

Article

EAP Teachers' Agency in Flux and Transformation: A Longitudinal Study in the GenAI Context

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Abstract

This qualitative multiple case study follows two EAP teachers: one novice and one experienced over 24 months to explore how they enacted professional agency during significant educational reforms at a Sino-British university in China. The study is situated within a context of “flux and transformation”, a period marked by the cancellation of Year 2 EAP courses and the rapid integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). The study traced the co-evolution of emotions, identity negotiations, and agentic actions over 24 months (2023–2025) using critical reflective narratives, semi-structured interviews, and informal communication logs. The findings reveal that agency is jointly mediated by emotion and identity. The experienced teacher demonstrated adaptive agency, reframing anxiety as a catalyst for professional growth and constructively integrating the teacher-researcher identity. In contrast, the novice teacher exhibited strategic compliance coupled with internal resistance, as negative emotional turbulence and identity fragmentation blocked meaningful identity negotiation. The study proposes the “*Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus in Flux*,” a non-linear model illustrating how macro-political forces (e.g. neoliberal Key Performance Indexes (KPIs), curriculum cuts, GenAI disruption) are filtered through teachers' emotional and identity resources, shaping whether agency manifests as adaptation, compliance, or resistance. Our findings point to the need for emotional scaffolding for novice teachers, differentiated performance evaluation policies, and a reconceptualization of the teacher-researcher role in EMI contexts.

Keywords

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers, agency, emotion, identity, flux and transformation

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1 Introduction

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers find themselves marginalised within broader higher education frameworks, largely because of the dominance of general English education and the undervaluation of their specialised skills in academic language and literacies (Bell, 2023; Du, 2025). This marginalization constrains their professional identity development and limits opportunities for research and career development. Currently, EAP teachers in China are navigating an unprecedented period of “flux and transformation” as higher education institutions undergo rapid structural changes, including curriculum cancellations and the disruptive emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). These changes challenge traditional pedagogical roles, destabilize epistemic authority and intensify the expectation that EAP teachers balance classroom teaching with research output, often without adequate institutional support.

Although language teacher agency (LTA) is increasingly recognized as critical to effective academic language instruction, empirical studies investigating how EAP teachers exercise agency in response to rapid institutional flux remain rare. Recent scholarship has highlighted the interrelationships among LTA, language teacher emotion (LTE), and language teacher identity (LTI) (Tao & Gao, 2025). However, existing studies often treat emotion and identity as static background variables rather than dynamic mediators that co-evolve with agency during crises. Furthermore, while some research has examined identity tensions in EAP contexts (e.g., Hu et al., 2024; Weng, 2023, 2024, 2026), longitudinal investigations of how these constructs dynamically interact during transformative events, such as curriculum cuts and GenAI integration, are conspicuously absent.

To address these gaps, the present study investigated EAP teachers’ agency from the dual perspectives of emotion and identity, explicitly foregrounding a context of “flux and transformation.” The recent cancellation of Year 2 EAP courses at a Sino-British EMI university in China offers a critical early-warning case study for the global higher education sector, revealing how the unchecked integration of Generative AI is forcing institutions to radically rethink foundational literacy, regardless of their geographic location. This longitudinal multiple case study traced how two participants (one experienced and one novice) make sense of their emotional experiences, negotiate their professional identities, and enact agency amidst educational reform over 24 months. By examining the co-evolution of LTE, LTI, and LTA, the study proposes the *Emotion–Identity–Agency Nexus in Flux*, a non-linear model that reveals how macro-level institutional pressures (e.g., neoliberal KPIs, curriculum cuts, GenAI) are mediated by micro-level emotional and identity resources, shaping whether agency manifests as constructive adaptation, strategic compliance, or internal resistance.

2 Literature Review

The literature review first introduces the three core constructs: Language Teacher Agency (LTA), Language Teacher Emotion (LTE), and Language Teacher Identity (LTI) in separate sections, highlighting their relevance to EAP contexts and periods of institutional flux. Following this, the review synthesizes their interrelationships, with a dedicated section (2.4) examining how LTA, LTE, and LTI dynamically intersect. This structure allows for a systematic understanding of each concept before turning to their complex co-evolution, which is central to addressing the research questions of this longitudinal study. Throughout, the review also draws on foundational theorisations of autonomy, agency, and identity (Teng, 2019) to ground the analysis of how these constructs interact in language teaching contexts.

2.1 Language teacher agency (LTA) in context of flux

Language teacher agency (LTA) refers to the sense of ownership and control teachers have regarding their teaching (Tao & Gao, 2025). It is not an inherent trait but rather an ecological phenomenon achieved

through the interaction of personal capacities and contextual structures. Teng (2019) conceptualizes agency as “the capacity to initiate purposeful action that implies will, autonomy, freedom, and choice” (p. 67), emphasizing that agency is socioculturally mediated and emerges from individuals’ engagement with their social worlds. This multifaceted construct can significantly influence student learning outcomes (Putra, 2024), curriculum development (Bahrami & Gao, 2024), and professional growth (Tao & Gao, 2017; Wu, 2023). Moreover, it empowers teachers to adapt their practices, engage in meaningful professional development, and advocate for social justice within their classrooms (Leal & Crookes, 2018; Peña-Pincheira & De Costa, 2021; Vitanova, 2018).

Given its importance for effective and equitable language education, LTA has been empirically researched in evolving educational contexts including multi-level language classrooms (Ashton, 2021), multilingual classrooms (Banegas et al., 2024), curriculum or educational reform (Wang, 2022; Wang & Li, 2025), and teacher professional programmes (Nazari et al., 2024; Xu, 2025). In the post-pandemic era, it has also been examined in technology-enhanced scenarios such as emergency online teaching (Ashton, 2022), immersive VR telecollaboration (Liaw et al., 2025), and blended teaching (Rong & Yao, 2025). In addition to these contexts, a limited but growing body of research has addressed the agency of teacher-researcher, another crucial role of language teaching professionals in tertiary settings. For example, Ruan et al. (2024) examined university foreign language teacher agency in securing research funding through a complex-dynamics lens, while Aqajani Delavar et al. (2025) explored how teachers’ perceptions of agency changed during an action research engagement program. Lu and Zhang (2025) analysed the negotiation of university foreign language teachers’ dual roles in China using the activity theory and Liu and McVee (2025) foregrounded agency in EFL teachers’ positioning at the research-practice nexus.

Recent scholarship has significantly extended understanding of teacher agency in relation to institutional change and technological disruption. Deng et al. (2026) examined how teacher agency influences behavioural engagement in human-AI collaborative writing feedback practices, demonstrating that the effectiveness of GenAI-assisted feedback relies on teachers’ critical engagement and familiarity with technology. Their findings highlight that teachers’ agency shaped by their capacity and willingness to perceive and shape the affordances of GenAI feedback is central to maximising the benefits of AI-assisted pedagogy. Similarly, Wu and Miller (2025) investigated the intricate connection between teachers’ agency and their levels of AI literacy, revealing that proactive agentic behaviours are closely linked to the development of critical digital competencies. Synthesizing a corpus of 23 contemporary empirical and theoretical works, Teng and Shen (2026) offer a comprehensive examination of language learning, pedagogy, and teacher professional growth, while charting emergent trajectories for GenAI-powered Digital Applied Linguistics (DAL). Methodologically anchored in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, their analysis underscores the transformative capacity of digital tools, e.g., generative AI, to reshape both instructional practice and learner engagement. To complement this broad review, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with three focal practitioners situated across mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Drawing on communities of practice heuristic, the interview data illuminate critical dimensions of teacher agency within DAL contexts, particularly regarding professional identity, role reconfiguration, and shifts in pedagogical belief systems. Importantly, qualitative findings indicate that teacher agency emerges not as a static trait, but as an adaptive outcome co-constituted by the dynamic interplay of individual motivation and structural support

Despite this breadth, limited attention has been paid to how agency is enacted specifically during moments of acute institutional “flux”, defined here as rapid, destabilising changes such as sudden course cancellations or the disruptive introduction of GenAI. In such contexts, agency often manifests not just as routine adaptation but as acts of resistance, strategic compliance, or survival. As English-medium instruction(EMI) continues to expand rapidly in Chinese higher education (Xiong et al., 2024),

EAP teachers in these settings are increasingly likely to encounter the varied forms of institutional flux described above. Furthermore, while research on teacher-researcher agency is emerging (e.g., [Aqajani Delavar et al., 2025](#); [Liu & McVee, 2025](#); [Lu & Zhang, 2025](#); [Ruan et al., 2024](#)), empirical studies that focus specifically on the teacher-researcher in EAP contexts remain absent.

2.2 Language teacher emotion (LTE) as a site of agency

Language teacher emotion (LTE) refers to the dynamic affective experiences that arise from both internal factors and external contexts ([Han et al., 2023](#); [Vitanova, 2024](#)). It is a complex, multifaceted construct that encompasses a wide range of emotions, from positive feelings such as enjoyment and hope to negative states like anxiety and burnout ([Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015](#); [Mosqueda, 2025](#)). As [Teng \(2019\)](#) notes in his discussion of identity and emotion, teachers' emotional experiences are intimately connected to their sense of who they are as professionals and their capacity to act agentively. The intersection between LTE and LTA is particularly significant: emotions can both enable and constrain teachers' ability to act purposefully. Positive emotions like enjoyment, hope, and pride enhance motivation and engagement in the classroom, contributing to a more dynamic and effective teaching environment and ultimately leading to better student outcomes ([Derakhshan & Pawlak, 2025](#); [Leng & Zhang, 2025](#)). These positive emotional states often foster a sense of agency, encouraging teachers to experiment with new pedagogies or advocate for change. In contrast, negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and burnout are prevalent among language teachers due to heavy workloads, challenging student behaviours, and institutional pressures. They can severely restrict agency, leading to withdrawal, compliance, or survival-oriented teaching ([Alzaanin, 2024](#); [Chu et al., 2025](#); [Fraschini & Park, 2021](#)). For example, teachers working with migrants and refugees often face heightened emotional distress because of their challenging contexts ([Blanco & Almeida, 2025](#)), which in turn limits their agentive capacity. Thus, LTE is not simply an outcome of teaching but a dynamic "site" where agency is negotiated ([Tao & Gao, 2025](#)).

Research has also contributed to understanding the emotional dimensions of language teacher agency, particularly in the context of GenAI integration. Studies have explicitly foregrounded the interplay between teacher beliefs, agency, and emotional labour, highlighting how teachers' emotional responses to GenAI integration shape their professional practices and identity negotiations. [Teng and Yip \(2025\)](#) examined how English language teachers navigate ideological tensions and manage emotional labour in response to community changes caused by GenAI, revealing that teachers evolve their roles as either "worriers" or "warriors" in the face of technological disruption. Their findings suggest that teachers' emotional response ranging from resistance rooted in concerns about critical thinking erosion to embrace of AI for enhanced efficiency are central to how they negotiate their professional identities and exercise agency. [Zhang and Dikilitaş \(2025\)](#) further demonstrated that novice teachers' investment in critical digital literacies involving GenAI is mediated by their emotional engagement with their evolving teacher identities and the ideological spaces of their professional communities. These studies reinforce the conceptualisation of emotion as a site of agency, particularly in contexts of rapid technological change.

Although research on LTE has grown in recent years ([Goetze, 2023](#); [Han et al., 2023](#); [Heng et al., 2024](#); [Shi et al., 2023](#)), very few studies have explored the emotions of EAP teachers specifically. Among the limited exceptions, [Weng \(2024\)](#) touched upon the emotional labour of an EAP instructor navigating online teaching, yet that study did not systematically trace emotional trajectories in response to institutional flux. Similarly, [Hu et al. \(2024\)](#) noted identity-related emotions among EAP teachers at a Sino-British university, but without longitudinal tracking of how these emotions shape agency over time. Although recent studies suggest that emotions can be a "site" of agency ([Tao & Gao, 2025](#), p. 616), few studies have examined how emotional trajectories shift specifically in response to the dual pressures of curriculum reduction and AI disruption. Further longitudinal investigation is clearly required.

2.3 Language teacher identity (LTI) and role conflict

Language teacher identity (LTI) refers to teachers' understanding of what it means to be a language teacher and of their professional role (Miller, 2009). In essence, it concerns how they understand who they are. Teng (2019) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding teacher identity, defining it as "what it means to be a teacher" (p. 49) and emphasising that identity development is fundamentally a social process occurring in various institutional settings. He further argues that teacher identity is not fixed or stable but adjusts over time and across settings, and that the development of teacher identity is "largely a non-linear process" (p. 50). The components of LTI include an understanding of language teachers' work and working contexts; perceptions and performances in teaching; awareness of how their role is viewed by other educational stakeholders; decision-making based on personal values and knowledge; and reflection and continuous learning when encountering changes in the working environment (Miller, 2009).

The multidimensional view reveals that language teacher identity is shaped by the combined influence of internal and external factors. Internal factors mainly include professional competence (Fairley, 2020) and critical language awareness (CLA) (Mahalingappa et al., 2022). External factors cover a much wider range of sociocultural issues, such as school language environments (Lee, 2023), curriculum reform (Wang et al., 2024), practice levels (Derakhshan et al., 2024), and multilingual and multicultural environment (Guo & Sidhu, 2024). Teng (2019) further elaborates that identity construction is "a process of negotiation between individual and contextual factors" (p. 59), during which teachers "encounter struggles that prevent the enactment of an ideal professional identity" (p. 59).

Recent studies have investigated LTI in contexts including primary schools (Yim & Mercer, 2025), universities (Chen et al., 2024), and teacher education programs (Yazan, 2025). However, little attention has been paid to LTI in EAP teaching specifically. The limited research in this area has concentrated on novice EAP teacher identity construction in Iran (Atai et al., 2022), identity change during reform and textbook development (Gao & Cui, 2021, 2023), the shaping effects of multiple roles on identities (Derakhshan et al., 2025), identity tensions experienced by an EAP teacher in Hong Kong (Trent, 2024), and EAP teachers' professional identity formation in response to institutional policies at a Sino-British university in China (Hu et al., 2024). Despite these contributions, research on EAP teachers' identities in EMI contexts remains scarce.

The growing body of scholarship on teacher identity in the GenAI era offers particularly relevant insights. Teng and Yip (2025) conducted a narrative inquiry into language teacher identity construction in the global GenAI context, revealing that the emergence of GenAI inevitably leads to changes in EFL teacher identity construction. Their study demonstrates that teachers negotiate professional identities amid ideological tensions, manage capital disparities, and evolve their roles in response to community changes caused by GenAI. Zhang and Dikilitaş (2025) explored how novice teachers of different sociocultural and educational backgrounds negotiate multiple teacher and social identities in current and imagined teacher communities as ideological spaces, illustrating the complex interplay between identity, investment, and critical digital literacies in the GenAI era. These studies highlight that identity negotiation in times of technological flux is not merely a matter of acquiring new skills but involves fundamental reconfigurations of professional self-understanding.

In EMI settings, EAP teachers often navigate conflicting identities: they are expected to be skilled practitioners yet are increasingly pressured to become researchers. This tension is exacerbated during periods of flux, where institutional roles shift rapidly. Although previous studies have explored identity construction in EAP contexts (e.g., Gao & Cui, 2021; Trent, 2024), few have analysed how identity negotiation serves as a mechanism for enacting (or hindering) agency when the very foundation of the teacher's role (e.g., the existence of their course) is threatened.

2.4 The interrelationship between LTA, LTE and LTI: a dynamic nexus

While the previous sections have discussed each construct separately, a growing body of research acknowledges that LTA, LTE, and LTI are deeply intertwined and co-constitutive. This section focuses specifically on their intersection and reviews empirical studies that have examined their dynamic relationships, particularly in times of change. Teng (2019) provides a foundational framework for understanding these interrelationships, arguing that “there is a very faint boundary between teacher autonomy and teacher agency” (p. 86) and that “teacher autonomy is a precondition for the development of teacher agency” (p. 86). He further posits that “identity conceptualization and construction may help teachers find a proper direction for the development of autonomy” (p. 87), which “constitutes the guiding force for further agentic work in teaching practice” (p. 87). This dynamic nexus suggests that “teacher agency facilitates the development of teacher autonomy, which results in teacher identity formation, as one of the most important outcomes” (p. 87).

A growing number of studies on LTA and LTE suggest that these constructs are significant components of LTI and contribute positively to teacher identity construction (Derakhshan et al., 2024; Hiver & Whitehead, 2018; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Wernicke, 2018). On the one hand, emotions are not merely byproducts of teaching but are central to agency enactment. For instance, a year-long study showed that an emotion-oriented professional development course boosted teachers’ autonomy and motivation, both of which are important contributing factors to enhanced agency (Nazari et al., 2024). In a Community of Practice (CoP) centered on sharing emotional vulnerabilities, Nazari et al. (2024) traced how the CoP mitigated negative emotions and strengthened three novice language teachers’ ability to enact agency over time. Similarly, Nazari et al. (2025) explored seven English teachers’ emotion and agency construction in a teacher education course, identifying a trajectory from initial emotional apprehension and assumed agency, through emotional tensions and challenged agency, to enhanced agency via developed emotionality. On the other hand, teachers’ identity construction coexists with agency enactment. In a longitudinal narrative case study, Wu (2023) showed how consistent individual agency played a significant role in negotiating and reconstructing an EFL teacher’s professional identities. Liyanage and Walker (2023) found that the negotiation of professional identities was crucial for reform enactment among English teachers in China. Weng (2024) demonstrated that the professional identities constructed by an EAP instructor were critical for motivating purposeful actions toward teaching expertise while a follow-up study confirmed that language teachers can negotiate agency and identity simultaneously (Kang, 2025).

Considering these interrelationships, although Weng (2024) indicates that the LTI can serve as a motivator for LTA, emotion was not incorporated into that analysis. Furthermore, that study’s small sample: a single EAP writing teacher and cross-sectional design limit its scope, underscoring the need for longitudinal approaches. To date, no longitudinal study has traced how all three constructs co-evolve in response to rapid institutional “flux” (e.g., curriculum cancellation and GenAI integration) in EAP contexts, nor has the teacher-researcher identity been adequately integrated into this nexus.

The unprecedented cancellation of Year 2 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, accelerated by the disruptive integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), has thrust transnational EMI educators into a precarious state of professional flux—making the investigation of teacher agency an urgent global priority. Taking this institutional rupture as a critical case, the present study adopts a longitudinal qualitative multiple-case approach within a Sino-British joint university in China, investigating how EAP teachers negotiate their professional agency through the dual, intertwined lenses of emotion and identity. Far from a localized administrative anomaly, this Sino-British EMI setting serves as a global microcosm, offering generalizable insights into how language educators worldwide are reasserting their pedagogical autonomy amidst technological and curricular upheaval. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research question (RQ): In what ways does the interplay of emotion and identity mediate the enactment of teacher agency in response to institutional flux?

3 Methods

3.1 Context and participants

The study was conducted at a Sino-British joint university in southeast China, an institution characterized by its English Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy and compulsory EAP courses for first-year undergraduates. While the “publish or perish” paradox facing early-career academics in Chinese higher education is well-documented (see, e.g., the identity crisis of applied linguists navigating performance metrics), the context of this study is defined by a qualitatively distinct and intensified state of “flux”: one that transcends conventional productivity pressures. Starting from the 2025 cohort, the university abruptly cancelled EAP courses for Year 2 students, replacing the 10-credit module with courses in GenAI and Innovation. This curricular erasure stripped EAP teachers of their foundational pedagogical role, effectively delegitimizing their primary professional identity overnight. Compounding this ontological rupture, the institution simultaneously intensified faculty research expectations, explicitly linking contract renewal to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for publication output. Crucially, this dual-pressure scenario is not merely a localized iteration of China’s broader academic performance culture. Rather, it represents a global harbinger of the post-GenAI university, where language educators face the unprecedented condition of being simultaneously rendered pedagogically redundant and hyper-accountable for research productivity: a convergence that existing models of teacher agency or ECR identity crisis have not yet theorized. This study, therefore, does not simply replicate inquiries into publication pressure; it investigates how EAP teachers negotiate professional agency when both their teaching purpose and career survival are destabilized in tandem, within a transnational institutional framework that lacks clear policy guidance for either crisis.

To capture the full spectrum of professional agency amidst institutional flux, this study employed a maximum variation sampling strategy, deliberately selecting two focal participants who occupy contrasting career-capital positions within the same departmental context. Participant T1, a mid-career teacher with over eight years of EAP experience across two tertiary institutions and a pure TESOL background, was selected to represent the perspective of deep pedagogical investment. Her extended tenure means her professional identity is heavily sedimented in traditional EAP curricula, rendering the sudden cancellation of Year 2 EAP courses a significant ontological rupture. In contrast, Participant T2, a novice teacher with only three years of experience and an undergraduate degree in Textile Engineering (coupled with prior educational administration experience), was selected to represent the perspective of institutional adaptability. Her non-linear career trajectory and STEM background suggest less emotional attachment to legacy EAP pedagogies and potentially greater openness to systemic and technological reconfiguration. See Table 1 for the detailed demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Age	Degree	Gender	EAP Teaching Experience	Other Working Experience
T1	37	BA English MA TESOL	Female	8 years	EFL teaching in training center, international high school
T2	32	BE Textile Engineering MA TESOL	Female	3 years	Educational administration in Sino-Foreign university and international school

Crucially, participants were not selected based on their proficiency with Generative Artificial Intelligence. While GenAI undeniably functions as a tool for expediting research publication: a direct

response to intensified KPI pressures—the present study is fundamentally concerned with the affective and identity-based negotiations that underpin agentic decision-making, rather than technical proficiency *per se*. Selecting participants based on AI competence would have obscured the very phenomenon under investigation: namely, how EAP teachers experience and respond to the convergence of curricular erasure and research intensification before we assume their technological adeptness. Indeed, the divergent academic backgrounds of the two participants function as a theoretically productive contrast; T2’s engineering-inflected mindset may predispose her toward pragmatic, tool-oriented uses of GenAI, while T1’s humanities-centered training may foreground concerns of authenticity and disciplinary integrity. This contrast allows us to examine not whether teachers can use AI to publish, but how their differential emotional and identity resources shape their agentic responses to an institutional environment where both their teaching purpose and career survival are simultaneously destabilized.

3.2 Data collection

Table 2

Data Sources

Data Type	Description
Critical Reflective Narratives	Each participant wrote 12 narratives (approx. 4,000 words each) responding to open-ended prompts designed to elicit stories of challenge and action (e.g., “Describe a moment where your role was challenged by university changes. What did you do?”). Collection timeline and method: Narratives were collected bimonthly over 24 months. Participants wrote them in a Word document within two months once receiving each prompt. Prompts were delivered via WeChat at the beginning of the research, and participants were encouraged to write freely. (See Appendix 1 for the full list of prompts.)
Semi-structured Interviews	Four interviews per participant (60–90 minutes each) conducted at 6-month intervals (Month 1, Month 6, Month 12, Month 18), while critical reflective narratives and informal communications continued for the full 24 months. Interviews focused on the participants’ six professional roles: practitioner, designer, material provider, collaborator, researcher, evaluator and the specific actions they took in response to curriculum cuts and GenAI integration. These six roles are drawn from the established framework of EAP teacher competencies by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) and have been recently validated in identity research by Derakhshan et al. (2025). These roles comprehensively capture the multifaceted nature of EAP teaching in tertiary EMI contexts: (a) practitioner refers to classroom teaching and instruction; (b) designer involves curriculum and course planning; (c) material provider concerns adaptation and creation of resources; (d) collaborator captures team teaching and peer interactions; (e) researcher reflects the scholarly and investigative dimension expected of university faculty; and (f) evaluator involves assessment of student learning and course effectiveness. This framework was chosen because it directly aligns with the identity tensions observed in the context of flux (e.g., the practitioner-researcher conflict under KPI pressure) and allows systematic tracing of how agency and emotion manifest across each role. Interview prompts varied by role; a complete interview guide is provided in Appendix 2. All interviews were conducted via Tencent Meeting, recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Informal Communication Logs	Ongoing digital communications regarding research collaboration and professional development. These included WeChat messages and email exchanges between the participants and the first author. Total number of logs: 187 individual message threads (89 from T1, 98 from T2), comprising approximately 18,000 words of text. Frequency: Communications occurred on average 2–3 times per week, with higher density during critical periods (e.g., course cancellation announcement, GenAI integration roll-out). Platform: All communications were conducted on WeChat (for real-time messaging) and institutional email (for longer reflections). Logs were exported monthly and anonymized
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The longitudinal study traced the trajectories of two participants’ emotional experience, identity shifts, and the influence of these factors on their agency over a two-year period in the university educational reform. Data collection spanned 24 months (2023–2025). It included 12 critical reflective narratives from each participant (approx. 4,000 words each), four semi-structured interviews per participant (60–90 minutes each, fully transcribed), and ongoing informal communication logs. The three data types were designed to elicit complementary dimensions of the participants’ experiences, enabling methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978). The total corpus comprises approximately 150,000 words of textual data. See Table 2 for data sources.

3.3 Data analysis

To answer the research question, the process for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was generally followed and the three-level coding process was implemented.

Step 1: Familiarization and initial coding

The researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading the critical reflective narratives and interview transcripts repeatedly and recording initial observations. Guided by the previous literature, initial codes were generated. Initial codes were descriptive labels applied to short segments of data (usually one sentence to one paragraph). Examples include:

- “anxiety about course cancellation”
- “pride in adapting materials for GenAI”
- “researcher identity threatened by workload”
- “strategic compliance – taught GenAI module but kept EAP objectives”
- “emotional exhaustion after KPI meeting”
- “agentic resistance – requested research leave”

These codes were derived inductively from the data but also informed by the theoretical constructs of LTA, LTE, and LTI.

Step 2: Identifying intersections across codes

To look across codes and identify intersections among emotion, identity, and agency, the researchers performed cross-tabulation and thematic mapping. First, all codes were organized into three preliminary

families (emotion, identity, agency codes). Then, we systematically examined every instance where two or more families co-occurred within the same data segment (e.g., a sentence containing both an emotion code and an agency code). These co-occurrences were then grouped into higher-order themes such as “emotion as driver of resistance” or “identity conflict blocking agency.” This process allowed us to trace how, for example, anxiety (emotion) about losing the researcher role (identity) led to strategic compliance (agency).

Table 3

Data Triangulation: Elicitation and Cross-Validation of Different Data Sources

Data Type	What It Elicits	How It Triangulates
Critical Reflective Narratives	Longitudinal, participant-led accounts of emotions, identity shifts, and agentic actions over time. These capture <i>retrospective sense-making</i> and recurring patterns in a naturalistic writing format.	Narratives provide the <i>temporal</i> changes. They are compared with interview claims to check for consistency or contradiction (e.g., a participant may report agency in an interview but reveal emotional paralysis in a narrative).
Semi-structured Interviews	Focused, researcher-prompted exploration of specific roles and events. These elicit <i>contextualized explanations</i> of why and how teachers acted, including justifications for strategic choices.	Interviews add <i>depth and specificity</i> to narrative accounts. For example, a narrative might mention “anxiety about research”; the interview then probes the exact actions taken. Discrepancies between narratives and interviews (e.g., downplaying conflict in interviews but detailing it in narratives) are treated as analytic insights.
Informal Communication Logs	Real-time, unfiltered exchanges about daily challenges, quick decisions, and emotional reactions as they occur. These capture <i>in-the-moment agency</i> and spontaneous emotion, often less curated than narratives or interviews.	Logs serve as a <i>validity check</i> against retroactive accounts. For instance, if a participant claims in an interview to have been proactive, but logs show passive or avoidant messaging at the time of the crisis, this reveals the gap between perceived and enacted agency.

Step 3: Thematic development and cross-case comparison

After identifying intersections, we developed thematic networks for each participant separately, then compared across the two cases to identify patterns and divergences related to experience level (novice vs. experienced). Final themes were refined through team consensus meetings. See Table 3 for data triangulation.

3.4 Researcher positionality

The research team leveraged diverse positionalities to deepen interpretation rather than seeking positivist “neutrality.” T1 and T2 served as insider participants, providing rich, emic accounts of their lived experiences. The first author, an outsider to the focal department but a former classmate of the participants, acted as a “critical friend” (Alan et al., 2021). This position allowed him to challenge insider assumptions, probe deeper into power dynamics, and facilitate a reflexive dialogue that transformed personal narratives into critical sociological data. Subjectivity was managed through continuous reflexive dialogue among the team.

4 Findings

The findings reveal distinct trajectories of agency for the experienced and novice teachers, mediated by their emotional regulation and identity stability amidst the institutional flux. Drawing on longitudinal data (2023–2025), we trace how each participant's emotions, identity negotiations, and agentic actions co-evolved across two transformative events: the cancellation of Year 2 EAP courses and the disruptive integration of GenAI. Rather than presenting discrete thematic categories, we narrate each teacher's journey chronologically to illuminate how and why their emotional, identity, and agentic trajectories unfolded as they did.

4.1 T1's Story: From anxiety to adaptive agency

4.1.1 *The beginning: A satisfied practitioner confronting change*

When T1 first joined the university, she brought with her a sense of professional satisfaction and stability. As she reflected in her initial interview, *"I am quite satisfied with my present job since its social status as a university teacher and competitive salary"* (Interview, Month 1). This foundational contentment provided her with emotional resources that would later prove crucial. In her early career, she identified primarily as a practitioner—someone who delivered content effectively and built rapport with students. Her identity was clear, coherent, and aligned with institutional expectations.

However, the educational landscape was already shifting. By Month 4, T1 began to articulate anxieties that many language teachers were beginning to feel: *"The emergence of GenAI and new technologies makes me anxious, and I am afraid of being replaced by them"* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 4). This admission marked the first fissure in her otherwise stable professional identity. Notably, however, T1 did not suppress or deny this anxiety. Instead, she engaged in what scholars describe as emotional sense-making—the process of interpreting and assigning meaning to emotional experiences (Zembylas, 2005; Benesch, 2017). Rather than allowing anxiety to paralyse her, she began to reframe it.

By Month 8, this reframing had crystallised into a more constructive orientation. She wrote: *"When the university first announced the new GenAI and Innovation course replacing our EAP modules, I felt a sense of loss. But then I thought: if I don't learn this, my students will learn it elsewhere. That anxiety pushes me to keep learning"* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 8). This moment was pivotal. As Teng (2019) argues, teacher identity is not fixed but evolves through negotiation with contextual factors; here, T1 demonstrated how emotional reframing could serve as a catalyst for identity expansion rather than identity erosion. Her anxiety, rather than leading to withdrawal, became a source of professional motivation.

4.1.2 *The first shock: Curriculum cancellation and identity expansion*

The announcement that Year 2 EAP courses would be cancelled starting from the 2025 cohort represented a direct threat to T1's teaching practitioner identity. She initially experienced *"a sense of uncertainty about my role"* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 10). Rather than accepting the curriculum cut as a verdict on EAP's irrelevance, she interpreted it as a call to demonstrate EAP's enduring value—albeit in new forms. She explained in an interview (Month 18): *"If EAP is being reduced, then I need to show that EAP skills are still essential, just delivered differently. I volunteered to redesign the remaining first-year modules to include academic integrity and AI literacy. I also proposed a workshop series for students on using GenAI for paraphrasing and referencing."* This response exemplifies what we term adaptive agency: a teacher's capacity to reinterpret institutional threats as professional challenges, thereby transforming potential paralysis into purposeful action. T1 was not merely reacting to institutional change; she was proactively shaping her professional future.

Her identity negotiation during this period was gradual and explicit. In her early career, she identified primarily as a practitioner. Over time, she added designer, material provider, collaborator, and assessor. However, the most challenging negotiation involved the teacher-researcher identity. She acknowledged: *“In my early career as an EAP teacher, I focused on delivering content to students. Gradually, I realised that I needed to engage in course and material design. The most difficult shift has been becoming a researcher. Honestly, I started with nearly ‘zero’ research knowledge”* (Interview, Month 1).

4.1.3 The turning point: Internalising the researcher identity

T1 initially attributed her research engagement to external requirements: a Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) module: a university-mandated teacher training programme that includes action research and academic writing. However, her agency transformed this external pressure into internal value. By Month 18, she stated: *“I now see research as a way to prove that teaching is not just craft, it’s knowledge. When I present my classroom research at conferences, I feel that my teaching experience gains legitimacy. That satisfaction drives me to do more”* (Interview, Month 18).

This shift from compliance to internalisation was accompanied by positive emotions (pride, satisfaction) and agentive actions (submitting abstracts, seeking collaborations). Her research engagement, initially motivated by institutional requirement, became a source of professional fulfilment and identity affirmation. In terms of research agency, T1 actively sought conference presentations. After her first individual talk at an international conference, she wrote informally to the first author: *“I could present our collaborated research individually. I am not afraid of delivering the academic presentation after the first attempt. I have already experienced the most stressful moment last time”* (Informal Communication Log, Month 20). She further explained: *“When I act as the teacher-researcher or collaborator in research, it pushes me to enhance my research capability. I should try my best to provide my own value and achieve personal continuous growth”* (Informal Communication Log, Month 21). Figure 1 presents the informal communication between T1 and the first author, showing her growing confidence in presenting research independently.

Figure 1

Informal Communication between T1 and the First Author



Note: This is the screenshot of WeChat conversation showing T1's reflection on presenting research individually at an international conference, expressing that she is "not afraid of delivering the academic presentation after the first attempt"

4.1.4 Integrating GenAI: From threat to pedagogical opportunity

T1's response to GenAI disruption mirrored her response to curriculum cuts: rather than resisting or avoiding, she embraced it as a pedagogical opportunity. By Month 18, she had already begun integrating GenAI tools into her remaining EAP modules. She explained in an interview: *"I started using ChatGPT to generate sample essays for students to critique. I also designed an activity where students compare AI-generated feedback with peer feedback. This way, I'm not competing with AI, I'm teaching students how to use it critically"* (Interview, Month 18). T1 was not simply implementing institutional directives; she was actively shaping how GenAI would be used in her teaching context. Her adaptive agency enabled her to position herself not as a passive recipient of technological change but as an active mediator of its pedagogical implications.

4.1.5 Summary: T1's trajectory of adaptive agency

In summary, T1's trajectory across 24 months demonstrates adaptive agency mediated by positive emotional reframing and stable yet expanding identity. She transformed curriculum cuts and GenAI disruption from existential threats into opportunities for professional growth. Her emotions (anxiety to motivation), identity (practitioner to teacher-researcher), and agency (compliance to proactive adaptation) co-evolved constructively. Even when external pressures mounted, her foundational satisfaction with the teaching profession provided emotional resources to enact adaptive, rather than resistant or compliant, agency. Her story illustrates how, with effective emotional regulation and identity flexibility, institutional flux can become a catalyst for professional development rather than a source of demoralisation.

4.2 T2's story: The downward spiral of compliant and resistant agency

4.2.1 The beginning: Contentment without a researcher identity

Like T1, T2 began her career with a sense of professional satisfaction. She initially reported contentment with her working conditions: *"short teaching weeks, well-paid and flexible office hours"* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 1). Her identity as a practitioner was clear and valued. She transitioned from practitioner to material provider and collaborator with relative ease: *"I not only need to deliver the courses but also provide students with learning materials devised by myself or my team. Collaborating with colleagues in lesson planning makes me improve my teaching"* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 2). However, unlike T1, T2's identity foundation was narrower. She had no prior experience with or aspiration toward research. Her background was in textile engineering, not education or applied linguistics. When the institution began emphasising research output as a performance indicator (KPI), with 20% of performance index tied to research. T2 felt unprepared and unsupported. She described: *"I feel anxious at the beginning of every new semester. My colleagues with PhDs are publishing papers. I only have a master's degree and a background in textile engineering. I don't even know where to start"* (Interview, Month 18).

4.2.2 The erosion: Emotional turbulence and identity crisis

T2's emotional trajectory was dominated by negative affect, particularly anxiety and anger, which were exacerbated by institutional flux. Her initial contentment eroded rapidly under pressure from curriculum

cuts and research KPIs. Regarding the cancellation of Year 2 EAP courses, T2 expressed anger and a sense of devaluation: *“When they told us that Year 2 EAP is being replaced by GenAI and Innovation, I felt angry. Not because I love grading 200 essays (the heavy workload), but because it felt like the university is saying: EAP is not important anymore. We are just a steppingstone”* (Interview, Month 12). Regarding GenAI, T2 reported overwhelming anxiety: *“Students are using ChatGPT to write their assignments. I caught three cases last semester. But how do I even assess original writing now? I feel like my role as an evaluator is collapsing. I lie awake worrying about whether I can still teach anything useful”* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 10).

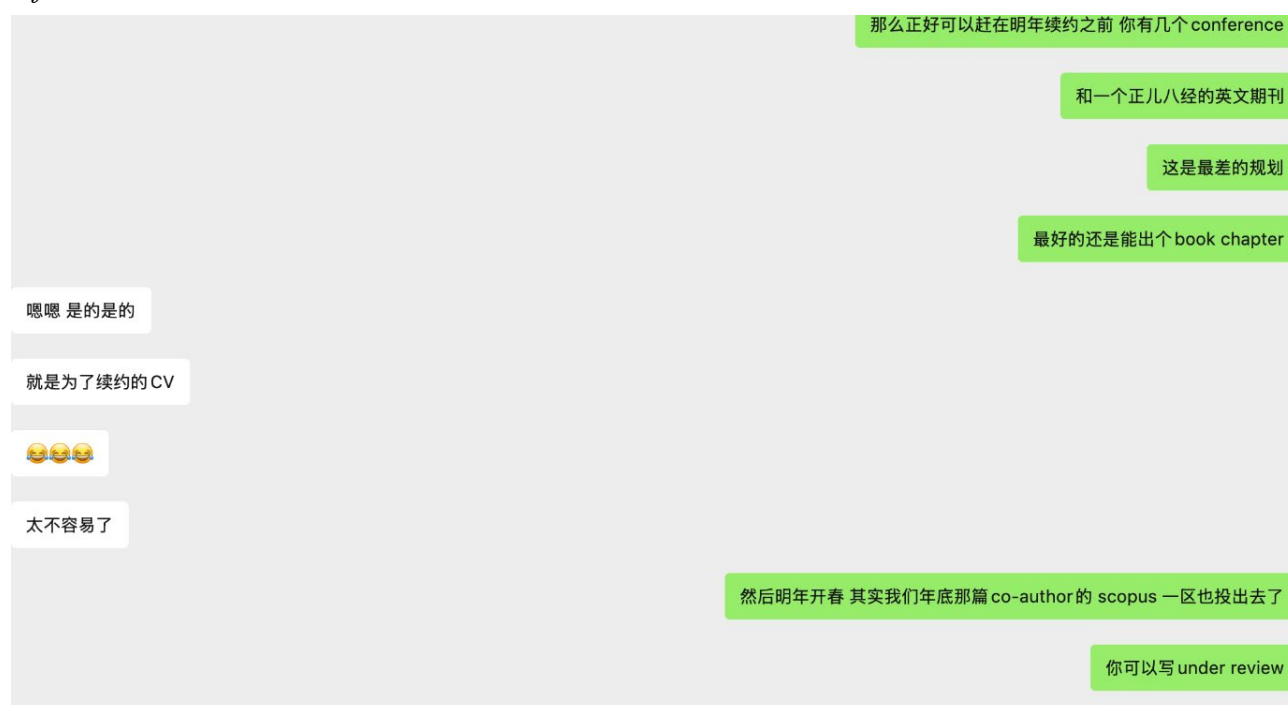
Unlike T1, who interpreted anxiety as a professional stimulus, T2 experienced anxiety as paralyzing. This paralysis prevented her from successfully integrating the teacher-researcher identity and blocked constructive identity negotiation. Her identity crisis became explicit by Month 8, when she wrote: *“Every time my department head mentions research output, my stomach tightens. I feel like I am being asked to become someone I am not. I only wanted to teach well. Now I am afraid that I will fail at both”* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 8). In an interview (Month 12), she elaborated: *“I don’t know who I am anymore. Am I a teacher? A researcher? A fraud? My colleague who joined the same year just published a paper in a Q1 journal. I haven’t even written an abstract. The disparity is crushing.”*

4.2.3 The paradox: Strategic compliance and internal resistance

T2’s agency manifested in two seemingly contradictory forms: compliant/strategic agency (doing research for survival) and internal resistant agency (emotionally rejecting the researcher role without changing institutional structures). In terms of strategic compliance, T2 co-authored a book chapter with the first author for contract renewal. In informal communication, she explicitly stated: *“I only joined this research project because I need something on my CV for the contract renewal. Honestly, I have no passion for it. But I have to play the game”* (Informal Communication Log, Month 15). Figure 2 presents the informal communication between T2 and the first author, showing her instrumental motivation for participating in research—solely for contract renewal purposes.

Figure 2

Informal Communication between T2 and the First Author



Note: This is the screenshot of WeChat conversation showing T2 stating “I only joined this research project because I need something on my CV for the contract renewal. Honestly, I have no passion for it”. As for internal resistance, while T2 complied outwardly, she internally resisted being identified as a researcher. Unlike T1, who gradually internalised the researcher role, T2 rejected it as illegitimate. She insisted: *“From my personal perspective, the major responsibilities of EAP teachers mainly rely on delivering courses well. The university pays much emphasis on research for teachers’ evaluation. I could feel the peer pressure, especially when collaborating with PhD holders”* (Interview, Month 12). This resistance did not lead to structural change but to emotional exhaustion. In a narrative (Month 12), she wrote: *“I go through the motions of research: reading papers, attending workshops, but inside I am thinking this is not me. I feel like I am wearing a costume. And it’s exhausting.”*

4.2.4 The consequences: Avoidance and hopelessness

Regarding curriculum cuts, T2’s agency was passive. Rather than redesigning her pedagogy or advocating for EAP, she accepted the cancellation: *“If they cut Year 2 EAP, what can I do? I will just teach whatever they assign. Maybe fewer teaching hours means more time to pretend to be a researcher”* (Interview, Month 12). Regarding GenAI, T2’s agency was avoidance oriented. She did not integrate AI tools into her teaching; instead, she tightened plagiarism checks and expressed hopelessness: *“I tried using an AI detector, but it gave false positives. Now I just ignore it. If students use AI, I probably can’t tell. I feel defeated”* (Critical Reflective Narrative, Month 14).

4.2.5 Summary: T2’s trajectory of compliant and resistant agency

In summary, T2’s trajectory across 24 months reveals a downward spiral of negative emotions (anxiety, anger, hopelessness), identity crisis (rejection of the teacher-researcher role), and fragmented agency (outward compliance, inward resistance). Unlike T1’s adaptive reframing, T2 interpreted curriculum cuts and GenAI as threats that devalued her core teaching identity. Her emotional paralysis prevented constructive identity negotiation, leading to strategic survival actions devoid of professional passion. Her story illustrates how, in the absence of emotional regulation and identity flexibility, institutional flux can produce not adaptive agency but emotional exhaustion and performative compliance. This trajectory underscores the importance of emotional support and identity resources in enabling teachers to navigate periods of professional instability.

4.3 Comparative summary: Contrasting trajectories

Table 4 presents a comparative summary of the contrasting trajectories of T1 and T2, illustrating how individual differences in emotional regulation and identity flexibility shape teachers’ responses to institutional flux. These findings suggest that the co-evolution of emotion, identity, and agency is not predetermined but shaped by teachers’ capacity for emotional regulation and identity flexibility. T1’s adaptive agency emerged from her ability to reframe anxiety as motivation, to internalise new identities gradually, and to act proactively in response to institutional change. T2’s compliant and resistant agency, by contrast, reflected her inability to regulate negative emotions, her resistance to identity change, and her tendency toward avoidance and strategic compliance. These trajectories have significant implications for teacher professional development and institutional policy, particularly in contexts of rapid technological and curricular transformation.

Table 4

Comparative Summary of T1 and T2's Contrasting Trajectories

Dimension	T1: Adaptive Agency	T2: Compliant/Resistant Agency
Emotional Response	Anxiety reframed as catalyst	Anxiety experienced as paralysis
Identity Negotiation	Gradual internalisation of teacher-researcher role	Rejection of researcher identity, identity crisis
Agency Enactment	Proactive adaptation, pedagogical innovation	Strategic compliance, internal resistance, avoidance
Outcome	Professional growth, identity expansion	Emotional exhaustion, performative compliance

5 Discussion: The emotion-identity-agency nexus in time of flux

The findings reveal that “institutional flux”, defined as rapid, destabilizing changes including curriculum cancellation and GenAI integration in this context, which triggers a dynamic interplay among language teacher emotion (LTE), language teacher identity (LTI), and language teacher agency (LTA). This section explicates *the Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus*, a conceptual framework that explains how these three constructs co-evolve to shape teachers' responses to transformation. We first introduce the nexus, then examine how emotion and identity jointly mediate agency, why identity stability anchors the nexus, how power dynamics permeate this interplay, and finally proposes a non-linear model of their co-evolution.

5.1 The emotion-identity-agency nexus: A conceptual framework

The emotion-identity-agency nexus refers to the mutually constitutive relationship among teachers' emotional experiences, professional identity negotiations, and agentic actions during periods of institutional change. Rather than operating as separate variables, these three constructs interact dynamically: emotions can either facilitate or block identity negotiation; identity stability or fragmentation shapes the capacity for agentic action; and agency enactment, in turn, modifies emotional landscapes and reinforces or challenges identity positions. This nexus is particularly salient in contexts of “flux” because rapid change destabilizes the habitual alignment among emotion, identity, and action, forcing teachers to renegotiate who they are (identity), how they feel (emotion), and what they can do (agency) in an iterative, often turbulent process.

In our longitudinal data, the nexus operated differently for T1 (experienced) and T2 (novice). For T1, the nexus was virtuous: positive emotional reframing enabled identity expansion (teacher to teacher-researcher), which in turn fuelled adaptive agency (redesigning courses, pursuing conferences). For T2, the nexus was vicious: negative emotional paralysis blocked identity integration, leading to fragmented agency (strategic compliance without internal commitment). Thus, the nexus does not predetermine a single outcome; rather, it is a relational space where teachers' emotional and identity resources determine whether flux becomes a catalyst for growth or a source of crisis.

5.2 Joint mediation: How emotion and identity shape agency

Our data demonstrate that agency is neither a direct product of emotion nor of identity alone but emerges from their intersection. The same emotion: anxiety about course cuts and GenAI led to opposite agentic responses depending on teacher's identity stability. This finding challenges earlier work that examined emotion–agency or identity–agency as separate dyads (e.g., [Liyanage & Walker, 2023](#); [Weng, 2024](#);

Wu, 2023); instead, we show that emotion and identity function as a joint mediator, with each construct gaining its agentic force only through the other.

For T1, anxiety about GenAI and curriculum cuts was mediated by a stable, expansive professional identity. Having successfully integrated multiple roles (practitioner, designer, collaborator, researcher) over eight years, she interpreted anxiety as a signal for professional development. The resulting agency was adaptive: she integrated GenAI tools into teaching, volunteered to redesign modules, and pursued research presentations. In contrast, T2 experienced the same institutional pressures but her identity was fragmented. She strongly identified only as a teaching practitioner and rejected the imposed researcher role as illegitimate. Anxiety, in her case, was not filtered through a resilient identity; instead, it amplified her sense of precarity and led to defensive agency: outward compliance (e.g., co-authoring a chapter for CV update purposes) coupled with internal resistance and emotional exhaustion.

Thus, the quality of agency is not predicted by emotion or identity in isolation, but by their alignment. A teacher may have strong positive emotions but a fragile identity; agency may still be limited. Conversely, a stable identity can buffer negative emotions, enabling adaptive responses. We therefore propose that future research on teacher agency in flux should treat the emotion–identity dyad as a single, co-constitutive mediator rather than as two separate antecedents.

5.3 Identity stability vs. fragmentation as the nexus anchor

The two cases demonstrate that identity stability serves as the anchor of the *Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus*. T1, despite initial difficulty in transitioning to a researcher role, gradually internalized this identity. Her narratives reveal a coherent self-concept: she saw research as a legitimate extension of teaching excellence. This stability allowed her to absorb institutional shocks (e.g. course cuts, GenAI) without losing her professional role, and it channelled her negative emotions into productive, identity-congruent actions.

T2, however, experienced identity fragmentation. She explicitly stated: “*I don’t know who I am anymore. Am I a teacher? A researcher? A fraud?*” (Interview, Month 12). This fragmentation was not merely cognitive but deeply emotional, generating chronic anxiety and anger. In the nexus, a fragmented identity cannot effectively mediate external pressures; instead, it becomes a source of additional distress. Consequently, T2’s agency was performative—she engaged in research activities solely for contract renewal—lacking the transformative potential observed in T1. The intersection of identity confusion and negative emotion thus locked her into a self-reinforcing cycle of defensive agency and emotional exhaustion, rather than freeing her to adapt.

These findings extend prior work on EAP teacher identity in EMI contexts (Hu et al., 2024; Trent, 2024) by showing that identity tensions are not uniform. The experienced teacher with disciplinary alignment (English background) and longer socialization was able to negotiate the practitioner–researcher tension constructively, while the novice teacher with a non-English undergraduate degree and administrative background experienced the same tension as irreconcilable. This suggests that pre-existing disciplinary socialization and length of EAP teaching experience are critical resources in the nexus.

5.4 Power dynamics, marginalization, and precarity: Permeating the nexus

The findings reveal that the Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus is embedded within broader power dynamics that become visible during flux. These dynamics do not sit outside the nexus; they directly shape the emotional cues, identity pressures, and agentic possibilities available to teachers. In this study, power operates at three interrelated levels:

- (1) Institutional power over curriculum: The university administration unilaterally cancelled Year 2 EAP courses, replacing them with GenAI and Innovation modules. This decision marginalized

EAP teachers by implying that their expertise was less valuable than technological training. Both T1 and T2 felt this devaluation, but the nexus processed it differently: T1's stable identity allowed her to reframe the threat into an opportunity to teach AI literacy, while T2's fragmented identity turned the same devaluation into anger.

- (2) Neoliberal power over employment conditions: The university's KPI system, linking contract renewal to research output (20% of performance index), imposed a "publish or perish" logic on teachers whose primary training and interest lay in pedagogy. This power structure forced EAP teachers into a researcher identity regardless of their readiness or desire. T2 explicitly named this: *"I only want to concentrate on teaching, but I have to transform my identity as a researcher due to the 20% KPI... I am afraid that I could not produce high-quality research and lose the job contract."* (Interview, Month 6). The institutional power directly generated identity threat and fear, which filtered through her rejection of the researcher role, produced only strategic compliance rather than genuine agency.
- (3) Epistemic power of GenAI: The sudden integration of generative AI disrupted teachers' traditional authority as knowledge holders. Students could now generate essays, paraphrases, and even lesson content via AI, challenging the teacher's role as primary evaluator. This shift in epistemic authority was a source of anxiety for both participants, yet their identity positions determined whether this anxiety catalysed adaptive agency (T1's integration of AI literacy) or defensive withdrawal (T2's avoidance of AI and hopelessness).

By tracing these power dynamics through the lens of the Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus, we demonstrate that structural forces do not determine teacher agency in a linear fashion; rather, they are mediated by individual's emotion and identity resources. This reframing avoids simplistic structural determinism while still acknowledging the profound influence of institutional power.

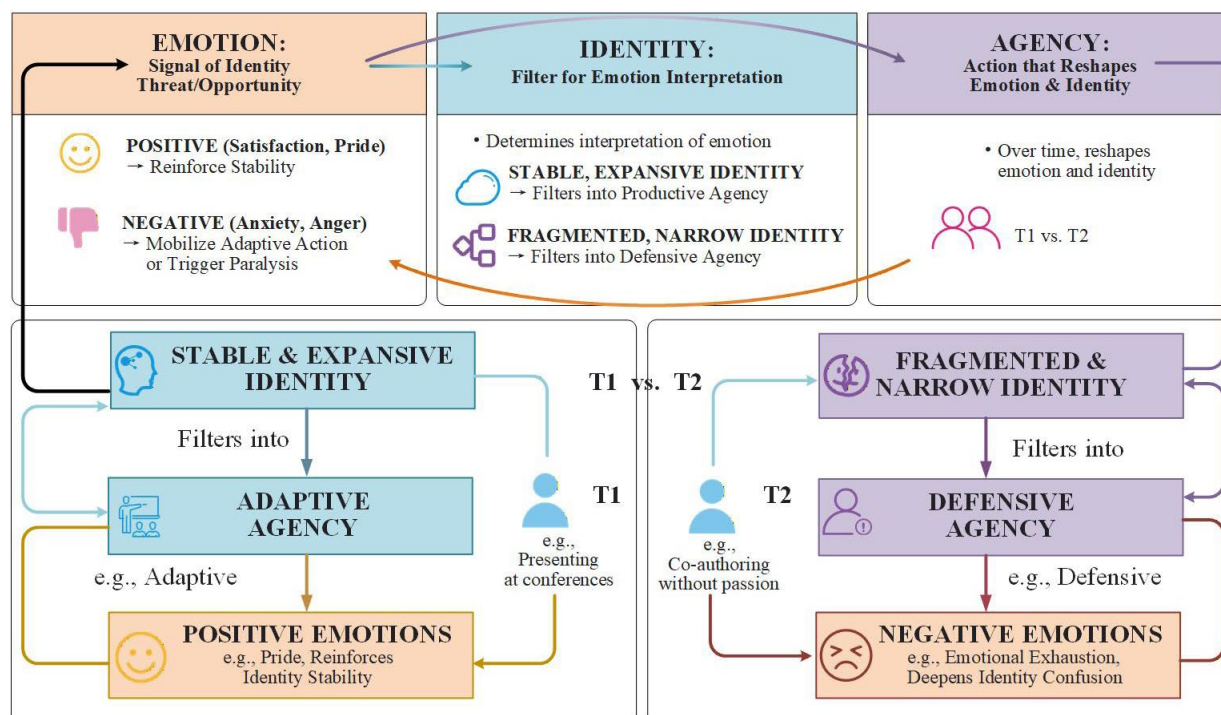
5.5 The nexus in flux: A non-linear, contextual model of emotion-identity-agency

Drawing together the above strands, we propose a non-linear model of the *Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus* in times of flux (Figure 3). Unlike stable educational settings where emotion, identity, and agency may evolve gradually, flux accelerates their interaction and makes their co-evolution visible. In such contexts:

- Emotion acts as a signal of identity threat or opportunity. Positive emotions (satisfaction, pride) reinforce identity stability; negative emotions (anxiety, anger) can either mobilize adaptive action or trigger paralysis, depending on identity resources.
- Identity acts as a filter that determines whether an emotion is interpreted as a challenge to be met or a threat to be avoided. A stable, expansive identity filters negative emotions into productive agency; a fragmented, narrow identity filters them into defensive agency.
- Agency, in turn, reshapes emotion and identity over time. Adaptive agency (e.g., T1 presenting at conferences) generates positive emotions (pride) and reinforces the teacher-researcher identity. Defensive agency (e.g., T2 co-authoring without passion) generates emotional exhaustion and deepens identity confusion.

This model extends previous linear accounts of language teacher agency (e.g., [Tao & Gao, 2025](#)) by emphasizing bidirectional and recursive relationships. It also bridges the gap between micro-level teacher cognition and macro-level institutional power, showing how structural pressures (e.g. curriculum cuts, KPIs, GenAI disruption) are mediated by emotion and identity processes at the individual level. The model thus underscores that agency in flux is never simply a matter of will or competence; it is always tethered to the ongoing emotional and identity work that teachers perform in response to institutional turbulence.

Figure 3

A Contextual Model of Emotion-Identity-Agency Nexus

6 Implications

The current study bridges the research gap by exploring the interrelationship between LTA, LTE and LTI longitudinally, narrating how EAP teachers' emotions and identities influence their agencies. The research findings not only enrich the limited literature on EAP teachers' agency in EMI context but also offer critical pedagogical implications for teacher education and institutional policy in EMI contexts:

Emotional Scaffolding for Novices: Institutions must recognize that novice EAP teachers are particularly vulnerable to negative emotions during reforms. Structured mentoring programs and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) should be established not just for skill transfer, but as safe spaces for emotional sharing and regulation strategies.

Reconceptualizing the Teacher-Researcher Role: The transition to a "teacher-researcher" identity cannot be mandated solely through KPIs. For teachers without backgrounds in applied linguistics (like T2), institutions must provide systematic training in research paradigms and foster interdisciplinary collaboration to make this identity attainable and meaningful, rather than a source of anxiety.

Policy Reform: Performance evaluation policies should be differentiated to reflect the diverse roles of EAP teachers. Over-emphasizing research output for teaching-intensive staff exacerbates identity conflict and leads to strategic, low-quality compliance. A more balanced evaluation framework would support sustainable agency enactment.=

7 Conclusion

This longitudinal multiple-case study explored how experienced and novice EAP teachers navigated the "flux and transformation" of educational reform and GenAI integration. By analyzing the interplay of emotion, identity, and agency, the study reveals that teaching experience is a pivotal factor in determining the quality of agency. The experienced teacher leveraged emotional challenges to enact adaptive, transformative agency, while the novice teacher, hindered by identity confusion and anxiety, resorted to

strategic compliance and internal resistance. These findings underscore that teacher agency in times of flux is deeply mediated by the emotional and identity resources teachers can mobilize. Although initial reflections may have been influenced by the narrative writing prompts, the study's longitudinal design facilitated deeper, emergent reflections over time. Future research should employ mixed methods to further explore how institutional contexts and disciplinary socialization mediate this nexus across larger populations.

Disclosure Statement

The authors used Generative AI (specifically DeepSeek) for language refinement and grammar checking during the preparation of this manuscript. All AI-generated suggestions were reviewed, revised, and approved by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the final content. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or the generation of core ideas.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Critical Reflective Narratives Writing Prompts

- How long have you been teaching English for academic purpose (EAP)?
- What are the common emotions (positive, negative or mixed) you experienced in your career as an English for academic purposes (EAP) teacher?
- Which emotion occurs most frequently? In what situations do these emotions usually arise? Can you provide examples?
- Are there any changes of your identity as an EAP teacher? If yes, why these changes occurred? Can you provide examples (e.g. teaching practitioner, course designer, material provider, teaching collaborator, teacher-researcher, teaching evaluator, etc.)?
- Did the emotional experiences and identity changes influence your agency of being an EAP teacher? If yes, how? Can you provide examples?

Appendix 2

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Adapted from Derakhshan, Karimpour & Nazari (2025)

- Could you please tell me about your role as an EAP teacher? How do you see it? How do you think about yourself?
- How do you see your role as a designer of courses? How does it influence your perceptions about yourself?
- How do you define your role in relation to materials? What materials do you use? How does it influence your perceptions about yourself?
- How do you collaborate with other teachers? How does it influence your perceptions about yourself? Do you face any challenges?
- Do you engage in research? If no, why? If yes, why and how does it influence your perceptions about yourself? What do you seek for in doing research?
- How do you see your role as an assessor? How do you assess the students? What do you do and how does it influence your perceptions about yourself?

- Describe a moment in the past where you felt your role as a teacher was challenged by changes in the university. What did you do? How did you feel?
- How did you adapt your teaching materials when the EAP course was cut?
- What specific actions did you take to negotiate your research role when faced with GenAI anxiety?
- Do you have any further comments?

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