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Vietnamese EFL Teacher Identity Reconstruction under the Pressure of Technological Integration

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ABSTRACT: Understanding teacher identity highlights a significance in language education since how teachers define who they are and their roles in a current context influence their pedagogical growth, teaching approaches, and interaction with students and colleagues [1], therefore, supporting effective teaching and learning outcomes [2]. Considering teacher identity as an unfixed quality that gradually changes depending on contextual shifts, it is crucial to investigate the reconstruction of teacher identity as a result of integrating technology into teaching. Despite the necessity, this area remains under-investigated in Vietnam, particularly among EFL language teachers. This qualitative research, therefore, aims to examine the reconstruction of Vietnamese ELF teacher identity as they adapted the requirement of technological application in their teaching practices. This research employs narrative inquiry and the hermeneutic circle to explore these experiences. The finding indicates that those teachers engaged with the complex interplay between their inside and the outside, resulting in distinct identities as two main groups: technological-learners who teach and technological-interested teachers. The study went deep into the influence of personal beliefs, institutional policies, and pressure from peers and students on these identities.

KEYWORDS: Teacher Identity, Technological Integration, EFL Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Since the National Foreign Language Project 2020 aimed at enhancing foreign language proficiency released, technology implementation has been implemented in policies. Despite many efforts, the effectiveness of such actions remains doubtful [3], [4], [5]. To put it into detail, there has been an assumption that many training programs are unstructured, top-down, and technology-centered [4], [5]. Research has also identified several issues, including poor communication across key levels and a lack of consideration for teachers' needs, beliefs, and time limitations in professional development programs [5].

Vietnamese ELF teachers have limited choices to deal with such a changing situation. The first reason is that technology has become a must-have of daily life, and teachers have to face pressure from school requirements, colleagues, and even students. The second reason is that teachers must align their personal beliefs with the current contextual factors. According to Miller [2], this process leads to a reconstruction of their identities as teachers. In a context where technological implementation research mainly focuses on students' perspectives like Vietnam, there is a scarcity of insights into teachers' views. Acknowledging how teachers identify themselves in the middle of these changes would offer more practical suggestions for their professional development.

Research Question:

How do Vietnamese EFL teachers build their identities as teachers in response to the incorporation of technology in language classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Identity In Foreign Language Education

Historical education research has dedicated significant effort to exploring teacher identity under different labels, from the early Rationalist Model around the 1950s [6], which elucidated the role of student teachers in receiving scientific knowledge and applying it to teaching practice upon becoming teacher, to the Reflective Model around the 1990s, emphasizing the complex ways teachers think about their careers based on prior experience as students [7], personal practical experience [8], their values, beliefs [9], or their decision-making and planning processes [10]. These foundation studies can be considered precursors to subsequent research on teacher identity.

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In terms of foreign language education, teacher identity has emerged as a distinct research area with various directions and explanations. Particularly, three main aspects have attracted researchers, including (i) the conceptualization of teacher identity, (ii) the antecedents of teacher identity research, and (iii) factors leading to teacher identity construction.

(i) *The conceptualization of teacher identity:* Regarding the conceptualization aspect, scholars have put great effort into defining professional identity and professional roles based on multiple understandings [11], [12], [13], [14], [15]. The term teacher identity has been conceptualized as a lived experience of participation [16], a pedagogical tool for professional development [17], or a subject matter and didactical expert [19]. These studies, however, ultimately converge on the agreement that teacher identity encompasses how teachers engage in their teaching careers, their attitude toward their profession, the importance they attribute to their professional work, and other traits that combine to shape a professional [19], [20].

(ii) *The antecedents of teacher identity:* The second aspect centers on teacher cognition, teacher beliefs, professional development, and reflection. Research on teacher cognition aimed at organizing the knowledge base for teachers in education [21], [22], while teacher beliefs contributed to understanding the connections between teachers' personal and professional experiences [23], [24]. The concept of professional development, on the other hand, [25], [26], [27] holds significant importance in stressing the continual process of self-improvement to foster professional advancement. Finally, research on teacher reflection provided examinations of the personal and professional dimensions of teachers' lives [28], [29]. The development of these studies indicated that understanding teacher identity within educational reforms can facilitate effective teaching approaches and improved learning outcomes [2].

(iii) *Factors leading to teacher identity construction:* The third major aspect emphasized that teacher identity is multifaceted, comprising interconnected elements. Among various factors, teacher cognition has been highlighted as pivotal. In second language education, the link between professional development and teacher identity has also been explored. Notably, learning and functioning have also been identified as crucial factors related to teacher identity, especially in the case of non-native English teachers [30], [31]. In addition, a newly emerging area of research on teacher identity has investigated the relation between emotions in teaching and teacher identity development [33], [34].

Language Teacher Identity In The Technical-Integration Era

It is evident that teachers' identities are shaped by context and the negotiation between the "*self*" and the "*other*." According to [35], when the context changes, teachers' identities will be re-constructed by drawing upon their original identity resources to form multiple identities. In other words, [2] argues that the teacher identity formation process is incomplete because it is a response to changes within a specific context This adaptive process enables them to continue functioning effectively as professionals. Even before COVID-19, ELF teachers were undergoing professional transformations in response to technological integration in their classrooms. As education transitions into the post-COVID era, with computer-assisted learning becoming the norm [36], it is essential to view teacher identity as a process of negotiation and continuous development to respond to various changes.

Despite substantial investment in technology integration within Vietnamese education, its impact remains large limitations. Engaged with the policies and the practical situation in Vietnam, the understanding is characterized by more pressure than support [5]. There has been a fact that we are trying to support teachers by providing technological knowledge while overlooking their background of technological competence and systematic training delivery [5]. Specifically, when there is a disconnect between teachers' beliefs and the contextual pressures, available support, and stakeholders' expectations, teachers may adopt a "d*iplomatic*" approach [37]. This approach involves balancing power relations, resulting in the formation of unstable multiple identities. As teachers navigate their identities under the pressure of technology integration, their roles and practices evolve, influenced by their pre-existing beliefs, which can lead to personal-contextual conflicts [38]. Additionally, there has been a limitation in looking at teacher identity formed by their positions within various contexts and interconnections which might affect classroom practices [39], [40]. This identity is crucial in determining how teachers "*position and appropriate technology in the teaching process*" [40,p.1], especially during periods of change. Without acknowledging this aspect, efforts toward technology integration are likely to fail.

Vietnamese EFL teachers operate within a context characterized by two barriers. The first thing is a variation in teachers' levels of digital knowledge and attitudes toward technology adoption, with many negative perspectives [5]. The second thing is although the expectations placed on teachers are significant, professional support is unsystematic and in wide ranges [4]. As a result, teachers who can not adapt to new demands are likely to use technology superficially [41], leading them to identify themselves as tech resisters who have fewer technological skills than their students [35]. If this identification can not be improved, those teachers will

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suffer negative impacts on well-being [42]. Despite the importance of addressing these issues, there is a notable lack of knowledge in the Vietnamese context, creating a significant gap in understanding and supporting EFL teachers.

Conceptual Framework

.In this research, Hsieh's (2010) theories have been adapted to investigate the construction of teacher identity. According to the author, teacher identity would be centered on four characteristics: (i) *identity as negotiated and socially constructed*; (ii) *identity as tied to specific roles or groups*; (iii) *identity as thematic*; (iv) *identity as linked to authority and agency*. Teacher identity is formed by the interaction between the physical world and figured worlds. While the physical world refers to external requirements and expectations, the figured world is about teachers' beliefs, values, and commitments. The process of navigating the outside along with the inside is often known as a negotiation of power [43]. As members of an organization, teachers are expected to balance organizational and personal dimensions concurrently. This study particularly investigates how other influential agents within the context are influenced by teachers. This interaction is considered to be a main factor in shaping teacher identity when it is guided by a teacher's personal beliefs, autonomy, and values.

Hsieh's understanding has been chosen as a framework for this research because it demonstrates the relative relation in two ways. First, while there has been a wide range of teacher identity perspectives, Hsieh's (2010) explanation has fixed the focus of this study which teacher identity is examined as the negotiation between internal and external factors. Second, the framework was instrumental in designing the data collection tools. Finally, it was used to guide the analysis of the data collected during the study.

METHODS

Research Design

The researcher applied narrative inquiry as the research method and applied the hermeneutic circle to analyze collected data. The overarching aim of using narrative quality study is to examine personal stories in multiple truths. Besides, the hermeneutic circle facilitates a comprehensive understanding of these stories particularly in elucidating the interconnected events that the participants had been through [44].

Context and Participant

The research was situated in the field of Vietnamese EFL education, where technology has dramatically transformed teaching and learning. This context was shaped by a combination of dependent and independent universities, which both intentionally and unexpectedly compelled EFL teachers to adopt technological integration in their classrooms.

Four university EFL teachers participated in the study, half of them were employed at public organizations, and the other worked at private institutions in Vietnam. All participants were familiar with the technological integration approach and had experienced applying it in their classrooms. To capture a wide range of perspectives on the stories, the study included teachers at different stages of their careers: novice teachers, mid-career teachers, and seasoned teachers. The table below provides more detailed information about the participants.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Participant	Sex	Qualification	Teaching Experience	Teaching Workplace
F1	Female	MA in TESOL	23 years	Public University
F2	Male	MA in TESOL	14 years	Public University
F3	Female	MA in TESOL	9 years	Private University
F4	Female	MA in TESOL	5 years	Private University

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Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected data and applied semi-structured interviews as this method ensured comprehensive input in terms of explanation and analysis. Given the aim to explore participants' stories, the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews was ideal for in-depth investigation. The interview questions were designed around the research question, focusing on Hsieh's (2010) concept of teacher identity.

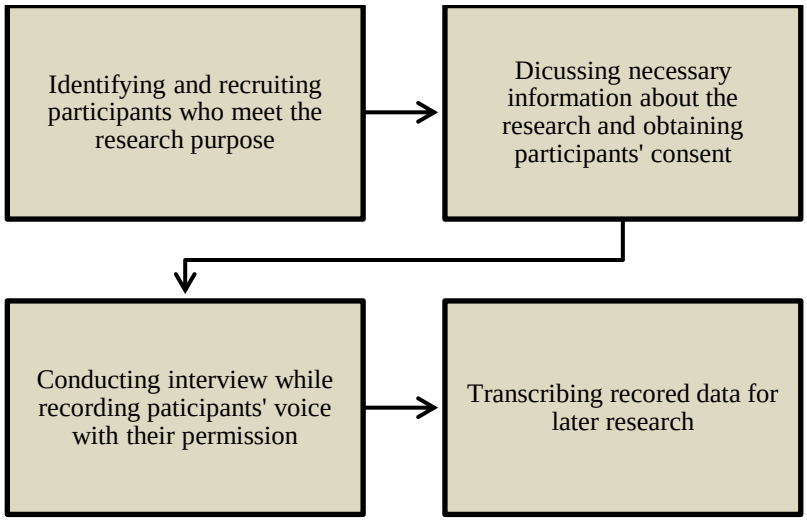

Figure 1. Data Collection Process

In order to analyze the collected data, the researcher follows Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) and Wertz et al.'s (2011) suggestions to work with narrative data. The process was split into 4 steps:

- *Step 1*: Transcribed data from the interview were analyzed and adjusted to the interview questions for subsequent sessions.
- *Step 2*: Collected transcription was read multiple times to ensure the participants' ideas.
- *Step 3*: Hermeneutic circle was applied to gain a deeper understanding.
- *Step 4*: Cross-case analysis was conducted to identify patterns across the individual narrative texts.

FINDINGS

Initially Engagement with Technology

In terms of technological proficiency, the teachers' skills ranged in large scale, from "*limited*" (F1) to "*quite good*" (F2). F1 had received " *some*" technological–related training, but "*unsystematic*" instruction, F2 and F4 had " *few*", but "*not really worth*", and another had "*quite regular training*" (F3). Common tools they were familiar with were Google Drive, Microsoft Offices, and Gmail, which they learned independently rather than in formal training. F2 described this experience, which resonated with F4, despite their teaching age over a decade apart:

"*The school administration gave us a requirement—a limitation of paper use. We, as employers, had to be familiar with such tools to meet the need. We took it as an opportunity for professional development*." (F2)

Half teachers categorized themselves as unconfident in technological use, leading to hesitating technological-assist lesson involvement. The common reasons belonged to schools' support. In other words, institutions were unprepared for the reconstruction as three out of four participants pointed to inadequate teaching facilities:

"*There was only one lab room where computers are equipped for our whole language department – we had to book and wait for schedule arrangement if we wanted to use it*". (F1)

"*A typical classroom had basic devices such as a chalkboard, a projector, and fixed tables and chairs serving always over 50 students. When we wanted to use classroom response systems like Class Point, or Quizizz to improve interaction, we had to pay personally. The school refused to support the account's fee.*" (F2)

"*The internet connection was poor*." (F3)

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The finding indicates two distinct patterns among teachers: technological integration had little impact on their classrooms and technological integration influenced their classrooms. While F1 and F3 reported that technology use in teaching was "*fairly good*" as "*it saves time compared to what happened in the past*", they claimed it as "*an optional*", not " *a must*" in their schools, so they distanced themselves from these contextual changes. F2 and F4, however, considered the context as "*highly recommended*" and "*is required*" and therefore they involved themselves in the changes. The policies, which were hoped to improve language learning quality, became a factor in professional identity reconstruction while the extent of its influence depends on how the institutions implemented it: encouragement or enforcement.

Another contributing factor affecting those teachers' acceptance of technology is the pressure from their colleagues and students. F2 observed that his colleagues, particularly, the next-generation teachers "*master in technology use*," and " *own wide source of tools and apps aligning with almost teaching conditions*". Additionally, F4 noted Gen Z teachers such as her " *were educated to be familiar with technology during teaching training programs*", therefore, she was likely to be "*ashamed when there is an updated technology issue that my peer knows but I do not know*" In addition, F1 and F3 cited their students' attitudes as a motivating factor:

"*My students even access a new tool faster than me. Once, they taught me how to log in to TikTok to follow Mr. Tung Duong* [a well-known IELTS mentor]. *It is unable to overtake the youth, but I try not to be out of date, somehow*" (F1)

"*I found that my students get more excitement when technology was applied in the classroom* [using ClassPoint integrated to Microsoft PowerPoint] *and they also did effectively with homework delivered through wireless platforms*." (F3)

At the beginning stages of the technology reform, there was an interaction between contextual and personal factors, resulting in a shift in teacher identity. Both policies and pressure from peers and students resulted in teacher identity reconstruction although the first one offered less effect than the other. The teachers' beliefs changed because they were stressed by their novice colleagues who were "*digital natives*" (F2). Also, high-tech students put a hand in the role as F1 commented "*They* [students] *are much quicker on these tech things than me*[teacher]" and she felt "*running behind*" them. The benefits that technology integration brings to the classroom were also considered contributions but in an unclear manner. To sum up, these factors – policies, benefits, and fears- became critical components in the teachers' ongoing negotiation of their professional identities.

F2, F4: Technology-Interested Teacher

Though these two teachers represented distinct career ages, they shared a common positive attitude toward technology and transitioned into the role of teacher-center. They cited the influence of "*this digital age*" (F4) as a key sociocultural factor that prompted their transformation. As socially active individuals, F2 found using high-tech devices both "*interesting*" and "*fun*", while F4 became "*frequent*" to update new trends and "*preferred*" working on wireless platforms.

Both F2 and F4 eventually evolved into confident teacher-users of technology, shaped by their pedagogical beliefs, agency, authority, and existing identities. In the latter half of the 2010s, F2 was influenced socially and professionally by the growth of technology, the encouragement of implementation in the educational field, and the increasing use by her students. He noted that technology " *has become a part of everyday life*" and " *some of my colleagues have already integrated technology in teaching*." On the other side, F4- a Gen Z teacher believed that applying technological tools in teaching is "*a matter of course*". She explained this behavior as a result of her teaching training program:

" *We* [F4 and her classmates] *used many techs to conduct our assignment during training course* [….]. "*We also had related subjects such as Adapting Technology into Teaching, LMS Using*".

In terms of teaching perspective, the two participants saw technical access as a "*must-have*" for enhancing their lecturing delivery. Both F2 and F4 adopted a teacher-centered approach, using technology firstly to support their presentation. As F2 put it, " *It helps me to give feedback to the whole class in a short time without effort to handwriting to each student* [use WordSheet]". Similarly, F4 expressed the effectiveness of spreading material for students within a second "*with just a click*" (F4).

The shift aligned with their pedagogical beliefs and also the evolving context. What left the teachers feeling "*worried*" (F2) eventually turned into motivation for personal development, spurred by their changing interests and beliefs. They began to actively learn officially and non-officially by joining training workshops and asking their peers to improve their skills. As a result, they started to feel achievement and engagement.

"*I started by observing other high-tech teachers, then I copied them*. […]. *Later on, I decided to go further, discovered by myself, and enjoy the amazing feeling of achievement*." (F2)

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Students also became crucial components as F4 addressed the need to "*keep up*" with the following generation, as well as she acknowledged that her students "*master in tech*" and sometimes her students figured out "*many interesting things*".

A more significant turning point came when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, putting all teachers in fully online teaching. Their positive attitudes and growing competence with technology helped them suffer the event as an opportunity to become professional tech users. Tools support online meetings, document storage, and management systems were no longer challenges but could be used daily. As F4 reflected, "*I was able to use different tools comfortably*." and "[…] *being familiar with a new app took me less than three days*." F2 also detailed his increasing tech integration: "*Before COVID, I used technical tools in the classroom as my interest. However, when it was no way, I fastened myself with i*t […]"

With their teacher-directed beliefs and increasing agency, the participants became technophiles. Their descriptions of technology were dominated by comments about how "*comfortable*," "*exciting*" and "*smooth*" their lessons had become. All of the teachers affirmed that they would "*remain using technology regularly*" (F2) when his school required or not, and even F4 felt her teachings were "*less effective when technology was not inserted*. " Applying technology in teaching had become their personal interest, and they all took a willingness to "*share*" with others to improve.

F1, F3: Technology Learner Who Teach

F1 and F3 shared a similar contributing factor, students, with F2 and F4. While F1 explained, " […] *to engage them* [students] *into the lessons*", F3 put it into detail, " *I found my students did well when they were happy* […], *so I tried to learn and used different funny tools to serve them*." Both F1 and F3 focused on their students leading to their focus on practical learning: "*to serve them*" or "*to attract their attention*".

However, what set F1 and F3 apart from the other two teachers was the central role their pedagogical beliefs played in their journey to becoming learners of technology. They consistently emphasized the schools' requirements as a guiding influence in their technological adoption.

" *It was put into the curriculum that every subject requires both offline meeting and online working*." (F1).

"*They* [her school administration] *did not say it was a force, but they asked us* [F3 and other teachers in her school] *to give evidence of applying tech in class." (F3)*

While social change contributed to the reconstruction of F2 and F4 teacher identity, F1 and F3 suffered it as an enforcement. When their agency and authority were further strengthened, it reflected on their experience. To describe the initial hard time, F1 inserted, "*I did not have basic technological knowledge before*. […], *it went wrong at first, then correct, then wrong again* […] *cost me triple time*!" F1 often blamed external factors, citing "*old age*" as a barrier. "*Although the school offered training often and I attended all, I still struggled with it and offered assistance for my 15-year-old son.*" (F1). Slightly different, F3 had a more easy time, " *I already had a foundation, so it was not very difficult for me to go further*."

The two participants demonstrated a dual identity, acting as both a learner and a teacher simultaneously. Their learner-teacher identity was shaped not only by contextual factors but also by their beliefs as F1 added into her voice, "*I tend to learn*", or F3 once said, " *I try to learn*". The teacher-learner identity played a significant role in F1 and F3 technological growth. It allowed them to take control of their learning and apply technology, progressing from "*learned*" to becoming "*used*" with it. Unlike their colleagues, F1 did not view technology as an "*interest*" (F2) or " *a matter of course* " (F4). Instead, they believed that tech-enhanced lessons should be accepted just because it primarily support student learning. This belief navigated the way that they adapt technology.

" *I still went behind other colleagues as I knew less than them. I understood my competence, as well as my age* […]. *Therefore, I only learn the most necessary ones*." (F1)

" *I looked through their functions, then examined what is the most suitable for my students and even for me, then I started to learn how to use*" (F3)

This distinct negotiation, grounded in their pedagogical beliefs, ultimately shaped how they developed as teacher-users, differing from the paths taken by their colleagues.

DISCUSSION

Institutional Policies – Teacher Personal Belief Relation: A significant Contribution.

According to [42], institutional policies can significantly influence teachers' identities, particularly when policies require adaptation to new practices, such as technology use. However, the degree of influence varies based on how these policies are implemented—

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through encouragement or enforcement. Such theory aligned with this study since teachers like F2 and F4, who described technology integration as "*required*" or "*highly recommended*", embraced technology as a necessary component of their professional development. F1 and F3, however, perceived technology as "*optional*" in the initial stage, reflecting a more passive approach to integration.

Not as simple as it was, teachers' personal beliefs about technology intersected with these institutional requirements. F2 and F4, who saw the change as inevitable and essential, experienced a more active reconstruction of their professional identities. On the other hand, F1 and F3, who categorized technology as optional at first, suffered a hard time during their reconstruction, from being hesitant at the beginning to fully embrace after their school it in enforcement later. This finding had a positive relation with Hsieh's (2010) voice suggesting teacher identity is formed by the interaction between the "*physical world*" which refers to institutional policies and the "*figured world*" which refers to teachers' personal beliefs in this study.

Peer and Student Pressure: A Social Factor

The result of this study also proved that teacher identity is not just shaped by top-down policies but also by the dynamic interaction between teachers and students in the classroom [43]. The influence of students, particularly their technological competence, contributed to teachers' identity reconstruction. F1 and F3 both noted that their students' familiarity with technology served as a motivation for them to integrate more digital tools into their teaching. In this study, students not only served as passive recipients of technology-enhanced lessons but also acted as catalysts for teachers' learning processes. Meanwhile, peer pressure also played a role in shaping teachers' attitudes toward technology. F2 and F4, for example, mentioned feeling "*ashamed*" or "*worried*" when their colleagues, particularly younger or more tech-savvy ones, demonstrated superior technological skills. This aligns with studies by [44], which highlight the role of social comparison in professional identity formation. Teachers often compare themselves to their peers, and feelings of inadequacy or being "outdated" can spur them to embrace new technologies.

Technology-Interested Teacher – Technology Learners Who Teach

The findings also reveal two distinct teacher identities that emerged from the study: technology-interested teachers and technology learners who teach. F2 and F4, who identified as technology-interested, embraced technology as a tool for enhancing their teaching and professional growth. Their positive attitudes toward technology align with previous research [45] which suggests that teachers who view technology as a natural extension of their teaching philosophy are more likely to integrate it effectively. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated their transformation into confident technology users, as they described the shift to online teaching as an opportunity rather than a challenge. This is consistent with studies on post-pandemic teaching, where many educators who initially struggled with technology became adept users as a result of necessity.

On the other hand, F1 and F3, who identified as technology learners who teach, approached technology with more caution, focusing on learning the tools that were most practical for them and their students. This distinction highlights the role of pedagogical beliefs in shaping technology integration. According to [46], teachers' beliefs about pedagogy significantly influence their use of technology. For F1 and F3, their focus on student-centered learning led them to adopt technology selectively, using it primarily to enhance engagement and support student learning outcomes, rather than as a central component of their teaching philosophy. This learner-teacher identity, shaped by both external pressures and internal beliefs, illustrates the complex, multifaceted nature of teacher identity reconstruction in response to technology integration.

CONCLUSION

Answering the initial research question, suffering a contextual change of technology integration into the classroom, Vietnamese EFL teachers reconstructed their professional identity in two directions: (1) technology-interested teachers, and (2) technology learners who teach. Facing the current context, some teachers embraced technology as an integral part of their professional identity, while others adopted it with a more cautious, learner-centered approach. There are multiple factors, both inside and outside, contributing to their process of reconstruction, significantly noted such as personal pedagogical beliefs, institutional policies, peer pressure, and student pressure. The finding of this study aligned with and expanded upon existing research in the field of teacher professional identity, as well as in the language education field.

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