A Future of Hope and Dread: How K-12 Pre-service Language Teachers are Situating Their Identities within Modern Japanese Value and Belief Systems

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Abstract

The current study is located among the body of language teacher identity research by focusing on the identities of pre-service language teachers in Japan. This study looks at how pre-service language teacher identities are situated among Japanese values and belief systems and investigates how participants are coping with disrupted language teacher identities as they are preparing to embark on teaching careers. Three pre-service teachers took part in this study, and data originated from narrative frames and semi-structured interviews. These participants are preparing for future employment as K-12 English teachers in Japan. Drawing upon grounded theory and Gross' (2015) process model of emotional regulation, findings illustrate the conflicted manner in which pre-service teachers are constructing their nascent language teacher identities against the backdrop of Japanese values and belief systems and the realities of teaching in Japan. In this context, the participants are approaching their future careers with deeply held emotions of both hope and dread, complicating the development of empowered language teacher identities. Additionally, this study found that the participants were able to employ Gross' (2015) emotional regulation strategies to varying degrees of success. This article concludes with implications for pre-service teachers and pre-service teacher training programs in Japan and abroad.

Keywords: EFL teaching in Japan, emotional regulation, language teacher identity, pre-service language teachers

For the language teacher, constructing a professional identity is one of the most important components in establishing and maintaining a resilient career (see Barkhuizen, 2017; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Robertson & Yazan, 2022), and in the

teaching profession, the language teacher identity construction process begins early in one's professional life. Pre-service teachers are simultaneously gathering important pedagogical knowledge while they are in the early stages of developing their language teacher identities (Hiratsuka & Okuma, 2021; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Lindahl & Yazan, 2019). University studies can be informative and reassuring for pre-service teachers. However, their futures are always unknown, and the process of teacher identity construction is emotionally laden (see Benesch, 2012, 2017; Hiratsuka, 2016, 2022, 2023b; Hiratsuka & Barkhuizen, 2015; Song, 2016; Wolff & De Costa, 2017). For pre-service teachers, their teacher identity developments are directed by both the ambitions and interests of the individual and by various external forces.

The world that we live in today is becoming increasingly complex, often categorized by elements of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) (Mack et al., 2016). As teacher identities can be influenced by forces in this sociocultural environment—such as concepts of self, positioning, and meaning systems (Olsen, 2008)—there is a need to investigate teacher identity construction in specific contexts. Pre-service teachers are preparing for careers in teaching, but as they find themselves entrenched in the VUCA social paradigm, there is a risk that they may often find themselves at an intersection between indisposition and perseverance in regard to their professional lives. Indisposition is a feeling of uneasiness that arises when teachers perceive themselves as being unprepared to adapt to changes that require a shift in their educational approach (Esteve, 1994). Perseverance is the perceived capacity to successfully navigate and overcome challenging situations. (Stoltz, 1997). There is tension between these two in the lives of pre-service teachers as they work towards establishing their identities in a new community of practice. Such tensions need to be examined in empirical research. This research is especially urgent because "too little attention to the personal dimension in learning a teacher identity risks the danger of novice teachers leaving the profession" (Pugach et al., 2019, p. 4). The current study considers pre-service teachers in Japan as they approach their careers and construct their language teacher identities.

Japanese Values and Beliefs Regarding Teachers and Education

The Japanese term *sensei* is commonly translated as "teacher." However, its actual connotations are much broader. In modern Japanese society, *sensei* is also used to refer to doctors, writers, politicians, lawyers, and clergy (Tsujimura, 1991). Teachers, therefore, are socially positioned within a highly valued professional cohort in Japanese culture and society. Two recent studies have targeted the social evaluation and the status of teachers in Japanese society.

The Varkey Foundation conducted two studies on teacher status (Varkey Foundation, 2013, 2018), which surveyed 1000 citizens in each of 35 countries, giving insight into how teacher status is perceived by the general public in each country. When compared, these studies showed an increase in teacher status (20 points) in Japan between 2013 and 2018, suggesting a growing appreciation for teachers. Japan also scored positively in terms of students' respect for teachers (Varkey Foundation, 2018). However, perceptions of teacher status in Japan remained moderate when compared to the other 34 countries, and it lagged far behind countries such as China, Korea, and Singapore. In fact, when asked, "Would you encourage your child to become a teacher?" Japan had one of the least positive overall responses (Varkey Foundation, 2018, p. 45). The apparent disconnect between Japanese societies' respect for teachers and the reluctance of parents to recommend the teaching profession to their children may be culturally and socially ingrained, and it makes Japan an interesting site for research on teacher status.

Culturally speaking, Japanese society has Confucian roots, and Asian cultures tend to hold respect for both mastery of a skill (e.g., subject matter) and group cohesion (i.e., an educational outcome) (see Huang & Brown, 2009; Wen & Clément, 2003). This places teachers at a core position in the Japanese values and belief systems. The cultural value of authority has traditionally been placed in the role of the teacher, and the historically rooted Confucian paradigm urges the development of the group as a whole—a process by which teachers play a leading role. The socially and culturally valued position of teachers and teaching in Japan, however, does come at a cost.

In recent years, the language teaching profession in Japan has become increasingly difficult as the educational environment has changed. Over the past decades, the Japanese government has tried to improve English education through various policy changes. The rationale was that there was a need in a globalized society to focus more on learners' English communicative abilities. However, English study has historically been focused on the development of linguistic knowledge (see Markova & Rogers, 2004; McVeigh, 2002; Ushioda, 2013). Due to its dynamic nature, English educational policy has been referred to as being marked by a "permanent sense of crisis" (Ryan, 2009, p. 407), and some have argued that teachers lack self-confidence or the ability to implement English classroom reforms in accordance with policy changes (see Glasgow, 2014; Ikeda et al., 2019, 2020; Nagamine, 2015; Thompson & Yanagita, 2017).

Adding to the difficulty that persistent policy changes pose to teachers, teachers' workloads in other areas may also negatively impact how teachers feel about their careers. The teaching profession in Japan has also come to be characterized by many non-teaching duties, such as completing administrative tasks or being involved in school sports and extracurricular activities (Hiratsuka, 2023a). This has resulted in a situation where many teachers have had to work a significant number of overtime hours, contributing to job dissatisfaction and high attrition rates (see also Nagamine, 2018). It was reported that "a record high 953 teachers at public schools left jobs for mental health reasons in the 2021 academic year" (The Japan Times, 2023). More recently, it has been reported that the number of teachers who took leave due to mental illness—6,539 in 2022—has also hit a record high (Japan Today, 2024).

Aware of these problems, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology periodically investigates teacher well-being, and it is widely known that teachers in Japan work long hours (see OECD, 2018). The Japan Trade Union Confederation found that the majority of teachers self-reported more than 80 hours of overtime per month (JTUC, 2016). Such overwork has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease (Araki & Iwasaki, 2005; Takahashi, 2019) and is considered the threshold for *karoshi*—death from overwork (Kuwato & Hirano, 2020). Stress, long working hours, interpersonal relationship difficulties, conflicts with students or parents, and a lack of agency necessary to fix any of those problems are all contributing factors to mental and physical health risks for teachers. The educational system in Japan has even come to be known as *black kigyou*—a term used to denote an institution that is known to exploit its employees with little or no real concern for their well-being (see Bunyarat & Tuptim, 2023). In short, in Japan, the respectable job of a teacher is increasingly being viewed as an undesirable career choice. Nevertheless, education still plays a central role in Japanese society. A robust society cannot exist without a functioning and healthy educational system, and teachers continue to make up the heart of education in Japan. Language teacher identity, therefore, plays an integral part in determining how a teacher performs and persists throughout their teaching career in Japan.

Language Teacher Identity

Broadly speaking, language teacher identity research has become commonplace in the academic field of applied linguistics because it has "introduced a new framework to theorize and analyze the complex ways in which teachers learn to be and become teachers, grow as teachers, and exercise their practices situated in sociohistorical, cultural, and political contexts" (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020, p. 1). Norton (2013) defined identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). Language teacher identity research can play an important role in supporting and improving the professional working lives of teachers.

Concerning pre-service teacher identity, language teacher identity construction is an ongoing process, as English teachers in EFL contexts are themselves learning to teach a second language (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Tsui, 2011). Pre-service teachers are in the process of joining a community of professionals, and communities of practice are of interest because they can directly impact the identities of language teachers (Trent, 2017; Yazan, 2017). In the effort to establish themselves in their careers, pre-service teachers are constructing a professional identity that strikes a balance between their personal desires and the expectations of others. In other words, language teacher identity construction is both directed by the individual and contextually mediated by external forces (Fan & de Jong, 2019; Gu & Benson, 2015). It can also be beneficial to view the '*novice-ness*' of language teachers from the perspective of identity construction, as contextual factors influence individuals' identities in the early stages of their language teaching careers (Nazari et al., 2023). In addition, pre-service teachers are heavily influenced by their *imagined* language teacher identities and *imagined* communities of practice. For them, identity construction is a dynamic process that is mediated by prior learning experiences, beliefs, hands-on teaching practice, as well as institutional culture (Jiang et al., 2021).

The current scenario surrounding the teaching profession in Japan poses a problem for well-intentioned individuals pursuing a teaching career. Despite being an admirable profession amongst Japanese values and belief systems, given its drawbacks and risks, stakeholders have to wonder whether it is really worthwhile. Hence, there is an urgent and pressing need for language teacher identity research studies to be conducted in Japan (see Hiratsuka, 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Nall, 2021), and the present study aims to fill this gap in the research. The research questions in the present study are:

> (1) How are pre-service language teacher identities situated within the sociocultural values and belief systems in modern-day Japan?

> (2) In terms of Gross' (2015) process model of emotional regulation, how are pre-service teachers in Japan positioning their identities for careers as language teachers?

Methods

Context and Participants

This case study took place at two universities in Japan. Both universities had teacher training programs, granting us access to potential research participants. This research is especially of interest to stakeholders in language teaching due to the valued and demanding job of language teachers in this context. The pre-service teacher participants entered their university to pursue an English teaching license and are aiming for careers as English teachers. They are dedicating

themselves to their university studies amid the backdrop of teachers' status and working conditions as outlined above.

Prior to conducting research, an ethics review was completed. The second author is a Ph.D. advisor to the first author, and the ethics review was completed at the second author's university. The research was explained, and participants gave written consent before any data was collected. The present study is one part of a larger project, and the three participants (see Table 1) were selected for this particular study because of the relevant information that they had provided in the initial data collection. The participants were undergraduate or graduate students between 19 and 22 years old. Aside from student teaching or part-time tutoring, none of them had any extensive teaching experience. They had different majors but were all pursuing English teaching licenses. Participants were selected by means of convenience and purposeful sampling, as they were all known to the researchers before the research began (convenience sampling), and they were able to provide valuable data needed to address the research questions (purposeful sampling). All data was collected during the 2022 academic school year, and all names are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participant Biographical Information

Name	Age	Gender	Student status	Major	Desired Future Job	CEFR English Proficiency
Ryosuke	19	Male	Undergraduate	Elementary English Education	Elementary school English teacher	B2
Nana	21	Female	Undergraduate	English Communication	Junior high school English teacher	B2
Takeru	22	Male	Graduate	Language Communication	High school English teacher	C1

Research Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two phases. First, the participants filled out three narrative frames (Appendix A). Narrative frames (Barkhuizen, 2014; Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008) are a scaffolded writing data collection instrument. The participant is given sentence starters, which they complete with their own ideas. The structured nature allows researchers to steer the participants into providing data related to the research questions, but their open-endedness permits participants the freedom to freely reveal their own experiences and thoughts. For this study, the frames were constructed by referring to previous studies in similar contexts (e.g., Hiratsuka, 2014, 2018).

Participants were given a two-week period to complete three different narrative frames in English. Narrative frame 1 aimed to identify the participants' personal histories and future career goals. Narrative frame two was designed to give us access to the participants' ideas about the future of education and their future language teacher identities. Narrative frame 3 required the participants to imagine foreign language education around the year 2050 and make guesses about how changes in the educational field might impact language teacher identities. All responses were assembled in a spreadsheet for analysis. In the discussion below, the participants' narrative frame data will be

referenced according to their first initial and the numbered narrative frame, which is quoted or paraphrased. For example, Nana's narrative frame one will be cited as 'NNF1.'

Semi-structured interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) were conducted in phase 2 and lasted approximately 1 hour each (Appendix B). This format allows the researcher to guide the interview in relation to the research aims and objectives, yet it allows for the exploration of various topics as they arise in conversation. In other words, pre-determined questions were used as a jumping-off point, but much of the dialogue centered around ideas and topics that the interviewees themselves raised. Interviews were conducted by the first author in Japanese so that the participants could express themselves clearly and at length, and interview questions aimed at exploring the participants' reasons for becoming an English teacher, their thoughts about their future careers and identities, and about educational changes that they thought were likely to occur in the future. Interviews were translated and transcribed into English for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

To address research question 1, data analysis was driven by constructing grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to allow for the emergence of the findings from the data itself. This was done through inductive and deductive methods and utilized "iterative strategies of going back and forth between the data and analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). This constructivist approach to data analysis also recognizes the interrelatedness between the participants and the researcher as meaning is co-constructed. This was especially true for the semi-structured interviews. In accordance with grounded theory, the data were coded for emergent themes, which are addressed in the following sections.

Regarding research question 2, the findings were coded and organized in accordance with Gross' (2015) process model of emotional regulation (see Appendix C for data analysis codes and a coding sample from the data set). Gross (2015) argues that "emotions can be either helpful or harmful, depending on the context" (Gross, 2015, p. 4). Emotions take a wide variety of forms, and when emotions arise, they present the individual with opportunities to implement and exercise various emotional regulation strategies. Emotion regulation is chiefly characterized by the initiation of a purposeful effort to shape the course of emotional experiences (Gross et al., 2011). Human emotions and emotional regulation strategies are numerous, and in an effort to codify and organize these, Gross proposed the process model of emotional regulation (Gross, 2015). This model specifically identifies and elaborates on five emotional regulation strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. This theoretical framework was chosen for this study because teachers' identity construction processes are intertwined with emotional processes by which they position themselves in preparation for professional careers (Barcelos, 2015; Hiratsuka, 2023b). In Aspinwall & Taylor's (1997) words, emotional regulation is a form of 'proactive coping' and is "a process whereby an individual builds skills and resources to predict and prevent future emotional events" (Morris & King, 2020, p. 200). The data pointed to strategies the participants employed that were in accordance with Gross' (2015) model. These stages will be addressed individually in the findings below.

Findings

Language Teacher Identities within Educational Value and Beliefs Systems

Beginning with research question 1, as established, teachers are highly regarded in Japan, and teaching is viewed as a difficult but altruistic profession. However, teachers' heavy workload

contributes to a buildup of stress and can lead to physical and mental health problems, burnout, and attrition. The literature review has given us an idea of how *in-service* language teacher identities are situated within sociocultural values and belief systems in Japan. However, to address how *pre-service* teachers are situating their identities, it is necessary to analyze how the participants' identities are positioned as they approach their careers. In accordance with grounded theory, two themes emerged from the data that help answer research question 1: feelings of hope and dread.

Feelings of hope. Participants were asked about how they felt about becoming a language teacher. Many of their responses showed an exuberance for their careers. Nana, for example, is studying to become a junior high school English teacher. In narrative frame 1, she wrote that she feels "confident . . . because [she] really want[s] to become a teacher" (NNF1). When asked about this, she said, "The biggest reason to become a teacher is just to become involved with children's lives." As Japanese society values teachers, Nana also views teaching as a worthwhile career in which she can influence the lives of students. Digging deeper, Nana revealed:

> I wanted to become an elementary school teacher, but after coming to university, I realized how much fun it could be to teach English, and I really admired my teachers [in junior and senior high school]. So, I changed my idea and wanted to become an English teacher.

This statement showcases how pre-service teacher identities are malleable. One can see how positive emotions arising from her assessment of the lives of her teachers can influence the trajectory of one's career path.

Like Nana, Ryosuke felt motivated and confident because "[he likes] teaching, children, and English" (RNF1). He also mentioned that he "feel[s] the necessity of English in Japan" (RNF2). This statement places Ryosuke, as a teacher, in an essential position within Japanese society and suggests that he feels that he can influence not only students but also society as a whole. Regarding his rationale, Ryosuke chose teaching because teachers "should be focused on the children . . . to help them become adults. To look to the future and help them grow up . . . Not to make them grow up, but to support them in growing up." Ryosuke felt motivated to become a teacher for the altruistic goal of helping children grow up, adding depth to the idea that he is hopeful and enthusiastic about his future career.

Takeru was optimistic about his career because of his part-time cram school teaching experience coupled with his practical teaching experience as a university student (TNF1). When questioned about his reasons for choosing this career, he claimed that his high school teacher supported him, and thanks to him, Takeru had a fulfilling high school life (Takeru). Takeru views the teaching career as valuable and wants to contribute positively to his future students' lives.

Considering their developing language teacher identities, the participants displayed hopeful feelings about their future careers. Aligned with Japanese values and beliefs about education, the participants viewed teaching as important, and they maintained positive attitudes for their future careers. While the participants had a hopeful exuberance for teaching, not all the emotions displayed in the data were positive.

Feelings of dread. Despite having positive attitudes, the participants were also keenly aware of the negative aspects of teaching in Japan, giving rise to negative emotions, primarily dread. Nana revealed that "teachers have a lot of work" (NNF2). When questioned, Nana said, "I've heard rumors [from my seniors]. The work—not the teaching—but other schoolwork is too much. A lot of extra work is assigned . . . I don't want to do that kind of work." This awareness gives rise to Nana's feeling of dread about the teachers' workload. This feeling appears to be a complicating

factor in Nana's identity development. She is hesitant and fearful of teachers' extra duties and is therefore hesitant to take on a career in teaching.

Ryosuke and Takeru showed similar concerns (RNF3, TNF3). When asked, Ryosuke said, "The working hours are too long and too busy for teachers (Ryosuke). When discussing the expectations that are placed on teachers, Takeru claimed:

> Teachers work from Monday until Sunday. Every day they have club activities . . . When I was a high school student, my homeroom teacher, when he would have to do things related to his son, like the entrance ceremony or graduation, he couldn't participate in those kinds of things . . . I really want to value the time together with my family in the future. If the situation doesn't change, then I think I really can't look forward to it.

The participants are firmly aware of the heavy workload. Takeru has personally observed how this burden can negatively affect a teacher's family life. In the final phrase, Takeru mentions the urgency for change, but he nonetheless shows a lack of agency to alter the situation, adding to the dread that he feels.

We have seen how hope and dread play out in the participants' lives and identities. Given this complexity in the lives and identities of pre-service teachers, it raises a question about how pre-service teachers are dealing with this tension in their teacher identities, which will be addressed in the next section. The language teacher identity construction process will be viewed from the lens of Gross' (2015) emotional regulation strategies.

Identity Positioning from the Perspective of Gross' Model of Emotional Regulation

This section addresses research question 2. Emotions are an important aspect of identity (Barcelos, 2015; Nall & Mansouri, 2023). Regarding the emotionality of the teaching profession, King et al. (2020) stated:

> From joy to frustration, enthusiasm to boredom, fear to anger, teachers' emotional experiences shape not only their professional identities and classroom practices but also ultimately help to determine their length of service, being as they are intimately linked to teacher stress, burnout, and attrition (p. 288).

Since emotions are part of teacher identities, this necessitates the need for pre-service teachers to explore emotional regulation strategies as they construct their identities. The following findings will be presented in five sections according to Gross' (2015) process model of emotional regulation. It is our hope that in this section, we can show how the participants are positioning their identities by employing various emotional regulation strategies. Additionally, pre-service teachers experience both emotions as they are enrolled in teacher training programs and emotions in relation to speculation about their future lives. These two types of emotions can be both felt and be relevant to pre-service teachers and their identity development processes, and will be explored together in the following sections.

Situation selection. Situation selection means "taking actions that make it more (or less) likely that one will be in a situation that one expects will give rise to desirable (or undesirable) emotions" (Gross, 2015, p. 7). The participants' situation selection strategies originated in an appraisal of their own skills and abilities. Nana foresees having trouble forming meaningful relationships with students. She said, "The thing I lack the most is having spent a lot of time with children . . . I need to do volunteer work . . . and become used to being with them" (Nana). Nana senses her own lack

of experience and employs a situation selection strategy by showing a willingness to engage in activities that maximize the development of her interpersonal skills.

Ryosuke illustrated two forms of situation selection when he said, "I need to know more about the actual status of English education . . . I want to do my practical teaching, and I want to go abroad" (Ryosuke). In this statement, he shows an awareness of his own lack of pedagogical knowledge and experience, as well as a lack of English proficiency (RNF2). He plans to overcome this by selecting situations where he is likely to benefit an English user and teacher. Takeru likewise felt that he had insufficient knowledge related to English education and therefore continued his education (i.e., selected his situation) in graduate school rather than entering the workforce after graduation (interview, TNF1).

In these examples, one can see how participants employ situation selection strategies to increase knowledge and abilities in areas that they deem themselves to be lacking. Situation selection, therefore, is a common strategy utilized by the participants to position themselves in an advantageous manner for their future careers.

Situation modification. Situation modification happens when one resorts to "taking actions that directly alter a situation in order to change its emotional impact" (Gross, 2015, p. 8). This can take place by creating a 'new' situation out of something uncomfortable. Exercising agency is a necessary element in enacting this strategy.

Situation modification was related to the participant's perceptions of their expected future careers that they find undesirable. Nana was aware of the teachers' heavy workload (interview, NNF2). When asked about how she would deal with this problem, she was unable to give a well-formulated response. She said, "How? . . . How? . . . I'm not sure . . ." (Nana). Takeru also could not employ situation modification strategies when he worried about teachers' non-teaching duties. In the interview, he said, "If I'm speaking honestly, I don't really have the confidence to tackle those issues" (Takeru). Ryosuke feared the possibility of being forced out of his career due to the pressure. He claimed that this is ingrained within the teaching profession in Japan, and he feels that he is helpless to change such a situation (interview, RNF3).

When imagining their future careers, the participants showed an *inability* to take action to facilitate situation modification. This seems to be an important defining feature of their language teacher identities.

Attention deployment. Attention deployment is "directing one's attention with the goal of influencing one's emotional response" (Gross, 2015, p. 8). This strategy entails consciously manipulating one's attention to focus on a positive rather than a negative.

Narrative frame 3 asked participants to imagine the job of an English teacher when the participants were around 50 years old. One issue that emerged had to do with artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on education. Nana wrote, "Translation apps will evolve, and we may not have to study English anymore" (NNF3). Later, she said, "I think that English as a subject may no longer be needed" and that "the job of an English teacher may disappear" (Nana). Takeru echoed this sentiment when he wondered whether "we [teachers] will be really needed or not" (TNF3). Nana later illustrated attention deployment when she hesitantly said, "I guess I'm not that worried about it. Things will be OK, I think." Takeru rationalized his worries about the AI problem by claiming that "anyway, it's becoming more and more common to change your career" (Takeru), shifting the focus of the discussion to the group of working professionals rather than on himself. Regarding the AI problem, Ryosuke said, "If it did come true, I don't know what I would do. All I can do is to

think about it when it actually becomes a reality" (Ryosuke). Nevertheless, Ryosuke feels "optimism" about the future of teaching because "humanity has managed to get by so far" (RNF3). This is one more example of attention deployment.

Attention deployment is one strategy that the participants employ when confronting thoughts about uncomfortable future situations. This attention deployment may be little more than wishful thinking, but for the time being, it allows the participants to minimize negative emotions by simply shifting their attention away from looming problems.

Cognitive change. Cognitive change is "modifying one's appraisal of a situation in order to alter its emotional impact" (Gross, 2015, p. 9). In other words, one can deal with negative emotions by changing the way one thinks about an undesirable situation. The participants altered the way they thought about specific problems to reduce emotional strain. Takeru viewed the traditional teacher-student relationship as being psychologically distant. He felt that this limits his ability to form meaningful relationships with students and lessens his ability to help them. Illustrating cognitive change, he said, "I really don't want the students to call me *Sensei* [teacher]. I want that power relationship to be as equal as possible. I want to spend my time at the same level as the students" (Takeru). Takeru is changing the way he thinks about the traditional teacher-student status hierarchy and relationship. He believes this will allow him to bypass the hierarchical teacher-student relationship and grant him social capital with the students, thereby being better socially positioned to help them.

When considering his career, Ryosuke tackles the problems associated with long working hours and reveals a cognitive change strategy (RNF3). Ryosuke proclaimed:

> *I* can't deal with those problems by myself. So, the team, or my grade, or as an entire school, *we* have to deal with those problems . . . it's teamwork. We can't solve the problems alone (Ryosuke's interview).

Ryosuke is employing cognitive change by thinking about them as '*our* problems' as a group of teachers rather than '*his* problems,' enabling him to lessen the personal emotional burden.

Nana, on the other hand, worried that learning English may become unnecessary due to technological advancements. When pressed further, she came to recognize that technology would also "reduce the burden on teachers" in other areas (NNF2), illustrating a cognitive change in the way she thinks about technology and its impact on teachers.

Response modulation. Response modulation means "directly influencing experiential, behavioral, or psychological components of the emotional response after the emotion is well developed" (Gross, 2015, p. 9). This can include strategies that alter one's feeling state or influence one's physiological responses. For the participants, response modulation can occur following experienced emotions during pre-service training, but there is also a future element, as they imagine their future emotions and anticipate how they will cope. This future element of response modulation will be in focus here as it pertains to the development of their teacher identities.

When faced with thoughts about prolonged teacher stress, Takeru claimed, "I may resign at some point" (TNF3). Quitting a strenuous profession is perhaps the most drastic way to employ response modulation. When probed further, he said:

> With my classmates, we often talk about plan B careers. The thing we often talk about is our first jobs, it is just to bear it and put up with it, and save money. Then when we're in our 30s or 40s we talk about using that money to start something new (Takeru).

Nana also echoed this sentiment when, in reference to the future AI problem, she said that she would consider a second career as a writer. Ryosuke stopped short of saying that he would leave the teaching profession. However, when confronted with the impact of future technologies on teaching, he said that "the job of a teacher will become a formality and lose its significance or existence" (RNF3). It's possible to see how espousing such a belief might lead to a response modulation strategy like Takeru and Nana's. The participants imagined their future careers, identities, and emotions and employed hypothetical future response modulation in response to negative emotions in their imagined future careers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how pre-service teachers are situating their identities amongst Japanese values and belief systems regarding education in Japan and to assess how those pre-service teachers are coping with disrupted identities as they are approaching their future careers as K-12 English language teachers in Japan. The participants' identities incorporate deeply held emotions of hope and dread for their careers. What this means is that they are not stepping into the teaching profession enthusiastically and wholeheartedly. Due to teachers' overwork, the participants are not looking at the profession as a life-long career that allows them to perfect their skills, in addition to allowing them to construct fulfilling personal lives. The dread stands in the way of the construction of empowered teacher identities that will serve them throughout their careers (see Barkhuizen, 2017; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Hiratsuka, 2022; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Robertson & Yazan, 2022). It is in this sense that we argue that pre-service teacher identities in this study are '*disrupted*.'

To address research question 1, the pre-service teachers are situating their identities within sociocultural values and belief systems (see Hiratsuka & Okuma, 2021; Olsen, 2008; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020) in a worrisome way. For one, teachers are respected and valued in Japanese society (see Tsujimura, 1991; Varkey Foundation, 2013, 2018), and the participants are embarking on careers in alignment with those values. On the other hand, it is widely known that teachers are overworked (see Hiratsuka, 2022; JTUC, 2016; OECD, 2018), but little real action has been taken to mitigate this situation. Aware of this, the pre-service teachers are averse to the teaching profession and feel helpless to remedy it. This contradiction in the way that pre-service teachers are situating their identities may result in two negative outcomes for their teacher identities. First, it may result in disengagement from the teaching profession (i.e., 'I am not a good teacher because I cannot handle all my duties'). The three participants showed signs of early disengagement when they claimed that they don't want to do all the non-teaching work typically assigned to teachers (NNF2; RNF3; TNF3) and that they don't look forward to their careers because of the overwork (e.g., Nana's interview; Ryosuke's interview; Takeru's interview). Secondly, it may eventually result in dis-identification (i.e., 'teaching is not for me'). The dis-identification from the teaching profession was made evident when they claimed they might eventually leave the teaching profession (TNF3; RNF3; Nana's interview; Takeru's interview; Ryosuke's interview) to pursue other, less strenuous careers. Both disengagement and dis-identification will likely have detrimental effects and may eventually lead to the participants themselves actually leaving the teaching profession altogether (see Trent, 2017). This situation does not serve the students, teachers, or the wider communities well.

For the teaching profession in Japan, this complex situation means that there is a need to lessen the dread that pre-service teachers are experiencing so they can situate their identities more positively as they prepare to begin their careers. The pre-service teachers are affected by the knowledge of

overwork gained from seniors and other in-service teachers. For one, they need to hear more stories about in-service teachers who have balanced and fulfilling professional and personal lives (see Hiratsuka, 2016; Hiratsuka & Barkhuizen, 2015). Additionally, administrators and policymakers need to implement and enforce meaningful changes in teachers' workloads. This may be done by hiring additional staff members to tackle the administrative tasks and extracurricular activities that teachers have overseen thus far. However, given the financial constraints that often characterize education, perhaps a more reasonable first step would be to reduce the burden of after-school programs by making them entirely voluntary for teachers or limiting the activities to a few months during the year. Schools could also enforce a much stiffer division of labor, limiting teaching duties to teachers, administration duties to administrators, and coaching to coaches.

Gross' (2015) model of emotional regulation was chosen as the theoretical framework for research question 2 because emotions and identities are intertwined (Barcelos, 2015; Hiratsuka, 2023b), and Gross' model allows us, as researchers, to systematically view and understand the ways in which the pre-service teachers are positioning their identities by employing emotional regulation strategies (or not) in preparation for their careers. Emotional regulation strategies function as a form of proactive coping (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997) and are, therefore, related to their identity positioning (see Morris & King, 2020). The participants in this study were able to exercise emotional regulation strategies to varying degrees, placing us, as researchers, in a position to identify important implications of the study and suggest directions for future research.

Situation selection and cognitive change were two of Gross' (2015) emotional regulation strategies that the participants were able to effectively utilize in their identity positioning. The participants were able to sense their own deficiencies and employ emotional regulation effectively to manipulate their future emotions. For example, Nana and Ryosuke were able to self-identify their lack of social skills and linguistic proficiencies and were willing to put themselves in situations where those worries would be alleviated (Nana's interview, Ryosuke's interview). They did that to better prepare themselves for careers in teaching, thereby increasing the positive emotions experienced as in-service teachers. What this means for the teaching profession and pre-service teacher training programs in Japan is that pre-service teachers have a self-awareness of their skill sets and abilities and that they have a solid knowledge foundation about what the teaching profession entails for them. This suggests that current teacher training programs are doing a good job of communicating and demonstrating the basic duties and responsibilities of teachers to pre-service teachers and that there are programs and opportunities in place that help pre-service teachers gain the knowledge and experience that they deem necessary in forming their identities, placing them on a path toward successful careers.

Gross' (2015) emotional regulation strategy of cogitative change also emerged as a positive force for pre-service teachers' identities. For example, Takeru wanted to change the way he and his future students thought about the teacher-student relationship (Takeru's interview), and Ryosuke believed he would be able to approach problems in future teaching environments by cognitively transforming them from '*his* problems' to '*our* problems' (Ryosuke's interview). Takeru's strategy of transforming the teacher-student relationship by abandoning formal titles shows us that he possesses the mental flexibility and fortitude to contradict and transcend the cultural values and beliefs within Japanese society—values and beliefs that he viewed as holding back teachers' ability to help students. Ryosuke illustrated solidarity with colleagues when facing problems at work. This kind of collegial unity may form the basis of a powerful driving force in calling for and establishing meaningful change in the problematic work culture in Japan. If there is any hope for improving the

lives of teachers, in-service and pre-service teacher training programs need to support and build on the development of emotional regulation strategies such as situation selection and cognitive change.

In contrast, the participants were sometimes *unable* to employ emotional regulation strategies successfully. When Nana imagined being overworked, she could not think of a way to employ situation modification to better the situation (Nana's interview). Takeru's and Ryosuke's comments also reflected this sentiment (Takeru's interview, Ryosuke's interview, RNF3), showing that the participants believed they would lack the future agency or ability to lessen their own workloads. This places them in a position of helplessness, and it appears that they can only rely on administrators and policymakers to change teachers' working conditions. To alleviate this situation, pre-service teachers need to be shown how others have successfully implemented situation modification strategies through the exercise of teacher agency in Japanese schools. This may be done by conducting qualitative research studies regarding situation modification strategies successfully employed by teachers in Japan and introducing them as part of the regular teacher training curricula. Additionally, rather than merely assessing teacher stress (e.g., JTUC, 2016; OECD, 2018), administrators and policymakers in Japan need to take immediate action that would reduce the workloads of teachers and give teachers some agency or ability to control at least part of their work duties and tasks.

A third category of emotional regulation strategies also emerged. These are what we call the neither-nor strategies, as the pre-service teachers are neither facing the challenges directly nor taking any direct action to avoid them. Attention deployment was utilized by the participants when they considered the potential problems that AI and translation technology posed to the future of foreign language education (NNF3, TNF3, RNF3, Takeru's interview, Ryosuke's interview). The participants simply took the position of 'I'll worry about that problem when we get there.' For the moment, they may find at least an avoidance of negative emotions. However, this strategy only postpones such problems and emotional struggles to be dealt with later. The participants may be doing this because they are not well informed about the problem or because they simply don't know what to do otherwise. Technological advancements and AI are already disrupting certain labor sectors and industries, and the intersection between technology and education is becoming more evident every day. Teacher training programs can better serve students by providing pre-service teachers with the opportunities to learn about current technological advances that are directly related to language education and exposing students to critical thinking exercises that target how they might tackle future changes in education, as well as how they might negotiate their identities to incorporate new and emergent technologies into their teaching.

Another neither-nor strategy that was particularly worrisome involved response modulation, emerging from the participants' thoughts about plan B careers (TNF3, Takeru's interview, Nana's interview, Ryosuke's interview). The fact that pre-service teachers are already thinking about second careers is particularly telling for the teaching profession in Japan. Quitting the teaching profession to pursue a less strenuous vocation would likely alleviate stress and negative emotions, but it nonetheless avoids directly dealing with the problems that teachers face. This suggests that the problem of teacher attrition needs to be given more serious attention in academic circles and among policymakers and administrators in Japan.

Conclusion

The current study addressed how three pre-service teachers and their identities are positioned within Japanese values and belief systems. The participants' identities are conflicted, comprising

both strong emotions of fear and dread. We have also described and interpreted the emotional regulation strategies employed by the participants in accordance with Gross' (2015) process model of emotional regulation. Gross' (2015) process model of emotional regulation can be viewed as a tool for understanding and analyzing how pre-service teachers are emotionally pro-actively coping (or not) as they approach careers in teaching, which they view as being strenuous and stressful yet rewarding. Since the emotional regulation strategies were exercised at varying levels, this hints at implications and directions for future research.

Language teacher educators and researchers can benefit from the current study by having a raised awareness of some of the identity-related issues that pre-service teachers encounter and by being consciously aware of the ways that pre-service teachers are employing emotional regulation strategies while they are enrolled in language teacher training programs. Much attention needs to be paid to areas where the participants struggled, for example, with the development of situation modification strategies. Language teacher educators could modify their pedagogies to help their students more appropriately prepare for their future careers by incorporating activities that require pre-service teachers to think critically about the challenges they are likely to face in the future and about how those challenges can be effectively addressed, and how it might affect their identities as language teachers (see Fanselow & Hiratsuka, 2019). Situation modification skills and language teacher agency seem to be other areas that need to be the focus of more research in Japan. As the pre-service teachers in this study worry about their future teacher agency and their ability to modify difficult situations in their work environments, it seems that researchers need to make an endeavor to uncover how in-service teachers can or cannot exercise their professional agencies and modify their working situations to be more conducive to life-long resilient careers in Japan. An effort should also be made to raise awareness among policymakers and administrators regarding the growing need for meaningful change in teachers' working conditions. Likewise, research studies that target pre-service teachers' response modulation and beliefs about plan B careers could also be informative in teacher training programs, as well as for policymakers and administrators.

The current study is not without its limitations. This study included a small number of participants. However, an effort was made for triangulation in terms of data collection methods (i.e., narrative frames and interviews) and participants (i.e., pre-service teachers hoping to work at three different educational levels), and we believe that the findings are transferrable to other individuals who find themselves in similar situations to the pre-service teachers in the present study. Future studies could include a larger number of participants from a wide variety of backgrounds (e.g., non-Japanese pre-service teachers).

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Appendix A

Narrative Frames

Narrative Frame 1: Participants' personal narratives and future career

1. My ideal future job/career is (   )
2. This is because (   )
3. Right now I am working toward this goal by (   )
4. I am excited about my future career because (   )
5. I hope to maintain excitement about my future career by (   )
6. I am a little worried about my future career because (   )
7. I hope to overcome worries about my future career by (   )
8. Describe yourself as a pre-service teacher (a student who is studying to become a teacher) today. How do you feel about your studies? How do you see yourself as a student? How do you think others see you? (   )
9. Imagine yourself working as a teacher in the year 2050. Describe yourself as a teacher. How do you feel? How do you see yourself as a teacher? How do you think others see you? (   )

Narrative Frame 2: Participants' narratives concerning education in the future

1. I think that in general school/learning environments in the year 2050 will be different than today. For example (   )
2. This change is likely to occur because (   )
3. I think this because (   )
4. When I imagine a teacher's job in the year 2050, one of the things I'm most concerned about is (   )
5. I think this because (   )
6. When I imagine a teacher's job in the year 2050, one of things I'm most concerned about is (   )
7. I think this because (   )
When I think about education in general in the year 2050, the strongest emotion that I feel is (joy, enthusiasm, inspiration, optimism, frustration, boredom, fear, anger, other)
8. If you chose "other" in the above question, which is the strongest emotion that you feel? (   )
9. I feel this way probably because (   )

Narrative Frame 3: Participants' narratives about English/foreign language education in the year 2050

1. Imagine English as a second/foreign language education in the year 2050. Some changes in the way we learn/teach languages are likely to occur. For example (   )
2. As a language teacher, I hope to adapt to such changes by (   )
3. Skills that will help me when I need to adapt or learn new things as a teacher in 2050 are (   )
4. I think this because (   )
5. When I think about my future career, specifically in the year 2050, the strongest emotion that I feel is (joy, enthusiasm, inspiration, optimism, frustration, boredom, fear, anger, other)
6. If you chose "other" in the above question, which is the strongest emotion that you feel?
7. This is probably because (   )

Appendix B

Semi-structured interview questions

Can you tell me a little bit about your life story?
Why did you decide to become an English teacher?
In your own words, what is the job of a teacher?
In the future, what kind of teacher do you think you'll be?
What roles do you look forward to most in being a teacher?
What is your idea of an ideal teacher?
In the future, what challenges do you think you will encounter as a teacher?
What do you think your future students will think about you and your teaching?
Can you tell me about the things you are learning about teaching?
Are you supportive or critical of the current educational system in Japan?

Appendix C

Data Analysis Code	Code Meaning	Example from the data set
Hope	Participant displays feeling of hope for their future career	"I realized how much fun it could be to teach English, and I really admired my teachers" (Nana)
Dread	Participant displays feeling of dread toward their future career	"If the situation doesn't change, then I think I really can't look forward to it" (Takeru)
S.S.S.	Situation Selection Strategy	"I want to do my practical teaching, and I want to go abroad" (Ryosuke)
S.M.S.	Situation Modification Strategy	Interviewer: "So how will you deal with those difficulties?" Nana: "How? . . . I'm not sure"
A.D.S.	Attention Deployment Strategy	"I guess I'm not that worried about it. Things will be OK, I think" (Nana)
C.C.S.	Cognitive Change Strategy	"I really don't want the students to call me *sensei* [teacher]. I want that power relationship to be as equal as possible" (Takeru)
R.M.S.	Response Modulation Strategy	"I may resign at some point" (Takeru)