

Introduction to the Special Issue: Disrupted Language Teacher Identities in Times of Uncertainty

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Language Teacher Identities and Global Shifts: A Brief Introduction

The English language teaching (ELT) profession is at its precipice with large-scale global events and transitions in the recent decade. Changes in global alliances, international conflicts, geopolitical tensions, wars, economic crises, and global climate changes brought uncertainties to the world and the ELT landscape. In this special issue, *Between Indisposition and Perseverance: Disrupted Language Teacher Identities in Times of Uncertainty*, we explore how English language teachers, researchers, and professionals grapple with indispositions from social, historical, political, economic, and emotional dilemmas in times of uncertainty.

The gradual impact of declining birthrates, downsizing of the teaching and ELT profession, decreasing transnational mobility, global climate change impacting economic recession escalated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and other sociopolitical tensions and movements shifted the research and praxis in the field of ELT. The declining birthrates have inevitably affected student enrollments worldwide, which, in return, disrupted the market for educational resources. The disruption of the educational resources market results in lower quality of education, inequity in access to education, less funding or investment in education, and more hurdles for international education (Chen, 2020; Marturello, 2021). Beyond the boundaries of countries known for hosting majority international students or top destinations for studying abroad, the current globalization period is claimed to be threatening the field of international education and ELT profession marked by catastrophic climate change, growing inequality, war, neoliberalism, resurgent nationalism, and other macro-level issues worldwide (Ilieva et al., 2014; Jornitz & Timm, 2022; Reeves, 2018; Silova, 2021; Yazan, 2022). ELT professionals across the world are waking up to the reality of the fate of the field being heavily controlled by a turmoil of social changes and pressured by various stakeholders.

Concerns are spiraling as ELT professionals adapt to the new era of changes while feeling undervalued with a lack of support and resources to advance the field. As the multilingual

reality trenches into this 21st-century society, the pushback voices of seeking unity and singularity become louder. Although the economic market promotes English language teaching as a valuable resource to advance an individual's knowledge and access, significant budget cuts in the educational field worldwide have limited the advancement of the field (Cai & Fang, 2022). At the same time, educational policies undergirding neoliberalism attempt to transform education into for-profit businesses and open new avenues for reframing assimilation and alienation (Kubota & Takeda, 2021). Language teacher identity (LTI) research is critical to understanding teachers' beliefs, values, and commitment, which, in return, improves language teaching (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Stenberg et al., 2014; Yazan, 2017). It is fundamental to question and redefine the contemporary theoretical lenses by imagining LTIs beyond the ELT community and examining the emerging global factors (e.g., financial, governmental, physical, and emotional factors) within the larger socio-political climate. While countless ELT professionals feel indispositions in their institutions, research fields, political climates, local communities, and global discourse, we seek opportunities to heal through collaborative and humanizing exploration of LTIs in this special issue.

Language Teacher Identities

LTIs have been studied, theorized, and researched by numerous and prominent scholars for decades. However, a structured and concise definition specific to language teachers is yet to be provided in the previous scholarship. LTI has been studied and interrogated through the lenses of the theorization and philosophies of scholars who discussed teacher identities in general (e.g., Alsup, 2008; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Danielewicz, 1995; Gee, 2001; Olsen, 2008; Sachs, 2005; Wenger, 1998). LTI has also been theorized and explored to understand the elements and aspects that shape teachers' identities who are teaching language (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; Norton, 2013; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Varghese et al., 2005). Despite the wide array of research and scholarship examining LTI, a clear definition that distinguishes a "language teacher" identity from a "teacher" identity of a language teacher remains a gap in our knowledge and understanding of LTIs.

In an attempt to provide a concise definition of "language teacher" identity, here in this special issue, we define LTI as an evolving process, holistic engagement, and a framework through which language teachers, as agentic beings, understand their positions (including self-positioning and positioning by others) and relationship to language, language learners, and the language teaching profession—how to be, act, and understand themselves and regarded by others—across time and space, including a collection of influences from immediate contexts, sociohistorical and ideological world, and the possibilities for advocacy-action, change, and transformation in the future.

In research and practice, LTI has gained increasing interest and attention as part of scholarly discussions to shed light on the belief, value, and commitment of language teachers, professionals, and researchers. Recent research has demonstrated the saliency of LTIs to teacher learning, practice, and growth as framing teacher professional development with an LTI lens affords the space to form agency and enact their identities. Although there is an emerging body of literature that dissects the intersections of LTIs with personal and social identities, there is a need to tackle macro-level issues by zooming out of the individual-level analysis and critically examining LTIs through a multifaceted lens. LTIs are situated on the macro-level of ideological structures, including belief systems, cultural values, political values, religious values, and economic values (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Thus, engaging in

conversations concerning LTI construction informed and shaped by recent issues allows us to make sense of the ever-shifting social, cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts that impact the ELT profession.

Featured Articles in this Special Issue

In organizing and constructing LTIs in the unprecedented new era, featured articles in this special issue draw on numerous prominent works and theorizations with specific attention to the current social, cultural, historical, and political contexts.

The special issue opens with articles investigating LTIs internally and their interplay with the surrounding sociocultural contexts. Matthew Nall and Takaaki Hiratsuka's *A Future of Hope and Dread: How K-12 Pre-Service Language Teachers are Situating Their Identities within Modern Japanese Value and Belief Systems* delves into pre-service LTIs in Japan by employing a robust mixed-methods approach and combining narrative frames and interviews. By using grounded theory and a process model of emotional regulation, it unveils a nuanced narrative of hope and dread. The study effectively illuminates the complexities of LTI construction and offers implications for constructing positive future-selves identities amid the complex sociocultural contexts and value systems in Japan that complicate their LTIs.

Next, Aysel Eyerci's article, *EFL Teachers' Responses to Crisis: Investigating Pedagogical Adaptations, Trauma-Sensitive Practices, and Teacher Identity after Earthquake*, explores the adaptations made by a senior EFL teacher in Turkey during emergency remote teaching post-earthquake. The study highlights the complex process of LTI construction and negotiation, where empathy, resilience, and professional collaboration played a significant role in dealing with a devastating and traumatic event. The study informs educational policies and practices for effective crisis response in language education.

The following articles paid more attention to deeply rooted religious beliefs, social ideologies, and policies that (re)shaped and constrained LTI negotiation and construction processes. At the same time, these studies highlight language teachers' agencies, assertions of their positions, and skillful navigation of ideological constraints. Mostafa Nazari's article, *Ecological Intersections of Religious Ideology, Agency, and Identity: Voices of Iranian English Language Teachers*, draws on ecological perspectives to explore the intersection of religious ideology, agency, and identity among Iranian English language teachers. The study sheds light on how Islamic principles permeate various aspects of teachers' work and their identities, while teachers' agency acts of resistance also resulted in developing critical awareness. The article provides valuable insights into language teacher agency, identity, and ideology, emphasizing the dialectic relationship between teachers and religious ideologies.

Sibel Söğüt's *Disrupted English Language Teacher Identities: A Social Justice Perspective* is another article that pays particular attention to the ecological (re)construction and negotiation of LTIs. As this exploratory case study probes into the identities of two in-service and three pre-service teachers in Turkey, factors pertaining to dominant ideologies, policies, and language education contexts are analyzed in relation to micro, meso, and macro-level identity constructs. The author underscores the pronounced impact of dominant ideologies and policies on LTIs and implies significant ramifications concerning the apparent disconnect between policy frameworks and the practical realities of teaching English.

In *Chinese EFL Academics' Experiences of Aligning Researcher*

Identity (Re)-Construction with University Policy Practices of a National Research Policy, Hua Lu and Sook Jhee Yoon present the impact of national-level policies on college-level language teacher-researcher identities. This case study of six EFL academics at a public university in China investigates the identity alignment and misalignment processes in regard to the change in macro- and meso-level policies. The authors highlight EFL academics' identity conflicts as well as exercising their agencies amidst institutional and national policy constraints.

The studies that we feature in this special issue serve as a testament to the ongoing quest to understand LTIs as a multifaceted endeavor and to listen to the voices of language teachers. As we conclude this special issue, we emphasize the importance of acknowledging, valuing, and validating LTIs as a core framework to understand the work, motivation, and struggles of language teachers. In times of uncertainty, it is imperative to hear and amplify the voices of language teachers as we move forward to providing an equitable and responsive educational space for language learners. As we embark on future research, we encourage inquiries that use innovative methodological approaches and ecological lenses to capture the intricacies of LTIs and the ever-evolving socio-cultural contexts and policy landscapes.

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