Novice Teachers' Professional Identity Reconstruction

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Abstract: A transition from pre-service training programs to teaching is a dramatic and somehow painful experience for novice teachers. The question is what difficulties novice teachers face and how they negotiate their professional identity to cope with difficulties and find joys in their career. This study is aimed to investigate novice teachers' professional identity reconstruction, from their imaged-identities to their practiced identities. The use of semi-structured interviews collected data from four Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) novice teachers. According to the data, cue-based was the most common type of novice teachers' imagined identity. Regarding the practiced identities, the interviewees reported different professional identity reconstructions in the first five years of teaching practice. The participants' excerpts enlisted some challenges that the novices faced such as students' learning attitudes, working environments, or unorganized colleagues. Based on the research findings, some solutions were proposed in order to help novice teachers get through their difficult times at the very beginning of their career.

Keywords: *Novice teacher, professional identity reconstruction, teacher education.*

Introduction

In education, teachers play a significant role in determining the success or failure of students' learning. Darling-Hammond (2003) claimed that teachers, the most decisive determinant, affect students' learning and performances. In the summary proposed for a guide to develop teacher professional development by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015, the presence of qualified teachers is indispensable. It also highlights the importance of teacher education. Many graduated students from colleges and universities of teacher education begin to engage in teaching every year. A new stage in their lives is opened. In the new work environment, they can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in specific educational settings, aiming to bring their learners the best learning experiences and improve their learners' learning outcomes accordingly. However, many new graduates find the novice stage very challenging. For instance, novice teachers' certainty sense and self-efficacy are negatively impacted in this transition phase (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014).

During the pre-service teacher education programs, although novice teachers could have had many opportunities to participate in micro-teaching sessions or teaching practicum in their teaching training programs, they received feedback and suggestions for improvements from their mentors, and inevitable confusion when teaching in new classes as novice teachers are explainable. Some scholars stated that pre-service teacher training programs did not prepare teachers well for schools (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014; Eret-Orhan et al., 2018; Wyatt & White, 2016). Professional learning activities in pre-service teacher education could be better if more time is allocated for student teachers to get exposed to school contexts to learn more about authentic teaching in a school.

A transition from pre-service training programs to teaching is a dramatic and painful experience for novice teachers (Senom et al., 2013). During this period, novice teachers have to adjust their expectations and update their knowledge as between one's belief and reality is a gap (Hebert & Worthy, 2001). The transition from pre-service teacher training programs to fundamental teaching practices is a big challenge for novice teachers as they have to perform their responsibilities right after graduation. These new teachers change from a student who learns to teach to someone who teaches their learners (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Flores and Day (2006) indicated that this transition could be described as a sudden move and sometimes a dramatic change or a shock. These early years of teaching are also often confusing,

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challenging, and tensing for novice teachers (Farrell, 2003, 2006; Loughran et al., 2001). This stage has been described as a scenario in which novice teachers have to decide to sink or swim (Varah et al., 1986). One important task of these novice teachers is to continue to learn, update to keep pace with the development of professional knowledge and contribute their own experience to that development (Shagrir, 2010).

After admission into the job, novice teachers are allocated similar tasks as their more experienced colleagues. For instance, they have to teach and learn how to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Furthermore, they play many roles simultaneously, namely a student, a teacher and a researcher (Smith & Sela, 2005). Novice teachers are expected to know the specialized knowledge, apply it appropriately, and adapt to the new environment (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Novice teachers also will experience the same difficulties of the early days that their experienced colleagues have got through (Farrell, 2012). Although novice teachers might not be as competent as experienced teachers, the most challenging teaching tasks are often assigned to them, and they are expected to be as well-performed as experienced ones (Yost, 2006). However, novice teachers also often find their jobs frustrating, unrewarding, and challenging to deal with, and resulting in their problems (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

In addition to highlighting the gaps in teacher training, teacher professional development, and classroom realities, Brighton (1999) indicated that the mentioned challenges have led to attrition among novice teachers. To some extent, the attrition hindered the development of the educational system. Many studies have shown an increase in the number of novice teachers leaving the profession (e.g., Hong, 2010; Öztürk & Yıldırım, 2013; Wonacott, 2002), and people gradually realize this difficult situation. When comparing the turnover rate of new teachers in the profession and that of new employees of other professions, the rate of the first group outweighs it (Wonacott, 2002). According to Öztürk and Yıldırım, between 25% and 50% of new teachers quit their jobs in the first three years of teaching. To Hong (2010), many novice teachers leave their jobs during the first five years of their teaching careers.

The early years of a teaching career are crucial for a teacher as teachers' identity, attitude, and future teaching practice are built and affected through their experiences in these early years. Pitton (2006) confirmed a close connection of new teachers' success to what they experience and the opportunities they receive to express their classroom difficulties in the profession's early years. Novice teachers develop their understanding of themselves during the initial years (Pennington & Richards, 2016), and it is also during the initial years, their professional identity is formed and reformed and their professional practice is constructed and reconstructed (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Kang & Cheng, 2014).

Novice teachers are likely to have negative emotions without receiving the necessary support and self-understanding in the beginning period. They may even think this profession is not for them and decide to give it up. The question is what difficulties novice teachers face and how they negotiate their professional identity to cope with difficulties and find joys in their careers. Many recent studies which examined the difficulties faced by early-career English teachers and their identity construction and reconstruction have been remarkably increasing around the world. However, the number of studies focusing on the challenges faced by Vietnamese novice EFL high school teachers and how they reconstruct their identity is still underexplored, to the best knowledge of the researcher of this study. Therefore, this study is conducted to address that gap.

Literature Review

English Teacher Education Programs in Vietnam

In Vietnam, English teacher education is one of the most concerned fields of study among students and parents. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam issued a detailed guideline to curriculum development for the program. Student teachers will learn various subjects, including two different knowledge blocks: general and specialized knowledge ones.

Regarding the general knowledge block, student teachers will learn the second foreign language such as beginning French, Japanese, Korean, or Chinese, and other subjects, including physical education, national defense education, philosophy, applied psychology, applied informatics, and politics. In terms of the specialized knowledge block, the students are taught to develop their English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), enrich their English vocabulary, enhance their micro-teaching skills, better their knowledge of applied linguistics, cultures of English-speaking nations, principles and methods in language teaching and learning, and foster their research skills. Besides, they will take turn to do their teaching internship and teaching practicum at a designated high school upon their completion of English language skills and professional learning courses. The number of course credits for teaching internship and practicum might be different from universities to universities, but the objectives are not significantly distinct.

The teaching internship is expected to equip the novice teachers with knowledge of high school contexts, school students' learning needs, teaching English in practice and organizing educational and English language extra curriculum activities for students. The teaching practicum offers student teachers chances to apply what they have learnt in their program including designing lesson plans for students of different grade levels, teaching the lessons, self-evaluating one's teaching effectiveness and receiving feedback from their mentor. Student teachers also practice developing and administering tests to assess students' learning outcomes.

It can be seen that the teaching practicum is very important because it will affect the student teachers' teaching beliefs, their identities in their teaching career, as well as the extent to which they desire to work in this profession.

Novice Teachers

In the available literature, novice teachers were mentioned with various names such as new, newly qualified, newly recruited, beginning, or early career teachers. Farrell (2012) suggested no precise definition of a novice teacher in literature. Some researchers support the idea that novice teachers, completing their university education program, have just begun teaching in an academic unit (Amin & Rahimi, 2018; Lomi & Mbato, 2020). Farrell (2012) stated that novice teachers could be anyone who first teaches something new. There was no universal agreement on how long the teaching period was required to complete the novice stage.

Considering teaching time, many scholars have set different amounts of teaching time to define a teacher as a novice. According to Haynes (2011), teachers with two-year teaching experience at maximum were regarded as novices. Nevertheless, to Farrell (2012) and Trent (2016), novice teachers have less than three years of teaching experience. Others characterized novices as teachers who have been working for four years (Sali & Kecik, 2018) or five years (Kim & Roth, 2011; Widiati et al., 2018) after graduating from university. For the purpose and scope of this study, a novice teacher was identified as a teacher with five years of teaching experience or fewer. In conclusion, this current study defined the novices who serve the teaching profession in their first five years.

Challenges Faced by Novice Teachers

Novice English teachers share most of the challenges faced by novice teachers. However, due to the distinctive nature of the English subject, novice English teachers face other challenges such as teaching in large class sizes, teaching method adoption, and teaching students with low proficiency.

Numrich (1996) found that novice language teachers dealt with time management challenges in class, giving clear instructions, meeting students' needs, teaching grammar effectively, assessing student work, and emphasizing students more than themselves. In addition, heavy workload of teaching and non-teaching issues, teaching in large class sizes, low proficiency learners, and dealing with misbehaved learners were the main challenges found by Richards (1998) in their study of five novice English as a second language (ESL) teachers working at secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Farrell (2003) found that the novices confronted the burden of teaching load, external obligations, dealing with students at low levels of English proficiency, examination papers' correction, lack of collaborative work and mentor assistance, and surroundings. He carried out this case study to investigate ESL novice teachers' challenges and personal influences in their first year of teaching in Singapore. Farrell (2006) highlighted additional problems faced by the same group of new teachers, including the dilemmas as to how they were required to teach, contrary to what they wanted to teach, and lack of assistance from colleges and the administration. Farrell (2016) recently conducted another study to examine novice language teachers' challenges. Several challenges were found: lacking professional support and guidance, feeling alienated and isolated, disallowance of creativity, and large class sizes.

Fareh (2010) conducted a study on EFL teachers to explore the challenges they faced in their teaching in Arab countries. The findings reported that EFL teachers found it challenging in adopting different teaching methods. Most of them reported that they only adopted the Grammar-Translation method. Furthermore, other challenges were figured out, such as meeting the needs of individual students, student demotivation, lack of student involvement in the learning process, and inadequate teaching sources.

Al-Seghayer (2014) found that students held negative beliefs and attitudes toward learning English. It is considered the most common difficulty that causes students' apathy and discouragement in EFL classrooms. Razmjoo and Mavaddat (2016) conducted a study intending to examine the viewpoints on professional challenges faced by English high school teachers in Iran. The results proved the presence of difficulties in terms of education, society, economy, and time. They also found that factors like gender, years of experience, and educational location had no significant influence on participants' perspectives.

To sum up, in comparison with challenges faced by novice teachers, EFL novice teachers face other unique challenges such as giving clear instructions, teaching grammar effectively, emphasizing on students more than on self, teaching in large class sizes, dealing with students at low levels of English proficiency, and disallowance of creativity (Farrell, 2006, 2012, 2016; Numrich, 1996; Richards, 1998).

Consequently, inexperienced teachers' competency to cope with various challenges can negatively influence them, resulting in burnout, stress, and attrition. Even though numerous studies have been published in the literature concerning the problems of the novices, not many studies were devoted to this topic on novice English teachers. Farrell (2016) stated a surprising shortage of studies regarding new qualified English teachers, but that understanding is essential if we support new teachers to transition to their careers appropriately. In addition, research on beginner EFL teachers was quite rare. Fortunately, some studies conducted recently have been conducted on novice EFL teachers, which will be presented in the section on related studies.

Novice EFL High School Teachers in Vietnam

In Vietnam, Ngo (2018) examined the relationship between the cognitions of novice EFL high school teachers and their practices. He also investigated the influence of personal, situational and sociocultural factors on their cognitions and practices. The findings indicated that novice EFL high school teachers' cognitions and practices are significantly influenced by personal, situational, and sociocultural factors. The results also showed that teachers had difficulty finding optimal teaching methods to satisfy diverse stakeholders' demands. On the one hand, according to the directions of the curriculum, textbooks and teacher education, the novice EFL high school teachers attempted to apply the communicative language teaching (CLT). However, due to some classroom limitations, including pressure from students, colleagues and examinations, they had difficulties applying the CLT in the classroom. These difficulties were the mismatch between teaching contents in the curriculum and examination focus, unsatisfactory textbooks contents, and students' low level of language proficiencies. The difficulties were solved when the novice EFL high school teachers found a pedagogical compromise between teaching expectations, textbooks, teacher education, and what is helpful for the students. Nevertheless, due to the more immediate and pressing constraints in the teaching contexts of the novice EFL high school teachers participating in the study, the compromise seemed to emphasize more on teaching the forms than communicative practice.

Nguyen (2015) investigated the professional identity construction of a novice EFL teacher in Vietnam. The factors affecting the process of one's professional identity construction and the interaction among those factors were also studied. Data collection instruments included narrative inquiries and semi-structured interviews. The results showed that the professional identity construction of the participant is exceptionally complicated. Numerous factors were found to affect the process of professional identity construction, such as personal, contextual and socio-cultural factors. For personal and contextual factors, the participant strived for self-affirmation and could adopt various strategies to handle situations in the classroom. Regarding social-cultural factors, teachers' identity construction was affected by relationships and communities of practice. These factors interacted and were closely connected, and it was not easy to separate them. The research results offered insights into how EFL teachers' identity construction and reconstruction proceeded in a particular context.

H. T. Nguyen (2017) examined the professional identity development of Vietnamese novice English secondary teachers and how the resources they bring to school negotiate their identity development. She found that the formation of teachers' identity involves managing social positions as teachers negotiate and invest in the goals and demands essential in their school context. The school, therefore, functions as a place to determine what is meaningful, giving priority or downplaying particular objectives and values. It was discovered that novice teachers knew and believed that their pre-service training served as limited sources in meeting the complicated requirements of the located context. Therefore, the teachers were locked in school identities, relying on school culture and teaching standards that enabled them to reach desired social positions.

Teacher Professional Identity

It was seen that scholars in the field of teacher professional identity had provided different definitions of the term teacher professional identity. As Beijaard et al. (2004) stated, teacher professional identity is the association between teachers and their students, co-workers, and parents. To some scholars, teacher professional identity is understood as to how teachers identify their professional roles (Lasky, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2018) and what they find essential for their educational work (Van Veen & Sleegers, 2006). Teacher identity is their insights into their cognitive knowledge, self-awareness, voice, faith, and relationships with their colleagues, pupils, and parents. Developing a solid teacher identity promotes teachers' dedication to learning, expands their understanding and skills, motivates them to participate in their teaching, helps them comprehend their works and choose the most appropriate self-image for them (Day, 2018; Hong, 2010).

Novice Teachers' Identity Reconstruction

This study adapted the conceptualization of imagined identities and practiced identities (Norton, 2001). In addition, the theory of social cognition representation proposed by Moscovici (2001) was also adopted. The mentioned concepts and theories set the theoretical framework for investigating the professional identity reconstruction of novice EFL high school teachers in Vietnam.

Imagined identities have built in their minds the connections between themselves and other people and things they do not directly get access to or engage with. Lampert (2010) suggested that practiced identity is associated with actual practices that people are involved in. Various components contribute to EFL teachers' identity reformation, including "agency, prior experience, personal beliefs about teaching and learning, interactions between individual's multiple identities, contextual factors arising from school environments, policy demands, and educational and cultural backgrounds" (Jiang et al., 2021, p. 2).

Xu (2013) used the social representation theory to classify the collective actions of people (or the events they meet in specific social settings) and divide people into different representations to understand their pattern of social cognition.

As a brand of social cognition, professional identity can be distributed based on rules, cues, exemplars, or schema. These divisions provide significant interpretive instruments for examining identity reconstruction.

- Rule-based identities are externally specified by institutional regulations and laws. For instance, a part of a teacher's professional identity should be established by the associated legislation and rules of the academic institution or the MOET in the Vietnamese context describing his or her duties and performances.

- Cue-based identities are facilitated with traits or distinctive characteristics of particular social positions. For example, when a teacher describes oneself as an expert/authority with the feeling of obligation to provide answers/solutions to their students who are doubted in their learning. This kind of identity may be cue-based because that obligated feeling is an expert/authority.

- Exemplar-based identities are based on representative samples of social role models. In other words, when a novice makes efforts to imitate previous teachers whom he or she admires, such imitation belongs to exemplar-based identities.

- Schema-based identities ''embeds a series of social cognitions and behaviors in response to a dynamic context or situation'' (Xu, 2013, p. 80). For example, becoming a teacher at an educational institution is connected to mental conditions and physical behaviors and is often related to a particular culture or context.

The conceptions of imagined identities and practiced identities (Norton, 2001) and social representation theory (Moscovici, 2001) are adopted as a theoretical framework to analyze the participants' identity reconstruction in this study. Imagined identities are someone's imagination about the relationships between oneself and other people or things, while practiced identities are those that someone is currently practicing in their context. Regarding social representation theory, identity can be divided into four kinds which are rule-based (following regulations and laws), cue-based (showing traits or characteristics of a specific social role), exemplar-based (imitating someone), and schema-based (having thoughts or acting to match a particular context or situation).

Related Studies

Xu (2013) carried out a longitudinal case study over three years to investigate the transformation of professional identities of four EFL teachers during their first years of teaching in K-12 schools in the Chinese context. Even though student teachers have little teaching experience, they have various images of themselves and the world. Teachers have constructed their identities in the pre-service stage based on those imaginations. It is seen that their identity relies on themselves and their imaginations about the real world. Nevertheless, regarding practiced identity, teachers' practices were valued. Through interaction in the real world, the practiced identity was formed. The study showed that novice EFL teachers' imagined identities established in the pre-service stage were either cue-based or exemplar-based. Later, in the novice stage, those identities were changed into practiced identities consisting of rule-based or schema-based.

Similarly, Hamiloglu (2014) also adopted the theory of social cognition representation (Moscovici, 2001) to categorize participants' identity types illustrated from imagined to practiced identities in the changing phase. Ten volunteer pre-service teachers in a Turkish state university took part in the study. Interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and reflective journals were the main instruments for data collection. The results demonstrated a multilayered identity of student teachers. Rule-based was the key one, followed by personal qualities based. Other identities were permanently altered by facts and circumstances, including cue-based, exemplar-based, or schema-based identities. Besides, student teachers' imagination, which they cultivated via reflective practices and participated in numerous activities and interactions, played an essential part in their identity formation. Hamiloglu shared the view with Xu's (2013) study. They both viewed identity as a cognitive construction and anticipated a linear path of identity transition from being imagined to being practiced with imagined identity as the basis for building practiced identities.

Jiang et al. (2021) argued that identity transformation is not just a cognitive and psychological process but a socio-cultural process of negotiating meanings between each person and a broader educational system. Jiang et al. conducted a study on four novice EFL teachers in Macau to examine the transition process of identity from the pre-service to novice stage, adopting the concepts of imagined identities, practiced identities and the social representation theory. The findings presented four identity change paths, including renegotiation, evolution, establishment, and sustainment. Renegotiations were related to a shift in which novice EFL teachers' imagined identities shaped in the pre-service phase were renegotiated to new identities in the novice phase. Evolution meant a positive change of identities, from problematic and straightforward exemplar-based imagined identities into mature and explicit schema-based practiced identities. The establishment can be seen as a change of someone who started the novice stage without a clear imagined identity but then gradually established identity after participating in the teaching practice. Concerning sustainment, when working within a hostile school condition, a novice teacher had to practice an undesirable identity. Then, she decided to fight against that practiced identity by quitting and moving to another environment where she could practice her desirable imagined identity formed in the pre-service stage. These data showed that the identity shifting of novice EFL teachers does not represent a linear movement from imagined identities in pre-service phases to practiced identities in the novice

stage. However, it was a dynamic process driven by personal interpretations, experiences with past learning, the practice of teaching and the institutional examination culture.

Lomi and Mbato (2020) recently uncovered the difficulties experienced by three EFL novice teachers and how they managed to cope with their professional identity development in the first year. As cited below, the result showed that novices all faced internal and external challenges that changed their professional identity.

> *"...the struggles make the novice teachers renegotiate their identity; from a kind and friendly teacher to be a strict teacher, from a sensitive teacher to be a strong-minded teacher, from a frail teacher to be a tough teacher, from a money-oriented teacher to be experience-oriented teacher, from an unmotivated teacher to be a very motivated teacher, and the most important, from novice teachers to be experienced and professional teachers. Another significant issue is related to self-appreciation." (Lomi & Mbato, 2020, p. 14)*

Studies on identity construction were abound, yet those investigating identity reconstruction seemed quite rare in scope. The recent study of Jiang et al. (2021) provided a more multidimensional view of teacher identity reconstruction. Identity reconstruction should be considered a dynamic process rather than a linear path, as claimed in the study of Xu (2013) and Hamiloglu (2014). Besides, in reality, a participant might hold several imagined identities rather than a single and straightforward imagination, as in the study of Xu. Regarding Lomi and Mbato's (2020) study, the ideas of professional identity renegotiation only account for a small part and have not explicitly been explained. In short, it is worth conducting more research on identity reconstruction to gain more insights into the issue. Consequently, this current study addressed two main research questions related to how novice teachers reconstruct their professional identity to pursue their teaching careers as follows:

1. After finishing teaching practicum offered in the teacher training program, what kinds of teachers did the novice teachers imagine themselves to become?

2. In the first five years teaching in high schools, how did Vietnamese EFL teachers' imagined identities change?

Methodology

Research Design

This study was designed as cross-sectional research in which the qualitative approach was employed. This kind of design was to help the research gain insightful understanding of how novices transformed their identities in their first five years of serving the teaching profession.

Participants

Four novice EFL high school teachers were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The novices were purposefully chosen according to their teaching experiences and genders. Specifically, four interviewees had different levels of experience. Two are male, and two are female. Table 1 provides details about four interviewees.

Table 1. Participants

Novice's name	Gender	Teaching experience	School location
1. Thanis*	Female	1 year	Rural area
2. Noble*	Male	3 years	Rural area
3. Miami*	Female	4 years	Urban area
4. Paul*	Male	5 years	Urban area

*Pseudonames

All interviewees' names were presented as pseudonyms to keep their information confidential. Additionally, participants' information was only reviewed by the researchers in order to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. The participants had the right to withdraw from the research if they found it harmful.

Instrument

Six main questions were raised in the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview allows the interviewers to ask further questions to clarify participants' unclear answers or penetrate deeper information (Evans, 2018). Besides, the order of the six questions might also change to match the flow of the conversation naturally. The interview was to obtain verbal data on novices' professional identity reconstruction. Questions for semi-structured interviews were designed in accordance to answer the two research questions as follows:

• After your teaching practicum, what kind of teacher did you imagine yourself to become?

- After your teaching practicum, what did you imagine about the relationships between you and … (a) the students, (b) colleagues, (c) experienced teachers, (d) mentor teachers, (e) principals, (f) students' parents? (Relationships with mentioned groups are asked in turn)
- What kind of teacher do you see yourself as now?
- Currently, how are the relationships between you and … (a) the students, (b) colleagues, (c) experienced teachers, (d) mentor teachers, (e) principals, (f) students' parents (Relationships with mentioned groups are asked in turn)
- What changes in your professional identities did you recognize? What led to those changes?
- Will you continue pursuing your teaching profession in your current high school?

Interview questions included in the semi-structured interview were sent to participants one week before the official interview. The term identity was also clearly explained in that document to enable participants to have time to think, recall their past experiences, and respond more smoothly in the upcoming interviews. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the dispersion in participants' workplaces, four interviews were conducted online via Zoom at participants' convenience and preferences. The calls were recorded under the participants' consent, and each lasted around forty-five minutes.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to two themes, namely the participants' self-image identities and the practiced identities. Mainly, the research team followed these steps in data analysis. First, reading through the interview transcripts helped the analyzers familiarize themselves with the data. Ideas related to participants' self-image identities were coded red, and those related to their practiced identities were yellowed. The excerpts of the same code were then coded. After that, the sub-themes of teacher's identities such as rule-based identities, cue-based identities, exemplar-based identities, and schema-based identities were identified. After that, the research team developed interview protocols to compare and contrast the respondents regarding the main themes and sub-themes. As a result, the research team was informed of participants' identities and their identity reconstructions as a whole and an individual.

Results

Novice Teachers' Self-Image Identities

When asked to describe what kind of teacher they imagined themselves to be after the practicum, the four novices have similarities and differences in their answers.

Thanis's case

In the interview, Thanis described her ideal teacher image as a teacher full of passion. She said,

> *"… I would be full of passion at that time." (Thanis).*

She also held a positive belief about the teaching career and was eager to start the job as soon as she could. She mentioned,

> *"I think this job is so beautiful and I really want to start teaching right away." (Thanis)*

Furthermore, she also believed that students would find her lessons exciting and that she could make her students better, which is shown in the excerpt below.

> *"I feel that students will be very interested in what I say. I feel that I can help my students become better. They will be more interested in learning English, not only learning to know but also to be good at it." (Thanis)*

In short, Thanis's excerpts showed that she had a cue-based imagined identity. She wanted to become a passionate teacher fostering students' love of language learning.

Noble's case

Sharing the positive imagined identity with Thanis, Noble illustrated his future teacher identity as an enthusiastic one. He also highlighted the importance of solid professional preparation for EFL teachers. For instance, he said,

> *"I think that after graduating from the university to become a teacher, I will be a teacher having a solid professional preparation as well as being enthusiastic. I will help my students grasp and understand the lesson clearly. I think I will never scold students, will graciously support students in all matters, will prepare all the best for my students, from teaching, this and that." (Noble)*

Several features of Noble's imagined identity were listed, such as "graciously support students in all matters" and "prepare all the best for my students". It can be seen that Various features supported Noble's enthusiastic and skillful imagined identity. Hence, his imagined identity was cue-based.

Miami's case

Miami had a positive imagination as Thanis and Noble when she talked about the kind of teacher she would become. In her sharing, she used the word "teaching wholeheartedly to students" for illustrating her imagined identity. However, she did not believe that she would be friendly but strict and fierce. She said,

> *"In terms of personality, I want to become a strict teacher who teaches wholeheartedly to students. However, I also want to strict, not too friendly… it is impossible to be overly friendly like I am their friend… Maybe I am a bit fierce, so they [students] are afraid (laughs)." (Miami)*

When queried why she wanted to construct such a strict image, Miami explained that it was due to the traditional Vietnamese belief in teachers and her learning experiences. She noticed that the students only learned when the teachers were strict, at least from what she observed from her previous teachers. She said,

> *"From my own learning experience, I will not be afraid of easy-going teachers. I mean they do not have the power asking their students to follow their instructions. And, I think it can become a bit messy. Therefore, it is why I want to become a strict teacher." (Miami)*

What is more, Miami posed that she would follow precisely the curriculum in her teaching. She stated,

> *"As a teacher, I must faithfully teach their standard curriculum [their means school's/ Ministry of Education and Training's]" (Miami).*

Besides, her parents and her supervisor affected Miami's imagined identity. She shared,

> *"From a young age, my mom taught me to socialize with colleagues… Moreover, when I posted the graduation picture on Facebook, a former teacher also shared that I should be careful with my colleagues." (Miami).*

It turned out that Miami tried to imitate the images of her previous teachers and followed the rules set by administrative authorized units. In this case, exemplar-based and rule-based identities are two types of her imagined identities.

Paul's case

Paul imagined himself to be an EFL teacher who is serious, which is similar to Miami's imagination of becoming a strict teacher. He also described himself as a responsible and ethical teacher who would care much about teaching methods. He used the word "standard" as an umbrella construct for all representations he listed out. The excerpt below supported the conclusion that his imagined identity was cue-based.

> *"I envision that my teacher identity will be… serious, responsible for work, having the mindset to explore new teaching methods, and try to apply some of the methods that I have learned. The image of teachers must have professional ethics, not this and that [not doing negative things]. I think I have to be standard as a teacher." (Paul)*

In general, it becomes clear that after the practicum, cue-based identity was the most common type of imagined identity (Thanis, Noble and Paul), followed by exemplar-based and rule-based ones (Miami). The findings, showing the diversity in imagined identities of student teachers in the pre-service stage. The novices' imagined identities were derived from their past personal beliefs, learning experiences, or other people's perspectives.

Novice EFL High School Teachers' Identity Reconstruction

Thanis's case

As Thanis described, when she was a pre-service teacher student, she believed that she would become a passionate teacher who had positive feelings toward the teaching job and self-confidence to facilitate the students to learn English. Her practiced identity seems to be quite the opposite of the imagined one. First, Thanis's identity changes were negative most of the time, holding negative beliefs about teaching and relationships, losing enthusiasm, and being money-oriented. She also realized that she had developed in such a negative direction. She stated,

> *"… I feel that I am going out of track, in a negative direction […] the way I look at education in our country […] well, like I said from the beginning, I used to look at it very positively, but now it's negative…" (Thanis)*

Vietnam is witnessing a rapid socio-economic change which has made significant impacts on Vietnamese people's material life and mentality. Specifically, English is perceived to play an essential role in people's lives. As a result, English teaching and learning is, even more, paid attention to, and EFL teachers are somehow in decision-making positions to assess whether the quality of teaching and learning English satisfactorily meets the expectations of society. EFL teachers, accordingly, are, one the other hand, empowered and under pressure, on the other hand.

Thanis felt so frustrated with the education system and the relationship between other people, such as family members, colleagues or superiors. She said,

"… In the past, I thought the relationship between people was pretty, really pretty. But now I don't think so anymore." (Thanis)

Sharing among colleagues and learning contribute to professional development. Therefore, the collegial relationship is thought of as a strong motivator for EFL teachers to comfortably and confidently share their ideas, change their teaching beliefs, and grow in their profession together. Nonetheless, Thanis's excerpt showed that she was disappointed with her colleagues, which became one of the reasons why she negatively reconstructed her professional identity.

Besides, teaching was just for earning money for Thanis. She did not love it as much as she did before. She remarked,

"…Now, I am working mainly because of the mission and for the money." (Thanis)

In addition, Thanis got credit-driven practice or had worse English. Under the pressure of the school, Thanis got credit-driven practice. She said,

"In the past, I thought I taught because I loved my job, but now I teach because it is my mission…" (Thanis)

Besides, due to students' low English proficiency and learning motivation and her teaching context, Thanis did not get the opportunities to strengthen her English proficiency. Therefore, she thought her English would gradually worsen, and her English skills dropped. She shared,

"I am mostly teaching basic English courses. Therefore, I do not need to practice my English proficiency… However, it has also caused many problems to me, especially my language skills. Lacking practicing speaking skills, my abilities have decreased significantly…" (Thanis)

As presented, English has even received more attention from Vietnamese educators; students' learning motivation for English is still a big problem. Most Vietnamese students learn English as a compulsory school subject, which results in their low motivation for learning English. Learners just learn to earn an average score (five out of ten) for English, and their utmost attention is paid to mathematics or natural science subjects. This could explain why Vietnamese EFL teachers encounter students' learning demotivation as a postulate in their teaching careers. As a result, it seems to be, to those in their initial stage of their careers like Thanis, a remarkable damage to their self-imaged professional identity. Thanis then reconstructed her professional identity in a negative way accordingly.

Additionally, instead of engaging in professional development training, she had to take more responsibilities for doing paperwork or unnamed work. Consequently, she did not develop her English skills. She said,

"Sometimes, I do not know why I have a lot of unnamed work such as writing reports of meetings or something. It took a lot of time. Therefore, I did not spend my time improving my language skills… I was so disappointed." (Thanis)

In addition, income seemed to be a significant factor affecting Thanis's identity reconstruction. In the interviews, Thanis honestly shared that she was oriented by money and taught for money, not passion. Thanis said,

"I am doing this job for money… Instead of engaging training on developing my teaching skills, I would like to work as a tutor in order to gain more money. You know, I have to take care of my family…" (Thanis)

Income is the concern of many teachers due to the low salary, so it can be seen that teacher salary affects their change to be more experienced and professional. Many Vietnamese teachers must do more jobs to increase their incomes. However, comparing to teachers of other subjects, EFL teachers have more chances to make money to improve the quality of their lives. For instance, becoming private tutors to earn more money is a solution for enhancing their living conditions.

The only positive change was that her patience was improved as she said,

"I become much more patient now…In the past, I turned to get angry quickly but I am currently better at controlling my negative emotion." (Thanis)

She depicted four reasons for her identity reformation: the working environment focusing on achievements, relationship-related problems, financial issues, poor attitude of students about learning English, unnamed work such as reports, and financial issues. These causes can also be considered the challenges she faced in her profession. When facing mentioned challenges, Thanis's passionate imagined identity has shifted into a negatively renegotiated schema-based identity as she negatively adjusted herself to survive in her working environment.

Noble's case

While Thanis is the one who has changed a lot about her practiced identity in comparison with her imagined identity, Noble is the one who has the minor changes. Now he still practices the enthusiastic and skillful identities that he saw in his eyes during the practicum time. The only unprecedented change is that Noble has become more flexible in dealing with different students and tackling problems better. The extract below is an example that illustrates Noble's practiced identity.

"...I think the biggest change is in the teachers themselves. They have to change to adapt to different types of learners they teach. The relationships, the specifics of the job, the required skills are completely unchanged." (Noble)

While some manifestations were considered unchanged, namely relationships, job characteristics, and required skills, teachers themselves needed to change to fit the job better. Noble stated that as teachers, they "teach a variety of students", especially in English classes, so teachers must be flexible. Besides, overcoming problems is no longer challenging to Noble. For instance, he said,

"After many years working as a classroom practitioner, it seems that I also have more experience in dealing with those problems, I have better solutions..." (Noble)

Someone says, "Fire proves gold, adversity proves men." Noble was significantly aware of the challenges and opportunities in his first five years of initial stage of his career. The mental preparation helped him overcome several negative feelings and become better. Besides, Noble perceived his practiced image to be more brutal than his previous version. He explained,

"I became much tougher now comparing to who I was at the very beginning of my career. At that time, no one was afraid of me and it caused several problems, especially classroom management issues. However, when I changed to be a tough teacher, it was easier for me to manage my class. As a result, my students learned better..." (Noble)

No one would remember a friendly but lazy teacher who only dishes out false compliments or expects nothing of his/her learners. Otherwise, taskmasters, the tough-love ones, or demanding teachers are able to receive more respect from their students because it shows that they care about their students' learning outcomes.

There was another significant finding related to how Noble reconstructed his professional identity. At first, he perceived himself as excellent teachers because of his distinction teaching degree after graduation. Noble said,

"With the distinction teaching degree, I did not have any doubts about my teaching abilities after graduating from my university..." (Noble)

However, after experiencing teaching at his current workplace, Noble recognized that he had to improve more and more because the knowledge he had learnt at the university was insufficient for him to deal with problems in practice. He said,

"I lost my confidence after taking the teaching job because there were a lot of problems that I could not solve. I realized that I still have a lot of things to learn..." (Noble)

It was lucky for Noble because he had lots of support from his experienced colleagues, helping him get through the challenges mentioned earlier. He remarked,

"I think I am a very lucky person because I have a lot of wonderful colleagues. They helped me a lot..." (Noble)

Thanks to the more experienced colleagues, the novices were equipped with professional or psychological knowledge, which they had not possessed at the beginning of their teaching career. Therefore, they listened more to the experienced teachers, reduced their egos and stopped showing off their knowledge. In Vietnam, there is a proverb, "Do not be smug about your achievements, as there are always people who do even better". After working on teaching duty, the novice teachers might recognize some more space for them to improve. As a result, they became humbler and more modest. Furthermore, respect for the more experienced ones in the workplace is also a Vietnamese cultural characteristic.

Noble went through an easy identity transformation from the pre-service stage into the in-service stage. Noble's enthusiastic and expertise cued-based identity changed into a positively adapted schema-based identity since he flexibly adjusted himself to suit his students and learned how to handle the classroom and workplace wellness.

Miami's case

Many similarities in professional identity reconstruction were discovered between Thanis and Miami. For instance, like Thanis, Miami's English capacity is getting worse and worse. Miami shared,

"Lacking chances to practice speaking skills in advance, I find my English speaking abilities have become worse and worse..." (Miami)

In addition, losing enthusiasm and becoming money-oriented or exam-oriented are the salient features of Thanis and Miami's practiced identity. Miami's enthusiasm for teaching has been dramatically reduced. Her teaching career was now just a tool to earn money, and teaching was used to serve the exam, not to convey fundamental knowledge. She said,

"Regarding the enthusiasm for teaching, there is really not much left. I just see teaching as a profession to make money [...] teach just to serve the exam" (Miami)

Similar to Thanis's case, Miami reconstructed her professional identity due to the pressure from students' low grades in their English examinations.

The word "strict' was repeated several times when Miami talked about her imagined identity and practiced one. Now she still believes that it would be better if she is strict with students and the idea of being their friend is still impossible for her. Examples of those views are presented below.

"With students, in the past, I thought that I had to be strict and fierce. And now when I teach, I just need to be strict […] I am strict but humorous. I am willing to tell jokes in my class […] However, my wish in the future is that I would only come to class to teach, so that the students would be scared of me." (Miami)

Miami would like to build a strict, distant image similar to the other teachers she thought were successful. Without judging her identity reconstruction, Miami did make an effort to force her students to study. Student motivation for English learning, again, was showed to be a factor affecting a teacher's professional identity reconstruction. Miami stated,

"At the end, the goal is to force the students to learn…" (Miami)

Besides, Miami lost her working motivation because she had a bad relationship with other colleagues. She firmly believed that she was nice to her colleagues, but it did not happen in the opposite direction. She said,

"I do have any problems with my colleagues. Even I support them with all I have. However, I do not know why they misbehave to me. It makes me feel sad and reduces my working motivation as well." (Miami)

Three reasons, including lacking chances for practicing language skills, students' low English proficiency, and messy colleagues, were provided as the sources leading to changes in her identity. In Miami's case, her exemplar-based identity remained the same. However, the rule-based identity has changed into an exam-oriented schema-based identity since she could not follow the standard curriculum correctly but became exam-oriented. In short, Miami has maintained a strict exemplar-based imagined identity and is practicing negatively renegotiated schema-based identity like Thanis.

Paul's case

In Paul's case, despite going through various relational challenges such as students' disdain, colleagues' suspicion, and the principal's apprehension, he managed to have a positive identity reconstruction at moment. Paul said,

"Compared to what I imagined, I am much better now. I have matured, become a proper teacher." (Paul)

He stated that he has improved in a few aspects, consisting of communication, manners, responsibility, lesson preparation, and maturity. To face all the relationship difficulties, Paul has kept a positive attitude. Therefore, thanks to his patience, spirit, will and awareness, he has become who he is today. The following excerpt illustrates his views.

"I always keep a polite and respectful attitude; I don't mind or care at all [the negative attitudes towards him]. I still live according to what a teacher should do. I didn't do anything wrong." (Paul)

Paul did fight against the wrong things to practice his imagined identity and get along well with the people around him. She stated,

"My living belief is related to one word only, "fairness". Therefore, I will fight with the wrong things against my belief…" (Paul)

Paul's challenges served as sources that led to the change from standard cue-based identity to better schema-based identity in Paul's situation. Table 4 summarizes participants' imagined identity, practiced identity and its causes.

Table 4. Participants' imagined identity, practiced identity and causes/challenges

Novices	Imagined identity	Practiced identity	Causes/ Challenges
Thanis	cue-based	schema-based (negative renegotiation)	Working environment focusing on achievements, relationship-related problems, financial problems, poor attitude of students about learning English, and unnamed work such as reports
Noble	cue-based	schema-based (adaptive development)	Teaching a variety of students, collegial supports
Miami	exemplar-based, rule-based	exemplar-based, schema-based (value preservation; negative renegotiation)	Low level of students, their bad attitudes towards learning English, and messy colleagues
Paul	cue-based	schema-based (revolution)	Relational challenges; patience, spirit, will and awareness

Discussion

The results of this current study showed that four participants reported different professional identity reconstructions in the first five years of teaching practice. Noble and Paul expressed positive identity changes, while Thanis and Miami's identities were reconstructed negatively. Professional identity reconstructions of participants in this study can be

summarized as negative renegotiation, adaptive development, value preservation, and revolution. Negative renegotiation referred to two cases of Thanis and Miami. They negatively adjusted their identities to survive and protect themselves when working in unfriendly school conditions and facing numerous challenges. Adaptive development was illustrated in the case of Noble, who had flexible teaching adaptation to suit all kinds of students. Value preservation was explained in Miami's case. From the pre-service stage to the present, she still desired to become a strict teacher, the role model that she always wanted to imitate. Revolution was related to Paul's case. Paul started his career with a positive image of the future. Despite facing numerous obstacles in terms of jobs and relationships in real-life practice, he overcame all of them and became a better version of himself then. The transformation into schema-based practiced identity found in the novice stage is also in line with what Xu (2013) found. He claimed that later, in the novice stage, the imagined identities were changed into practiced identities consisting of rule-based or schema-based. Miami's exemplar-based practiced identity was the new finding that this study contributes to the literature. It could be explained that novices might hold firm beliefs and desires to imitate the role models that they still keep in the novice stage.

Regarding the causes leading to professional identity reconstruction, the manifestations of the working environment focusing on achievements were supported by Hong et al. (2018), who found out that contextual factors arising from school environments affected teacher identity. Issues like spirit, will, and awareness in Paul's case was approved by Nikoopour and Esfandiari (2017) and Tsui (2007). Other factors such as troublesome relationships, poor attitude of students about learning English, workload, meeting different individual's needs, low level of students, and students' bad attitudes towards learning English were seen as challenges or sources for novices' identity reconstruction. Taking Thanis and Miami's cases as examples, they adjusted their practiced identities to survive in their teaching contexts when encountering numerous obstacles. Although their practiced identities seemed hostile and were different from their positive imagined identities, they accepted that fact. What novices have been through and the context could significantly contribute to their practiced identities.

Last but not least, some teachers reconstructed their identities positively, but some decided to mold themselves as someone worse than their imagined identities. In the Vietnamese context, the teaching profession is one of the most respectful jobs. The more teachers receive community respect, the more they are in charge of doing their best. Therefore, preservice teachers are intensely aware of their responsibilities for their future duty. As a result, they start dreaming about a beautiful identity they will become in the future. However, "Life is not like a dream", said someone. Remarkably, the novice teachers were affected by many influential factors forcing them to change their identities after taking the teaching job. The factors included outcome-based working environment, relationship-related problems, students' attitudes, paperwork, mix-level classes, student proficiency, messy colleagues, and characteristics. The findings were in line with previous studies on factors affecting teachers' identity reconstructions (e.g., C. D. Nguyen, 2017; H. T. Nguyen, 2017; P. A. P. Nguyen, 2015). However, the current study also raised questions about the teachers' grit. Without grit, one cannot have enough perseverance and passion for a long-term goal (Christopoulou et al., 2018; Duckworth et al., 2007). Some teachers in this study did not have the grit to follow their dream model. As a result, they became worse with their reasons.

Conclusion

Four EFL novices' professional identity reconstructions in their first five years of teaching in practice, including negative renegotiation, adaptive development, value preservation, and revolution, were found. To teachers with negative regeneration, they reconstructed their professionals to deal with lousy working conditions, consisting of unfriendly colleagues, students' bad attitudes, unnamed paperwork, and the like. Next, the teachers chose an adaptive development style to reconstruct their professional identities as they wanted to fit with their students' learning styles. Then, novices with value preservation-reconstruction still desired to become their imaged identities. Finally, holding desires to be better, novice teachers with revolution-reconstruction transformed themselves into another higher level in their professional career. These teachers had great attitudes towards challenges, then transformed the challenges into opportunities and gained revolution. Besides, this current study also found several challenges that novices had faced in the initial stage of their teaching career. Notably, the factors of working environments, students, colleagues, or even their characteristics affected how they reconstructed their imaged professional identities and became their practiced images.

The main results shed insights into the common challenges that novice EFL high school teachers encountered and how their professional identity was reconstructed in their first five years of teaching in practice. Thanks to those understandings, the stakeholders will have more insight into the researched content and plan to approach it appropriately. Several implications can be drawn in light of the mentioned findings.

First, student teachers should be provided with applicable teaching methods or approaches instead of being exposed to numerous methods in the undergraduate program that they might not use later in the actual teaching context. Regarding lesson preparation, it is recommended that pre-service education students should have more opportunities to practice planning the lessons, even for the high grades like K11 or K12 in their learning program, since it is possible that after graduation, they may be in charge of these grades immediately. This practical task is quite challenging but significant for teachers at the beginning of their careers.

Additionally, it is necessary to change students' negative attitudes about learning English. This subject's importance and practical significance should be widely disseminated to students. Furthermore, students in each grade must be adequately taught and assessed so that when they reach a higher level, they can absorb the amount of knowledge designed for that level. Besides, information technology should also be applied to reduce teachers' workload.

In terms of teacher professional identity reconstruction, educators should raise the importance of building imagined identity among student teachers at the pre-service stage and warn them of the possible challenges in the coming future. Moreover, if a novice works in a setting with various challenges in an unfortunate case, overcoming those is still possible as long as the novice wants to do it (as in Paul's case). Therefore, novices should have a positive attitude about their teaching career and practice their dreamful practiced identity.

Besides, the course on teaching ethics in English teacher education should be reformed. Before taking the teaching job as one of the most respectful jobs in Vietnam, novice teachers have to be aware of their role in not only developing their students' knowledge but also affecting their students' future behaviors. To do that, selecting mentors for novice teachers is a crucial issue as they will play as role models for the students to follow and form their teaching beliefs and identities. Without devoted mentors during the teaching practicum, the students' love of teaching might be negatively affected. Moreover, due to the importance of the teaching practicum, the connection between the university and the internship place must be close enough to ensure that the novice teachers are on the right track.

Recommendations

Future studies on novice EFL high school teachers' challenges and professional identity reconstruction should be done more extensively and employ multiple research methods to collect the data, namely questionnaires, classroom observations, or analyzing diaries. In terms of professional identity reconstruction, in ideal conditions, conducting longitudinal research on novice EFL teachers' identity change in various contexts should be considered. Moreover, further studies should consider administrators' roles in novice teachers' identity reconstructions to see how they support their inferiors and academic staff in the initial stage of their teaching career. Additionally, researchers interested in this field are recommended to conduct their studies to see whether teachers' demographic information affects their initial changes after teaching for five years. Lastly, it is a worth-doing study investigating the differences between novice teachers in their first, second, third, fourth, and fifth years of teaching in practice. The abovementioned ideas will be promising to show an insightful understanding of novice teachers and their trends in constructing their professional identities.

Limitations

Although the research aims of this current study were achieved, it still has a few limitations. First of all, due to the convenient sampling technique, only four novices were involved in the semi-structured interview. The sample size was considered not big enough to generalize the study results. Besides, semi-structured interviews with novice teachers were conducted online, affecting the study's validation since the researchers did not meet the four participants in person.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Trinh: Conceptualizing the study, overseeing the study, editing the report. Tran: Reviewing literature, conducting the study, and collecting data. Le: Reviewing literature, analyzing data and drafting the report.

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