachers make sense of their professional experiences and construct their identities.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design to examine how novice EFL teachers construct their professional identity through emotionally mediated experiences within a specific institutional context. A case study approach is particularly appropriate for capturing the complexity of identity construction as it unfolds in real-life settings, where individual experiences are closely intertwined with contextual conditions (Yin, 2018). By treating each participant as an individual case, the study enables both in-depth exploration of individual experiences and cross- case comparison to identify shared patterns and variations.

The participants were six novice EFL teachers working at a private university in Hanoi. All held a Master's degree in a relevant field and had fewer than five years of teaching experience, consistent with commonly used definitions of novice teachers (Farrell, 2009). Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the research focus. The institutional context, characterized by a strong emphasis on English language instruction and internationalization, provides a relevant setting for examining how broader reform-oriented expectations are experienced and negotiated at the individual level. While the sample size is relatively small, it is consistent with qualitative case study research that prioritizes depth and contextual richness over generalizability (Yin, 2018).

Table 1: Demographics of participants

No	Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Qualifications	Years of experience
1	Jane	Female	Master	3

2	Kate	Female	Master	3
3	Lucy	Female	Master	2
4	John	Male	Master	3
5	Tom	Male	Master	5
6	David	Male	Master	3

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allow for both consistency and flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview protocol was aligned with the research questions and focused on participants' emotional experiences in teaching, their perceptions of how these experiences shaped their professional identity, and the contextual factors influencing these processes. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, development and refinement of themes, and interpretation in relation to the research questions and conceptual framework. Both inductive and deductive approaches were employed:

while themes emerged from the data, their interpretation was informed by the conceptualization of identity as an emotionally mediated and contextually negotiated process. This combination enabled a balance between sensitivity to participants' lived experiences and theoretical coherence.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, member checking was conducted, and an audit trail was maintained throughout the analytical process. While the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable, they provide a contextually grounded understanding of how novice teachers experience and negotiate their professional identities within a specific institutional setting.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings are presented as follows:

4.1 Emotional Tensions as Triggers of Identity Reflection

Across participants, emotional tensions emerged as a recurring feature of early teaching experiences, particularly in relation to discrepancies between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and institutional expectations. These tensions were often accompanied by feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and self-doubt, especially when participants perceived their teaching practices as constrained by external requirements.

As one participant expressed, "I often feel torn between what I believe good teaching is and what the institution expects from me" (Jane). Similarly, another reflected, "These expectations make me question whether I am doing enough as a teacher" (Tom). Such accounts illustrate how institutional demands can generate not only practical challenges but also emotionally charged moments that unsettle teachers' sense of professional adequacy.

Importantly, these tensions did not merely reflect difficulties in practice; rather, they functioned as critical moments of reflection through which participants began to reconsider their professional roles and underlying beliefs. In this sense, emotions operated as mediating forces that shaped how teachers interpreted their experiences and positioned themselves within their professional contexts. Feelings of uncertainty and dissatisfaction prompted participants to re-evaluate the alignment between their "ideal" conceptions of teaching and the realities of institutional practice, thereby initiating processes of identity negotiation.

This finding resonates with Zembylas' (2003) sociocultural perspective, which conceptualizes emotions as socially mediated rather than purely individual responses. The emotional tensions reported by participants can thus be understood as emerging from their engagement with institutional norms and expectations, rather than from isolated personal struggles. At the same time, the findings extend this perspective by demonstrating how such emotions actively trigger identity reflection, highlighting their role not only as responses to context but as drivers of identity construction.

Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional tensions play a pivotal role in early career identity development. Rather than being incidental or disruptive, they create spaces for reflection through which novice teachers begin to renegotiate their professional identities in response to the complex demands of their work.

4.2 Identity Positioning through Relational Experiences

In addition to emotional tensions, participants' identity construction was closely shaped by their relational experiences within the institutional context. Interactions with students, colleagues, and broader institutional structures emerged as key sites through which teachers made sense of themselves and their professional roles. These interactions were not neutral; rather, they were emotionally charged and played a significant role in reinforcing or destabilizing participants' sense of professional identity.

Positive relational experiences, particularly those involving student engagement and collegial support, contributed to a stronger sense of competence and belonging. As one participant noted, "When students respond positively, I feel like I am becoming the teacher I

want to be" (Lucy). Such moments appeared to affirm participants' emerging professional identities, enabling them to align their sense of self with their aspirations as teachers. In this sense, identity was not formed in isolation but co- constructed through meaningful interactions with others.

However, not all relational experiences were affirming. Several participants described feelings of marginalization or invisibility within the institutional environment. For example, one teacher reflected, "Sometimes I feel invisible in the institution, like my role doesn't really matter" (Kate). These accounts suggest that institutional positioning can significantly influence how teachers perceive their professional value and legitimacy. Negative relational experiences, therefore, did not simply affect emotions; they also disrupted participants' sense of belonging and raised questions about their place within the professional community.

Importantly, through these relational encounters, participants actively positioned themselves in relation to others, negotiating multiple and sometimes conflicting roles. Depending on the context, they described shifting between identities as facilitators, authority figures, or even learners alongside their students and colleagues. This ongoing repositioning highlights the fluid and context-dependent nature of teacher identity, which is continuously shaped through interaction rather than predetermined or fixed.

These findings align with Beijaard et al. (2004), who conceptualize teacher identity as a process of ongoing interpretation and negotiation. At the same time, the present study extends this perspective by foregrounding the emotional dimension of relational experiences. Interactions are not only social but also affective, and it is through these emotionally embedded relationships that teachers come to understand who they are and who they are becoming.

Taken together, the findings underscore that identity construction is fundamentally relational. It emerges through teachers' engagement with others and is continuously negotiated within the social and institutional contexts in which they are situated.

4.3 Strategic Identity Negotiation under Institutional Constraints

Alongside emotional tensions and relational positioning, participants' identity construction was further shaped by their responses to structural constraints within the institutional context. These constraints—including heavy workload, performance evaluation systems, and established institutional norms—created conditions in which teachers were required to navigate competing demands while maintaining a sense of professional coherence.

Rather than passively conforming to these pressures, participants described engaging in a range of strategies to manage and negotiate their professional roles. These included adapting their teaching practices to meet institutional expectations, selectively aligning with certain requirements while resisting others, and seeking informal support through peer networks. Such strategies suggest that identity construction was not simply imposed by context but actively negotiated within it.

As one participant explained, "I adjust my teaching to meet expectations, but I still try to keep my own beliefs" (David). Similarly, another noted, "I pick what works for me rather than following everything strictly" (John). These accounts illustrate how teachers navigated institutional constraints by creating a balance between compliance and personal conviction, rather than fully accepting or rejecting imposed expectations.

Importantly, these practices reflect a form of agency that is both situated and constrained. Participants did not operate with unlimited freedom; instead, their actions were shaped by the boundaries of the institutional environment. However, within these boundaries, they actively made choices about how to interpret, adapt, and respond to external demands. In this sense, identity negotiation can be understood as a process of strategic positioning, where teachers continuously adjust their practices while attempting to maintain alignment with their professional values. This finding resonates with Norton's (2013) conceptualization of identity as closely linked to agency and the negotiation of positioning within social contexts. At the same time, the present study extends this perspective by illustrating how such agency is enacted in everyday professional practice under conditions of constraint. Identity, therefore, is not only shaped through interaction and emotion but also through the strategies teachers employ to navigate the structural realities of their work.

Taken together, these findings highlight that novice teachers are not merely recipients of institutional pressures but active agents in shaping their professional identities. Through strategic negotiation, they construct identities that are both contextually responsive and personally meaningful, reflecting a dynamic balance between external demands and internal commitments.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how novice EFL teachers construct their professional identities within a reform-oriented higher education context, highlighting the central role of emotion, relational experiences, and strategic agency. Taken together, these dimensions illustrate that identity construction is not a linear developmental process but a dynamic and contextually mediated negotiation, shaped through the interplay of emotional experiences, social interactions, and structural constraints.

First, the findings underscore the role of emotional tensions as critical triggers for identity reflection. Consistent with sociocultural perspectives on emotion (Zembylas, 2003), participants' experiences of frustration, self-doubt, and uncertainty were not merely individual responses but were closely tied to institutional expectations and contextual pressures. However, rather than functioning

solely as barriers, these emotions created moments of disruption that prompted teachers to re-evaluate their beliefs and professional positioning. This extends prior research that has primarily framed teacher identity development as a gradual or cognitive process (Beijaard et al., 2004), by demonstrating that emotionally charged experiences can act as catalysts for identity negotiation.

Second, the study highlights the fundamentally relational nature of identity construction. Participants' sense of self as teachers was continuously shaped through interactions with students, colleagues, and institutional structures. In line with Beijaard et al. (2004), identity emerges through processes of interpretation and negotiation within social contexts. However, the present findings further emphasize that these relational processes are deeply affective. Positive interactions reinforced participants' sense of competence and belonging, while negative experiences, such as feelings of marginalization, disrupted their sense of legitimacy. This suggests that identity positioning is not only socially mediated but also emotionally constituted, adding an important layer to existing conceptualizations of teacher identity.

Third, the findings draw attention to the role of agency in identity construction under conditions of constraint. Participants demonstrated an ability to strategically navigate institutional expectations by adapting their practices, selectively aligning with certain demands, and maintaining aspects of their professional beliefs. This supports Norton's (2013) view of identity as closely linked to agency and positioning within social contexts. At the same time, the findings highlight that such agency is not exercised in isolation but is shaped by the structural conditions within which teachers operate. Identity negotiation, therefore, involves a continuous balancing act between personal values and contextual demands, rather than a simple process of compliance or resistance.

Taken together, this study moves beyond existing work in two important ways. First, rather than treating emotion as a contextual or secondary dimension of teaching, it conceptualizes emotion as a central mechanism through which identity is constructed and negotiated. Second, it demonstrates that identity work is not only relational but strategically enacted under institutional constraints, thereby extending sociocultural accounts of teacher identity by foregrounding the role of situated agency.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that teacher development initiatives need to move beyond a narrow focus on pedagogical skills and knowledge. Instead, greater attention should be paid to the emotional and identity-related dimensions of teaching, particularly for novice teachers navigating complex institutional environments. Supporting teachers in making sense of their emotional experiences and providing spaces for reflection and dialogue may play a crucial role in fostering more sustainable professional development.

In sum, these findings demonstrate that teacher identity is not simply developed over time but is actively negotiated through emotionally mediated experiences within specific social and institutional contexts. By foregrounding the interconnected roles of emotion, relational positioning, and agency, it offers a more comprehensive understanding of how novice teachers construct their professional identities in the early stages of their careers.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to examine how novice EFL teachers construct their professional identities through emotionally mediated experiences within a reform-oriented higher education context. The findings demonstrate that identity construction is not a linear process of development, but a dynamic and contextually situated negotiation shaped by emotional tensions, relational positioning, and strategic agency. By foregrounding the emotion–identity nexus, the study highlights that emotions are not peripheral to teaching but central to how teachers interpret their experiences and position themselves within their professional worlds.

In doing so, the study makes an important contribution by offering a more integrated understanding of teacher identity as both emotionally mediated and contextually negotiated. It also extends existing research by providing empirical insights from a Vietnamese higher education context, where institutional expectations and reform pressures create distinct conditions for early career teachers.

These findings carry several implications for practice. First, teacher development initiatives should move beyond a sole focus on pedagogical competence to incorporate the emotional and identity-related dimensions of teaching. Creating spaces for reflection, dialogue, and peer support may help novice teachers make sense of their experiences and navigate professional challenges more effectively. Second, institutions need to be more attentive to how their policies and expectations shape teachers' emotional experiences and sense of professional belonging. More supportive and flexible environments may enable teachers to exercise agency while maintaining alignment with their professional values.

While the study is limited by its small-scale design and context-specific focus, it offers a contextually grounded account of how novice teachers negotiate their identities. Future research may build on this work by exploring similar processes across different institutional settings or over longer periods of time to capture the evolving nature of teacher identity.

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