

Article

Changing Technologies or Changing Identities? The Effects of Online Teaching on Educator Identity in Vietnam During COVID-19

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to understand the current effects on professional identity during the move to online learning from traditional class-based learning among higher education English lecturers in Hanoi, Vietnam, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst multiple studies have focused on the storied experiences of teachers in multiple contexts during this period, few have utilized the lens of teacher professional identity as a tool to understanding reported successes and challenges at the classroom and institution level. Semi-structured interviews took place with six higher education lecturers of English across two universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Data was analyzed in NVivo using deductive thematic analysis, based on a conceptual framework of identity congruence and incongruence. The study found that sites of identity congruence during the move to online learning in this context included values of efficacy, professionalism, and innovation, while sites of incongruence included student motivation, social connection, and control. The study highlights the potential of using the lens of professional identity as a tool for greater insight into rationale and potential remedying of challenges within educational settings, particularly when observing the notion of change in teaching delivery.

Keywords

Professional identity, online teaching, identity work, TESOL, Vietnam

1 Introduction and Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread disruption to education systems on an international scale. Within Vietnam, the context of this study, in order to maintain learning during this period, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) declared a policy of “suspending school, not stopping learning”

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during the first period of the pandemic (Pham & Ho, 2020, p. 3). As a result, over 100 higher education institutions in the country found themselves transitioning to an online delivery model (MoET, 2020) equating to 58.8% of the Vietnamese undergraduate population and 39.1% of its post-graduate population (B and Company, 2020 in: Pham & Ho, 2020).

Until this time, online delivery of education had remained largely at the periphery of Vietnamese higher education (Pham & Ho, 2020) and general attitudes regarding its effectiveness and place within the higher education context were considered to be unfavorable amongst key stakeholders such as students, parents and teachers (Nguyen, 2021; Pham & Ho, 2020). Furthermore, teachers and students in Vietnam have self-reported as having little experience utilizing technology within the classroom, with little exposure to online learning as a result of its absence within general education in the country prior to this period (Hoang & Le, 2020). Covid-19 and its subsequent impact on take-up of digital modes of delivery for education shifted what was a growing debate regarding the future relationship between education and technology into the national and global limelight.

At the very forefront of this radical shift, teachers found themselves positioned under a nation's spotlight as key agents in the continuation of education in the face of the largest disruption to higher education in Vietnam's recent history (Vu et al., 2020). Whilst little research on Vietnamese teachers' experiences during this time has been conducted to date, global trends in research point to a picture of teaching during Covid-induced periods of distance education as affecting teacher satisfaction (Orhan & Beyhan, 2020); well-being (Allen, Jerrim & Sims, 2020); creating feelings of burnout (Pressley, 2021); and damaging perceived efficacy of teaching (Dabrowski, 2020).

In such periods of disruption and change, particularly with transitions to technology-based teaching, there have been calls within the literature to look past purely the technical and practical aspects involved, and to adopt a more holistic and nuanced lens of observing the outcomes with their relation to teacher professional identity (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Sachs, 2005; Varghese et al., 2005; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Through utilization of professional identity as a lens to view these outcomes, details regarding teacher experience and subsequent relationships with outcomes can be explored (Baxter, 2012; McNaughton & Billot, 2016). This research adopts such an approach by examining the effects of this transition to online learning on the professional identity of eight higher education lecturers across two universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Specifically, the research aimed to understand how the move to online teaching affected the professional identity of Vietnamese tertiary English educators, and whether these effects were congruent or incongruent with their existing professional identities alongside coping mechanisms engaged to assist with sites of incongruence, otherwise known as "identity work" (Ibarra & Petrigieri, 2010).

1.1 Defining teacher identity

Teacher identity can be defined broadly as "self-representation" (Hall, 1996, p. 31) and the "sense of self" (Golden, 2016, p. 67), which is formed and reformed from a complex interplay between individual, social and cultural influences and input (Giddens, 1984). Luehmann (2007) recognizes four key features of identity, in that it is socially constituted, is constantly being reformed, is multifarious, and is constituted in the interpretation and narration of experiences. Identity then, can be considered a sum of components through which teachers define themselves (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) and is reciprocally related to the perception of professional belonging (Davey, 2013) which lies at the core of understanding, interpreting and living the teaching profession (Johnson et al., 2010). Teacher identity can also include a range of harmonizing sub-identities, equally based on interpretation and re-interpretation of experience (Beijaard et al., 2004). Understanding such complex concepts of identity can be challenging but can be partially understood through teachers' professional practice and professional roles (Enyedy, Goldberg, & Welsh, 2005). It follows then, that inconsistencies and disruptions in professional practice can cause

changes to professional identity, which Ibara and Petriglieri (2010) state may include reshaping or formulating an entirely new professional identity.

Requirements to adopt or interact with technology within teaching delivery, as witnessed during multiple educational contexts during Covid-19, have the capacity to impact teacher's self-perception of their identity, given that pedagogy, values, and personal narratives of the self can be particularly affected by technological change (McNaughton & Billot, 2016). Even prior to the pandemic, Slater et al. (2005) highlight in other contexts that the move to online teaching for higher education faculty can cause role ambiguity, stress, and emotional strain, while Schmidt, Hodge, and Tschide (2013) found that teachers had feelings of being unprepared, overwhelmed, and apprehensive during their initial online teaching periods. Thanaraj's (2016) study found that in the USA, university faculty were challenged in recognizing their identity when moving to online teaching. This can be the result of multiple factors, including the "deskilling" effect, where teachers no longer feel as though they are experts using unfamiliar technology, or the dissociative effect, where the faculty and students no longer occupy the same physical space (Golden, 2016). However, it can also deeply affect social dynamics of the classroom, as Chronaki and Matos (2014) also highlight that moving to an online teaching model can result in the unexpected or unequal distribution of power. Given these far-reaching effects, understanding teacher identity is of vital importance during what could be a permanent transition to at least blended, if not fully online learning in the future.

1.2 Teacher identity in TESOL

The role of identity in understanding language teacher profession and experiences has gained significant traction in the last 15 years. The importance of reflecting on and investigating identity within the TESOL profession was touted by Ramanathan (2002) as being integral to critical reflections on the cognitive aspects of language teaching. This is a view later echoed by Varghese et al.'s (2005) claim that "understanding identity is key to understanding language teaching through interaction of meta-awareness towards the development of the well-rounded, critical and proactive language educator" (p. 33).

Relevant to the focus of this particular research, multiple studies have utilised the notion of professional teacher identity as a tool through which to attempt a deeper understanding of areas of change, innovation and disruption within English language teaching. Kubanyiova's (2012) study of Slovakian teachers of English leans on the notion of "multiple teacher selves" within language teaching as lying at the heart of teacher pedagogical choice, motivation and responsiveness to professional learning opportunities (p. 61). This is echoed in Hiver's (2013) study of Korean English teachers as their "ideal" and "ought-to" teacher selves fuelled decisions over interaction with professional development (p. 13). Indeed, a range of studies utilise identity as a way to gain insight into decision-making in the context of change and the cognitive and emotional mechanisms at play which govern teacher response (Shelley et al., 2013).

The field is also witnessing gradual momentum towards greater focus on the cognitive and emotional aspects of teachers' experiences within Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) alongside explicit investigation into the mechanisms at play when professional identity comes under threat. In White & Ding's (2009) longitudinal study of experienced language teachers' involvement in an e-learning project, the authors contextualized the way teachers in their study engaged with new forms of teaching, and thus professional learning, through leaning on teachers' "possible selves" (Dornyei, 2005, p. 99). Shelley et al.'s (2013) study investigated how teachers were able to frame their experiences of shifting to digital delivery through enacting various tenets of their professional identity, whilst framing feelings of unease as a result of a "destabilizing of their identity" (p. 572). Sahakyan et al. (2018, p. 45) also indicate the use of framing of "feasible teacher self" as a way to reflect on discrepancies between aspirations and daily constraints of mode of teaching in their study of Armenian EFL teachers. The call for inclusion of

identity in observing language teaching in evolving contexts remains large as researchers in both TESOL and CALL highlight the teacher identities potential in providing valuable insight for both practitioners, institutions and decision-makers in language education.

1.3 The context of teacher identity in Vietnam

Prior to determining a methodology, analysis of the teaching context was undertaken. This included identifying the relevant sociocultural factors affecting identity among higher education professionals engaged in tertiary English teaching in Vietnam. Of note is the historical legacy of Confucian heritage culture (Roe & Perkins, 2020), as teacher beliefs and values may be framed by these societal considerations (Pham, 2014). Following these cultural values, teachers are often considered “gurus” and the “ultimate source of knowledge” in the classroom (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005, p. 32). Vietnamese teachers are then considered masters of their subject and garner students’ respect for this (Phan, 2004). These findings are relevant given that professional identity may be seen as rooted in these aspects of the role of the teacher in broader Vietnamese society, particularly as traditional power relations may be upended, rebalanced, or reconfigured when moving from a classroom to online teaching (Chronaki & Matos, 2014).

2 Development of the Theoretical Framework

Concerning periods of change, which in this case refers to the adoption of a new online mode of teaching delivery, there is no unified framework for addressing these effects on teacher identity. The framework developed in this research focusses on changes to professional identity based on the concepts of “identity congruence”, “incongruence”, (Ibarra, 1999; Tudor & Worrall, 2006) and “identity work” (Ibarra & Petrigieri, 2010).

Incongruence (Ibarra, 1999) can be considered a form of value misalignment (Karavas-Doukas, 1998) or identity disruption (Donnelly & Young, 1988; McNaughton & Billot, 2016). These terms refer to contexts whereby external forces establish a situation in which the individual finds their core values, identity and aspirations within the profession as being misaligned, disrupted or challenged (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005). Such sites of incongruence can be found in multiple forms, including opposing views of education at the organizational and teacher level (Winter, 2009), policy change (Lee & Yin, 2011; Clarke, Hyde & Drennan, 2013) and inclusion of new technologies which impact the way teachers deliver their lessons (Baxter, 2012; Richardson & Alsup, 2015; Oldale & Knightley, 2018).

While research in the area of teacher professional identity often focuses on struggles, tensions and disruptions of identity, it is also possible to identify contexts as being able to enact, enable and fulfill certain values and identities. This can be considered “identity congruence”, which refers to situations whereby “values and the expression of these in the context of [their] work are closely matched” (Oldale & Knightley, 2018, p. 223). Situations of change including implementation of technology see alignment of teacher professional identities as aiding adoption, engagement and continued usage (Liu, 2019; Baxter, 2012).

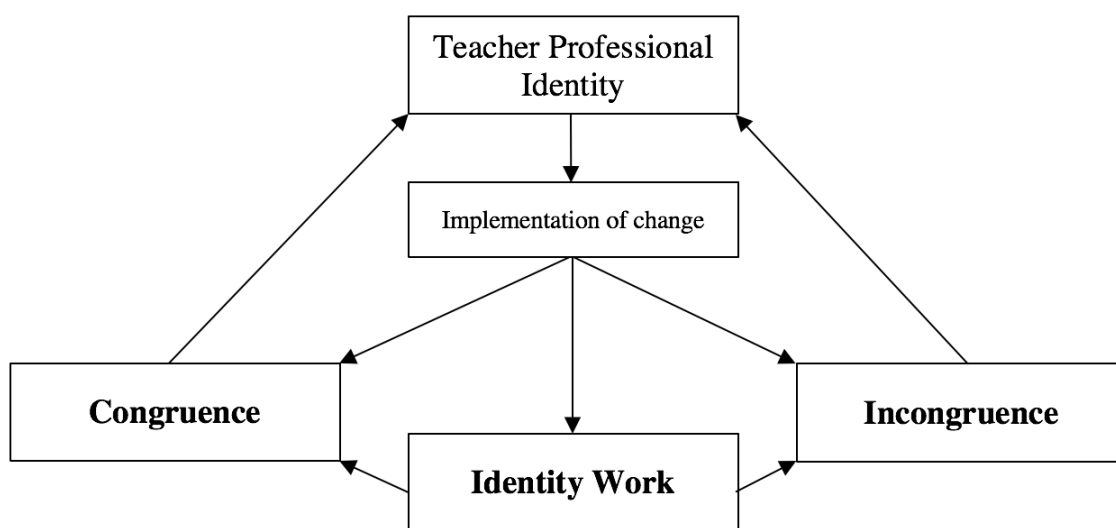
However, congruence and incongruence are not wholly distinct entities, as identities are dynamic and fluid (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Sites of disruption can lead to individuals engaging in a variety of actions and framings as they look to deal with such incongruence (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). In essence, this is understood as “identity work” (Ibarra & Petrigieri, 2010) whereby individuals engage in “forming, repairing, maintaining and strengthening or revising their identities” in periods of disruption or challenge (Svevingsson & Alvesson, p. 1165). In doing so, individuals can renegotiate their identities to align with the site of disruption, externally manipulate their approach to sites of disruption to ensure continuation of identities or frame the experience in a way which allows for congruence. The nature of

identity is considered to establish this “third space” (Whitchurch, 2006, p. 68) whereby teacher agency allows interacting with contexts of change in order to establish identity congruence or reaffirm identity incongruence, and this is reflected in the framework for this research.

In order to unify core concepts within the literature, a theoretical framework (Figure 1) was established to illustrate the relationships between the three core areas of focus for the study: congruence, incongruence and identity work. This theoretical framework subsequently guided the research questions of the study.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework of the Study



3 Research Questions

The following research questions were established as guiding the research:

RQ1: What sites of identity “congruence” and “incongruence” did teachers identify during this period of online teaching?

RQ2: What mechanisms of “identity work” did teachers employ to mitigate effects of incongruity during this period of online teaching?

4 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach using in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Teachers were selected using snowball sampling (Coleman, 1958). All selected teachers consented to the study and were sent a link to an online form regarding research aims, data collection, privacy, and storage, following ethical guidelines given by Piper and Simons (2005), while all identifiable data was anonymized. Eight interviews took place prior to data saturation occurring.

Semi-structured interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes were conducted online with video conferencing software and recorded for transcription. Online video conferencing software was utilized to conduct the interviews, suggested by Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown (2016) that utilizing synchronous audio-visual interviews may aid in allow participants to provide more information as they open up as a result of conducting the interview in the comfort of their own space. Interview questions were developed based closely on the research questions as informed by the conceptual framework. The same question set

was used through all interviews, however there was space for the researcher to ask probing and follow-up questions (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1992), alongside room for participants to expand to additional comments and stories whilst also reducing risk of participants providing socially desirable answers which may impact reliability of data (Patton, 1990).

The teachers were all higher education lecturers in English across two universities, one public and one private. Each teacher held a higher education qualification in a related field and had a minimum of one-year teaching experience. This data is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Study Sample

Site	Teacher	Years Teaching Experience	Highest Educational Qualification
Uni 1	N	1	MA TESOL (Ger)
	H	18	MA TESOL (VN)
	P	2	MA TESOL (UK)
	I	2	MA TESOL (VN)
Uni 2	V	15	MA Linguistics (VN)
	K	20	MA Pedagogy (VN)
	B	3	MA TESOL (VN)
	D	10	MA Linguistics (VN)

Once the data was collected, it was coded and analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA) in NVivo. Thematic analysis is a flexible method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which has been shown as effective in educational research (Xu & Zammit, 2020). This method of analysis contains six steps, comprising initial familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming and defining the themes, and the writing up process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes give insight into the “qualitative richness” (Boyatzis, 1998) of the interview data.

The research is aligned with Pierre and Jackson’s (2014) proposal that qualitative research should make use of theory to “determine first, what counts as data and, second, what counts as “good” or “appropriate data” (p. 715). The process of analysis began deductively, placing coded data into the “prior themes” Crabtree and Miller (1999, p. 45) of the thematic areas: “congruence”, “incongruence” and “identity work” from the as informed by the theoretical framework (Figure 1) and subsequent research questions. These was followed by inductive coding in a cyclical manner in order to establish themes (Tucket, 2005).

In order to support the face-validity of the coding process, the two researchers independently coded the interviews, developing two independent coding documents before being merged into a final coding document through the consensus model (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). Final coding of all datasets was undertaken by one of the researchers with the finalised coding set and checking by the second researcher for agreement.

5 Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis identified six themes which were categorized into sites of congruence or incongruence. These included Transmission, Professionalism, and Innovation for congruence, and Motivation, Social Connection, and Pedagogy and Control for incongruence.

Table 2
Identified Themes and Sub-Themes

Site	Theme	Explanation	Examples
Congruence	Transmission	Teachers' perceived ability to successfully transmit knowledge to their students.	<i>I can easily share, um, like some interesting materials to them because, um, it's easy to get internet connection and like, if I want to show them a video, I can just show it. (Interviewee 3)</i> <i>However, we are at home with the online classes there. So I have a lot of, uh, books around me. And it means that, I'm ready to answer any questions from student (Interviewee 5)</i>
	Professionalism	Perceptions of being engaged in a professional network or enacting desired professionalism.	<i>You know that on Facebook, there are a lot of group. The English teacher using technologies or something like that. So I joined in that and I learned some tips from my colleagues or from my colleagues all over the world, or around our country. (Interviewee, 6)</i>
	Innovation	Teachers' perceived ability to innovate their teaching practises in lesson and content delivery.	<i>Online teaching opens like a new aspect of teaching aspect for me, interesting. (Interviewee 1)</i>
Incongruence	Motivation	Teachers' perceived ability to motivate students.	<i>Well, like at first I, um, I think I felt like, I mean, I felt a bit down at first because like, I was not able to motivate like most of the students (Interviewee 4)</i>
	Social Connection	Teachers' perceived ability to establish socio-emotional connection with students.	<i>I missed interacting with them. Yeah. Very little interaction between student and teacher (Interviewee 6)</i> <i>Yes. I think because I am limited when I'm on-line, like, you know, about communication, 73% of communication is about body language, but we cannot have body language when we teach online and just only our voice. (Interviewee 1)</i>
	Pedagogy	Teachers' perceived ability to fulfill ideal pedagogical practises, including those specific to ELT teaching.	<i>when I asked some student maybe they, I don't know the answer... And then they tell me the answer. However, they don't really understand the things they have to tell me (Interviewee 5)</i> <i>I even have to ask them in Vietnamese, in English several times and in Vietnamese, but nobody say. So it was terrible. (Interviewee 1)</i>
	Control	Teachers' perceived ability to have control over the flow and direction of the lesson or students' behaviour.	<i>They turn off their audio or the video, so we cannot control them. (Interviewee 6)</i> <i>I think that my students like the online version, because, I cannot punish the students [laughs]. Uh, when I have a class, most of the time I am very hard. (Interviewee 4)</i>

5.1 Sites of congruence

5.1.1 Transmission

Teachers identified within their transcripts that through teaching online as mode of delivery they were able to effectively provide students information and knowledge. Taking teacher K as a primary example, teacher K recognized the limitations of teachers being considered a “know-all” (Interview 8, 2021), yet highlighted the importance for her to fulfill her role in providing students the information they request in their questions during class, even if this required her to take time to research and return to the students’ questions. In her description of her online experience, she noted her appreciation of being in a mode of delivery which aided this process:

When we are in class, yes, all of our activities will be witnessed by our students. However, we are at home with the online classes there. So I have a lot of books around me. And it means that, I’m ready to answer any questions from students. (Teacher K, Interview 6, 2021).

Further areas where teachers saw online teaching as aiding their ability to transmit knowledge or information was through the instantaneous multi-media functions online delivery taught. This was especially resonant for teachers of Uni 1, whereby they indicated not all classrooms were equipped with projectors.

I can easily share, um, like some interesting materials to them because, um, it’s easy to get internet connection and like, if I want to show them a video, I can just show it. So quite, I don’t need to have, like, because in our university not all the rooms have, um, have projector. (Teacher N, Interview 1, 2021).

5.1.2 Professionalism

Professionalism was identified as an important site of engagement with identity congruence. This included identifying and updating or becoming aware of new trends within the practice (Teacher H), regularly attending internal and external professional development workshops (teachers H, P) or continuing to reflect on approaches to teaching and learning in processes informed by formal professional development (Teacher P).

One area that many of the teachers identified with being core to their approach to professionalism as part of their self-identity was their engagement within a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This could be established within their immediate context, for example their department, but also realized on a broader, wider scale with the rise of social-media based professional groups – the rise of which has been noted as an increasingly prominent form of professional development within education (Kirschner & Lai, 2007). Thus, the period of online teaching and learning, for some, encouraged teachers to engage in both as they looked for ways to navigate through uncharted territory:

I joined a group on Facebook, in which they, I mean, the group members share a lot about teaching online. So I learned a lot from them and I really appreciate what they shared. (Teacher P, Interview 3, 2021).

One teacher, H, believed that her immediate departmental CoP was enhanced and strengthened by the experience. She noted that typically there was little discussion on pedagogical practice and sharing of ideas pre-pandemic, however once online teaching was required, she stated this increased, which she personally embraced and thus was congruent with her professional identity:

But then with online. So we have, we are familiar with using the technology and the sharing online, having the online lesson. So it will become a new habit that we type and then we share

immediately. Okay. So it will be easier and then it will become a habit and then we become more familiar with sharing that way. (Teacher H, Interview 2, 2021).

5.1.3 Innovation

Many of the teachers identified enacting innovation within their teaching practices as an important part of their role as educators. Innovation appeared to be the most consistent area in which teachers felt able to enhance or enact their existing professional identities:

Um, I think when I teach online, I can have more opportunities to use new technologies and I, and I also have the chances to try still try new technologies or the applications that can support students (Teacher B, Interview 7, 2021).

Other teachers enjoyed the “challenge” that was presented with transferring their mode of delivery to the online sphere, allowing them to seek for new ways in order to fulfill their ability to conduct effective learning and teaching. This was particularly present in P, a self-described “lifelong learner”:

Uh, but at the time I felt like I had to do something new each week because like, I feel like if I had used one website in the previous lesson, then we kind of have to change it up for the next time. Yeah. So that encouraged me to keep, uh, finding out new ways of making it interesting. (Teacher P, Interview 3, 2021).

5.2 Sites of incongruence

5.2.1 Motivation

One of the most dominant sites of incongruence was the ability to motivate students as a core tenet of identity as a successful teacher. The majority of the teachers interviewed highlighted the limitations of motivating students through a distance-based medium, often indicating this as the main area of frustration with the online teaching experience:

Well, like at first I, um, I think I felt like, I mean, I mean, I felt a bit down at first because like, I was not able to motivate like most of the students. (Teacher I, Interview 4, 2021).

Whilst various approaches were taken in order to enhance student motivation, the results of such were varied, with most teachers coming to the conclusion that reduced student motivation was inherent in this form of teaching and learning delivery.

5.2.2 Social connection

Another site of resistance and challenge, where teachers felt their professional identity was comprised, included feeling unable to fulfil their nurturing roles and perform maintenance of student-teacher connection as a result of the conditions of online learning. When questioned on the greatest challenge she faced, Teacher P answered:

Um, long answer, so internet connection, human connection. So, um, a lot of students, I would say most of the students preferred to have the camera off and I couldn't convince them to turn it on. (Teacher P, Interview 3, 2021).

Other teachers likened the use of digital video conferencing platforms as a “block” between students and teacher – whereby meaningful and positive interaction between students and teachers could not be established and failed to develop ways in which to remedy such situation.

For Teacher B, the practicality of not having a break time during online teaching meant she did not have an equivalent opportunity connect with students as she had done previously in her face-to-face classes:

Uh, I was not happy when I didn't have a time to chat with my students. (Teacher B, interview 7, 2021).

Similar findings are found in the transcripts of Teachers N, H and K as they found their previous ability to enact mentoring roles as being diminished, pushing themselves to a more didactical model of distanced student and teacher relations: thus, making awareness of student progress much less immediately available to them.

For others, the lack of physical presence added to this sense of distance and a reduced ability to maintain control over the class:

Yes. I think because I am limited when I'm online, like, you know, about communication, 73% of communication is about body language, but we cannot have body language when we teach online and just only our voice. (Teacher V, Interview 5, 2021).

5.2.3 Pedagogy

At the beginning of her transcript, Teacher P indicated her conscious shift away from the "traditional" model of teaching typically attached to educators in Vietnam:

So in my opinion, teachers, I know traditional Asian belief is that teachers are in a high position that students always have to respect and listen to no matter what, but in my opinion, I think teachers are just a facilitator. (Teacher P, Interview 3, 2021).

However, she believed the online form of delivery restricted her ability to fulfill her own identity as a facilitator:

I've, I feel like with online teaching, I'm more like a presenter than an instructor, because most of the time it was just me talking (Teacher P, Interview 3, 2021).

For other teachers, sites of struggle were found in the inability to carry out the more practical elements of their teaching values, especially as language teachers – as they found the online teaching platform unsuitable for speaking classes, alongside supporting collaborative learning amongst students.

5.2.4 Control

Closely related to ability to enact pedagogical practice effectively in online settings, was the notion of control over the classroom and flow of student behaviour and interaction.

For teachers such as D and K, being able to ensure control over students' behaviour and involvement in the class was greatly affected by the online delivery:

But I think that I was a worse teacher than...because I can't control my class. I can't instruct the student all the things to do in a lesson. And the biggest one is that I feel that I can't do nothing, I can't do anything with them. (Teacher D, Interview 8, 2021).

That is, uh, I just know taught, and I didn't care actually, uh, if the students could learn anything, because I asked- before the class yes I asked that my student, if they have any questions and then they can type in the chat box or they can raise their hand and ask the questions, um, but it seems that now, um, the students, they, they were out of my control. (Teacher K, Interview 6, 2021).

Control, a tenet often ascribed to traditional Vietnamese teaching practice (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005) was clearly a site deemed both important and fragile in online teaching deliver, and lack of enacting this had the ramifications of teachers feeling “like a worse teacher” (Teacher D) and “depressed” (Teacher K). It is further interesting to note, that these comments were prominent amongst more experienced teachers, highlighting a potential shift in teaching values between novice and older teachers from “control” to more democratic pedagogical approaches. This is a notion echoed in Richards’ (2016, p. 60) coining of “transposable identity” to refer to novice teachers’ frequent adoption of an identity that aims to communicate authenticity, informality and personal connection with students.

5.2 Identity work and coping mechanisms

The research identified these themes as key sites of congruence and incongruence in professional identity when moving to online teaching. As a result, teachers engaged in “identity work”, more specifically, by utilizing value coping mechanisms whereby they attempted to alleviate the direct threat on their identity and values. Such “value coping mechanisms” were widely found in teachers’ transcripts as they attempted to navigate through an experience which led to restriction of ability to enact certain values and beliefs regarding their teaching practices and approach.

Such mechanisms were wide and varied. For Teachers N and K, they made the decision to view the experience through a lens of temporality – a non-acceptance as this version of their teaching selves as being a permanent representation of reality, but rather, one which was limited to the duration of the required experience:

Um, I just try to think positively that’s, um, this too shall pass and I would fight try to find more ways to, um, help my students to become motivated and more engaged in the class. (Teacher N, Interview 1, 2021).

So, um, at first I imagined I a little bit, uh, depressed, uh, motivated, and then I, um, I thought that, oh, uh, it couldn’t last long (Teacher K, Interview 6, 2021).

P and H frequently used reflection on both their lessons and past experiences to determine whether lower levels of motivation were likely a result of the mode of delivery of the student group themselves. After establishing the root cause, P would then view the lack of motivation as either a threat on the performance of her values as a teacher (one who wants to motivate) or recognize that the context and situation were beyond her control. For H, such reflection led to deep research on methods and techniques in order to solve the issue of motivation in her classroom. In H’s case, if repeated attempts were made but no progress was established, then she knew not to blame her inability to not motivate students.

Others utilized specific tools in order to achieve some level of consonance with their values and beliefs in teaching. For H this was using text messaging functions in order to fulfil her nurturing role of providing a caring figure for students. B utilized a wide range of technologies in order to ensure her lessons were engaging and student motivation was maintained, and V used the break-out room on her video conferencing software to emulate group work within the classroom.

Communities of Practice (Wenger & Lave, 1991) were also used as sources of assistance through periods of values conflict. For N, she engaged her immediate community of practice within her professional teaching network at the university when sharing her frustrations and concerns, noting their sympathy and advice helped her “emotionally” place her experiences into perspective (Interview 1, 2021). Teacher B found solace in a Facebook-based community of practice which went into detail on available educational technologies through a pedagogical perspective rather than a purely technical one. Other teachers also highlighted the importance of sharing amongst teachers and emotional support during the online experience.

6 Conclusion

The overall findings from the interviews indicate that despite a period of teaching whereby their values, and subsequently their professional identity, were compromised, and sites of incongruence were common, on the whole teachers' professional identity and identification of core values associated with their identity remain largely unchanged. Of our teachers, the majority only referenced practical positives from the experience (such as reduced commute – teachers P & N). Approaches to implementing technology in the classroom seemed rather a continuation of pre-existing values and practices, with the experience teaching online identified more as an opportunity to explore and trial a wider range of technologies. These findings echo those of Johnson *et al.* (2014) whereby they found attitudes to technology within teachers' professional identities as remaining stable in a period which required them to transfer their teaching to online delivery.

It can be understood from this study that, as found by Akkerman and Meijer (2011), that while professional teacher identity undergoes negotiation, after time a “more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained” (p. 315). Thus, whilst the online experience dramatically changed the way our teachers delivered their teaching, the change has not, in terms of their current perceptions, drastically altered their values and beliefs as teachers. There are limitations to this research, including the limited geographical area, limitations on sample size, and nature of the ongoing period of social distancing at the time of publication, as the situation continues to unfold. However, the findings offer an insight into the areas of identity congruence and incongruence in this context and time which are valuable as a basis for further investigation into the lasting effects of COVID-19 on education in the East Asia region and the long-lasting legacies of this period of major social, economic, and technological disruption.

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