

BOOK REVIEW

Language Teacher Identity Tensions: Nexus of Agency, Emotion, and Investment, by Z. Tajeddin and B. Yazan. Routledge, 2024, 292 pp., USD 135.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-032-51472-7

Grazzia Maria Mendoza Chirinos ^{a*}

^a University of Wisconsin–Madison

* Contact Info: 1025 W Johnson St., Madison, WI 53706, the U.S.A., gmmendoza@wisc.edu

Article Info

Received: November 26, 2024

Accepted: December 4, 2024

Published: December 25, 2024

In this book review, we want to highlight the key constructs of agency, emotion, and investment within Tajeddin and Yazan’s edited volume *Language Teacher Identity Tensions: Nexus of Agency, Emotion, and Investment*. The volume highlights key areas that teachers should consider when seeking their professional identities, while also acknowledging what does and does not work towards bridging those gaps. The diverse global perspectives and valuable research presented shed light on the intricate interplay between pedagogy and the complexities of language identities (Banegas et al., 2023), demonstrating the intersectionality of these dynamics (Crenshaw, 2016) within educational contexts.

This edited volume is divided into three sections. The first one, *Tensions and Teacher Identity Construction*, explores how language teachers navigate the structural and sociocultural constraints to exercise agency, addressing questions of autonomy, resistance, and adaptation. The second, *Identity Tensions and Teacher Education*, makes a deep dive into the experiences of student teachers, how they build their professional identities early on, the challenges they face as they engage in the career pathway, and the emotional aspects of LTI. Finally, the third section, *Identity Tensions and Teacher Beliefs and Practices*, investigates tensions related to “gendered identity”, particularly those arising from discrimination, societal constraints, and interactions with other gender identities, with a focus on the experiences of female teachers.

Throughout the volume, the strengths of the chapters lie in their robust theoretical frameworks, as the authors integrate diverse theoretical perspectives. The inclusion of varied contexts including EFL, ESL, multilingual settings, and teacher education enriches discussion of the issues at hand. Furthermore, concrete examples illustrate how teachers navigate various pressures and professional challenges to assert their identities. These challenges range from adapting curricula and resisting rigid pedagogical norms, to confronting discriminatory practices related to their teaching practices or immigration backgrounds within specific contexts. The volume also demonstrates careful integration of interdisciplinary insights, such as psychology and sociolinguistics, authentic narratives (Rushton et al., 2023), and a nuanced understanding of cultural influences and sensitivities in building LTIs. Finally, the theoretical innovation of addressing teacher identities within diverse sociolinguistic landscapes, as well as drawing connections between investment and policy, underscores systemic changes necessary to support educators' professional growth. This serves as a pathway to envision what is possible when teachers are provided with spaces to thrive, specific support systems, and opportunities to reflect on their identities.

Part I consists of seven chapters, but here we will highlight specific ones that lead the reader to meaningful reflection. Chapter 1 focuses on the experience and journey of Ufuk, a Turkish ELT teacher and it illustrates how critical autoethnography narratives (CAN) support teachers' understanding of identity and tensions, as well as their implications, within the context of Türkiye. Ufuk provides a compelling narrative of their beginnings in ELT, offering a critical reflection on their journey and the influence of their own learning traditions. This chapter vividly depicts the interplay of multiple factors that shape educator identity and demonstrates how tensions can foster growth.

Chapter 2 examines the context of Iranian public school teachers, exploring how rigid institutional norms compel teachers to advocate for best practices, such as learner-centered approaches (Bremner et al., 2022). These efforts are framed by the tensions of navigating mandates in an ever-changing educational landscape shaped by sociopolitical, institutional, and personal factors. Chapter 4 investigates the dynamics of age, nationality, and language power from the perspective of young Kuwaiti teachers, navigating the dual tensions of their youth and their roles as Kuwaiti educators within a field historically dominated by expatriates. Chapter 6 delves into the experiences of novice ESL teachers in the United States, as they balance the tensions between prescribed curricula and their pedagogical beliefs.

These examples collectively demonstrate how contextual factors shape identity, how reflective practices contribute to identity formation, and how sharing such stories helps build a community where teachers can confront challenges, learn from one another's journeys, and grow both individually and collectively. This section is particularly valuable for educators seeking empowerment and for practitioners navigating institutional constraints. By illuminating these processes, readers are offered concrete strategies to enact agency, fostering their own by using these experiences as a foundation for advocacy and/or self-advocacy—not only at the in-service level but also during the pre-service stages of teacher education. Finally, this collection of studies underscores the temporal and relational aspects of agency and identity, illustrating how past experiences, present challenges, and future aspirations converge in the negotiation of teacher identity.

Within Part I, it is notable that the authors draw extensively on ecological models of agency (Priestley et al., 2015), which situate individual actions within broader cultural and systemic contexts. This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how teachers navigate the tensions between their professional aspirations and systemic constraints. The inclusion of diverse educational contexts, from under-resourced rural schools to affluent urban schools, further enhances the applicability of the findings. Each chapter presents compelling narratives of agency in action; teachers creatively adapt their classroom practices to align with their professional identities, despite external pressures and demands. Such narratives not only provide a humanizing approach to research but also offer actionable insights for practitioners, showcasing how theory can inform practice in meaningful ways.

As we delve into Part II, we enter into the realm of language teacher identity, shifting the focus to its emotional dimensions—an area that remains relatively underexplored (Golombek & Doran, 2014). This section highlights how emotions serve as both mediators and outcomes of identity tensions, profoundly shaping teachers' experiences and decision-making processes. It details the emotional labor involved in balancing professional expectations with personal and cultural values, offering a deeper understanding of the complexities that teachers navigate in their identity formation.

Chapter 8 examines the tensions experienced by three student teachers, highlighting how their perceptions of their competencies and limitations intersect with institutional and social demands, and the availability—or lack—of clear pathways for support. These factors significantly impact their journeys as student teachers, revealing the realities they face in their contexts. The narrative prompts reflection on the responsibilities of teacher education

programs and how to better prepare future teachers for success, or at the very least, rethink our approaches to this critical stage of their occupational growth.

Chapter 9 takes Language Teacher Identity a step further by connecting it to the community. It explores how the author's background and context of teaching multilingual learners factors into their identity, particularly when implementing translanguaging pedagogies. The author insightfully demonstrates how classroom experiences, informed by learners' diverse backgrounds, compel teachers to reflect on their engagement with the community. Those reflections in turn transform their understanding of language development practices and lead to actionable steps. Readers will find it valuable to see how this process enables teachers in similar contexts to scaffold their knowledge and experiences, ultimately becoming role models for their multilingual learners.

Chapter 10 introduces the concept of multiplicity in teacher identities (Masters & Freak, 2015), focusing on an immigrant teacher in the United States who teaches a third language they have mastered. This chapter examines the interplay of religion, profession, and nationality, illustrating the tensions of navigating a foreign context. The narrative underscores the significance of belonging and the value of incorporating one's cultural assets, such as multiculturalism and multilingualism, to advocate for others in similar spaces. The teacher's background is portrayed as a powerful tool for easing learners' anxieties about their own identities as they move through new places, spaces, and countries. This chapter also highlights the complexities of "othering" and demonstrates how teachers create environments where they establish their identities, using them to guide students as well as their families and communities.

In Part III, we delve into identity tensions around teachers' beliefs and practices, in relation to gendered identities. Patriarchal beliefs in various global contexts—whether learned from home or society—underlie systems which favor specific gender roles and stereotypes, significantly impacting educators' journeys. Chapter 12 explores the experiences of six women, aged 21 to 40, who share a common struggle: discrimination in favor of their male counterparts. In the chapter's Iranian context, this includes disparities in salary, access to promotions, division of responsibilities, participation in communities of practice, and even adherence to gender-specific dress codes. This chapter contrasts globally shared gender roles with those unique to the local context, shedding light on the double burden these educators face as they advocate for themselves and others. It resonates with broader experiences highlighted in Salas Serano and Mendoza Chirinos (2023), where narratives from 31 women

in ELT worldwide reveal that, even after years in the profession, many still face systemic barriers to success.


Chapter 15 explores the role of teachers' emotional experiences in shaping LTIs, an often overlooked area in research, despite its significant implications for both educators and learners (Frenzel et al., 2021). This chapter focuses on how teachers' emotions are affected by external factors, including societal perceptions and prejudices that can even dictate their institutional assignments. These challenges lead to feelings of powerlessness and anxiety, which are emphasized throughout the chapter. It becomes evident how these emotions drive varied responses, with teachers taking different paths of action depending on the tensions they face. The narrative highlights the high levels of confusion, uncertainty, and lack of support that educators often encounter, and how they must navigate these circumstances to persist in their chosen careers. Moreover, the chapter prompts readers to reflect on what might have occurred had these teachers not taken the actions they did. It also provides valuable insights into why so many of them leave the profession after only one or two years.

This volume makes a significant contribution to understanding teacher identities in language education by offering diverse perspectives and contexts. It underscores the complexities of an educator's role and the nuanced challenges they face. Moreover, it identifies areas for further exploration, including the need for deeper analyses of macro-structural influences, such as political forces shaping the educational landscape. Engaging in longitudinal studies to examine how these core concepts evolve over time would provide valuable insights into how historical changes and shifting educational contexts have affected educators differently across eras. Additionally, the intersectionality of gender, race, and class warrants further investigation, to complement existing analyses of gender and religion. Exploring the intersection of gender and immigration (Bressler & Rotter, 2017) could shed light on the particular challenges faced by female immigrant teachers, compared with those faced by teachers who carry other identities. Studies that incorporate quantitative validation of the emotional impact of these tensions would also enhance our understanding, offering a more holistic and integrated perspective.

Finally, examining the role of digital spaces (Ho, 2023) in shaping language teacher identities and tensions is a promising avenue for future research. As virtual professional communities become increasingly prevalent (Slagoski, 2019), understanding how these spaces play into teachers' investment and identity formation could provide a richer understanding of the field. Such nuances and complexities form the core of what readers are

invited to explore in these chapters, encouraging self-reflection among language teachers and, perhaps, inspiring them to share their own autoethnographies that they may benefit from each other's perspectives.

THE AUTHOR

Grazzia Maria Mendoza Chirinos  is a multilingual researcher at WIDA, housed in the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she supports PD for educators of bi/multilingual learners through evidence-based approaches. She is a former USAID education specialist who managed and designed projects to support the Ministry of Education in Honduras reaching 2.1 million learners in public schools. A language educator for 30 years, Grazzia is a USDoS Alumna recognized for project development and teacher training. She has been recognized by TESOL International Association through the Virginia French Allen for Scholarship and Service and the Outstanding Advocacy Awards. She is the Founder and Former President HELTA TESOL, former President of LAC TESOL, and is a Past Member of TESOL Board of Directors, where she served as Chair of the Finance Committee during her last year of service. She also does volunteer work and is currently volunteering as the EVO Lead Coordinator and Chair-Elect for the TEIS.

REFERENCES

- Banegas, D. L., Beltrán-Palanques, V., & Salas, A. (2023). Language teacher educators' identity construction through teaching and supporting action research: A trioethnographic study. *RELC Journal*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882231212855>
- Bremner, N., Sakata, N., & Cameron, L. (2022). The outcomes of learner-centered pedagogy: A systematic review. *International Journal of Education Development*, 94, Article 102649. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2022.102649>
- Bressler, C., & Rotter, C. (2017). The relevance of a migration background to the professional identity of teachers. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(1), 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n1p239>
- Crenshaw, K. (2016, October). *The urgency of intersectionality* [Video]. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality
- Frenzel, A. C., Daniels, L., & Burić, I. (2021). Teacher emotions in the classroom and their implications for students. *Educational Psychologist*, 56(4), 250–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1985501>
- Golombek, P., & Doran, M. (2014). Unifying cognition, emotion, and activity in language teacher professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 39, 102–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.01.002>

- Ho, W. Y. J. (2023). Discursive construction of online teacher identity and legitimacy in English language teaching. *Learning, Media and Technology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2023.2259295>
- Masters, Y., & Freak, A. (2015). Grappling with multiplicity: A framework for teacher formation. *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(12), 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n12.2>
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474219426>
- Rushton, E. A. C., Rawlings Smith, E., Steadman, S., & Towers, E. (2023). Understanding teacher identity in teachers' professional lives: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Education*, 11(2), Article e3417. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3417>
- Salas Serano, L. A., & Mendoza Chirinos, G. M. (Eds.). (2023). *Empowered women in ELT: A collection of worldwide stories*. <https://sites.google.com/view/empoweredwomeninelt/series/volume-1-stories>
- Slagoski, J. D. (2019). Professional learning practices and beliefs of an online community of English language teachers. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 19(1), 97–116. <https://citejournal.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/v19i1current/practice1.pdf>