

## A Conceptual Framework to Understand Language Teacher Identities

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### **Abstract**

Language teacher identity (LTI) has recently become a prominent theme in the second language teacher education (SLTE) research because teacher identities play a major role in teachers' learning-to-teach processes and instructional practices. Teacher identity refers to teachers' dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and position themselves (and are positioned by others) in social contexts. Therefore, it casts an influence upon a wide array of matters, ranging from how language teachers learn to perform their profession, how they practice theory and theorize their practice, how they educate their students, and how they interact and collaborate with their colleagues in their social setting. This paper offers a conceptual framework for LTI that explicates the interrelationships between teacher identity and these core constructs: teacher learning, teacher cognition, teachers' participation in communities of practice, contextual factors, teacher biographies, and teacher emotions.

**Keywords:** teacher identity; teacher learning; teacher cognition; emotions; communities of practice

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language teacher identity (LTI) has recently received a lot of attention from second language teacher education (SLTE) researchers (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves, & Trent, 2016). Conceived "as an integral part of teacher learning" (Tsui, 2011, p. 33), teacher identity development has become a major theme of research in teacher education. LTI is a central part of language teachers' reiterative (re)construction of knowledge base and competences (Morgan

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& Clarke, 2011). This view is aligned with the novel sociocultural orientations in the field of SLTE which seeks “to portray teacher knowledge not as an isolated set of cognitive abilities but as fundamentally linked to matters such as teacher identity and teacher development” (Johnston, Pawan, & Mahan-Taylor, 2005, pp. 53-54). From this orientation, the investigation of teachers’ identity construction can shine light on the way language teachers develop as professionals while transitioning from a graduate or undergraduate student self to a teacher self.

As a result of sociocultural perspective permeating in the field of SLTE (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006), second language (L2) educators are not anymore viewed as operators utilizing the methods engineered by SLA researchers. Instead, they are seen as individuals having their beliefs and theories about language teaching and learning which have been considerably molded through their previous experiences as learners and as student-teachers (Freeman, 2013). SLTE scholars started directing their focus more to such questions as “how teachers come to know what they know, how certain concepts in teachers’ consciousness develop over time, and how their learning processes transform them and the activities of L2 teaching” (Johnson 2009a, p. 17). These new directions have engendered an increasing interest in the theorization and investigation of L2 teacher identity development.

Recent research in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) has explored various aspects of teachers’ negotiation and development of professional identities in the contexts of L2 teaching and teacher education. More specifically, scholars investigated LTI with regards to teachers’ linguistic identities (Aneja, 2016; Huang, 2014; Rudolph, 2016; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018), race and gender (Kayi-Aydar, 2015a; Park, 2015, 2017; Vitanova, 2016), their negotiation of discourses in communities of practice (Clarke, 2008; Gu & Benson, 2015; Ilieva, 2010; Trent, 2017), the role of practicum experiences in identity development (Dang, 2013; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Martel, 2015; Yazan, 2018), their positioning and agency assertion in teaching contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016; Haneda & Sherman, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2015b; Trent, 2017; Uzum, 2013), their emotions as part of identity development (Reis, 2015; Song, 2016; Wolff & De Costa, 2017; Yazan & Percy, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2016), and their identity negotiation through teacher education courses (Percy, 2012; Yazan, 2017). Those empirical studies contributed to the understanding of LTI in the burgeoning body of

literature and the current paper adds to this literature with a comprehensive conceptual discussion of LTI focusing on the related dimensions of being and becoming an L2 teacher.

In the remainder of this paper, I will define teacher identity depending on the existing conceptualizations in the prior TESOL and teacher education research. Then, referring to Figure 1 below, I will describe a conceptual framework by explicating the core constructs that are centrally related to teacher identity, namely, (a) teacher learning, (b) teacher cognition, (c) teachers' participation in communities of practice, (d) contextual factors, (e) teacher biographies, and (f) teacher emotions. Discussing the interrelationships between teacher identity and those constructs, I aim to present a conceptual foundation upon which researchers can draw when understanding and investigating LTI.

### **Conceptualizing Identity**

Until the social turn in applied linguistics in the 1990s (Block, 2003), identity was predominantly conceptualized from an essentialist standpoint (Block, 2007; Norton Peirce, 1995; Ricento, 2005), which maintained that “the attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group” (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 400). Therefore, scholars adopting essentialist assumptions viewed identity as a set of unchangeable characteristics or qualities that individuals learn or biologically inherit. Those scholars assumed “that groups can be clearly delimited; and that group members are more or less alike” (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 400). Reviewing the earlier work on identity, Ricento (2005) also observed that “there was little emphasis on the interaction of an individual's multiple memberships based on gender, class, race, linguistic repertoire, or on how these memberships were understood and played out in different learning contexts” (p. 898). He also added that essentialist conceptualizations of identity were underpinned by the positivist, structuralist orientations that prevailed in applied linguistics. The introduction of poststructuralist and critical conceptual lenses led to the shift towards non-essentialized views of identity (Ricento, 2005).

This shift began at the outset of the 1990s spearheaded by Norton Peirce's (1995) groundbreaking work on identity that influenced the

research on language learning, teaching, and teacher education. It proved to be a prevalent shift “away from identity in terms of psychological processes towards contextualized social processes” (Miller, 2009, p. 173), which explains the new understanding and its three principal premises which are all aligned with sociocultural turn in SLTE. First, “identity is not a fixed, stable, unitary, and internally coherent phenomenon but is multiple, shifting, and in conflict” (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 22). Second, identity is context-bound, therefore, it is “crucially related to social, cultural, and political contexts—interlocutors, institutional settings, and so on” (p. 23). Third, individuals construct, maintain, and negotiate their identities to a considerable degree “through language and discourse” (p. 23). Norton (2010) comments that “[e]very time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space” (p. 350).

Miller (2009) observes these three premises cutting across the existing trends to define identity in SLTE. She comments that identity is considered “as *relational, negotiated, constructed, enacted, transforming, and transitional*” (p. 174; emphases original). Additionally, she directs attention to the primary role of discourse in identity processes and of the “Other” (whether/how individuals are recognized by surrounding community members) in negotiation and legitimation of one’s identity work. Moreover, Tsui’s (2007) comment resonates with the patterns in these definitions. She maintains that “identity is not just *relational* (i.e., how one talks or thinks about oneself, or how others talk or think about one), it is also *experiential* (i.e., it is formed from one’s lived experience)” (p. 33; emphases original). Thus, individuals have multiple identities which they continuously negotiate, reconstruct, and enact through discursive tools as they interact with other individuals in different contexts.

### **Defining Teacher Identity**

Teacher identity can be viewed as “an organizing element in teachers’ professional lives” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p.175) and as a resource that teachers can “use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large” (MacLure, 1993, p. 311). Exerting indiscernible yet extensive power over their teaching practices (Rex & Nelson, 2004), teacher identity offers a

framework through which teachers can build their own ideas of their beings, actions and understandings of their teaching practice and their place in society and a basis for their decisions and meaning making processes (Bullough, 1997). Teacher identity has connotations for both current and aspired or imagined self-identifications (Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, Tavakoli, & Hamman, 2016). That is, it concerns teachers' responses to the following questions with respect to their teaching self-images: "Who am I at this moment?" and "Who do I want to become?", which highlight the dynamic and ever-changing nature of teacher identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Teachers' identities mold "their dispositions, where they place their effort, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005, p. 384). More specifically, the way they view, feel, position, or identify themselves as teachers in their specific context (Yazan, 2017) is intricately interwoven with their beliefs, values, conceptions, theories, and "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, p. 296). Identity determines and is determined by their experiences of teacher learning and teaching practice. This inevitable and close interrelationship between teacher identity, teacher-learning, and teaching practices necessitates the close investigation of identity to yield implications for practice: "a more complete understanding of identity generally and teacher identity in particular could enhance the ways in which teacher education programs are conceived" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 176).

Lacking a clear definition of teacher identity has proved a dire challenge for understanding the impact of identity on teacher education practices (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). There exist only vague conceptualizations of teacher identity in the literature, which cause "the concept of teacher identity to be taken for granted" (Bukor, 2011, p. 107). There is a consensus in the emerging teacher identity literature on the complex and complicated nature of the concept of identity in general and teacher identity in particular, which might be the reason why a definition of teacher identity is not readily reached (Mockler, 2011). The authors who attempt to offer a comprehensive understanding of teacher identity mostly present how teacher identity is characterized, what it influences and is influenced by, and how it is theorized rather than explicitly

defining teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Mockler, 2011).

During my review of the earlier studies, I found a few researchers who ventured to define teacher identity, and Table 1 below summarizes these definitions to present an overview of the conceptualizations of teacher identity that exist in the current teacher education literature.

**Table 1:** Definitions of teacher identity

Source	Definition
Kelchtermans (1993, p. 447)	"[teachers'] conception about themselves as a teacher and a system of knowledge and beliefs concerning 'teaching' as a professional activity"
Bullough (1997, p. 21)	"what beginning teachers believe about teaching and learning as self-as-teacher"
Lasky (2005, p. 901)	"[T]eacher professional identity is how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others [and is] a construct of professional self that evolves over career stages and can be shaped by school, reform, and political contexts."
Beijaard et al. (2004, p. 108)	"Teacher identity refers not only to the influence of the conceptions and expectations of other people, including broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should know and do, but also to what teachers themselves find important in their professional work and lives based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds."
Olsen (2008, p. 139)	"as a label, really, for the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems (each itself a fluid influence and all together an ever-changing construct) that become intertwined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments"
Urzúa & Vásquez (2008, p. 1935)	"how teachers relate to their practice in light of both social and individual perspectives"
Cohen (2010, p. 473)	"how teachers view themselves as professionals in the context of changing work situations, often driven by changes in education policy"

Hsieh (2010, p. 1)	“the beliefs, values, and commitments an individual holds toward being a teacher (as distinct from another professional) and being a particular type of teacher (e.g., an urban teacher, a beginning teacher, a good teacher, an English teacher, etc.)”
Akkerman & Meijer (2011, p. 135)	“should be defined as an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one’s (working) life”
Mockler (2011, p. 519)	“the way that teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers [and it] is thus understood to be formed within, but then also out of, the narratives and stories that form the ‘fabric’ of teachers’ lives”

Comparing these definitions coming from various scholars of teacher education, I identified five main commonalities regarding the conceptualization of teacher identity: (a) Teacher identity includes teachers’ conceptions and beliefs about themselves as teachers (Bullough, 1997; Cohen, 2010; Kelchtermans, 1993; Lasky, 2005; Mockler, 2011); (b) Teacher identity involves others’ expectations and social positioning (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004; Olsen, 2008; Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008); (c) Teacher identity is dynamic and evolves constantly (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Olsen, 2008); (e) Teacher identity is constructed and reconstructed in social contexts and interactions (Cohen, 2010; Lasky, 2005; Olsen, 2008); (e) Teacher identity develops through teachers’ commitment to, participation, and investment in the profession (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Hsieh, 2010).

In conceptualizing LTI, the language teachers speak and teach and the language learners they serve merit particular attention. First, relying on critical perspectives to language, Hawkins and Norton (2009) argue that “language (or discourse) is the tool through which representations and meanings are constructed and negotiated, and a primary means through which ideologies are transmitted” (p. 32). Through language, power relations are produced, maintained, and subverted. Language is not neutral, neither is the meaning that is made or represented with it. Whether and how language teachers understand this nature of language is

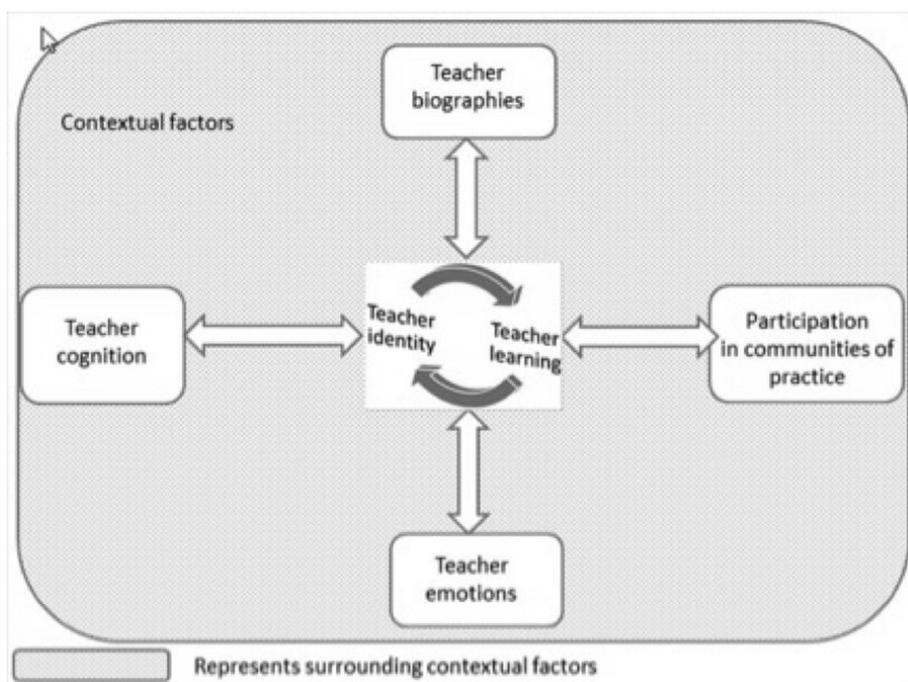
integral to their identities as language users and teachers, because this understanding guides what they see as important in language instruction and how they facilitate their students' language development. Particularly, in language classes, language is not only the subject matter which students (learn to) use or imagine using to interact with target language speakers but also the linguistic and cultural medium through which classroom conversations are constructed.

Second, language teachers' identity as language users or their linguistic identities are intertwined with their teacher identities, because their language competence is conflated with their knowledge of content or subject matter (Aneja, 2016; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Park, 2012; Reis, 2015; Rudolph, 2016; Selvi, 2018; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). How language teachers position themselves and are positioned by others within the discourses of "nativeness" influences what kind of language teachers they are or aspire to become. These value-laden discourses assign certain "strengths" and "weaknesses" to "native" and "non-native" language teachers, and they are contextually constructed and fluid, as well as interlaced with the discourses of race, gender, class, religion, and nationality. Lastly, LTI cannot be completely theorized without considering its interaction with language learners' identities (Motha, 2006; Reeves, 2009). LTI is influenced by the ways in which language teachers position themselves and their students in relation to language, gender, race, class, religion, and nationality. In other words, teachers' imaginations of the kinds of language teachers they "are," "can," and "should" be are in interplay with their imaginations of the kinds of language learners and users their students "are," "can," and "should" be (Rudolph, 2016; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). For example, if we intend to research LTI in a context where language teachers serve war-affected refugee students with different cultural, linguistic, national, and religious background, we need to take into account students' identities and how teachers understand these identities and their connection to students' language learning and use.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR LTI**

Miles and Huberman (1994) understand that a conceptual framework "lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them" (p. 440). Using this understanding, this section draws a conceptual framework for LTI by defining and

explaining the following relevant factors and constructs (see Figure 1 below): (a) teacher learning, (b) teacher cognition, (c) teachers' participation in communities of practice, (d) contextual factors, (e) teacher biographies, and (f) teacher emotions. They are drawn from the existing empirical and theoretical work in TESOL and teacher education to construct a conceptual foundation for the conceptualization and investigation of LTI.



**Figure 1:** A conceptual framework for language teacher identity

## Teacher Learning

The conceptualization of L2 teacher learning has undergone a dramatic change in the last two decades, thanks to the introduction of sociocultural understandings of L2 teacher learning, which is part of “a quiet revolution” (Johnson, 2000, p. 1) that has brought about innovations in SLTE. Sociocultural work criticized the prevalent assumption that SLTE programs should present teacher candidates with discrete amounts of knowledge about language, language learning, and language teaching, teach them a body of decontextualized teaching practices or methodologies, and place them in a school where they are expected to

find opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge in real teaching settings. These programs reflect the traditional approach to teacher learning which sees teacher learning “as a cognitive issue, something the learner [does] on his or her own” (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 4) and construct prospective teachers as blank canvasses to be painted upon with theoretical and practical knowledge. However, researchers contend that the conglomeration of teacher candidates’ (TC) experiences, memories, values, and beliefs impact the entire process of teacher learning that is expected to occur throughout preservice teacher education and beyond (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Olsen, 2016).

Recent SLTE research entails reexamining, reconceptualizing, and redesigning of the ways L2 teachers are educated. This research views teacher learning as theorizing teaching practices which foregrounds practitioner knowledge and inquiry, reflection in and on practice, and critically reviewing, elaborating, and revising personal pedagogical theories (Burns & Richards, 2009). Therefore, teacher educators in TESOL have started to understand the learning to teach process “as socially negotiated and contingent on knowledge of self, students, subject matter, curricula, and setting” (Johnson, 2009b, p. 20). From this understanding, TCs become part of a learning community in which they participate in activities of teacher education and interact with their ELLs, peers, teacher educators, mentors, and supervisors. Then, the following elements stand out as vital in teacher learning: the roles TCs and others take on in the community, the discourses they negotiate, construct, and navigate, the activities and practices in which they partake, and the tools and resources they use (Burns & Richards, 2009). This novel view on how L2 teachers learn to teach can be summarized in Johnson and Golombek’s (2003) comprehensive definition of teacher learning: “normative and lifelong, emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts: as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in professional teacher education programs, and later as teachers in the institutions where teachers work” (p. 729). These discussions about teacher learning fueled by the sociocultural turn in SLTE have prepared the scene for the growing research on L2 teacher identity.

Before the sociocultural perspective on teacher learning became recognized, there was very little focus on teachers themselves as the primary agents of teaching (Johnson, 2009b). Once teachers were placed in the center of SLTE research and practices in the sociocultural understanding of teacher learning, researchers attend to how L2 teachers’

self-conceptions and imaginations as teachers influence and are influenced by their learning to teach. Their identities and learning constantly interact and shape each other. TCs enter teacher education with their prior experiences, beliefs, values, aspirations, and imaginations about teaching, which, as part of their initial teaching identity, constitute their initial “interpretive frame” (Olsen, 2016, p. 43). Their emerging identities function as a frame and basis which orient and mold TCs’ understanding and interpretation of their experiences while participating in the practices of preservice teacher education (Percy, 2012; Yazan, 2015).

Teacher identities play a deciding role in where TCs channel their efforts and energy (Hammerness et al., 2005) and how they make decisions about their learning to teach and teaching behaviors and practices in the classroom. As they further learn to teach by participating in the discourses and activities of teacher education through courses and the teaching practica, they continuously negotiate, take on, imagine, and enact teacher identities in various “ecological spheres” (Singh & Richards, 2006, p. 170). While engaging in teacher learning and negotiating meanings by means of teacher education activities, they are afforded with the opportunity to revise and reconfigure their self-images as L2 teachers and enact and experiment with their fledgling teacher identities (Yazan, 2018). In brief, teacher learning and teacher identity development are two intimately connected contours which are both driving forces underpinning TCs’ professional growth.

### **Teacher Cognition**

Ever growing since mid-1990s, research on L2 teacher cognition has tremendously enhanced the field’s understanding of L2 teachers’ work with a focus on the unobservable mental aspects of teachers’ work to better understand L2 teaching. Earlier work has examined varying dimensions of L2 teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts, and of the ways they relate to their teaching practices in the classroom (Borg, 2009). Teacher cognition refers to teachers’ constellations of “beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives about teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities, self” (Borg, 2003, p. 82). Influenced by “a complex nexus of interacting factors” (Barnard & Burns, 2012, p. 2) ranging from learning and teaching

experiences to interactions with students and colleagues, teacher cognition concerns almost all aspects of teaching and learning practices. It lies on the premise that teaching is a complex undertaking which is cognitively oriented and influenced by classroom dynamics, teachers' goals and decisions, learners' motivations and responsiveness to the class, and the way teachers handle critical situations throughout the class (Burns & Richards, 2009).

When focusing on L2 teachers' cognition, SLTE researchers are primarily interested in exploring "unobservable mental dimensions of teaching and learning to teach" (Borg, 2009, p. 163), that is, how teachers make instructional decisions, what theories they hold about teaching and learning, how they conceive their subject matter, and how they problem-solve and improvise to handle unexpected teaching situations (Burns & Richards, 2009). Delving into this broad repertoire of issues, teacher cognition research dives into the depths of the ocean of L2 education to uncover and shine light upon the unseen part of the iceberg.

This domain of research has proven particularly instrumental to better explicate the inherent complexities of L2 teachers' knowledge and beliefs, processes of learning to teach, and teaching practices in various settings during their professional preparation and beyond (Johnson, 2009a). As TCs grow as L2 teachers, their cognition provides a basis for the justification of their teacher behaviors in and out of the classroom and contributes to their identity development. When he reviews the research on teacher cognition, Borg (2003) does not explicitly expound upon how identity can be a key issue in relation to what teachers think, know, believe, and do in the classroom. However, according to Miller (2009), teachers' identity construction is inseparable from their thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, and activities, that is, they are "part of teachers' identity work which is continuously performed and transformed through interaction in classrooms" (p. 175).

When TCs forge and enact their teaching identities, what constitutes their teacher cognition plays an important role because their beliefs, knowledge, thoughts, assumptions, and attitudes about all aspects of their teaching are closely intertwined with their current self-images, self-conceptions, and future aspirations as L2 teachers. As they engage in more teaching experience and interact with teacher educators, mentor teachers, supervisors, and students, what they think, say, and do is oriented by what they believe, think, and know and all their learning experiences influence their cognition. Their thinking, speaking, and

doing manifest the negotiation and enactment of their emerging identities and as they develop their identities, the kind of teacher they imagine being and becoming shapes their instructional beliefs, values, and priorities. Therefore, characterized as practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive (Borg, 2009), teacher knowledge and cognition is inseparable from teacher identity.

### **Participation in Communities of Practice**

From sociocultural perspectives (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Wenger, 1998), TCs learn to teach their subject matter and their cognitions evolve as they actively participate in the practices of teaching communities and seek membership to these communities. This perspective locates teacher learning and cognition in their social and context-embedded interactions and recognizes the “situated” and the social nature of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In preservice teacher education, TCs are “immersed in socially organized and regulated activit[ies]” which constitute “process[es] through which human cognition is formed” (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007, p. 878). That is, learning to teach occurs when TCs construct theoretical and practical knowledge to guide their L2 teaching through (non)participation in social contexts and engagement in certain kinds of activities by means of coursework and the teaching practica (Burns & Richards, 2009; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Yazan, 2017).

Those researchers who investigate teacher identity in SLTE usually understand participation in social context(s) in light of Lave and Wenger’s (1998) notion of “communities of practice” and postulation that learning is an “evolving form of membership” (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Singh & Richards, 2006; Ortaçtepe, 2015; Trent, 2017; Tsui, 2007). For instance, Singh and Richards (2006) conceptualize acquiring membership in a new community of practice and L2 teacher identity formation as two intricately interwoven processes. They remark that “becoming a member of a new community of practice is not just about learning new content but also about acquiring new practices, values, and ways of thinking which enable particular identities to be realized” (p. 158). Mantero (2004) argues that the contours of L2 teacher identity are not fixed or preset, but they are shaped by their participation in the activities of communities of teaching profession. Thus, L2 teachers’ identity negotiation and construction occur when they are active

participants “in the arenas of the language classroom, the profession, the curriculum, and the community” (Mantero, 2004, p. 143).

The prevailing contention about teachers’ identity formation in the SLTE literature is that becoming a teacher means negotiating and acquiring membership in a community of teaching practice, which can only happen through their participation in the activities of this community (Trent, 2017; Tsui, 2007, 2011). Teachers “enact socially situated identities while engaging in socially situated activity” (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007, p. 885). That is, their participation shapes their membership and socially situated identity formation because they discursively negotiate, frame, experiment, and craft their identities as they participate in the professional activities and interact with the other community members. This participation provides TCs with opportunities to revise and realign their ways of professional reasoning as they utilize the tools and resources accessible through the community and observe and partake in the activities. It also reinforces their self-identification (Wenger, 1998) as emerging L2 teachers who are seeking others’ recognition and endorsement in the community (Miller, 2009). Additionally, as they craft their identities, TCs calibrate their participation and channel their energy to what they value and what they view as important considering the dynamics in the community.

### **Contextual Factors**

Context surrounds and impacts all the phenomena that are intimately interrelated with TCs’ identity development (Flores & Day, 2006). To apply to TCs’ experiences, context can be defined as the set of circumstances and dynamics that shape the setting for L2 teacher learning and teaching practices both at macro and micro plans. That is, context refers to not only micro contexts such as a TCs’ teaching practica schools, classrooms where they experiment with and practice teaching, and preservice teacher education settings but also broader macro social, political, cultural, and educational contexts. Thus, contextual factors for L2 teacher identity formation are those that are borne out of both micro and macro contexts. However, because micro contexts are shaped by the dynamics of macro contexts, although they have their own idiosyncratic subtleties and undercurrents at work, sometimes it might be quite challenging to determine if a contextual factor is solely germane to the former or the latter. It could be at the nexus of the two.

Researchers have underscored context as a significant element or variable that factors into L2 TCs' identity construction. For example, Morgan (2004) is emphatic that all the spaces in schooling are value-laden and ideologically loaded rather than being neutral and that "there are no ways to insulate oneself from the social consequences of one's activities" in those spaces (p. 176). Freeman (2002) applies this argument to teacher education, and in his seminal work, he expounds upon the impact of context in teacher education articulating that "[i]n teacher education, everything is context" (p. 11). He observes that in the current literature, context has come to be regarded as a more complicated notion than previously, since it is "situated in personal and institutional histories and seen as interactive (or dialogical) with others – students, parents and community members, and fellow teachers – in the settings in which [these personal and institutional histories] unfolded" (p. 12). That is, there is a shift from context as a backdrop "like the decor and props in the staging of a theatre play" (Tudor, 2002, p. 1) to context as an interlocutor in the definition of the nature of teaching and learning, and in teachers' construction and use of their knowledge (Freeman, 2002). Therefore, it is imperative to critically examine the sociocultural contexts in which L2 TCs' learning to teach processes take place if we want to better document and understand how TCs develop professional knowledge and grow as teachers.

Researchers in the field of SLTE place emphasis on the crucial role of contexts in the (re)construction of teacher identities. For instance, Duff and Uchida (1997) note that teachers' identities rely to a large degree upon "the institutional and interpersonal contexts in which individuals find themselves, the purposes for their being there, and their personal biographies" (p. 452). In these contexts, depending on the self-image they frame for themselves, they negotiate what they value in terms of their teaching and exert their energy into what they see as important. In addition, while discussing the theorization and conceptualization of teacher identity in SLTE, Varghese et al. (2005) remark that identity is bound to "social, cultural, and political context – interlocutors, institutional settings, and so on" (p. 23). Teacher identities are configured and reconfigured as they utilize the resources and discourses in these contexts, interact with their colleagues and students, and navigate the system of activities. More specifically, Singh and Richards (2006) concentrate on the "course room" (in which teacher education courses

take place) as an influential context. Underscoring the fact that the microprocesses of the course room relate “to the larger macro context in which SLTE is situated,” Singh and Richards (2006) foreground context as a space in which L2 TCs engage in teacher learning and craft their teacher identities. They assert that L2 TCs learn to teach as they appropriate or resist to sets of knowledge and skills offered in the contexts of teacher education classes “for the purpose of remaking identity” (p. 153). From this perspective, the value-laden cultural setting of the SLTE course room receives utmost importance in TCs’ identity construction processes because L2 TCs forge and enact their identities in connection with “socially organized and complex ecological spheres of activity” which are nested in teacher education classrooms (Singh & Richards, 2006, p. 170).

Context is one of the significant determiners of the entangled processes of L2 teacher learning and identity formation. It has a shaping influence on the way L2 TCs negotiate, frame and enact their identities as they traverse the provisions of preservice teacher education, and transition from being a student to being a teacher (Flores & Day, 2006). During the experiences of university-based teacher education courses and field-based practica, teachers are exposed to certain contextual factors, (e.g., curriculum, testing, and students’ needs), which play a defining role, either affording or constraining, in their negotiation, imagination, and construction of their self-images as teachers. TCs always find themselves under the influence of context when making interpretations and decisions about their teaching. Different facets of context lead them to adjust the framing and enactment of teaching identities they envision for themselves.

### **Teacher Biographies**

L2 TCs’ personal histories or biographical trajectories have been found to hold a crucial role in the construction and reconstruction of their pedagogical knowledge and in their growth as teachers in general (Freeman, 2002). Knowles (1992) defines biography in teacher education contexts as “those formative [prior] experiences of preservice and beginning teachers which have influenced” their conceptions about teaching and learning and, later, their teaching practice in the classroom (p. 99). Through their schooling process, that is, approximately 13,000 hours of observations as learners (Lortie, 1975) or 3,060 days of learner

experiences (Kennedy, 1990), TCs “play a role of opposite teachers for a large part of [their] lives” (Britzman, 1986, p. 443) as “apprentices of observation” (Lortie, 1975, p. 61). As a result, they construct strongly-held views about teaching and learning before entering the preservice teacher education. These deeply-entrenched initial views hold “a persistent influence” upon TCs throughout their participation in the activities of teacher education and beyond because learning to teach relies upon “interactions between prior knowledge ... and new input and experience” (Borg, 2009, p. 164).

TCs’ identity formation is to a large extent mediated and organized by their biographical trajectories and “implicit theories” (Percy, 2012, p. 29). Sugrue (1997) calls preservice teachers’ initial conceptualizations about teaching “lay theories” which he maintains are crucially important in the process of teachers’ identity formation. To further explicate, these lay theories molded by TCs’ “implicit institutional biographies” according to Britzman (1986), “contribute to well-worn and commonsensical images of the teacher’s work and serves as the frame of reference for prospective teachers’ self-images” (p. 443). Sugrue (1997) finds that TCs’ personalities constitute the starting point for the formation of their “lay theories” and their teaching identities, yet the following biographical factors importantly shape those theories and identities: “(a) immediate family, (b) significant others or extended family, (c) apprenticeship of observation, (d) atypical teaching episodes, (e) policy context, teaching traditions, and cultural archetypes, and (f) tacitly acquired understandings” (p. 222). Scholars assert that formal teacher education needs to recognize TCs’ powerful and persistent lay theories and their determining impacts on the way they negotiate, frame, and craft their teaching identities (Britzman, 1986; Knowles, 1992; Olsen, 2008, 2016; Sugrue, 1997). They constitute “an indispensable dimension of how [TCs’] teaching identities” are constructed as well as an essential condition for continual reconfiguration of identities (Sugrue, 1997, p. 223). Thus, TCs’ biographies and their preconceptions shaped by these biographies stand out as “important constituents of teachers’ professional identity formation” (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 109).

The process of teacher identity construction cannot be conceived as a phenomenon which is temporally detached from teachers’ past experiences and how they understand, author, and re-author those experiences, and their future aspirations and how they envision them

(Barkhuizen, 2016; Ortaçtepe, 2015). Research on the interaction between teachers' biographical trajectories and their current self-images illuminates our understanding of how L2 teachers develop and enact their identities as they traverse the activities of initial teacher education (Yazan, 2017). To put it simply, it is imperative to explore the ways in which TCs' biographies determine their current beliefs and conceptions in order to shine much brighter light on teacher identity construction and reconstruction. This is because these beliefs and conceptions are the basis of their pedagogical "interpretive frame" (Olsen, 2016, p. 43) that orients their contours of identity formation and professional learning.

### **Teacher Emotions**

Comprehensive exploration of how TCs are developing their identities as teachers also requires an examination of their emotions and how they learn to handle them. Lasky (2005) views teachers' emotions "as a heightened state of being that changes" as a result of their reflections on past and future teaching practices and interactions with the dynamics of their teaching context and with their colleagues, students, and students' parents (p. 901). TCs experience various emotions of various degrees as they respond to numerous instructional and non-instructional situations they encounter and have to manage in their teaching contexts (Benesch, 2012, 2017; Lasky 2005; Yazan & Percy, 2016). Since teaching is largely composed of human interaction by nature, teachers' emotional states, as the "most dynamic qualities" of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998), are inevitably at the epicenter of their work (Nias, 1996). Teachers are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and all their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy" (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). In the same vein, Nias (1996) draws attention to the inseparable relationship between feeling and perception, and affectivity and judgment, and she maintains, "teachers' emotions are rooted in cognitions" (p. 294). Therefore, to grasp a better understanding of the complicated process of how teachers learn and think entails the exploration of their emotions (Golombek & Doran, 2014).

During the journey of growing as a teacher, emotions emerging out of TCs' interaction with their colleagues, students, and students' parents orient, inform, and define the development of their teacher identity. TCs go through and reflect on various emotional states which signal and point to their instructional values in which they are deeply invested (Zembylas,

2005). Thus, they can gain a more enhanced “self-knowledge” (ibid.), that is, they learn better what saddens, scares, annoys, frustrates, and stresses as well as what excites, animates, pleases, satisfies, and heartens them as teachers in their teaching practice. This self-knowledge also bolsters their capabilities to handle emotion-evoking experiences to have “appropriate” emotions for particular situations (Benesch, 2012, p. 112) and keep their individual integrity, commitment to teaching, and professional practice. TCs need support from their teacher educators, university supervisor, and mentor teachers to develop this literacy. On the other hand, their emerging teacher identity influences how they respond emotionally to varying incidents that they are confronted with as they journey the activities of initial teacher education. As their identities have a deciding effect on where they are channeling their efforts and exerting their energy (Hammerness et al., 2005), they determine to a large degree the type and intensity of their emotions.

Because emotions give us deeper insights into what matters and concerns teachers have at stake, the scrutiny of emotions can contribute to the increased and nuanced understanding of their commitment and identity as teachers (Yazan & Peercy, 2016). In conceptualizing L2 TCs’ knowledge and cognition, Golombek and Doran (2014) propose the addition of emotions to Borg’s (2003) definition of teacher cognition because they conceive cognition, activity, and emotion inseparable, that is, it should read: what teachers think, know, believe, do, and feel. Then, as important signals of their beliefs and values undergirding their identities, L2 teachers’ emotions should be incorporated into any discussion about their teacher identity construction. Inquiring into the ways in which TCs are coping with their emotions can afford SLTE researchers with new dimensions to observe how they negotiate, frame, and enact their identities in these emotional situations.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a highly complicated concept in educational research, teacher identity pertains to many dimensions of teachers’ growth, professional life, and classroom practices and it is impossible to focus merely on teacher identity without including into the equation other related dimensions of being and becoming a teacher. Understanding and investigating teacher identity in relation to those dimensions entails a multifaceted approach that comprises the constructs to help capture the complexity of teacher

identity. This paper is an attempt to present such an approach by critically synthesizing the existing empirical and theoretical research in TESOL and teacher education. It is my hope that researchers in TESOL will benefit from this approach and they make contributions to further streamline it as they investigate LTI in various contexts with differing research foci.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the *JSLTE* editor Dr. Zia Tajeddin and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on the earlier version of this paper, which significantly contributed to improving its quality. I am also thankful to my dissertation committee members Drs. Percy, MacSwan, Martin-Beltran, Valli, and Silverman for their support and guidance. Lastly, I really appreciate the generous support for my dissertation research from The International Research Foundation for English Language Education (TIRF).

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