The Development of Chinese Novice University English Teachers' Professional Identity in Interaction: A Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis

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A thesis submitted to the Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2026

School of Communication Studies

ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, teacher identity has attracted increasing scholarly attention, particularly in teacher education and professional development. However, the complex processes underpinning novice teacher identity formation remain underexplored. To address this gap, this thesis presents a longitudinal multi-case study of four novice EFL teachers in China, observed across one academic semester. The study employs a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) framework (Norris, 2004, 2011, 2019). Drawing on three rounds of video-recorded classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted throughout the semester, the study examines how identity is constructed across interactional, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions. This doctoral research is presented in a thesis-by-publication format, comprising three published articles (Articles I–III). Collectively, the research captures how novice EFL teachers negotiate personal aspirations and institutional demands through both discourse and embodied action.

Article I explores the identity struggles of one teacher (Caroline), revealing tensions between her imagined ideals of relaxed, student-centred teaching and the realities of exclusion and resistance within a high-power-distance institutional culture. Multimodal analysis highlights the emotional labour and adaptive identity work required for professional integration. Article II follows two novice teachers, Mandy and Yable, as they transition from textbook-centred delivery to a more student-centred, interactive pedagogy. By analysing changes in multimodal resources—such as gaze, gesture, and vocal modulation-the study shows how embodied communication facilitates pedagogical innovation and identity empowerment. Article III examines how four early-career lecturers navigate the competing demands of teaching and research under intensified "publish-or-perish" pressures. Divergent identity trajectories are identified: some participants resist institutional pressures to maintain teaching-oriented identities, while others strategically integrate research commitments into their professional self-concept. Multimodal analyses reveal how identity work is

negotiated not only through language but through bodily enactments within academic communities.

Together, the findings illustrate that novice EFL teacher identity development is a dynamic, multimodally mediated process shaped by discursive, relational, and institutional forces. The thesis advocates for teacher education and higher education policies that recognise the embodied dimensions of professional identity work, foster emotional resilience, and support more integrated models of teaching and research engagement. These insights aim to inform sustainable professional development strategies for novice educators, with implications extending beyond China to other international contexts.

Key words: Teacher identity, Novice teachers, EFL teaching, China, Professional development, Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, Embodied communication, Pedagogical innovation, Teaching-research nexus

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
CLT	Communicative language teaching
CoP	Community of Practice
ECAs	Early-career Academics
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English language teaching
EMCA	Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis
EMI	English-Medium Instruction
HLA	Higher-Level Mediated Action
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IR0	Initiation–Response–0
IRF	Initiation-Response-Feedback
LLA	Lower-Level Mediated Action
LTI	Language Teacher Identity
MIA	Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis
TBLT	Task-based language teaching

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

The research reported in this thesis was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) under reference number 22/243 on 28 November 2022 (see Appendix A).

Signed:
Date: 22/10/2025

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Chapter Number:	**Chapter Four**
Manuscript Title:	Imagined versus practised professional identity development: a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis of a Chinese novice English teacher.
Publication Status:	**Published**
Reference if published:	Zhou, J., Tennant, L. & Matelau, T. (2024). Imagined versus practised professional identity development: a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis of a Chinese novice English teacher. *Multimodal Communication*, 13(3), 397-414. https://doi.org/10.1515/mc-2024-0043

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Tui matelau	5%	Contributed feedback on analytical clarity
Chapter Number:		**Chapter Five**
Manuscript Title:		Transforming Pedagogical Practices and Teacher Identity Through Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis: A Case Study of Novice EFL Teachers in China
Publication Status:		**Published**
Reference if published:		Zhou, J., Li, C., & Cheng, Y. (2025). Transforming Pedagogical Practices and Teacher Identity Through Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis: A Case Study of Novice EFL Teachers in China. *Behavioural Sciences*, 15(8), 1050. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15081050
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Chengfei Li	5%	Provided feedback for journal revision
Yan Cheng	5%	Provided comments on language refinement

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This PhD journey has not only been an academic pursuit, but also a personal and emotional transformation—a journey of becoming, of navigating new terrains as a woman, an international student, and an early-career researcher.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Sigrid Norris, whose rigorous guidance, generous mentorship, and pioneering work in multimodal interaction analysis shaped the foundation of this thesis. Your high standards and critical lens taught me how to think and write with clarity and integrity. Thank you for walking with me through the most formative stages of this journey.

To Dr Lewis Tennant, thank you for your steady support and honest feedback during the later stages of my PhD. Your calm presence, constructive advice, and belief in my potential gave me the strength to push through to the finish line. I am also incredibly thankful to Dr Tui Matelau, whose kindness, patience, and gentle encouragement reminded me that care and academia can go hand in hand. Your warm spirit has been a quiet but powerful force behind my persistence.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the four participants in this study. Finding willing and suitable participants was far from straightforward, and without their generous commitment, there would have been no stories to tell, no data to analyse, and no thesis to write. Their openness, time, and trust formed the very heart of this research, and I remain deeply appreciative of their contributions.

To my parents, thank you for your unconditional love and material support. As a woman pursuing a PhD far from home, I could not have remained grounded without the support you provided. You gave me the freedom to dream and the courage to keep going, even when it felt like the world was too big.

To my dear friends—Ajie, Tuer, Yaoyao, Yanyan, Jacky—thank you for your

unwavering support, laughter, and sisterhood. Your companionship has sustained me in ways you may never fully know. Thank you for believing in me even when I doubted myself.

To Douzai, my dog and unofficial emotional support buddy—thank you for your cuddles, your chaos, and for reminding me to take breaks and enjoy small joys. You've brought so much warmth and silliness into my long days and nights.

This thesis is a testament to resilience, community, and the quiet power of care. It is for every woman who dares to pursue knowledge across borders, and for everyone who held me up along the way. Thank you, from the depths of my heart.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research context, theoretical foundations, and rationale for the present study. It begins by outlining the socio-political and institutional conditions that shape the professional identities of novice university EFL teachers in China, particularly within the context of increasing academic performativity and neoliberal reforms. The chapter then defines the study's aims and presents three central research questions. It reviews key theoretical perspectives on language teacher identity (LTI), emphasising its sociocultural, relational, and multimodal nature. Next, it introduces Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) as the methodological lens through which teacher identity is examined. Finally, the chapter identifies existing gaps in the literature. It explains how this thesis, through three empirical studies, addresses those gaps by exploring how novice teachers negotiate identity through embodied, interactional, and institutional practices.

1.1 Introduction and Research Context

In an era of heightened institutional accountability and performativity in higher education (e.g., 2003; Fox, 2021; Shore & Wright, 2015), the professional identity of university teachers has become a central concern in educational research. Within this context, teacher identity has emerged as a key theme in educational research, particularly in the study of teacher learning and professional development (Ahmad et al., 2019; Noonan, 2019). In language education, teacher identity is widely recognised as dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by sociocultural, institutional, and interpersonal factors (e.g., Martel & Wang, 2014; Norton, 2013). Rather than fixed, it evolves through ongoing interaction, reflection, and practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). In China, rapid developments in the economy, society, and culture have significantly influenced English language education.

These issues are particularly salient in Chinese higher education, where managerial reforms and metrics-based governance have significantly reshaped the working lives and professional identities of university teachers. As Huang and Guo

(2019) show, managerial reforms in Chinese higher education have significantly reshaped college English teachers' professional identities, as they respond cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally to increased teaching demands, research pressure, and shifting institutional expectations. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are tasked not only with cultivating students' international communicative competence but also with meeting rising institutional demands for research productivity, particularly under metrics-based governance (MOE, 2019). This dual expectation underscores the growing tension between intrinsic teaching values and extrinsic institutional pressures. Teacher identity should be nurtured within institutional environments that support both personal and professional growth (Goodson & Cole, 1994). However, identity is not only shaped by external expectations but also by individual values, experiences, and emotional responses (Truong et al., 2025). Scholars agree that identity construction is a complex and ongoing process, particularly for early-career teachers (Bao & Feng, 2022; Haim et al., 2022). In China's highly evaluative academic culture, professional identity development is often mediated by metrics-based governance—including performance evaluations, publication quotas, and student ratings—resulting in fragmented identity trajectories shaped by tensions between aspiration and adaptation, agency and compliance (e.g., Agenda, 2021; Nickel & Crosby, 2022; Wu, 2025). These systemic pressures tend to privilege quantifiable outputs over lived pedagogical practices, leaving the multimodal, affective, and interactional dimensions of identity formation under-recognised. Although teacher identity is always shaped through everyday interaction and participation, in this study such processes are understood within the broader institutional, structural, and sociocultural conditions of Chinese higher education.

For novice university EFL teachers in mainland China, these conditions are especially significant. Existing research shows that early-career language teachers often face heavy teaching and non-teaching workloads, limited mentoring and institutional support, and considerable pressure from evaluation and promotion systems that prioritise research productivity (e.g., Fan et al., 2021; Tian & Lu, 2017).

They face high-stakes evaluations, ambiguous institutional expectations, and the emotional complexities of transitioning from student to teacher (Romero, 2024; Zhang & Yusof, 2024). At the same time, they are expected to respond to ongoing pedagogical reform and innovation, often within an educational culture still substantially influenced by examination-oriented traditions and more teacher-centred expectations (Wang, 2021). For many beginning teachers, the transition into professional practice is therefore marked by uncertainty, imbalance, emotional strain, and the challenge of reconciling institutional demands with emerging professional values (Jiang et al., 2021; Zheng, 2024). In this sense, the present study is concerned not merely with teachers' identities in routine "academic and institutional settings", but with identity development within a hierarchical, performative, and reform-driven higher education system that both constrains and enables professional becoming.

Identity formation at this stage is fluid and fragile, often marked by psychological tension and emotional fluctuation (Xu, 2013). Prior studies have found that professional identity significantly affects teaching efficacy, research engagement, and long-term resilience (Tsui, 2007; Xun & Zheng, 2014). Novice teachers typically undergo intensive training, engage in competitive teaching assessments, and adapt rapidly to institutional norms (Amory & Johnson, 2023). Research has further shown that difficulties in establishing a coherent and stable professional identity are associated with increased vulnerability to attrition and burnout (Sabancıogullari & Dogan, 2015). Therefore, understanding how novice teachers construct and negotiate their identities is critical for supporting their transition and long-term development.

Despite the growing body of literature on teacher identity, few studies have examined how professional identities are constructed through embodied and multimodal interaction, particularly within the Chinese higher education context. In multimodal literacy research, identity is increasingly seen as co-constructed not only through discourse, but also through gesture, gaze, posture, spatial positioning, and other embodied semiotic resources (Sindoni & Moschini, 2021). Semiotic resources are commonly understood in social semiotic and multimodal research as the resources or means through which social actors make meaning in communication and

interaction (e.g., Van Leeuwen, 2005; see also Castaldi, 2024). In this thesis, these include talk, gaze, gesture, posture, movement, spatial orientation, and material artefacts, because teacher identity is analysed not only through verbal discourse but also through embodied and spatially organised conduct.

Beyond academic interest, this study is also personally motivated. As a novice university English teacher in China, my early professional experiences were shaped by moments of frustration, self-doubt, institutional pressure, and emotional tension—alongside growth, encouragement, and mentorship. These experiences were not merely logistical but deeply identity-shaping, prompting constant negotiation of who I was and who I aspired to become as a professional. This insider positionality became an asset in the research process. Sharing a similar professional trajectory with the participants facilitated trust, reduced hierarchical distance, and enabled candid, reflective dialogue—especially in interviews. Such relational proximity provided access to nuanced perspectives that might remain concealed in more distanced researcher–participant interactions. Rather than merely recounting personal anecdotes, this study seeks to analytically explore these lived experiences to better understand the identity struggles of novice EFL teachers and to inform more supportive institutional practices in language education.

This thesis explores how novice university EFL teachers in China construct and negotiate their professional identities during the early stages of their careers. It adopts a multimodal analytical lens to examine how identity is enacted not only through discourse but also through embodied practices, such as gesture, gaze, and spatial positioning. The study draws on Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) (Norris, 2004, 2011, 2019, 2020), further elaborated in Chapter 3, to reveal the complexity of identity work within the performance-driven and hierarchical context of Chinese higher education.

1.2 Research Aims and Research Questions

The overarching aim of this research is twofold. First, it explores how novice university EFL teachers in China construct professional identity in daily academic and

institutional settings, using a multimodal interactional lens. Second, it expands identity research by applying a multimodal approach that attends to embodied and affective dimensions of identity (see Chapter 3).

Against this background, this thesis aims to explore how novice university EFL teachers in mainland China construct and negotiate their professional identities through interactional and embodied practices within the institutional, sociocultural, and policy conditions of contemporary Chinese higher education. More specifically, it examines how such identity work unfolds within a hierarchical, performative, and reform-driven university system, where professional selves are shaped not only by everyday teaching and collegial interaction, but also by research evaluation regimes, reform expectations, and broader institutional power relations. In this study, these conditions are not treated merely as contextual background; rather, they are understood as constitutive of identity formation, shaping what kinds of professional selves can be imagined, enacted, negotiated, and sustained.

A central motivation for focusing on this group lies in the persistent underrepresentation of novice university teachers in identity scholarship. This gap is especially concerning given the increasing pressures they encounter in performance-oriented academic environments. Examining how identity is enacted through gesture, gaze, posture, and spatial positioning provides insight into the embodied resources that teachers mobilise, as shaped and constrained by institutional discourse and policy. While the study is situated in the Chinese higher education context, its findings offer broader relevance for understanding novice teacher identity construction in global academic environments. Against the backdrop of this socio-political and institutional complexity, the present thesis seeks to achieve its aim through the following research questions:

1. How do novice university EFL teachers in China construct and negotiate their professional identities through interactional and embodied practices during their early careers?

2. What multimodal strategies do they use to manage identity tensions in teaching and institutional settings?

3. How do institutional and sociocultural discourses, such as power dynamics, evaluative regimes, and collegial relations, mediate the identity trajectories of novice university EFL teachers?

1.3 Theoretical Framing of Language Teacher Identity

This study adopts a sociocultural and multimodal conceptualisation of language teacher identity (LTI), viewing it as dynamic, relational, situated, and embodied (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). Prior research frames identity variously as the roles teachers take up across sociocultural contexts (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Richards, 2006), the self-understandings they construct about themselves and their worlds (Brown & McNamara, 2011; Norton, 2000), and as an analytic lens on schooling and society (Gee, 2000). In EFL settings, identity work is further complicated by linguistic, cultural, and ideological tensions: teachers navigate global pedagogical discourses and local institutional norms, often positioning themselves simultaneously as language specialists and cultural mediators (Clarke, 2008; Le et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2019). For novices, imagined identities formed through prior learning frequently encounter institutional discourses that constrain or reshape practice (Xu, 2013).

Teaching is inherently interactional, bodily, and spatially organised , and research on embodied teaching and learning has increasingly shown that meaning-making in educational settings is accomplished through the coordination of talk, movement, space, and material engagement rather than through language alone (e.g., Allen, 2025; Lacković&Popova, 2021; Jakonen & Evnitskaya, 2020； Dobrich; 2023). Therefore, teachers enact authority, care, uncertainty, responsiveness, and alignment not only through what they say, but also through how they orient their bodies, deploy gesture and gaze, manage classroom space, and respond to pedagogical and institutional demands in real time. For this reason, embodied practice is not treated in this thesis as a supplementary dimension of identity, but as a necessary lens for examining how professional identity is enacted and negotiated in practice.

This embodied perspective is developed further in Section 2.5 of Chapter 2, where I review work calling for greater attention to classroom practice, multimodal interaction, and the embodied enactment of teacher identity. It is then taken up empirically in later chapters. Article I shows that identity tension is expressed not only in participants' verbal accounts, but also in embodied conduct during interview interaction. Article II (Chapter 5) provides the clearest classroom-based demonstration of this perspective by analysing how novice teachers reconfigure professional identity through gesture, gaze, voice, and movement in pedagogical practice. Sections 6.1 to 6.3 of Chapter 6 extend this logic by showing how academic identity and teaching–research tensions are negotiated through multimodal performances shaped by institutional expectations. Theoretically, this study integrates social constructivism (Wenger, 1999), narrative inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2000; Richmond et al., 2011), multiple/dialogical identity perspectives (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005), and post structural perspectives that foreground discourse, power, embodiment, and affect (Butler, 1993; Zembylas, 2005).

Social constructivism views knowledge, meaning, and understanding as jointly developed through social interaction rather than formed solely within the individual (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). From this perspective, teacher identity is understood not as a fixed inner attribute, but as something shaped through participation in social practices, relationships, and institutional contexts. This orientation underpins the thesis as a whole and is developed further in Chapter Two, especially in the discussion of communities of practice in Section 2.4, and in Articles II and III, where teachers' pedagogical and professional identities are examined as socially mediated and interactionally negotiated.

Narrative inquiry conceptualises experience as storied and temporally organised, foregrounding how individuals make sense of their lives, actions, and identities through narrative meaning-making (Barkhuizen, 2014). In this thesis, narrative inquiry is not treated as a standalone method in the strict sense, but as an interpretive lens that helps illuminate how novice teachers recount, interpret, and reframe their professional trajectories over time. This perspective is especially important in Articles

I and III, where interview data provide insight into teachers' imagined identities, self-understandings, and evolving professional commitments.

Multiple and dialogical identity perspectives conceptualise identity as plural, dynamic, and internally differentiated, rather than singular or stable (Varghese et al., 2005; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). From this perspective, teachers may inhabit multiple, and sometimes competing, identity positions across contexts and timescales. This understanding is central to the thesis's analysis of tensions between imagined and practised identities, between personal aspirations and institutional expectations, and between teaching- and research-oriented role demands. It is therefore particularly relevant to Section 2.2 and to Articles I and III.

Poststructural perspectives further emphasise that identity is shaped through discourse, power relations, institutional norms, and affective investments, rather than simply reflecting a pre-existing self (Butler, 1993; Zembylas, 2003, 2005). These perspectives are especially useful for understanding how novice teachers' identities are enabled, constrained, and emotionally charged within hierarchical and performance-driven university environments. In this thesis, poststructuralism informs the analysis of institutional discourse, emotional tension, and power-laden identity negotiation, especially in Sections 2.1–2.3 and in Article III.

Taken together, these perspectives provide the conceptual grounding for the thesis. However, they are operationalised analytically through Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA), which makes it possible to examine how such identity processes are enacted not only in what teachers say, but also in how they act, position themselves, use embodied resources, and participate in institutional and classroom interaction. MIA is introduced in Section 1.4, elaborated in Chapter Three, and applied across Articles I–III in context-sensitive ways.

This study defines LTI as:

A dynamic, socially mediated, and multimodally performed sense of self that evolves through interaction, reflection, and engagement with institutional discourses—encompassing self-understanding, relational positioning, and embodied enactments of professional roles.

1.4 Methodological Orientation: Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA)

This research adopts MIA (Norris, 2004, 2011, 2019, 2020) to examine how identity is enacted through talk, gaze, gesture, posture, object use, and spatial configuration. While other multimodal approaches, most notably Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis (EMCA), also attend to multimodality (Goodwin, 2018; Mondada, 2016), their primary focus remains on the sequential organisation of talk and the turn-by-turn coordination of embodied actions. By contrast, MIA foregrounds how micro-level embodied actions are linked to meso/macro institutional discourses via a nexus of practice (Scollon, 2001). This makes MIA particularly suited to tracing how novice EFL teachers' multimodal practices are entangled with power, policy, and performance regimes in Chinese higher education.

A key feature of MIA is its distinction between lower-level actions, higher-level actions, and frozen actions (Norris, 2004). Norris (2004b: 11) divides mediated actions into lower-level actions, as the smallest interactional meaning units; higher-level actions, as actions that are bracketed by an opening/closing and made up of a multiplicity of chained lower-level actions; and frozen actions, which are entailed in material objects. For example, if the English teacher is explaining a passage to students, this can be recognized as a higher-level action. This study will focus on the higher-level actions of novice English teachers. Frozen actions refer to semiotic traces stabilised in the material environment, such as board writing, classroom layout, or a worksheet, which continue to shape meaning-making even when no longer being actively produced (Norris, 2004, 2011). In this study, higher-level actions are especially important because they provide an analytically manageable unit for examining how identity is enacted through coordinated multimodal conduct over time.

It is important to note that lower-level and higher-level actions are not equivalent to traditional micro- and macro-level distinctions. Micro and macro usually refer to broader social-theoretical scales, with micro concerned with local interaction and

macro with wider institutional or societal structures. By contrast, lower-level and higher-level actions are analytical units within MIA itself. Lower-level actions allow close attention to moment-by-moment embodied conduct, while higher-level actions make it possible to analyse how such conduct is organised into meaningful courses of social action. In this sense, MIA bridges micro interaction and macro context analytically: it does not treat higher-level actions as macro structures in themselves, but as interactional units through which broader sociocultural and institutional influences can be traced (Norris, 2004, 2011).

For example, in a classroom episode where a teacher explains a grammar structure, individual lower-level actions may include shifting gaze between students and board, pointing to written examples, changing vocal emphasis, and writing key forms on the board. Together, these actions constitute the higher-level action of explaining grammar. At the same time, the written formula remaining on the board functions as a frozen action. Analysing these layered action units allows the thesis to examine not only how teaching is accomplished, but also how professional identity is enacted through embodied, interactional, and materially mediated practice. This methodological choice follows directly from the theoretical position outlined in Section 1.3: if teacher identity is dynamic, situated, and embodied, then it cannot be examined adequately through discourse alone. A more detailed explanation of these concepts and their analytical application is provided in Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4.2.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis, presented in a 'thesis by publication' format, comprises eight chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on teacher identity development and multimodal interaction analysis, identifying key theoretical and empirical gaps in the scholarship on novice university EFL teachers.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design, detailing the methodological rationale, data collection processes, analytical framework, and ethical considerations, with particular emphasis on MIA.

Chapters 4—6 present three interrelated empirical articles. Article I examines tensions between novice teachers' imagined and practised identities across classroom and interview contexts. Article II investigates pedagogical transitions from teacher-centred to student-centred practices, focusing on the embodied shifts in professional identity. Article III explores the identity challenges that emerge from balancing teaching and research responsibilities under institutional pressures.

Chapter 7 synthesises findings across these studies, highlighting overarching themes and the thesis's theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions.

Chapter 8 offers implications, limitations and conclusions for policy and practice and proposes directions for future research.

1.6 Overview of the Empirical Articles

The thesis comprises three interrelated empirical articles, each contributing to the overall investigation of how novice university EFL teachers in China construct and negotiate their professional identities through embodied, multimodal classroom practices.

Table 1 Overview of Empirical Articles

Article	Title (Shortened)	Research Questions Addressed	Participants
I	Imagined vs. Practiced Identities	RQ1, RQ3	Caroline
II	Embodied Pedagogical Transformation	RQ1, RQ2	Mandy, Yable
III	Balancing Teaching and Research	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3	Caroline, Mandy, Yable, Daisy

Table 1 above summarises the three empirical articles included in the thesis. It outlines the focus of each article (shortened title), the research questions addressed, and the participating teachers.

Article I (Chapter 4) addresses Research Questions 1 and 3. This article examines the tensions between imagined identities—shaped by the teachers' personal

aspirations and prior experiences—and the practised identities that emerge within the institutional context. Through the case study of Caroline, the article explores how institutional discourses—such as hierarchical power structures and collegial dynamics—affect identity construction. The article illustrates how novice teachers negotiate the tension between aspiration and institutional constraints, shedding light on the interplay between individual identity and broader institutional expectations. This article provides a foundation for understanding the complex relationship between personal aspiration and institutional expectation, which is further explored in Articles II and III.

Article II (Chapter 5) extends the findings of Article I by examining how novice teachers' identities evolve in response to pedagogical shifts. This article investigates how novice teachers Mandy and Yable shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogy, using multimodal strategies such as gesture, gaze, and voice modulation to manage identity tensions. While Article I highlighted the internal conflicts between imagined and practised identities, Article II focuses on how these tensions are worked through in real-time classroom interactions. The findings emphasise the performative dimension of identity and highlight the role of embodied practices in navigating and negotiating identity in pedagogical contexts. This article builds on the tension discussed in Article I and explores the embodied, real-time performance of identity in classroom contexts, thus contributing a deeper understanding of how identity is negotiated through multimodal pedagogical practices.

Article III (Chapter 6) further develops the insights from Articles I and II by exploring how novice teachers negotiate identity tensions arising from the dual demands of teaching and research. It addresses all three research questions, with particular emphasis on Research Question 3, examining how institutional discourses—such as performance evaluation systems and research expectations—mediate professional identity trajectories. Through a comparative analysis of four participants (Caroline, Daisy, Mandy, and Yable), this article identifies four distinct identity trajectories: embodied resistance, strategic adaptation, strategic balancing, and aspirational resistance. It demonstrates that identity

construction is non-linear and highlights the importance of institutional support and mentoring in fostering more sustainable identity configurations. By integrating findings from previous articles, Article III offers a comprehensive view of how novice teachers navigate multiple, sometimes conflicting, professional roles, drawing connections between pedagogical identity and institutional pressures.

This chapter outlines the research context, aims, and questions, and briefly introduces the theoretical framework and methodology. The following Chapter 2 will provide a detailed review of the literature, focusing on key theoretical perspectives on teacher identity, particularly within the Chinese higher education context, to establish the theoretical foundations for this study.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter synthesises theoretical and empirical literature on language teacher identity (LTI), with a particular focus on novice EFL teachers in Chinese higher education. As this thesis is presented in a thesis-by-publication format, Chapter 2 is intended to supplement and integrate, rather than repeat, the more focused literature reviews already presented in the three empirical articles. It therefore provides a broader conceptual foundation for the thesis as a unified study while addressing key areas of scholarship that could not be developed in equal depth within the constraints of individual journal articles.

The review was developed through a structured search of major academic databases, including *Google Scholar*, *JSTOR*, *ERIC*, and *Scopus*, using combinations of keywords such as *teacher identity*, *novice teachers*, *early-career teachers*, *embodied practice*, *multimodal interaction*, *professional identity*, *Chinese higher education*, and *EFL teachers in China*. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, major theoretical works, and studies directly relevant to novice teachers, language teacher identity, multimodality, and the Chinese higher education context. The review was thus selective but systematic, rather than based on a convenience sample of studies.

The chapter is organised around four thematic areas: (1) the institutional and sociocultural shaping of teacher identity trajectories; (2) the negotiation of imagined and practised identities; (3) the role of emotion and agency in identity work; and (4) the influence of communities of practice in mediating identity development. These themes were initially identified through recurring concerns in the literature and were later refined during the writing of the full thesis to strengthen conceptual alignment across the three empirical studies and the broader dataset. They should therefore be understood as literature-informed and subsequently refined through the research process, rather than as either a convenience grouping or themes derived solely from the data. In this way, Chapter 2 remains grounded in the literature while also functioning as a coherent conceptual bridge across the three published articles.

2.1 Institutional and Sociocultural Shaping of Teacher Identity Trajectories

Teacher identity is increasingly recognised as a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon (Pappa et al., 2017). Novice EFL teachers in Chinese higher education operate within institutional environments and sociocultural contexts that profoundly shape their identity trajectories. Research consistently highlights that identity development is embedded within micro-, meso-, and macro-level structures, including university policies, curricular mandates, evaluation systems, and broader sociocultural ideologies (Haim et al., 2022; Wang, 2021). Furthermore, many early-career teachers often experience identity struggles due to institutional constraints, power imbalances, or pedagogical dissonance (Goktepe & Kunt, 2021; He & Lin, 2013).

Chinese universities have become sites of intensified institutional reform, where novice teachers are expected to meet high standards for both teaching and research from the outset of their careers (Zhao et al., 2021). Recent studies have emphasised how policy reforms, such as publish-or-perish mandates and China's Double First-Class initiative, which seeks to build world-class universities and disciplines, have reconfigured academic identity by prioritising research output over teaching quality and teacher well-being (Lu & Tang, 2025; Yip et al., 2022). These structural demands produce tensions between institutional expectations and personal visions of what it means to be a teacher, especially for early-career lecturers with limited institutional power or support (Sachs, 2005, 2016). Xu (2014) captures this value in the concept of 师道尊严 (shidao zunyan, "teacherly dignity" or "the sanctity of the teaching profession"), which reflects China's deeply rooted Confucian tradition of positioning teachers as moral authorities and cultural exemplars. This cultural ideal often clashes with emerging pedagogical reforms that prioritise student autonomy, learner-centred practices, and intercultural communication (Li & De Costa, 2018). In this way, novice EFL teachers must navigate not only institutional mandates but also cultural role expectations, which can reinforce hierarchical power dynamics and limit

opportunities for pedagogical experimentation.

Qualitative evidence from Chinese and international contexts has shown how such tensions impact professional self-perception. For example, Gong and Gao (2024) highlighted identity dissonance among novice bilingual educators as they shift between traditional teaching expectations and the demands of cross-cultural communicative competence. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) demonstrated how university-level EFL instructors juggle competing discourses around grammar-focused versus communicative instruction, reinforcing the idea that teacher identity construction is an ongoing, situated negotiation.

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature still relies on interview data or retrospective self-reporting, which limits insight into how identity unfolds in the immediacy of teaching practice. Addressing this gap, the present thesis adopts a MIA (Norris, 2011, 2019, 2020) approach to investigate how novice university EFL teachers in China construct and negotiate their professional identities in real time. This framework foregrounds the embodied and spatial dimensions of classroom and institutional interaction—such as gesture, posture, gaze, and the use of teaching artifacts—as central to identity formation.

2.2 Negotiating Imagined and Practised Identities

The negotiation between imagined and practised identities has emerged as a central theme in research on language teacher identity. Imagined identities refer to teachers' aspirational self-concepts—who they hope or expect to become as professionals—often shaped during pre-service training and early idealisations. Practised identities, in contrast, are constructed through everyday interactions in real classroom and institutional contexts (Xu, 2013). Th tension between these two dimensions is particularly pronounced during the early years of teaching, when institutional demands, workload pressures, and sociocultural constraints confront idealised visions.

In the Chinese context, Xu (2013) observed how novice Chinese EFL teachers shifted their identity frameworks during their first three years, transforming from

cue- and exemplar-based imagined identities in pre-service training to rule- and schema-based practised identities shaped by institutional and contextual influences. This study demonstrates that teacher identity development is not simply a matter of personal aspiration, but also a process of accommodation to professional realities. Similarly, Sahling and De Carvalho (2021) examined language teachers' professional experiences through qualitative inquiry and found that tensions often emerged when teachers' expectations of meaningful participation and pedagogical autonomy clashed with the structural constraints of institutional life. Jiang and Zhang (2021) likewise showed how conflicts arose when expectations clashed with lived realities. Extending this line of argument, Sang (2022) called for more classroom-based observations, arguing that identity transformation is mediated through teaching activity.

Such tensions have also been widely documented in broader international contexts. Tajeddin and Yazan (2024), for example, conceptualised teacher identity negotiation as a "nexus of agency, emotion, and investment", highlighting how imagined selves confront institutional and ideological constraints. In intercultural contexts, Gong and Gao (2024) investigated how identity tensions mediate teachers' intercultural teaching through an exploratory sequential mixed-method design. Based on interviews, observations, and a subsequent survey, they identified multiple professional and sociocultural identities, showing that tensions and synergies among identities such as cultural learner, cultural bridge, and bearer of Chinese culture significantly shaped whether teachers adopted fact-oriented or holistic development-oriented approaches to intercultural teaching.

Other studies further illustrate the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of these negotiations. Paula and Patrick (2015) further show that tensions between imagined and practised identities are enacted in classroom activity rather than existing only at the level of belief or self-description. Drawing on a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective and using narrative inquiry, they examined the case of Patrick, a novice English teacher who experienced a contradiction between his aspiration to be a communication-oriented teacher and his actual enactment of a rule-focused

"grammar inquisitor" identity in an advanced grammar class. The study illustrates how this tension was shaped by the mismatch between his pedagogical beliefs and the exam-oriented demands of the teaching context. Ovalle Quiroz and González (2023) reported that Colombian English teachers' investment in professional development is closely tied to their imagined identities and imagined communities. Teachers are more likely to engage in professional development activities when these support their aspirations to become proficient English speakers, English language teaching (ELT) experts, and competent information and communication technologies (ICT) users, as well as their desire to belong to a community of bilingual professionals.

Together, these studies highlight that identity tension is not unique to a specific region, but a global phenomenon, particularly salient during the early years of teaching. They also suggest that classroom-based exploration offers valuable insights into how imagined identities evolve through embodied practice. This thesis contributes to this growing body of research by examining how novice university EFL teachers in China navigate the dissonance between their ideal selves and lived professional roles within a multimodal classroom environment.

2.3 The Role of Emotion, Agency in Professional Development

Emotions are increasingly recognised not only as outcomes of professional experiences but as active mediators in the formation of teacher identity (Han & Zhang, 2025; Zembylas, 2005, 2011). Both positive emotions (e.g., pride, accomplishment) and negative ones (e.g., frustration, alienation) influenced how teachers position themselves professionally (Li, 2022; Teng, 2019). In the Chinese EFL context, Han and Zhang (2025) demonstrated that emotional regulation strategies are essential for managing identity tensions under institutional pressure. Emotional labour has been cited as a factor in burnout, professional dissonance, and identity tension (e.g., He & Lin, 2013). This link between emotional well-being and identity underscores the importance of supporting novice teachers' mental and emotional health as part of their professional development. McCaw (2021) described

early-career teachers as occupying a “liminal” identity space, feeling like outsiders or impostors. These tensions may persist into the second year of teaching, indicating identity is not only unstable but emotionally fraught. As McKay (2021) argued, using arts-based reflections, identity work is closely tied to resilience and emotional well-being.

At the same time, the literature reviewed here suggests that research on teacher emotion and identity has predominantly approached emotion through reflective, narrative, or cognitive accounts rather than through the analysis of embodied conduct in naturally occurring interaction. While work such as Gao and Mager (2013) shows that embodiment matters in teacher learning, and Zembylas (2016) foregrounds the significance of emotion in education, relatively little research has examined how emotions are displayed, managed, and negotiated as embodied and multimodal practices in real-time educational interaction. Furthermore, research by Wilkins (2022) highlights how teachers’ embodied identities interact with power dynamics in the classroom, yet the emotional embodiment of these identities is often overlooked. Additionally, while Pettit (2019) underscores the role of embodied practices in the embodiment of social power, the emotional dimension of embodiment in educational spaces, particularly in teacher-student interactions, has not been fully explored. Similarly, Leigh (2018) discusses the importance of embodied practice in academic identity, but her work primarily focuses on cognitive and emotional self-awareness rather than the enactment of emotions in classroom settings. In other words, although teacher emotion is widely recognised as significant, it is less often analysed as something enacted through posture, gaze, movement, voice, and interactional alignment in situated practice. This gap is especially relevant to the present thesis because, for novice teachers, emotional tension is not only retrospectively described but also lived, embodied, and negotiated in the moment.

In response to emotional demands, agency has become a critical analytic lens. Agency is increasingly conceptualised as a dynamic, situated capacity, shaped by institutional structures, personal values, and professional relationships (Lau et al., 2024; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2015). Xu (2025) noted that identity, emotion, and

agency are deeply interrelated: teachers with a stronger sense of agency are often better at handling emotional challenges, which in turn reinforces a more positive identity trajectory. Moreover, reflective practices and mentorship have been shown to scaffold agency by enabling teachers to reframe their positioning (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; Kramer, 2018; Yalcin Arslan, 2019; Yazan, 2022). Importantly, mentorship and "third space" guidance has been found to mediate this process by providing emotional scaffolding and dialogic space for novice teachers (i.e., a hybrid zone between institutional demands and personal experience) (McIntyre & Hobson, 2016).

Reflection and reflexivity are both relevant to teacher identity formation, but they are not identical. Reflection is commonly associated with examining teaching experience, pedagogical decision-making, and professional learning, whereas reflexivity involves a more critical interrogation of how the self is positioned within broader social, institutional, and power relations (Cunliffe, 2003). Feucht et al., (2017) explicitly argue that reflexivity moves beyond reflection by requiring attention to the epistemic assumptions through which teaching and knowledge are understood, and related methodological work likewise foregrounds positionality and interpretive conditions as central to reflexive inquiry.

Within teacher identity research, both reflection and reflexivity have been linked to teachers' professional becoming. Reflective engagement can help teachers reinterpret experience, revisit pedagogical beliefs, and reconstruct their understandings of who they are as teachers. For example, Farrell (2011) shows that reflection offers a productive lens on the "who" of teaching, while Yuan and Mark (2018) demonstrate how reflective learning tasks can support language teachers' identity construction in practice, discourse, and activity.

At the same time, this strand of literature remains limited in several respects. Much of the existing work has been situated in teacher education, practicum, self-study, or professional learning contexts rather than in the everyday work of novice university teachers in authentic institutional settings (e.g., Ulla et al., 2024). In addition, reflection and reflexivity are often examined through journals, interviews, or retrospective narratives, which foreground what teachers say about themselves but

reveal less about how identity is enacted through embodied and interactional practice (e.g., Truong et al., 2025). Recent reviews of language teacher research have also synthesised the interplay among identity, cognition, emotion, and agency, yet reflection and reflexivity are not systematically theorised as central mechanisms in language teacher identity formation.

This suggests a need for research that explores how reflection and reflexivity intersect with embodied, multimodal, and institutionally mediated identity work in the everyday professional lives of novice university EFL teachers. The need is particularly salient in Chinese higher education, where novice teachers' professional development is shaped not only by classroom practice, but also by hierarchical collegial relations, evaluative pressures, and competing teaching—research expectations. It is within this gap that the present study is situated. By drawing on MIA, the thesis moves beyond teachers' retrospective accounts alone and examines how identity is both reflected upon and enacted through situated interaction across classroom and institutional contexts.

2.4 Influence of Communities of Practice in Mediating Identity Development

Communities of Practice (CoP) theory, introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), emphasizes the social nature of learning and identity formation. CoPs are considered the basis for the development of knowledge and materializes as the result of interaction and co-participation among members of a community (Wenger, 1998). CoPs are intrinsically formed by "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). It argues that professional identity is shaped through active participation in communities that share common practices, goals, and knowledge. For novice teachers, entering these communities helps mediate their identity development as they learn from more experienced peers and internalize the norms, values, and practices of the community. In China, for example, cultural expectations and hierarchical structures heavily

influence how teachers participate and shape their identities within such communities (Wang & Fang, 2025). While much of the literature on teacher identity focuses on individual cognition and institutional constraints, Communities of Practice (CoP) theory foregrounds identity as socially mediated-constructed through participation, recognition, and shared meaning-making (Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Novice teachers enter professional communities where norms, values, and status hierarchies shape how they learn to "be" a teacher.

In the Chinese context, participation in CoPs is often shaped by implicit cultural expectations around deference and seniority. School–university partnerships can either constrain or scaffold identity development depending on institutional power dynamics(Wang & He, 2022; Ye et al., 2025). Similarly, Zhong and Craig (2020) found that online communities also supported the negotiation of identities. Building on these insights, Gao and Cui (2021) employed metaphors to model identity as a dynamic, recursive process, highlighting the significance of community support in identity transformation. In intercultural or multilingual contexts, identity construction becomes even more complex. Gong and Gao (2024) identified how teachers navigated between roles, such as "cultural transmitter" and "multicultural mediator," shaped by their beliefs and institutional demands. Further, Xiong et al. (2024) revealed that English-medium instruction (EMI) teachers displayed agency by positioning themselves as translanguagers, content and L2 instructors, and culturally responsive educators-roles negotiated within the intersection of international curricula and local expectations.

2.5 Rationale for the Present Study

Despite significant contributions to the field, three key gaps remain.

First, most studies have focused on primary and secondary teachers or those in elite institutions (Ajayi, 2011; Soycan, 2023; Teng & Yip, 2022), leaving little understanding of novice EFL teachers in second-tier Chinese universities, who face limited mentorship, unclear promotion criteria, and pressure to publish (Lai et al., 2016; Xie & Teo, 2020; Zheng & Choi, 2024).

Second, while diverse qualitative methods, such as interviews (Smith, 2025), journals (Cheung, 2014), metaphor analysis (Yuan & Burns, 2017), and arts-based reflections (Harasym et al., 2024; McKay, 2021) have been used to explore teacher identity, Kayi-Aydar (2019) and Zhang (2025) have contributed valuable insights into teacher identity. However, their reliance on retrospective, self-narrative methods restricts the scope for examining how identity is constructed through real-time classroom interactions. Even where quantitative measures are applied, such as identity-related self-efficacy scales (Beijaard et al., 2000; Hanna et al., 2019), they rarely provide the fine-grained, situated perspective needed to examine how teacher identity is constructed through embodied classroom interaction. By contrast, MIA enables systematic and replicable analysis of real-time interaction, offering methodological transparency and precision largely absent in earlier approaches.

Third, a growing body of research demonstrates that MIA is effective in capturing how meaning and participation are co-constructed through gaze, gesture, posture, voice, and spatial arrangements in classrooms, thereby illuminating the multimodal foundations of identity work (e.g., Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Brône et al., 2017; Kress, 2011; Papen & Peach, 2021; Wilmes & Siry, 2021). A smaller strand of studies has applied MIA more directly to teacher identity, including investigations of novice or pre-service teachers (Bernad-Mechó, 2023) and analyses of frozen actions that materialise identity in classroom arrangements (Matelau, 2013; Norris & Makboon, 2015). Yet this literature remains largely short-term and Western-based. In contrast, Xu (2014) found that research on Chinese university teachers has tended to adopt cross-sectional designs relying solely on discourse data, leaving the multimodal enactment of novice EFL teacher identity underexplored. This gap motivates this MIA-based, semester-long investigation of embodied identity enactment in second-tier Chinese universities.

In response to these gaps, the present thesis investigates how novice university EFL teachers in second-tier Chinese institutions construct their professional identities through multimodal classroom interaction. Using MIA, the study tracks the identity development of focal teachers across one academic semester, examining how

embodied practices such as gesture, gaze, and head movement interact with institutional discourses and pedagogical choices. In doing so, it aims to contribute a practice-based and context-sensitive understanding of teacher identity formation, with implications for both theory and professional development in higher education.

Since MIA is foundational to this thesis, its key concepts are introduced here only briefly and are developed in greater depth in later chapters and articles. Section 3.1 explains the theoretical foundation and rationale for using MIA; Section 4.3 shows how MIA is used to analyse tensions between imagined and practised identities; Section 5.2.2 elaborates its role in examining embodied pedagogical transformation; and Section 6.4 extends this discussion to identity trajectories shaped by teaching–research tensions. Table 2 summarise how these aspects of MIA are distributed across the thesis.

Table 2 Overview of MIA Tools and Their Application Across Chapters

Chapter	Section	Discussion on MIA	Key Concepts/ Tools Discussed	Images Used and Signposting Across Chapters
Chapter 3	3.1 Theoretical Foundation and Rationale for MIA	Introduces MIA as a methodological framework for examining teacher identity. Provides rationale for using MIA in this study.	-MIA framework overview -Embodied practices -Relationship to teacher identity	Figure 1: *Theorising Vertical Identity Production: An Analytical Framework* (used in 3.2.1)
Chapter 4	4.3 Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis: Theoretical Framework	Detailed explanation of MIA, its theoretical underpinnings, and how it applies to analyzing teacher identity.	-Vertical identity production -HLAs,LLAs, frozen actions -Comparison to discourse analysis	Figure 2: *The Analytical Framework of Vertical Identity Production* Adapted from Matelau (2013, p. 263) (discussed in 4.3)

Chapter 5	5.2.2 Multimodal Strategies as Sites of Identity Construction	Explores how multimodal strategies (e.g., gestures, gaze) are used by teachers to construct their identities in real-time classroom interactions.	-Gaze, gesture, voice modulation, body language , embodied strategies in classroom	Figure 10 : *Example of Embedded Actions in Class Teaching* Figure 11: *Example of Modal Configuration & Aggregation of HLAs in Word-explaining*(used in 5.2.2)
Chapter 6	6.4 Analytical Framework: MIA	Describes the application of MIA to analyze data and identity development. Provides a detailed overview of MIA tools used in analysis.	-MIA tools: scales of action, modal configurations, vertical identity production	Figure 25 *Example of Vertical Layers of Discourse Producing Academic Identity Elements*(referenced in 6.4)

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on teacher identity, discussing its dynamic nature and the impact of cultural contexts. In the following Chapter 3, the research methodology and data collection processes will be introduced, with a particular focus on the Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) framework used to examine teacher identity in this study.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and research design adopted to investigate how novice university EFL teachers in China construct and negotiate their professional identities. Building on the theoretical discussions in Chapter 2 and the research questions set out in Chapter 1, this chapter positions MIA as the central analytical approach. MIA is particularly suited to this study because it enables the systematic examination of how identity is embodied, interactionally performed, and institutionally shaped in both classroom and interview contexts. By integrating multimodal micro-analysis with broader sociocultural and institutional discourses, the study captures the complexity of teacher identity as a dynamic, layered, and situated process.

The chapter proceeds in five sections. Section 3.1 introduces the epistemological and analytical foundations of MIA and explains its relevance for studying professional identity in Chinese higher education. Section 3.2 details the analytical tools used in this thesis, including vertical identity production, scales of action, modal configuration, and aggregation. Section 3.3 describes the research design, outlining the research site, participant recruitment, and data collection procedures, followed by ethical considerations. Section 3.4 presents the workflow for data processing, multimodal transcription, and analysis. Finally, Section 3.5 reflects critically on methodological choices, addressing the strengths and challenges of applying MIA in this context.

3.1 Theoretical Foundation and Rationale for using MIA

This study investigates how novice university EFL teachers in Chinese higher education enact and develop professional identities in real time over a semester, under publish-or-perish institutional pressures and culturally embedded expectations of authority. In this context, identity is not a fixed attribute or purely cognitive state but a situated, embodied, and interactionally negotiated process distributed across talk, bodily conduct, spatial configuration, and engagement with material artifacts.

These features require an analytical approach that can attend to the full range of semiotic resources through which identity is enacted, as well as capture how such enactment evolves across lessons and weeks.

Activity Theory (AT) conceptualises human activity as a system involving subjects, tools, community, rules, and division of labour (Engeström, 2001). It provides a valuable framework for understanding identity formation in terms of contradictions and tensions within professional practice, especially in institutional settings. However, AT was not adopted as the primary analytical framework because the present study focuses on the real-time, embodied enactment of identity rather than on modelling activity systems at a broader structural level. While AT is well suited to identifying systemic contradictions, MIA offers a closer methodological fit for analysing how identity is negotiated through talk, gaze, gesture, posture, spatial positioning, and material engagement in specific moments of interaction. AT is therefore acknowledged here as a valuable complementary perspective, but MIA was selected as the principal framework for analysing multimodal identity work in this thesis.

In Chinese university classrooms, novice EFL teachers often navigate between entrenched teacher-centred norms and policy-driven student-centred reforms. Their identity work is accomplished not only through language but also through gaze, gesture, posture, movement, and the use of teaching artifacts. MIA conceptualises these as interconnected semiotic resources, enabling the analysis of how teachers negotiate competing role expectations in the moment. Another reason for adopting MIA is its capacity to move beyond the limitations of self-reported data that dominate research in Chinese higher education. While interviews offer valuable insights into teachers' beliefs, they may obscure the real-time negotiation of authority, rapport, and stance. By combining reflective accounts with interactional evidence, MIA reveals the embodied and material processes through which identities are enacted. For example, in a grammar explanation on the present perfect tense, a teacher shifted gaze from students to the board, picked up chalk, and wrote "have/has + past participle" while verbally emphasising key points. These lower-level actions

formed the higher-level action of instructing, with the written formula remaining as a frozen action—stabilising her identity as a knowledgeable instructor and providing students with an enduring reference. In an interview setting, another teacher leaned forward, made a circular hand motion, and glanced upward before saying "I believe that…", with a lesson-planning notebook placed prominently on the table. Even without verbal mention, this frozen action contributed to the performance of a reflective and prepared professional identity.

MIA's integration of multimodal micro-analysis with material and discursive context makes it particularly suited to examining how novice Chinese EFL teachers navigate tensions between institutional performativity, Confucian role expectations, and student-centred pedagogies as these tensions unfold in classroom interaction.

Beyond Norris' s foundational work, MIA-informed and multimodal classroom studies have also shown the value of analysing embodied and material resources in educational interaction, including participation, identity positioning, and pedagogical meaning-making (e.g., Matelau, 2013; Bernad-Mechó, 2023; Norris & Makboon, 2015; Wilmes & Siry, 2021). While this section establishes the broader theoretical and methodological rationale for adopting MIA, a more detailed discussion of how MIA has been mobilised in classroom-based educational research, and how its analytical tools are operationalised in the present thesis, is provided in Section 5.2. In particular, Section 5.2 expands on the use of scales of action, modal configuration, and modal aggregation to examine how teacher identity is enacted through multimodal classroom interaction. This distribution reflects the thesis-by-publication structure of the dissertation, in which the overarching rationale is introduced here and the more fine-grained article-level application is developed in later chapters.

3.2 Analytical tools and application of MIA to identity

This thesis applies several analytical tools within MIA, each adapted to address the research questions and the different data types in the three core studies. Table 3 explains each research question is addressed across more than one article, reflecting the iterative and interconnected nature of the three empirical studies. MIA tools are

applied flexibly to different data types depending on the analytic focus of each article.

Table 3 Mapping Research Questions to MIA Tools, Data Sources, and Articles

Research Question	Core Focus	Data Sources	MIA Tools	Articles
RQ1	How do novice EFL teachers enact their professional identities in real time?	-Video-recorded classroom data -Semi-structured interviews	-Vertical Identity Production	Article I&II
RQ2	What multimodal strategies do novice teachers use to negotiate their roles and pedagogical tensions?	-Video-recorded classroom data -Semi-structured interviews	- Scales of Action -Modal Configuration & Aggregation -Higher-level Action Bundles	Article II&III
RQ3	How do institutional discourses mediate identity construction among novice university EFL teachers?	-Video-recorded classroom data -Semi-structured interviews	- Vertical Identity Production -Discourse Layering	Article I&III

3.2.1 Vertical Identity Production

This study employs vertical identity production (Norris, 2011, 2020; Matelau, 2013; Christensson, 2018) to examine how identity is simultaneously constructed at three interconnected levels of discourse.

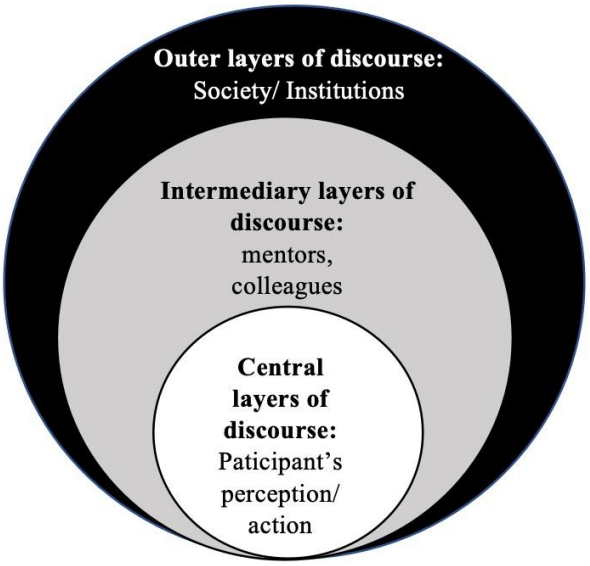

Figure 1 Theorising Vertical Identity Production: An Analytical Framework

Figure 1 illustrate the analytical framework of vertical identity production. At the central layer, identity emerges moment-to-moment in interaction, such as when a teacher's confident tone and board-writing position her as a knowledgeable instructor. The intermediary layer reflects the influence of professional and personal networks, mentors, colleagues, or peers, whose feedback and expectations stabilise or unsettle the teacher's sense of self over time. The outer layer encompasses macro-level forces such as institutional policies, evaluation regimes, and cultural ideologies that shape what counts as "good teaching" or "successful research." The strength of this framework lies in its capacity to connect micro-level embodied practices with broader institutional discourses. It enables longitudinal tracing of identity trajectories, makes visible the interaction between immediate classroom practice and wider structures, and accommodates both interview and classroom data. Yet the approach is methodologically demanding, requiring fine-grained transcription and interpretive rigor. To strengthen validity, this study employed triangulation across researchers, iterative coding, and member reflections with participants.

As discussed in Section 3.1, MIA provides a lens to analyze identity as a dynamic, embodied, and contextually mediated process, extending beyond discourse analysis to include bodily actions, gaze, gesture, posture, and the use of material

artifacts. Figure 1 directly connects these MIA elements to EFL teacher identity formation by visually representing how identity is enacted at multiple levels. At the central layer, identity is formed through immediate, real-time classroom interactions. These are immediate identity elements, which directly reflect the teacher's role in the classroom as a social actor. For example, a teacher's confident tone and body language during instruction position them as an authoritative figure. Lower-level mediated actions (LLAs), like a teacher's gaze, posture, and gestures, combine to form higher-level actions (HLAs), such as explaining a concept or managing student participation, which contribute to the teacher's teaching identity.

The intermediary layer focuses on the influence of professional and personal networks, such as feedback and expectations from colleagues, mentors, and peers. This layer produces continuous identity elements, which are shaped over time through ongoing interactions and reflections. For example, positive feedback from a mentor about classroom management can reinforce the teacher's competence identity. Constructive criticism or advice, on the other hand, can lead the teacher to adjust their practices, thereby affecting how they internalize their professional role and develop their professional identity.

The outer layer encompasses broader societal and institutional forces, such as cultural ideologies, academic policies, and performance expectations, which influence the teacher's role in the broader educational system. This layer produces general identity elements, which are shaped by overarching societal norms and institutional structures. For instance, a teacher may face pressure to prioritize research over teaching in a performance-driven academic environment, leading to identity fragmentation between their roles as a teacher and as a researcher. These competing expectations from the outer layer complicate the teacher's identity formation and may create tension between personal aspirations and institutional demands, impacting their institutional identity.

By mapping these layers of identity production, Figure 1 visually illustrates how EFL teacher identity formation is a continuous negotiation between immediate identity elements, formed through classroom actions (central layer), continuous

identity elements, shaped by feedback from networks (intermediary layer), and general identity elements, influenced by institutional and cultural expectations (outer layer). These layers work together to shape the teacher's evolving professional identity over time.

In this thesis, Article I and III have utilised vertical identity production to examine the central, intermediary, and outer layers of discourse. Article I focuses on the article "*Imagined versus practised professional identity development: A Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis of a Chinese novice English teacher" (Multimodal Communication, 13(3), 397–414)."* This article aims to investigate how the imagined identities of novice teachers, shaped by their aspirations, prior educational experiences, and societal expectations, interact with institutional power structures during the initial stages of teaching. Through three rounds of video-recorded interviews, the vertical identity framework was applied to trace how Caroline negotiated identity across the central, intermediary, and outer layers of discourse.

Article III features the article *"Balancing dual roles: Multimodal insights into EFL teachers' identity development in China's performance-driven academia" (currently under review)*. It extends vertical identity production analysis to examine how early-career university EFL teachers manage identity fragmentation amid dual demands of teaching and research by drawing on multimodal interview data from four participants (Caroline, Daisy, Mandy, and Yable).

In sum, Figure 1 functions as both a conceptual and analytical tool throughout the thesis, connecting the core elements of MIA to the process of EFL teacher identity formation. By linking the theoretical underpinnings of MIA to real-world classroom interactions and institutional pressures, the diagram offers a clear and comprehensive framework for understanding how novice teachers' identities are shaped and re-shaped over time in the context of Chinese higher education.

3.2.2 Scales of action, modal configuration, and modal aggregation

The concept of scales of action captures how smaller mediated actions are embedded within larger ones, offering a means to trace the relationship between

micro-level practices and broader pedagogical objectives (Norris, 2017). This analytical perspective enables the disentangling of complex classroom activity by linking discrete, moment-to-moment behaviours, such as asking a question, shifting gaze, or providing feedback, to the higher-level actions of which they are part.

Within these higher-level actions, modal configuration refers to the hierarchical ordering of lower-level mediated actions according to their relative importance in achieving the action's trajectory. In other words, some modes (e.g., gaze, gesture, spoken language) carry greater weight than others in enabling the higher-level action to unfold as it does, and the configuration adopted can be telling of a teacher's professional identity. Modal aggregation describes the fusion of two or more lower-level mediated actions, or chains of such actions, operating at the same hierarchical level (Norris, 2020). Both concepts make visible the ways in which multiple semiotic resources are orchestrated to accomplish complex teaching activities.

In Article II, *Transforming Pedagogical Practices and Teacher Identity Through Multimodal (Inter) action Analysis: A Case Study of Novice EFL Teachers in China. Behavioural Sciences, 15(8), 1050,* these tools were applied to examine classroom teaching as a site of embodied identity construction. Multimodal transcription of two novice teachers' classroom discourse revealed how they coordinated gesture, pitch, body movement, and gaze in ways that gradually shifted their pedagogical practice from traditional lecture styles toward more interactive, student-oriented engagement. By applying the concepts of scales of action, modal configuration, and modal aggregation, Article II demonstrates how professional identity emerges through the layered organisation of multimodal action over time. Together with the other two empirical studies, it forms part of this thesis's broader contribution: placing multimodal interaction at the centre of teacher identity research and thereby revealing the complex processes through which novice university teachers in China develop and negotiate their professional selves within the constraints and affordances of their institutional and cultural contexts.

3.3 Research design

To address the three research questions outlined in Chapter 1, this study adopts a longitudinal, case-based design that combines classroom observation with semi-structured interviews. This mixed-modal approach enables both real-time and retrospective insight into identity construction processes. The research design aligns with the analytical aims of the three core articles that form the empirical backbone of this dissertation.

3.3.1 Research Site and Participants

The research site was a second-tier university located in Anhui Province with around 16,000 full-time students. It is a typical Chinese university, and its foreign language department has been recruiting at least three new English teachers each year since 2016. Most of the newly recruited have just graduated from postgraduate schools. This fact makes it possible to easily find the prospective participant teachers. Participant recruitment was conducted between March 1 and July 19, 2022. Four early-career EFL teachers were initially recruited based on three key criteria: (1) they were novice teachers within the first five years of their teaching careers; (2) they were voluntarily participating in the study; and (3) they were teaching the College English curriculum at the research site. These criteria ensured consistency in institutional and pedagogical contexts while respecting participant agency. Such alignment enabled meaningful comparison of identity trajectories across shared teaching practices.

Table 4 A Brief Description of the Four Participants

Name	Background	Duration of teaching service
Yable	Master's degree in Linguistics, Project 985 University (2018)	From September 2018
Caroline	Master's degree in Translation, UK University (2018)	From September 2019
Daisy	Master's degree in Translation, Chinese University (2019)	From September 2019

Mandy	Master's degree in literature, Project 211 University (2021)	From September 2021

3.3.2 Data collection procedures

Data was drawn from recorded classroom observations and in-depth interviews. Both classroom teaching sessions and interviews were videotaped and audiotaped. The specific data collection methods were as follows. The steps adopted in this research were explained in detail in Norris (2019, Chapters 3 to 5).

Lesson observation of classroom interactions

The researcher observed each participant teacher's classroom teaching. In total, three lessons—conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the project (approximately 135 minutes in total, with each class lasting 45 minutes)—were observed and videotaped for each participant.

Interviews

The researcher conducted three semi-structured interviews with each participant following each classroom observation (approximately 180 minutes in total, with each interview lasting 60 minutes). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Considering that the participant teachers were native Chinese speakers, the interviews were conducted in Chinese to reduce any barriers associated with the use of a second language (Tsui, 2003).

As this thesis is presented in a thesis-by-publication format, the datasets are distributed differently across the three empirical articles. To provide a clearer overview of how the broader dataset was drawn upon in each article, Table 5 summarises the participants, data types, number of rounds and approximate duration of each study.

Table 5 Overview of datasets used across the three articles

Article (Chapter)	Main analytical focus	Participants	Data source	Data scope

Article I (Chapter 4)	Imagined and practised professional identities	Caroline	Video-recorded interviews	3 interview; approx. 180 minutes in total (3 × 60 min)
Article II (Chapter 5)	Multimodal pedagogical practices and identity enactment	Mandy and Yable	Video-recorded classroom -teaching	3 classroom observations per participant (beginning, middle, end) Approx. 270 minutes in total (2 participants × 3 lessons × 45 min)
Article III (Chapter 6)	Academic identity, institutional pressure, and role negotiation	Caroline, Daisy, Mandy, and Yable	Video-recorded interviews	3 interview rounds per participant Approx. 720 minutes in total (4 participants × 3 interviews × 60 min)

3.3.3 Ethics

All participants provided written informed consent after receiving a clear explanation of the research aims, procedures, and their rights. Participants gave explicit consent for the use of their professional English names in transcripts and reports, which are non-identifiable and used to ensure anonymity. No identifiable student data was collected, and classroom recordings focused exclusively on teachers' practices. All digital data were encrypted and securely stored, and member-checking was conducted to allow participants to review selected excerpts and interpretations, ensuring accuracy and respectful representation.

3.4 Data Processing and Multimodal Analysis procedures

Data analysis was grounded in MIA and proceeded through iterative phases.

3.4.1 Phase 1: Data Familiarisation and Preparation

For each participant, three full-length classroom sessions were video-recorded using two fixed-position cameras and external microphones to capture both visual and auditory detail. Lessons followed the standard syllabus without researcher intervention, thereby preserving ecological validity (Cicourel, 2007). Post-session

interviews were conducted after each class to contextualise the observations.

3.4.2 Phase 2: Demarcating Higher-Level Mediated Actions (HLAs)

In MIA, mediated action is the central unit of analysis, and the distinction between lower-level, higher-level, and frozen actions enables the examination of how social actors coordinate multiple modes in real time (Norris, 2004, 2020). Although HLAs can be traced analytically on a timeline, their boundaries are not determined mechanically by the cessation of a single utterance, gesture, or movement. Instead, they are identified through converging multimodal and interactional evidence.

Drawing on Norris (2019), all activity was segmented into HLAs, each composed of interlinked LLAs, such as gaze shifts, gestures, or verbal utterances. HLAs were defined by clear start and end points, with LLAs mapped within them. HLAs of similar type across teachers (e.g., "explaining grammar" or "eliciting responses") were compared to identify variation in modal orchestration and identity enactment.

A higher-level action was considered to begin when participants' talk, gaze, posture, gesture, spatial orientation, and engagement with objects became coordinated toward a relatively coherent immediate purpose. Its end point was identified when the previously foregrounded action no longer organised participants' attention and conduct, and another course of social action became focal. In practice, this judgement drew on several indicators: whether a relatively coherent interactional goal had been achieved; whether the chain of lower-level actions sustaining the action had ceased or been reconfigured; and whether participants' alignment had shifted, as shown through changes in gaze direction, body orientation, topic, participation framework, spatial arrangement, or material focus. In this sense, the end point of an HLA was determined not simply by the stopping of behaviour, but by a shift in the multimodal organisation of action.

This interpretation is consistent with the MIA view that higher-level actions may overlap, vary in duration and structure, and be differently foregrounded by participants at particular moments (Norris, 2004, 2009). Thus, "clear start and end

points" should not be understood as meaning that boundaries are always absolute or self-evident. Rather, the term refers to the presence of sufficient interactional and multimodal evidence to justify treating one action as having reached relative closure for analytic purposes.

The notion of the site of engagement is also useful here, as it refers to the real-time intersection of social practices and mediational means that make a particular action the focal point of participants' attention (Scollon, 2001; Norris & Jones, 2005). When this focal organisation shifted, the prior HLA was treated as having moved into the background and a new one as having emerged in the foreground.

Table 6 shows the delineation of Participant A's Teaching Episodes in Session 1 (Reading instruction delivery). In Caroline's Week 3 lesson, the HLA "reading instruction delivery" began when she turned to the board and picked up chalk, and ended when she moved away and addressed a new topic. This action contained LLAs such as gaze to students, writing on the board, pointing to examples, and verbal elaboration—together constructing a confident, knowledgeable teacher identity.

Table 6 Higher Level Mediated Action Table of an Exemplary Data Set

Developed by the author (2025)

Time stamp in video at the beginning of a higher-level mediated action	Brief description of a higher-level mediated action
00:00-01:11	The teacher entering the classroom and saying she will play a listening material for students
01:12-05.44	Teacher playing the listening material and explaining vocabularies simultaneously for detail: 01:12-01:40 teacher stop playing the recording , begins to explain the key word in the answer sheet (for some hints) 01:40-01:52 teacher is playing the recording 01:52-2:23 teacher is explaining what the answer should be 01:52–02:23: The teacher is explaining the correct answer. The listening session follows a cycle where the teacher plays a segment of the audio, pauses to explain the correct answer, and then continues with the next part. (06:30–07:10) After the listening activity ends, the teacher transitions to the reading section. During this time, a brief review of the content covered in the previous lesson is conducted.
07:34-07:50	teacher is asking students to listen to the whole passage and trying to find the main idea of the text ((English and Chinese speaking both)
07:51-14:40	the teacher is playing the audio, and reading the passage at the same time,also writing sth on the book
14:48-16.40	the teacher is asking question "what's the main idea", and then giving some hints for students to follow (such as scanning first and last paragraph)
16.41-20:07	the teacher is giving students several minutes to think about the questions/ the teacher is reading the book and watching how students are discussing /also,teacher is trying to give students some hints during students search process for answers
20:10-20:39	the teacher is asking students to answer the questions again (but students give no feedback)/ since students give no feed back, the teacher is trying to give some hints in Chinese again
20:40-21:56	the teacher is asking "anyone" (trying to get students answers)
21:57-23:10	the teacher is asking "have u figure out the main idea?",also use in Chines again.
23:18-24:08	the teacher is asking student1 answer the question, (and the student1 is giving her answer) ,also the teacher is give feedback at the same time (repeat the students answers and confirm)

To enhance analytic transparency, HLAs were marked only when multiple modal and interactional indicators aligned. Where boundaries were ambiguous, I adopted a cautious interpretive principle, relying on the continuity of the surrounding interaction rather than on any isolated cue. This approach grounds the identification of HLAs in observable shifts in social action, attention, and multimodal organisation rather than in purely intuitive segmentation.

3.4.3 Phase 3: Bundling HLAs

Once identified, HLAs were grouped into functional bundles to highlight recurrent pedagogical practices (e.g., "eliciting student responses," "content demonstration"). Bundling enabled the connection of micro-level identity enactments to meso-level professional networks and macro-level institutional discourses, in line with the vertical identity production framework introduced in Section 3.2.1. frequency patterns of bundles across sessions provided insights into both continuity and change in identity trajectories.

3.4.4 Phase 4: Micro-analysis of Selected Excerpts

From the full dataset, representative HLAs were selected for micro-analysis based on their salience to identity construction and their capacity to illustrate developmental shifts. This stage focused on how multiple modes—such as gesture, gaze, speech—and proxemics combined to realise identity-relevant behaviours in context.

3.4.5 Phase 5: Multimodal Transcription Procedures

The transcription process was tailored to the study's analytical aims, following MIA principles (Norris, 2004, 2019, 2020) and implemented in three sequential steps:

Step 1: Mode Identification

For each selected episode, analytically relevant modes were defined: spoken language, gesture, gaze, head movement, posture, facial expression, proxemics, object handling, and layout. Selection was based on each mode's contribution to identity construction in that moment. Identifying a mode involves conducting a micro analysis of the modes used to produce higher-level actions can make visible the discourses and practices that intersect with the mediated actions and mediational means within a site of engagement (Matelau & Sagapolutele, 2023).

The concept of site of engagement refers to specific locations or contexts where identity is enacted and constructed. Norris (2002a) expands this notion by defining it as: "A site of engagement is the real-time window opened through the intersection of social practices and mediational means that bring lower (or higher) level actions into focus for the participants, and radiate outward, encompassing those practices and mediational means that make less focused or unfocused actions emerge as less central to the participants' attention." The key point in this definition is that actions occur on a continuum, from focused actions (those that engage participants' attention directly) to less focused or unfocused actions (those that are peripheral or backgrounded).

In educational settings, a site of engagement can be a classroom, a particular

teaching moment, or an interaction between students and teachers. It emphasizes how identity is negotiated within these spaces through interaction, often influenced by the institutional and cultural frameworks in which these interactions are embedded. By analyzing the modes used in these interactions, MIA can trace how teachers' identities are constructed, not just through words but also through embodied practices like gestures, posture, and gaze, which align with or challenge institutional expectations.

Step 2: Mode-Specific Transcription

Each mode was transcribed independently (e.g., spoken language with intonation and pauses, gestures classified as iconic, metaphoric, or deictic, gaze direction annotated, posture and proxemics documented with still images).

Step 3: Integrated Transcripts

Mode-specific transcripts were merged into composite multimodal transcripts aligned to a shared timeline, supplemented with still images to illustrate modal coordination. To support accuracy, software tools were used: Premiere Pro (Adobe Inc., 2023) for frame-by-frame video analysis, Praat for acoustic analysis (Boersma & Weenink, 2023) , and Excel (Microsoft Corporation, 2021) for coding and logging. This workflow ensured that identity enactment could be traced across layers of talk, embodiment, and spatial organisation.

In the final stage of analysis, recurrent multimodal and interactional patterns identified through micro-analysis were synthesised into higher-level thematic interpretations. Through cross-modal comparison and triangulation with interview data, these patterns were connected to broader institutional and developmental contexts, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers' multimodal practices reflected and negotiated their emerging professional identities. This integrative phase provided the analytical bridge between fine-grained multimodal analysis and the interpretive discussions presented in the following chapters.

3.5 Methodological Reflections

The methodological design of this study was guided by the need to capture teacher identity as a dynamic, embodied, and socially situated phenomenon. MIA was indispensable because of its ability to connect micro-level embodied actions—such as gesture, gaze, and spatial orientation—with macro-level institutional and sociocultural structures. This integrative capacity goes beyond what self-reported data or discourse analysis alone can offer, as it reveals not only what teachers say about their identities but also how they enact and negotiate them in real time.

An essential component of this methodological approach was reflexivity, particularly given the researcher' s insider position as a novice university English teacher in China. In teacher education literature, reflexivity is understood as more than reflection on experience; it involves critical awareness of how the researcher's epistemic assumptions, positionality, and social location shape the production and interpretation of knowledge (Feucht et al., 2017). In qualitative inquiry, reflexivity requires researchers to examine how their prior experiences, values, and interpretive orientations may influence what is noticed in the field, how interactions are conducted, and how meanings are subsequently constructed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). It was therefore important to make explicit how the researcher' s positionality shaped both access to the field and the interpretive process in this study.

The dissertation's three empirical articles were developed as information-oriented case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006), prioritising analytical depth over statistical generalisability. Conducting research in authentic classroom and institutional settings ensured ecological validity (Cicourel, 2007). It enabled a fine-grained understanding of how professional identities evolve within the actual constraints and affordances of practice. The insider position of the researcher, as a novice university English teacher in China, was another methodological asset. This positionality facilitated rapport, reduced hierarchical distance, and encouraged candid and reflective dialogue, particularly during interviews. Such relational proximity provided access to perspectives that might have remained concealed in more distanced researcher–participant interactions.

Reflexivity was also important in the interpretation of multimodal data. Because multimodal analysis requires fine-grained judgments about which embodied actions become analytically salient, it was necessary to remain attentive to how the researcher' s familiarity with the classroom context, expectations about novice teachers, and emotional resonance with participants' experiences might shape interpretation. Rather than claiming interpretive neutrality, this study sought to make the researcher' s interpretive role more visible and accountable throughout the research process. In practice, this reflexive stance was sustained through repeated revisiting of focal episodes, iterative coding, comparison of classroom observations and interview accounts, and grounding interpretations in participants' own narratives as well as interactional evidence.

The methodology was not without challenges. The scale of multimodal data and the demands of detailed transcription required selective focus, while linking micro-level multimodal performances to macro-level institutional narratives risked oversimplification. These challenges were addressed through careful sampling of focal episodes, iterative coding, and triangulation across data sources. Importantly, interpretations were grounded in both observed practices and participants' own accounts, which safeguarded analytical validity and reflexivity.

In sum, the methodological contribution of this study lies in its demonstration that MIA, combined with ethnographic sensitivity, provides an irreplaceable lens for investigating teacher identity. It captures the embodied and material dimensions of identity work, situates them within institutional structures, and foregrounds the lived complexity of novice teachers' professional trajectories—dimensions that would remain inaccessible through conventional discursive or survey-based methods.

This chapter introduces the theoretical foundation, methodological framework, and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides the initial analytical entry point by examining how one novice teacher negotiates tensions between imagined and practised identities within a hierarchical institutional environment. As the first article in the thesis, it lays the conceptual foundation for the subsequent chapters by showing how identity tensions emerge at the intersection of personal

aspiration and institutional expectation.

CHAPTER FOUR ARTICLE I: IMAGINED VERSUS PRACTISED PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: A MULTIMODAL (INTER)ACTION ANALYSIS OF A CHINESE NOVICE ENGLISH TEACHER

Zhou, J., Tennant, L. & Matelau, T. (2024). Imagined versus practised professional identity development: a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis of a Chinese novice English teacher. *Multimodal Communication*, 13(3), 397-414. https://doi.org/10.1515/mc-2024-0043

The article I was accepted for publication in *Multimodal Communication*. The candidate contributed approximately 90% of the work, including conceptualisation, analysis, and drafting. Minor edits were made to formatting and figures for consistency with this thesis.

Article I explores how imagined professional identities evolve in response to institutional constraints, addressing Research Questions 1 and 3. It investigates how novice university EFL teachers construct and negotiate their professional identities through interactional and embodied practices during their early career (RQ1), and how these processes are mediated by institutional and sociocultural discourses such as hierarchical power structures and collegial dynamics (RQ3).

The article focuses on a single participant, Caroline, and examines the identity tensions she experienced while navigating conflicting expectations within a rigid institutional environment. Framed through the lens of vertical identity production (Norris, 2011, 2019), identity is conceptualised as constructed across three interconnected layers of discourse: the central layer (individual self and immediate action), the intermediary layer (interpersonal and professional networks), and the outer layer (societal and institutional discourses). This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of how novice teachers perform identity in ways shaped by both internal aspiration and external constraint.

In the field of teacher identity research, two key dimensions are particularly

relevant to this article: (1) the interplay between imagined and practised identities (Norton, 2010) and (2) the influence of institutional discourses and evaluative regimes on identity construction (Clarke, 2008; Lap et al., 2022). Imagined identities, as defined by Norton (2001), refer to the teacher's envisioned self, often shaped by past learning experiences and future aspirations. These imagined selves frequently come into tension with the demands of the institutional context, particularly for novice teachers (Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Empirical data consist of three rounds of semi-structured, video-recorded interviews conducted over a five-month period. These interviews function not merely as retrospective accounts but as real-time sites of identity enactment, analysed through MIA (Norris, 2004, 2011, 2019, 2020). The analysis attends to both linguistic and embodied modes, including gaze, posture, gesture, and voice quality, to trace how identity was negotiated in relation to institutional discourses and personal aspirations.

The findings reveal significant tensions between Caroline's initial idealistic views of teaching and the realities she encountered within her professional environment. Her imagined teacher identity, shaped by prior educational experiences and societal expectations, conflicted with the demands of her actual teaching role, which was heavily influenced by cultural norms that prioritise hierarchy and seniority. This conflict manifested in her struggles to integrate into established teacher communities and the emotional resilience required to cope with exclusion and resistance from senior colleagues. This conflict became particularly evident in her embodied responses, such as a downcast gaze and hesitant gestures, when recounting moments of marginalisation or resistance from senior colleagues.

In summary, Article I contributes both methodologically and conceptually. Methodologically, it demonstrates the affordances of vertical identity analysis in capturing the layered dynamics of identity-in-interaction. Conceptually, it foregrounds how imagined professional identities are continuously reshaped through embodied negotiation with institutional discourse. It reveals that identity formation is not simply internal or discursive—it is also evident in gesture, voice, and silence, and is shaped by structural conditions as much as by personal intent. This article underscores the

value of targeted mentorship programs and calls for a holistic support ecosystem.

Abstract: The journey from a novice to an established educator is fraught with challenges that significantly impact the development of a professional identity. This study examines the experiences of novice university English language teachers in China, focusing on Caroline, an early career teacher who navigates the challenge of navigating a high-power-distance culture and integrating into established teaching communities. Employing Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA), this research offers a nuanced examination of the interplay between Caroline's imagined and practised identities. The findings reveal the complexities of her identity formation, highlighting struggles with exclusion, resistance from senior colleagues, and the reconciliation of her aspirations with professional realities. The study advocates for a comprehensive approach to teacher training and support, emphasising the need for emotional resilience, personal growth, and the integration of theory with practice. It suggests targeted mentorship, the creation of supportive ecosystems, and the adaptation of educational policies to better prepare novice educators for the multifaceted challenges of the teaching profession. This case study contributes to the global discourse on teacher identity formation, offering insights that can inform the development of more effective support structures for novice teachers, thus enhancing the quality of education.

keywords: Novice teachers; Teacher identity development; Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis; High-power-distance culture

4.1 Introduction

In recent decades, teacher identity has been recognised as a dynamic and socially situated construct, with important implications for teacher education and professional development (Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). As outlined in Chapter 2, identity formation involves ongoing negotiation between individual aspirations, institutional structures, and cultural contexts.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the present article focuses specifically

on the Chinese higher education context, where novice teachers face high expectations for research output and teaching excellence within a hierarchical and high-pressure environment (Lai et al., 2014). These challenges are compounded by cultural traits like high-power-distance, which emphasises the authority of seniority (Hofstede, 2001). Newly graduated teachers face challenges in their first year of teaching, including managing relationships, maintaining classroom control, mastering teaching techniques, and upholding professionalism (Hamman et al., 2010). Moreover, resistance or exclusion from colleagues can hinder the formation of their ideal teacher identity, complicating their integration into the educational community and emphasising the vulnerability of novice teachers during this transitional period (Duan & Liu, 2020; Yuan, 2019).

This study, therefore, applies Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) to compare imagined and practised teacher identity in the case of Caroline, a novice university English teacher navigating a high-power-distance and hierarchical institutional environment.

4.2 Literature review

4.2.1 Teacher identity and identity conflict

Teacher identity is a multifaceted and dynamic concept that encompasses the various roles teachers assume within different social and cultural contexts (Duff & Uchida 1997; Richards 2006). Teacher identities are shaped by teachers' self-perceptions and their understanding of the world (Brown & McNamara, 2011; Dillabough, 1999), which in turn serve as a lens through which they interpret their roles and responsibilities within the educational setting (Gee et al., 2001). Teacher identity is characterised by fluidity, contradictions, development, and contingency (Rodgers & Scott 2008). Fluidity relates to how identity adapts over time (Beauchamp & Thomas 2009), while contradictions emerge from varied roles and expectations. Development is linked to experience and professional growth (Beijaard et al., 2004), and contingency reflects adaptation to specific circumstances (Day et al., 2006). Within this framework, the significance of "imagined identity" lies in its

representation of an individual's outlook on the potential self in the future, serving as a source of motivation and action (Wenger, 1998). The formation of "practised identity", on the other hand, signifies the materialisation of these imaginations through daily practices in the real world, reflecting the product of individuals' interactions and experiences within specific socio-cultural contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Identity formation is a complex process that often involves internal struggles and conflicts. This complexity is manifested within different socio-cultural contexts, highlighting culture's role in shaping identity (Edwards & Edwards, 2017; Erikson, 1968). For example, individuals in collectivist settings are more likely to prioritise group harmony and social obligations over personal aspirations, leading to unique challenges in identity formation (Cross et al., 2003; Suh, 2002), while participants in the individualistic self-prime condition generated more private self-concepts (Hong et al., 2001). Furthermore, Côté (2016) introduced the idea of "identity capital," suggesting that identity formation is linked not just to self-exploration, but also to social resources and positions. They emphasised that an individual's identity is multifaceted, potentially could be congruent or conflicting. This theoretical backdrop sets the stage for a deeper investigation into identity conflicts, particularly within the high-power cultural context of China.

Identity conflict is conceptualised as a state of internal discord that arises when an individual grapples with multiple, often competing, facets of identity (Marcia, 1980; Schwartz et al., 2011). This conflict is categorised into intrapersonal, arising from incongruence between one's self-conceptions and aspirations (Ibarra, 1999; Kroger & Marcia, 2011), and interpersonal, emerging from clashes between self-perception and societal expectations (Hong et al., 2018). Existing research on teacher identity conflict has made significant contributions but leaves room for further exploration. For instance, competing and authoritative discourses such as the discourse of the school district's scripted program and the discourse of the university's comprehensive literacy, clash with teachers' understanding of teaching (Legard Larson & Kalmbach Phillips, 2005). Similarly, pre-service teachers often

construct divisions between identities presented during their practicum, possibly hindering their professional development, yet this study does not delve into suggestions to address these conflicts. Further analysis indicates that EFL teachers confront conflicts between their personal beliefs and external expectations (Eslamdoost et al., 2020). Moreover, conflicts deeply affect the emotional and internal world of novice teachers, shaping their identity construction (Ghiasvand et al., 2023).

4.2.2 Identity conflicts in novice teachers

Conflicts encountered by novice teachers can be categorised into three major themes. Firstly, conflicts arising from differences in educational backgrounds. Prior school learning shapes novice teachers' initial teaching beliefs, which often evolve negatively upon confronting various contextual realities, impacting their views on teacher identity establishment (Huang et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers who complete their teacher education abroad can experience significant isolation (Alkubaidi, 2022). Secondly, conflicts between teaching and research duties. Novice researchers frequently encounter confusion, uncertainty, and overwhelm due to the intricacies of qualitative research, including data management, maintaining participant relationships, and adhering to methodologies (Kalman, 2019). Moreover, Bao and Feng (2022) noted initial identity conflicts for English teachers within a domestic visiting program. The participants in their research transitioned from feelings of being 'unreconciled dreamers' to becoming 'fulfilled research practitioners,' indicating a significant shift towards positive professional identity alignments. Though the mechanisms behind these transformations remain under-explored. These challenges can conflict with their evolving professional identities. Third, conflicts concerning different teaching approaches. Complications arise when reconciling differences between personal beliefs in effective teaching approaches and those existing in schools (Farrell, 2006). Similarly, novice teachers struggle with authority to experiment with personally developed teaching techniques, facing challenges in implementing their ideas or achieving ideal teaching conditions

(Goktepe & Kunt, 2021).

4.2.3 Teacher identity conflicts in China's high-power culture

China, traditionally influenced by Confucian values, is characterised by a high-power-distance culture that respects hierarchy and centralises power (Hofstede, 2001). In this context, teachers are often viewed as authoritative, fostering an environment where harmony and consensus are highly prised, sometimes at the cost of suppressing individual voices and conflicts (Zhang & Pang, 2016). Situated in the specific socialist context, the professional identities of EFL teachers are established through an endless struggle for balance between personal outlook, institutional rules, discipline, community rules, and publicly recognizable academic rules (Hao, 2011). Factors such as contract employment, an increased workload, and low morale have led to crises in academics in the Chinese mainland (Lai et al., 2014). Furthermore, novice teachers in Chinese tertiary education may face constraints that stem from institutional structures, institutional norms, and external social contexts (Wang, 2021). Similarly, high-power-distance and an emphasis on 'precious harmony' often suppress their status, power, and voices, leading to conflicts and affecting their coping strategies and professional growth (Hou et al., 2023). Moreover, four types of identity negotiation have been identified—ranging from identity conflict to integration—mediated by emotional resilience: the disheartened performer, the miserable follower, the strenuous accommodator, and the fulfilled integrator and voices of these novice teachers, affecting their coping strategies and professional growth (Yang et al., 2022). Despite these valuable insights, there exists a significant gap in understanding how cultural norms and societal expectations shape the identity construction process of teachers, and how teachers themselves negotiate these influences in their professional journey.

4.3 Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis: Theoretical framework

Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) is a methodological and analytical framework that was developed to analyse the actions and (inter) actions that social actors perform and engage in (Norris, 2011, p. 35). MIA builds on Wertsch's (1991)

concept of mediated action, which emphasises how social practices and actions are interconnected and hierarchically organised Scollon's (2002) framework, Mediated Discourse Analysis. Scollon (2002, p. 16) elaborates that "the mediated action (within a dialogical chain of such social actions as well as within a hierarchy of simultaneously occurring practices) is the focus of mediated discourse analysis". Mediated action is defined as social actors (s) acting or interacting with others, with or through various mediational means or cultural tools. People are social actors and the mediational means or cultural tools that they utilise can include language, thoughts, memory, emotion, body, environment, objects, culture, practices, or discourses (Norris, 2019, p. 39).

Norris (2004, p. 11) divides mediated actions into three levels: lower-level actions, as the smallest interactional meaning units; higher-level actions, as actions that are bracketed by an opening/closing and made up of a multiplicity of chained lower-level actions; and frozen actions, which are frozen in material objects. This study focuses on the higher-level actions of novice English teachers during interviews. For example, if the English teacher is describing her perception of being a college teacher during an interview, this can be recognised as a higher-level action.

Moreover, social actors produce higher-level mediated actions in connection to layers of discourse, thereby constructing diverse identity elements (Norris 2002). Norris (2011, p. 180) explains that identity construction occurs across three layers of discourse, which include the outer layers, the intermediary layers, and the central layers of discourse. Together these build "three vertical layers of an identity element; and vertical identity element production is apparent in the levels of discourse that a social actor refers to and/or enacts simultaneously", as illustrated in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Overview of Vertical Identity Production

Adapted from Christensson (2018, p. 6)

Layers of discourse	Involved in production	Identity elements produced
Outer layers	Society and institutions	General identity elements
Intermediary Layers	Immediate and extended networks	Continuous identity elements
Central Layers	Social actor	Immediate identity elements

For instance, when the participant was explaining her concept of being a college teacher, she constructed her identity at three different layers. The outer layers reflect a general identity, influenced by societal norms and institutional expectations, showcasing how broader contexts shape her professional self-view. The decision to become an English teacher, inspired by her own teachers and her family's encouragement, exemplifies identity formation through intermediary layers, where personal networks play a crucial role. Finally, her immediate perception of teaching as a relaxed profession illustrates immediate identity production, rooted in her individual experiences and understanding of the teaching role.

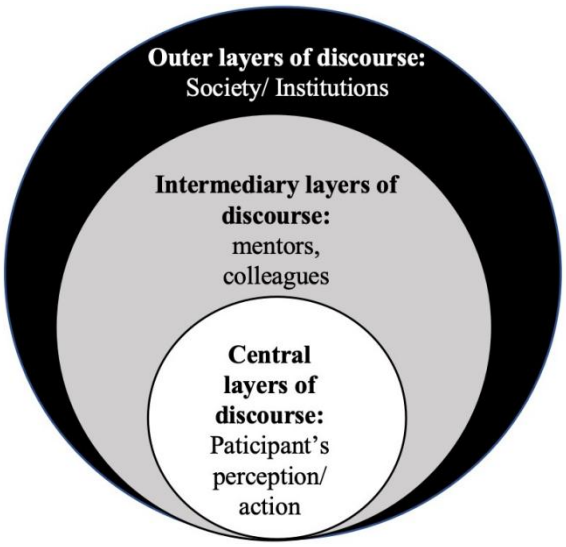

Figure 2 The Analytical Framework of Vertical Identity Production
Adapted from Matelau (2013, p. 263)

Other multimodal discourse researchers have utilised vertical identity production in their examination of identity. Matelau (2013)explored the construction of ethnic identity in New Zealand and adopted the diagram shown in Figure 2 to portray the diverse ethnic identities produced by her participants. Christensson (2019) extended the analysis to student teachers, showing how professional identities evolve beyond practical training through the layered processes of vertical identity production. Norris and Matelau-Doherty (2022) examined how a Māori (indigenous New Zealander) female artist's fluid ethnic identity challenges traditional discourses,

highlighting discrepancies in the construction of marginalised and nontraditional Māori identities.

By capturing the dynamic and layered nature of identity, the MIA framework reveals how different layers of discourse—from societal expectations to institutional pressures and individual experiences—intersect to shape the identities of novice teachers. Moreover, MIA enables a systematic analysis that moves beyond the one-dimensional focus of traditional methods, offering comprehensive insights into identity construction. It provides a replicable and reliable framework from data collection to analysis, grounded in a strong theoretical foundation (Norris, 2019).

In this study, MIA is applied to interview material to analyse the real-time interactions that occur during the interviews. Interviews are dynamic social interactions where participants actively construct and perform their identities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). This framework allows for a detailed examination of how identities are expressed and negotiated through multiple modes such as speech, gaze, gestures, and facial expressions during interviews (Jewitt, 2015). By conducting structured interviews at three intervals over a semester, this study captured the evolving nature of teachers' identities, highlighting how societal, institutional, and individual factors shape their professional journeys. For instance, when Caroline discusses her reasons for choosing to become a teacher and her outlook on her future career, these reflections are considered part of her imagined identity. This identity encompasses her aspirations, expectations, and the ideals she holds about her professional role. On the other hand, when Caroline talks about the challenges and struggles she has faced in her current work, these discussions reflect her practised identity. This identity is shaped by her real-world experiences, particularly the difficulties she encounters in her interactions with colleagues and within the institutional environment.

4.4 Study design

This section includes the research setting, participants, data collection methods, and analytical processes. It provides a detailed examination of the methodology used

to explore the vertical identity of novice university English teachers, with a particular focus on the case of Caroline, whose evolving identity is analysed through MIA.

4.4.1 Research setting and participants

Caroline's case stands out as particularly compelling for examining vertical identity, primarily due to her rich educational and professional background. Her academic journey, highlighted by an exchange program in Taiwan and advanced studies at Durham University in the UK, alongside her experience as a translator in Nanjing, China, has significantly shaped her identity. These unique experiences have endowed Caroline with a broad perspective and distinct identity conflicts, particularly evident through three rounds of interviews. Her diverse background and the depth of her identity formation challenges provide invaluable insights into the complexities of vertical identity construction. Thus, Caroline's narrative offers a detailed, nuanced exploration of how personal and professional experiences intertwine to influence a novice teacher's identity, underscoring her as an exemplary focus for this study on vertical identity.

4.4.2 Data collection

Over five months, the researcher conducted three semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with Caroline in private settings. Each interview lasted 60 minutes, the audio and video were recorded and later the selected video excerpts were transcribed. Considering that Caroline is a native Chinese speaker, the interviews were conducted in Chinese to reduce any barriers caused by a second language (Tsui, 2003).

It is important to acknowledge that the researcher played a role in shaping Caroline's novice teacher identity throughout this process. The act of engaging Caroline in reflective dialogue, responding to her narratives during the interviews contributed to an intermediary layer of discourse. The interaction between researcher and participant can create a co-constructed narrative, where the researcher becomes an active participant in the identity formation process (Pirini, 2017). Although the researcher's interaction with Caroline may have played a role in her identity development, it was not the primary focus of the study. The researcher's role was

primarily to guide her and elicit responses, rather than to influence or alter her answers.

4.4.3 Data analysis

The collection and analysis of data followed the systematic five-phase process outlined by Norris (2019, p. 271). These phases encompass data collection, delineation of data, selection of data pieces for micro analysis, transcription, and the application of analytical tools. Following the collection of video ethnography data, higher-level actions were identified in the videos, enabling the visualisation of mediated actions within each dataset and the identification of patterns across participants. To further investigate the connection between participants' mediated actions and layers of discourse, higher-level actions were analysed through the lens of vertical identity production.

Demarcating the higher-level actions

Once the interview was transcribed, the spoken language was grouped into higher-level actions. Figure 3 is an excerpt of Caroline's higher-level action table.

13.	A:你会学习西方的教学理念和方法吗? A:Will you follow the ideas and methods of western teachers in teaching? C:我不知道我有没有学习西方的方法，但我会在课堂上测试不同教学方法，然后再比较不同的教学效果 C: I don't know if I'm following their teaching methods, but I will test the effectiveness of my new teaching methods by comparing them with others.	personal actions- will test the effectiveness of teaching

Figure 3 Excerpt of Caroline's Higher-level Action

In Figure 3, the first column indicates the utterance/ higher-level action number. The middle column is the utterance excerpt from the section of the interview and the last column shows the higher-level action in connection to vertical identity production. For example, the term personal action here indicates that this action relates to the central layer of discourse.

Bundling the higher-level actions

Then the researcher bundled the higher-level actions across the interview dataset,

creating broader themes that were then applied to each interview. In this step, the researcher bundled the HLAs using vertical production: outer, intermediary, and central layers of discourse. Figure 3 is an excerpt of Caroline's bundled higher-level action table.

Caroline	outer layers
2	society inherent views shaping a presupposed teacher identity (the job of teaching is relaxing compared with other jobs)
4	previous work experience shaping determined teacher identity (previous work situation is too much burden)

Figure 4 Excerpt of Caroline's Bundled Higher-level Action

In Figure 4, the first column demonstrates how many times Caroline has displayed general identity elements shaped by different outer layers. The second column explains in detail which specific outer layer is shaping the identity.

Selecting data pieces

Following this, the researcher selected three excerpts. By demarcating and bundling higher-level actions, the analysis clarified how these identities evolve and are influenced by various layers of social interaction. Through analysing higher-level actions, the transition of Caroline's identity from her initial aspirations in the first interview (Figure 4) to its enactment in practice by the last interview (Figure 5 & Figure 6) becomes evident. The selected video frames are directly linked to Caroline's "imagined identity" and "practised identity", two concepts that become particularly important in the analysis.

Micro analysis of Higher-level actions

Based on the patterns that emerged, specific video excerpts were selected for transcription and micro-analysis. To create multimodal transcripts of these excerpts, multiple transcripts were generated to capture individual communicative modes, such as head movement, gestures, facial expressions, and gaze. These separate transcripts were then combined, and spoken language was integrated into the images, with prosodic behaviour indicated by variations in font size and "wave". The final transcripts provide a comprehensive representation of the higher-level actions under

analysis.

Identifying a Mode

Conducting a micro analysis of the modes used to produce higher-level actions can make visible the discourses and practices that intersect with the mediated actions and mediational means within a site of engagement (Matelau & Sagapolutele, 2023). A mode is defined as "a system of mediated action with regularities," (Norris 2020: 16). Furthermore, modes such as proxemics, posture, head movement, gesture, gaze, spoken language, layout, print, music, to name several, are systems of representation (Norris, 2004, p. 24). More importantly, by adopting MIA, defining a particular mode enables consistent transcription. This consistency is crucial for effectively analysing complex and intricately interconnected human (inter) actions (Norris, 2019, p. 204).

Transcribing different modes

The analysis involved transcribing various modes, including language, gesture, gaze, head movement, and facial expression in interviews. These modes work together to convey meaning and are critical to understanding how participants construct and express their identities.

Spoken language is widely regarded as the primary mode of communication. However, Norris (2004, p. 30) argues that while language is indeed important, it does not always take precedence in communication. Norris (2019, p. 225) outlines transcription conventions for spoken language, such as using commas for slight rising intonation, periods for lowering intonation, and dashes for sudden stops (glottal stops). Additionally, when transcribing spoken language multimodally to represent intonation, tools like waveforms for rhythmic patterns and font size for loudness variations are utilised (Norris, 2019, p. 226).

Gesture is defined as a mode that tells us about the way individuals hold and move their arms, hands, and fingers (Norri, 2019, p. 240). During interviews, participants often use beat gestures, hands moving up and down to make an emphasis, aligning with the prosodic rhythm of speech (McNeill, 1992).

Gaze is defined as a mode that tells us about the way individuals look at

something or someone (Norris, 2019, p. 243). For example, when a participant recalls a moment of frustration in the classroom, they may look away from the interviewer, signalling discomfort or introspection.

Head movement is defined as a mode that tells us about the way individuals hold and move their heads (Norris, 2019, p.245). For example, a participant might nod while affirming a point or shake their head when discussing a challenging experience.

Facial expression is defined as a mode that tells us about the way individuals maintain and move their expressions of the face (Norris, 2019, p. 248). During interviews, facial expressions can reveal emotions that might not be fully articulated in words. For example, a participant might furrow their brows when discussing a particularly challenging student or smile when recalling a successful lesson.

4.5 Results

In this section, multimodal transcriptions from three excerpts, taken from the first interview (Figure 5) and the third interview (Figures 6 & Figure 7), are employed to illustrate the novice teacher's imagined and practised vertical identity production.

4.5.1 Production of imagined teacher identity

Imagined identity refers to a self-concept and set of expectations that an individual constructs based on prior experiences, social understandings, and aspirations (Norton, 2013). In the context of education, it encompasses how a novice teacher perceives their role and how they anticipate this role will manifest (Varghese et al., 2005).

Figure 5 presents a transcribed excerpt from the first interview, where the participant elaborates on her imagined teacher identity, specifically detailing her preconceived ideas and perceptions of being a teacher before assuming the role.

Figure 5 Caroline's Perception of Being a College Teacher

In frames 1-3, Caroline explains "I was thinking one of", while shifting her head

and gaze away from direct eye contact with the interviewer, indicating a moment of reminiscence about her time as a student. This gaze shift aligns with Rossano's (2012) observations that people's gaze shifts based on the social actions and activities in which they are involved. The combination of gaze shift and increased voice indicates how the intermediary layers of discourse shaped her continuous imagined teacher identity element.

In frames 4-6, she continues with "the professors, he is just", pausing briefly when saying "just". Pauses in speech often reflect cognitive processing or hesitation as the speaker carefully plans their words (see e.g., Krivokapić et al., 2020). This pause suggests that Caroline carefully considered her response before concluding that a teacher's work is limited.

In frames 7-9, Caroline further remarks "doing what he loves". She moves her head from left to right, directing her gaze towards the interviewer. This shift in gaze termed a "gaze window," helps coordinate social interaction by synchronizing conversational turns (Bavelas et al., 2002).

In frame 9, she continues to maintain the gaze as she describes how these intermediary layers of discourse shaped her continuous imagined teacher identity element.

In frames 10-12, Caroline mentions "just deliver lectures", while raising her right hand. In frames 13-15, she continues by raising her left hand and moving it up and down, using beat gestures to emphasise the "minimal" she attributes to the teacher's role. This emphasis persists in frames 16-17, as she discusses "additional duties", with her left palm rising and right palm moving downward in a vertical motion. These beat gestures are synchronised with the prosodic rhythm of her speech and reinforce her message (Ruth-Hirrel & Wilcox, 2018), highlighting the perceived simplicity of a teacher's duties beyond delivering lectures.

In frames 19-21, the participant's immediate imagined teacher identity element is visible. Her head moves towards the right when saying "I think about being a college teacher...", as she directs her gaze at the interviewer. In the frames, the participant acts to perceive what it means to be a teacher using head movement,

spoken language, and gaze.

In frames 22-24, Caroline continues with the phrase “is relatively easy going.” In frame 22, her head nods. This nodding can serve as a nonverbal affirmation that complements verbal expressions, reinforcing her perception of the ease of the teaching role (Holler & Levinson, 2019). In frame 24, her smile indicates the positive emotions that she is feeling while stressing the word “easy going”. The combination of nodding and facial expression produces her immediate novice teacher identity element.

4.5.2 Production of practised teacher identity

Teachers’ professional identity is not static, it evolves as teachers navigate their roles, responsibilities, and relationships with policymakers, school administrators, and teacher educators. After nearly five months of teaching, Caroline participated in a third interview. By this time, her professional identity had begun to shift in response to her real-world experiences. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she also took on tasks such as mentoring students for competitions and collaborating with senior teachers. These activities gradually exposed her to the complexities of the profession, leading to a deeper understanding and re-evaluation of her role as a teacher.

The following two transcripts are both drawn from the third interview but occurred at different points. Figure 6 depicts a transcribed excerpt from earlier in the interview in which Caroline discussed her interactions with colleagues. Caroline shares her feelings and experiences as a novice teacher, trying to integrate into the senior teachers’ social groups.

Figure 6 Caroline Describing Exclusion Within Network

In frames 1-2 (above), her head shifts away from a central position, and her gaze moves from direct eye contact with the interviewer to looking to the left as she says, "I'm not sure...". Gaze avoidance often signals reduced participation in the interaction and can indicate uncertainty or discomfort (Goodwin, 2018). The hesitation can be understood within the context of Chinese cultural norms, where direct and concise expression of ideas and responses can lead to embarrassment and conflict. In Chinese culture, the principles of politeness and face-saving are highly valued, and individuals often prioritise maintaining interpersonal harmony over straightforward communication (Wang, 2020).

In frame 3, Caroline continues with, "... a bit CLIQUEY," while re-establishing direct eye contact with the interviewer. By using the term "CLIQUEY" with the high volume, Caroline is referring to the tendency of senior teachers to form tight-knit groups, often participating in activities together due to their long-standing relationships, which can result in limited opportunities for novice teachers to integrate. By making eye contact, Caroline may be attempting to reinforce the seriousness of her statement and ensure that her experience is being understood (Kleinke, 1986).

In frames 5-6, Caroline remarks, "They have known each other for ages, highlighting her awareness of the entrenched social networks among senior teachers, which she recognises as a barrier to her integration. This situation reflects the high-power-distance often found in Chinese professional environments, where hierarchical structures can make it challenging for newcomers to assimilate

(Kelchtermans & Vanassche, 2017). In frame 6, Caroline nods to herself as emphasises the phrase “for ages,” a nonverbal cue that reinforces her acknowledgement of the established social structures and her perceived exclusion from the senior teachers.

The discourse extracted from the third interview transcript vividly captures the struggles and conflicts that novice teachers like Caroline face in adapting to their professional environment. Despite Caroline’s awareness of the deeply rooted relationships and hierarchical structure within Chinese universities, she encounters significant challenges in integrating into the established community (Barbalet, 2021). This difficulty reflects the intermediary layers of discourse—where teaching networks and institutional norms influence her identity development. These layers are critical in shaping her continuous practised teacher identity, as she must navigate the tension between respecting seniority and attempting to carve out her own space within the professional hierarchy. Caroline’s non-verbal cues—such as nods, gaze shifts, and assertive tones—further illustrate the complexity of these dynamics, emphasising the delicate balance she maintains between assimilation and self-assertion.

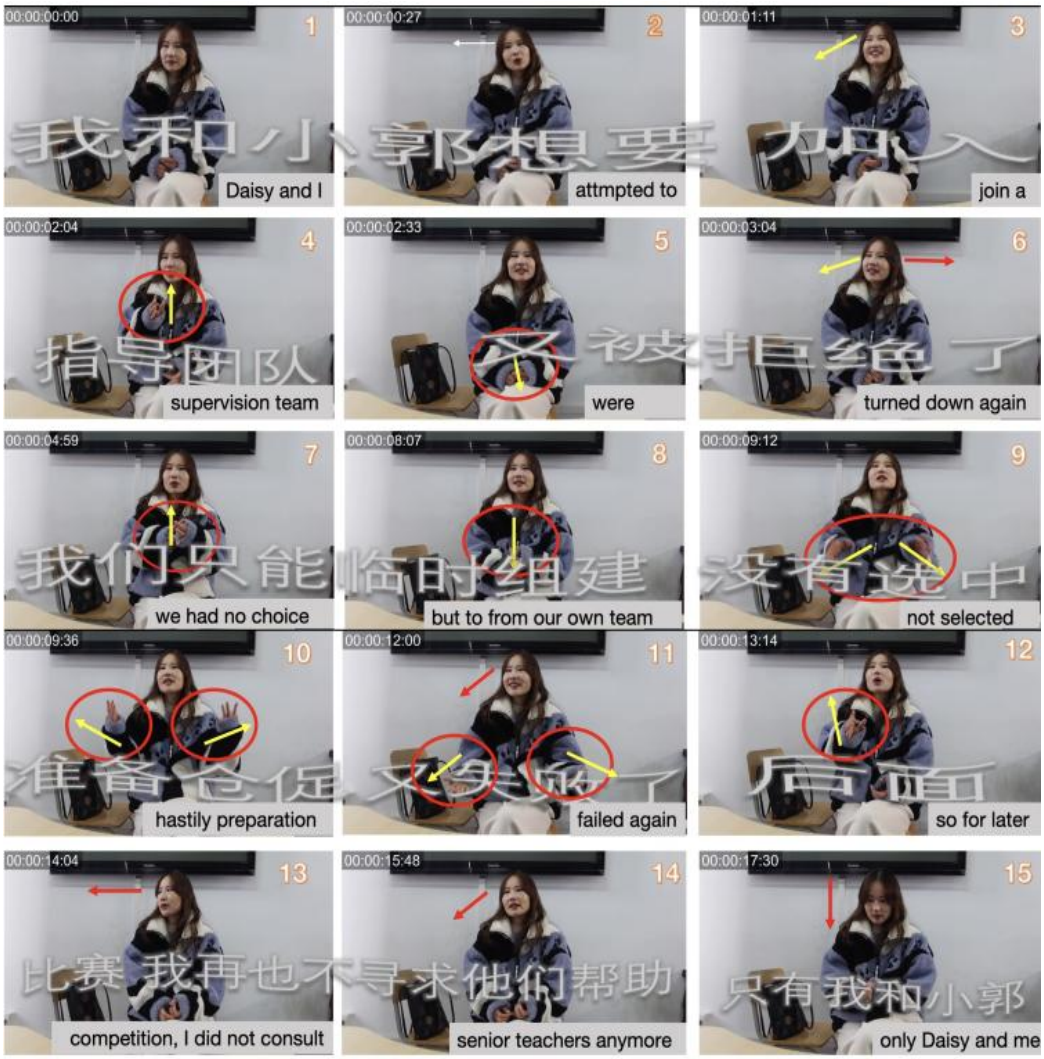

Figure 7 Caroline Sharing Story of Being "Rejected"

Figure 7 illustrates Caroline's second attempt to foster collaboration with her senior colleagues. Supportive relationships, especially with colleagues, play a pivotal role in the professional development and resilience of early career teachers (Day, 2008). However, building such support networks is among the least frequently mentioned strategies by teachers (Mansfield et al., 2012).

In frame 3, Caroline forces a smile, a bitter smile when mentioning the word "join." In Chinese Confucian culture, norms emphasise maintaining harmony and managing face (mianzi) within hierarchical structures, leading to controlled emotional expressions. The expression "fu siu 苦笑" or "bitter smile" reflects the act of displaying positive feelings in frustrating situations to maintain social harmony (Hwang, 1987) This subtle expression underscores Caroline's internal struggle and

uncertainty as she attempts to navigate her interactions with senior colleagues. This complexity highlights the intricate nature of early-career teachers' efforts to integrate themselves into the professional community, balancing the desire for inclusion with the realities of professional dynamics within educational settings (Eldar et al., 2003).

In frame 9, Caroline's palms face outward as she says, "not selected" , representing exclusion or dismissal from the senior groups.

In frame 10, the phrase "very hastily preparation" is delivered with hands moving up and facing inward, visually aligning with the notion of a rushed and less-prepared stance.

In frame 11, as she describes "fall apart again", Caroline's hands move downward and face outward, visually illustrating the sense of collapse or failure she experienced.

In frames 13 and 14, Caroline emphasises the statement "I did not consult senior teacher anymore," with a direct gaze at the interviewer, marking a clear turning point in her narrative However, when she says, "Only Daisy and me", her head lowers, indicating a resigned acceptance. This gesture of looking down mirrors the body language often seen in individuals who feel defeated or burdened (Niedenthal & Brauer, 2012).

4.5.3 Findings: comparing imagined teacher identity and practised teacher identity

By focusing on the production of Caroline's identity element within the first and the third interviews, the layers of discourse that shape her general, continuous, and immediate novice teacher identity element can be delineated and by doing so, we can demonstrate the comparison between imagined and practised identity.

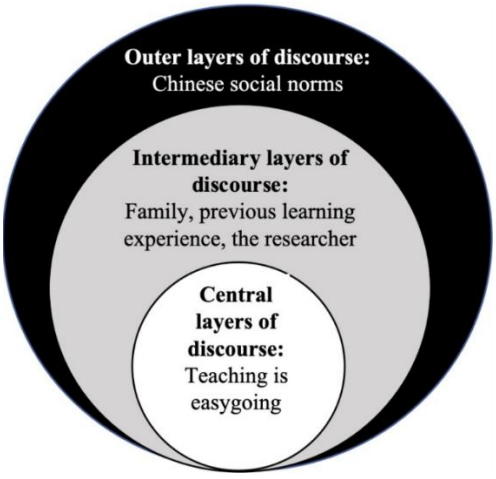

Figure 8 Production of Imagined Identity

Figure 8 depicts the three layers of discourse within the first interview that are contributing to the construction of Caroline's imagined teacher identity element.

At the outer layers of discourse, societal norms and embedded cultural values shaped the perception among recent university graduates like Caroline that teaching was a relatively relaxed profession.

At the intermediary layers of discourse, Caroline's prior experiences as a student and her observations of her own teachers reinforced this perception. She believed that being a university teacher offered ample free time to pursue personal interests. Additionally, during interviews, Caroline mentioned that her parents also viewed teaching as a stable and easy job, particularly suitable for women. The researcher, through the nature of the research and the framing of questions, also contributed to shaping Caroline's identity both as a research participant and as a novice teacher.

At the central layers of discourse, Caroline believed that being a teacher was comparatively easy and relaxing.

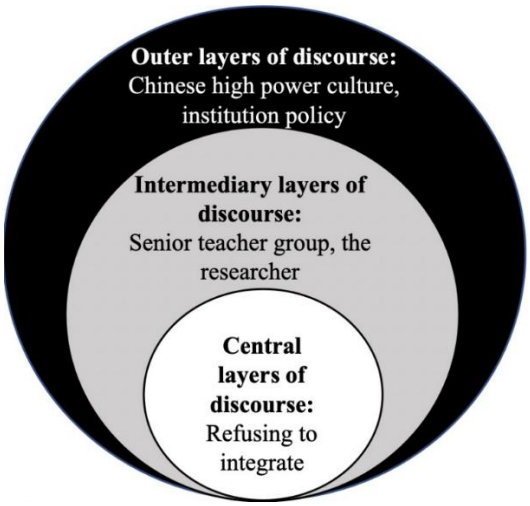

Figure 9 Production of Practised Identity

Figure 9 shows the three layers of discourse within the third interview that are contributing to the construction of Caroline's practised teacher identity element. Once Caroline began her teaching practice, she discovered a gap between her expectations and the actual complexities of the teaching role.

At the outer layers of discourse, the high-power culture and institutional policies have significantly shaped Caroline's general practised teacher identity. Her practised identity emerged as she encountered unexpected challenges, including the complex dynamics of hierarchical relationships and the additional responsibilities imposed by the school.

At the intermediary layers of discourse, Caroline's difficulty integrating into senior teacher groups has shaped her continuous practised novice teacher identity. Senior teachers, who have known each other for a long time, often form tight-knit groups, especially during activities like competitions. Their reluctance to include new teachers has resulted in Caroline facing significant setbacks in adapting to her work environment, leading to identity challenges.

At the central layers of discourse, Caroline's mediated actions, such as her reflections on repeated rejections from senior teachers, have shaped the construction of her immediate practised teacher identity. These experiences have discouraged her from proactively seeking inclusion in senior teacher teams.

4.6 Conclusion and implications

This study explores the complex process of teacher identity construction

through the experiences of Caroline, a novice English teacher navigating the hierarchical and high-power-distance culture of Chinese universities. By employing MIA, the research highlights discrepancies between Caroline's imagined and practised identities, revealing how these identities evolve in response to the institutional and cultural pressures inherent in the Chinese educational system. The findings reveal significant tensions between Caroline's initial idealistic views of teaching and the realities she encountered within her professional environment. Her imagined teacher identity, shaped by prior educational experiences and societal expectations, conflicted with the demands of her actual teaching role, which was heavily influenced by cultural norms that prioritise hierarchy and seniority. This conflict manifested in her struggles to integrate into established teacher communities and the emotional resilience required to cope with exclusion and resistance from senior colleagues.

Building on insights from the investigation into the conflicts of teacher identity construction, particularly as seen through Caroline's multimodal inter(action) analysis, several strategic initiatives are proposed: Firstly, contemporary teacher education and training paradigms should emphasise the construction of teacher identity (Phan & Pham, 2022). This entails ensuring that novice educators recognise that being a teacher goes beyond merely instructing in the classroom. They need to be made aware of the multifaceted roles and responsibilities that come with the profession and be mentally prepared for the challenges of integrating into established teacher communities. Secondly, Caroline's experience underscores the importance of targeted mentorship and training programs to facilitate the professional growth of novice teachers. Such an emphasis is consistent with earlier studies; for instance, Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) argued for more targeted mentorship, while Hughes et al. (2008) emphasised aligning mentor-mentee workloads and subjects to ease the transition. Peiser et al. (2018) further highlighted the need to foster a nurturing and inclusive environment, mitigating feelings of exclusion. Thirdly, it's indispensable for novice educators to be enveloped in a holistic support ecosystem. This encompasses not just mentor-teacher dynamics but extends to peers, students, and the

institutional framework (Florida & Mbato, 2020). Such an environment facilitates a smoother transition and promotes a more organic assimilation into the pedagogical community.

This study offers valuable insights into the formation of teacher identity through the detailed exploration of Caroline's experiences, yet it also highlights several areas for further investigation. By concentrating on the journey of a single teacher, the research underscores the diversity of teacher identity formation and the need to include a broader range of voices from novice teachers with varied cultural and educational backgrounds. Such inclusion could deepen our understanding of how identities are shaped across different contexts. Additionally, this research provides a snapshot of identity formation at an early career stage, pointing to the dynamic nature of teacher identity that evolves. Future longitudinal studies tracking novice teachers across their careers could shed light on the long-term development and stabilisation of professional identities. Moreover, while the study begins to explore the impact of high-power-distance cultures and institutional norms on identity formation, there is room for a more comprehensive analysis. A detailed examination of how educational policies, support systems, and school culture influence novice teacher identity could offer richer insights. This deeper understanding could then guide the development of targeted interventions designed to support novice teachers more effectively, addressing the unique challenges they face within their specific teaching environments.

Chapter 4 has shown how tensions between imagined and practised identities arise within novice teachers' early professional lives, particularly under hierarchical institutional conditions. However, identifying such tensions is only the first step. What remains to be examined is how these tensions are worked through in real-time pedagogical practice. Chapter 5 addresses this issue by shifting the analytical focus from identity tension as an institutional and discursive phenomenon to identity enactment as an embodied, multimodal process in classroom interaction.

CHAPTER FIVE ARTICLE II: TRANSFORMING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND TEACHER IDENTITY THROUGH MULTIMODAL (INTER)ACTION ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY OF NOVICE EFL TEACHERS IN CHINA

Zhou, J., Li, C., & Cheng, Y. (2025). Transforming Pedagogical Practices and Teacher Identity Through Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis: A Case Study of Novice EFL Teachers in China. *Behavioural Sciences*, 15(8), 1050. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15081050

Article II was accepted for publication in *Behavioural Sciences* in August 2025 (Vol. 15, Issue 8). The candidate, Jing Zhou, contributed approximately 90% of the work, including research design, data collection, multimodal analysis, visual transcription, and drafting of the manuscript. Co-authors provided conceptual feedback and revision suggestions. Minor edits have been made to formatting and visual layout for consistency with the thesis.

Article II was submitted to *Behavioural Sciences* because it focuses on observable teacher behaviour and how such behaviour changes in response to classroom and institutional demands. The study analyses novice EFL teachers' gaze, gesture, voice, and spatial movement as behavioural indicators of pedagogical development and identity negotiation. Using Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, the article offers a fine-grained account of how real-time verbal and non-verbal actions reveal adaptation, agency, and self-regulation in classroom practice. This makes it a good fit for Behavioural Sciences, particularly in relation to behaviour in educational contexts.

Article II builds on the institutional tensions and identity dissonance revealed in Article I, shifting the analytical focus to how these tensions are negotiated and transformed within the immediacy of classroom practice. While Article I highlighted how novice university EFL teachers in China often enter the profession with imagined identities that conflict with institutional norms—resulting in moments of

uncertainty, constraint, and self-doubt—Article II explores how these tensions are worked through in real-time, embodied pedagogical interaction.

This article examines how novice university EFL teachers construct and reconfigure their professional identities through embodied and multimodal pedagogical practices (RQ1), and what multimodal strategies, such as gaze, gesture, spatial movement, and voice modulation, they use to manage identity tensions in teaching and institutional settings (RQ2). This article shifts the focus to classroom-based interactions, emphasising the performative dimension of pedagogical identity.

Situated within Confucian-heritage educational contexts, where didactic authority, exam-oriented instruction, and hierarchical teacher-student dynamics remain deeply embedded (Li, 2023; Meijer & de Jong, 2021), the article examines the identity work of two novice university English teachers, Mandy and Yable, across one academic semester. Using MIA (Norris, 2011, 2019, 2020), the analysis draws from three rounds of video-recorded classroom observations. It employs three key analytical tools, scales of action, modal configurations, and modal density/aggregation, to examine how novice teachers develop their professional identity in classroom settings. These tools enable a layered analysis of interaction, capturing not only immediate pedagogical actions but also their embeddedness within broader institutional and cultural discourses. This aligns with prior methodological arguments that multimodal frameworks offer a generative lens for connecting micro-level classroom behaviour with macro-level identity formation (Norris, 2011; Matelau & Norris, 2021).

Unlike Article I, which emphasised constraint and dissonance, Article II foregrounds the presence of agentive and positive identity trajectories. While novice teachers undoubtedly face structural challenges, the findings demonstrate their capacity to resist, adapt, and reimagine pedagogy through multimodal means. Both Mandy and Yable transitioned from rigid, teacher-fronted instruction to more interactive, student-centred practices. Through deliberate shifts in gaze orientation, open-hand gestures, voice modulation for affective engagement, and dynamic

movement in classroom space, they reconstituted themselves as responsive and relational educators. These practices were not merely instructional techniques but embodied expressions of evolving professional identity. Despite the structural and cultural constraints, both participants enacted agency through bodily and spatial reconfigurations—affirming recent arguments that identity development is not only discursive but performed in space, gesture, and interaction.

In summary, Article II makes two key contributions. First, it empirically demonstrates how multimodal teaching practices are intimately linked to teacher identity transformation. Through fine-grained analysis of embodied discourse—gaze shifts, vocal modulation, gestures, spatial movement—this article reveals that identity development is enacted moment-to-moment in the classroom. Second, the study advances theoretical understanding of novice teacher agency in contexts of cultural and institutional constraint. It argues that professional identity formation is not simply a function of adapting to norms but entails ongoing multimodal negotiation in which teachers reconfigure both pedagogy and self. By situating these findings after the structural-institutional analysis of Article I, the thesis develops a cumulative account of identity development, showing how imagined, institutionally constrained identities evolve into embodied, agentive practices.

Abstract: This article investigates the evolving pedagogical strategies and professional identity development of two novice college English teachers in China through a semester-long classroom-based inquiry. Drawing on Norris's Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA), it analysed 270 minutes of video-recorded lessons across three instructional stages, supported by visual transcripts and pitch-intensity spectrograms. The analysis reveals each teacher's transformation from textbook-reliant instruction to student-centred pedagogy, facilitated by multimodal strategies such as gaze, vocal pitch, gesture, and head movement. These shifts unfold across three evolving identity configurations: compliance, experimentation, and dialogic enactment. Rather than following a linear path, identity development is shown as a negotiated process shaped by institutional demands and classroom

interactional realities. By foregrounding the multimodal enactment of self in a non-Western educational context, the study offers insights into how novice EFL teachers navigate tensions between traditional discourse norms and reform-driven pedagogical expectations, contributing to broader understandings of identity formation in global higher education

Keywords: Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis; Novice EFL teachers; Teacher identity development; Multimodal pedagogical strategies; China

5.1 Introduction

Within the contemporary educational reforms in Chinese higher education, College English (CE) teachers teach non-English majors at tertiary institutions in China by fostering language proficiency and intercultural competence (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Over the past decade, a surge in hiring new CE teachers has accompanied the compulsory status of College English courses across Chinese universities (Zhou & Zhang, 2016). However, the transition from novice to professional educator is often challenging, particularly in terms of identity formation, pedagogical knowledge consumption, and teaching efficacy improvement (Xun & Zheng, 2014).

Traditionally, English language instruction in Chinese higher education has historically been characterised by teacher-centred pedagogies, emphasising rote memorisation and standardised test performance, particularly due to the influence of high-stakes assessments such as College English Tests (CET-4 and CET-6) (Gu, 2022). In such settings, teachers are positioned as authoritative knowledge providers, and students as recipients. This model has faced criticism for limiting students' communicative competence (Pei, 2015), stifling innovative thinking (Ghafar, 2023), reducing learner autonomy (Cheng & Ding, 2021) and hindering the development of higher-order thinking skills (Sadeghi & Bahari, 2022) . Classrooms often follow the traditional Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern, limiting interactive engagement and student autonomy (Aini et al., 2024).

In response, recent reforms highlight the importance of fostering autonomous

learning, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness as essential competencies for modern education (MOE, 2019). For novice EFL teachers, this shift presents not only methodological challenges but also requires rethinking their professional identities. As Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) argued, foreign language educators must develop symbolic competence—the ability to convey and interpret meaning through verbal and non-verbal modes such as gesture, gaze, and spatial positioning. Teaching thus becomes a performative act of identity construction (Kramsch, 2014) . Framed by this view, the present study explores how multimodal classroom practices shape novice teachers' evolving identities. Richards and Rodgers (2014) account of language teaching methods further supports this inquiry by linking instructional choices to broader educational paradigms and teacher roles.

Despite a growing recognition of the importance of teacher identity and multimodal pedagogy, existing research predominantly focuses on experienced educators in Western contexts, leaving a critical gap in understanding how these strategies shape novice teachers' professional identity development and their transition from novices to experienced practitioners (Martínez-Álvarez et al., 2017). Specifically, there is limited empirical work on how Chinese novice EFL teachers employ multimodal resources (e.g., gestures, head movements, eye gaze) to construct and adjust their professional identities in classroom interactions. Addressing this gap, this study examines how multimodal strategies facilitate their transition from authoritative to facilitative teaching roles. Guided by Norris's Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) framework (Norris, 2004, 2011, 2019), it explores the research question: How do novice college English teachers' teaching practices and professional identities evolve through multimodal interaction strategies? By analysing the interplay between multimodal strategies and identity development within a specific cultural and institutional context, this study aims to deepen understanding of novice teachers' professional growth in diverse educational settings.

5.2 Literature review

5.2.1 Teacher Identity and Pedagogical Practices: A Theoretical Overview

Teacher identity, broadly defined as "the way we make sense of ourselves and the image of ourselves that we present to others" (Day, 2011, p.48), is integral to guiding teachers' practices and professional growth (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Varghese et al., 2005). It is inextricably linked to pedagogical practices, serving as both a reflection of and a vehicle for professional growth (Keiler, 2018; Sadeghi & Bahari, 2022). Language teacher identity has been a crucial factor in enhancing pedagogy and teacher learning (L. Li, 2020; Luguetti et al., 2019), whose development is a dynamic, socially situated process influenced by factors such as institutional culture, peer collaboration, student interactions, and societal expectations, as well as professional interactions (Liu & Trent, 2023; Van Lankveld et al., 2017; Varghese et al., 2005).

This intersection of identity and pedagogy has attracted increasing scholarly attention, particularly in understanding how teaching strategies reflect and reinforce evolving teacher identities (Liu et al., 2022; Wang & Yuan, 2024). Initial strategies such as creating a safe learning environment, fostering strong student-teacher relationships, and using precise instructional methods are foundational in shaping teacher identities (Mariën et al., 2023; Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021). These strategies provide a foundation for more complex approaches like adaptive teaching and integrating cultural awareness (Kong et al., 2024), emphasising responsiveness to classroom dynamics and individual student needs (Kazempour, 2009; Proweller & Mitchener, 2004). Moreover, teachers proficient in non-verbal communication (e.g., eye contact, gestures, body language) help establish stronger teacher-student rapport, enhance interactive idea exchange, and facilitate deeper comprehension (Pennings & Hollenstein, 2020; Tang & Hew, 2022; Van Leeuwen, 2021).

The evolving teacher identity also directly impacts teaching quality and classroom dynamics (Chen et al., 2023). Scholars have found that a strong professional identity can enhance teachers' confidence and commitment to their profession and decision-making, ultimately improving the quality of classroom

teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For instance, teachers identified as "managers" may adopt more authoritative and structured teaching methods, potentially limiting student interaction (Kessler, 2021). In contrast, teachers with a supportive, guiding identity often foster closer teacher-student relationships and more active engagement (Peng et al., 2020). Thus, teacher identity is critical in pre-service and in-service development, influencing curriculum design, guiding pedagogical enactment, and shaping classroom interactions (Golzar, 2020). Guo and Zhu (2019) identified three overlapping identities among Business English educators—practitioners, researchers, and professionals—each fostering a distinctive pedagogical orientation. Similarly, curriculum orientation has been shown to shape identity development: practice-driven programs (e.g., in Hong Kong) promote stronger pedagogical agency than theory-heavy ones (e.g., in Guangdong) (Gu & Benson, 2015).

This review foregrounds the interplay between pedagogical agency and identity formation, particularly through embodied interaction, a lens further deepened through multimodal analysis in subsequent sections.

5.2.2 Multimodal Strategies as Sites of Identity Construction

The multimodal turn in language education has emphasised the need to move beyond speech and text to include gesture, gaze, image, posture, space, and other semiotic modes in meaning-making (see e.g., Lim, 2020; Magnusson & Godhe, 2019). Multimodal teaching has proven highly effective in language learning, fostering social competencies (Martínez Lirola, 2016), critical thinking (Lee, 2019; Nuroh et al., 2020), intercultural awareness (Abdullah et al., 2023) and communicative engagement (Bao, 2017; Peng, 2019). Furthermore, some scholars focused on modality-specified features, such as language resources (Kövecses, 2003), facial expressions (Ekman et al., 1987), vocal features (Scherer, 2003), psychological reactions (Dzedzickis et al., 2020), or body language (Tucker et al., 2015). Therefore, teachers' multimodal competence is essential for effective teaching, especially when instruction differs from their native language (Morell, 2018). Research indicates that

multimodal classroom interaction is driven by teachers' pedagogical goals rather than their personal teaching style (Bourne & Jewitt, 2003). By strategically using semiotic resources, teachers can create meaningful student experiences, enhancing teaching and learning (Erfanian Mohammadi et al., 2019). High levels of multimodal competence positively influence student engagement, particularly during classroom lead-ins (Qin & Wang, 2021), and multimedia-enriched environments improve comprehension and engagement (Pujadas & Muñoz, 2020). Yet despite these developments, research has remained largely focused on student uptake and outcome. Studies rarely examine how teachers themselves negotiate identity through multimodal strategies in real-time classroom contexts.

Despite the documented benefits of multimodal pedagogy, its classroom implementation remains fraught with challenges. Yunus et al. (2022) highlighted teacher reluctance, limited conceptual training, and philosophical resistance as key barriers, especially in EFL contexts. Similarly, Laadem and Mallahi (2019) noted that multimodal teaching in ESP settings often lacks theoretical grounding, places high cognitive and emotional demands on teachers and learners and suffers from underdeveloped assessment frameworks for integrating semiotic resources such as gesture, gaze, and spatial layout. Such constraints underline the need for a deeper understanding of how multimodal practice's mediate identity negotiation, particularly among novice teachers navigating complex educational transitions.

5.2.3 Negotiation of Teacher Identities: Novice English Educators in Chinese Classrooms

The professional journey of novice English teachers in China is shaped by both institutional structures and evolving educational philosophies. Traditionally, Chinese EFL classrooms have emphasised top-down, teacher-centred instruction, often following rigid Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) or Initiation–Response–0 (IR0) patterns (Tong et al., 2024). This identity in traditional, teacher-centred classrooms emphasises teachers' roles as lesson providers and class leaders, with students in the default role of passive learners (Richards, 2006). New teachers often adopt a

"situated identity", which refers to the way individuals construct their identities in specific social and institutional contexts (Zimmerman, 1998).

However, with China's educational reforms promoting student-centered approaches, novice educators face challenges in shifting from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of interactive, student-driven learning (Li & De Costa, 2018; Zhu, 2010). EFL teachers are increasingly expected to focus on the teaching process and co-construct knowledge with students. As novice teachers progress, integrating intercultural competence (ICC) becomes vital for professional development and identity formation (Bennett, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). As global citizenship becomes a curricular priority in China (Camicia & Zhu, 2011), English teachers increasingly embed intercultural reflection into their pedagogical practices (Byram, 2020), thereby repositioning themselves as cultural brokers who promote cross-cultural dialogue and global awareness (Crozet, 2016; Porto, 2018). This transformative role is further reinforced through systematic intercultural training, which equips teachers with strategies to navigate culturally diverse classrooms and solidify their identities as mediators of intercultural learning (Hofmeyr, 2022). Ultimately, the shift from transmitting static linguistic knowledge to fostering dynamic cross-cultural understanding underscores the evolving identity of professional English educators in transnational contexts (Jackson, 2019).

Yet despite policy-level encouragement, the actual process through which novice teachers negotiate this professional transformation remains underexamined, especially in terms of their embodied classroom practices. The affordances of multimodal resources in helping novice teachers move from traditional to more responsive teaching identities warrant deeper empirical investigation—a gap that this study seeks to fill.

5.2.4 Analytical Framework: Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis

Given that professional identity is shaped through embodied, situated interaction, a methodology capable of attending to micro-level actions and contextual dynamics was essential. Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) was adopted for its

capacity to integrate fine-grained analysis of communicative modes (e.g., gaze, gesture, posture, spoken discourse) with broader institutional and sociocultural structures (Norris, 2019). Grounded in discourse analysis (Brown & Yule, 1983), interactional sociolinguistics (Goffman, 1983), mediated discourse analysis(Scollon, 2002), and multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002), MIA views all actions as identity-telling (Norris, 2011; Scollon, 1997). It is particularly useful for examining how teachers construct identity through various modes.

At the core of MIA is mediated action, which sees social actors acting with or through cultural tools such as language, gestures, objects, or discourse (Norris, 2019). Mediated actions are categorised into lower-level actions (e.g., a gaze shift or utterance), higher-level actions (HLAs) composed of multiple lower-level actions, and frozen actions embedded in physical objects, such as notes on a blackboard example (Norris, 2004, 2013), a teaching moment in an L2 class may involve a combination of gestures, gaze shifts, and written notes, with frozen actions preserving meaning in material form. Moreover, identity in this article is approached as situated and interactional, evolving within the specific institutional, cultural, and pedagogical structures of Chinese universities. MIA's attention to both micro-level actions (e.g., pointing while asking a question) and higher-level aggregated practices (e.g., managing a discussion through gaze and gesture) enables a nuanced understanding of how novice teachers navigate between traditional teacher-centred expectations and emerging student-centred demands.

Methodological tools like scales of action, modal configuration, and modal aggregation are central to multimodal interaction analysis. Scales of action reveal how smaller actions are embedded within larger ones, offering insights into how lower-level actions like asking questions or providing feedback support broader teaching objectives (Norris, 2017). Understanding these smaller actions within HLAs is essential for identifying effective teaching practices and improving instructional quality and effectiveness (Hejji Alanazi, 2019; Milkova, 2012).

Figure 10 (below) illustrates embedded actions relevant to class teaching, such as asking questions, asking students, and giving feedback. By examining how these

actions interrelate, one can identify their immediate impacts and how they contribute to broader educational goals or shifts in constructing teachers' professional identity.

Figure 10 Example of Embedded Actions in Class Teaching

Modal configuration refers to the dynamic arrangement of hierarchical or non-hierarchical modes used to produce higher-level actions (Norris, 2004). In teaching, this involves adapting verbal and non-verbal cues to different contexts. Multimodal inputs, integrating auditory, visual, and textual elements, enhance vocabulary retention more effectively than unimodal inputs (Mirzaei et al., 2023). A key concept within this framework is modal aggregations, where multiple lower-level actions merge at the same hierarchical level to form a unified higher-level action (Norris, 2020, p.16). As the modal configuration is fluid, specific modes take precedence over others depending on context, affecting the dynamics of teaching actions and their role in facilitating learning (Norris, 2009).

As illustrated in Figure 11 below, modes of teaching evolve, with some gaining or losing prominence. The size of circles represents their significance—more considerable for dominant actions, smaller for subordinate ones—while overlapping circles indicate simultaneous occurrence. For example, when a teacher speaks, gazes at students, and points at a PowerPoint slide, spoken language and gaze serve as primary actions, while pointing is secondary. This spoken language-gaze-point aggregation conveys a unified message, demonstrating how multimodal communication creates a combined effect greater than the sum of its parts (Kress &

Van Leeuwen, 2002).

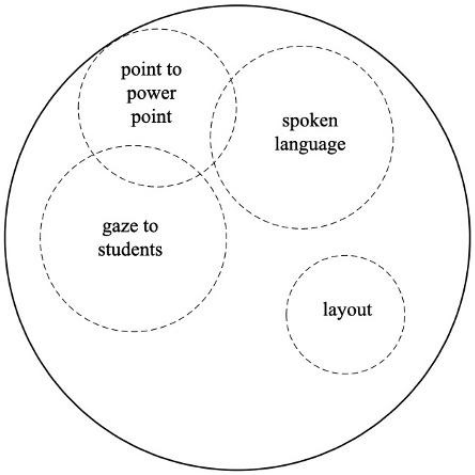

Figure 11 Example of Modal Configuration & Aggregation of HLAs in Word-explaining

When modes combine in a modal aggregation, they create a cohesive teaching message and reflect shifts in the use of multimodal interaction techniques over time. These shifts reveal changes in pedagogical strategies and identity development. The dynamic nature of modal configurations offers insights into how teachers adapt their multimodal skills. This aligns with the view of Baldry and Thibault (2006) that multimodal texts result from the combined effects of all resources used to create and interpret them. Understanding modal configurations and aggregates is crucial for analysing how teachers construct meaning, engage students, and shape their professional identities in classroom interactions.

Combined with an ethnographic sensibility, this framework enables a contextualised understanding of how identity is performed within and shaped by institutional settings (Blommaert & Huang, 2015). The research design followed an information-oriented case study logic (Flyvbjerg, 2006), aiming for analytical richness rather than statistical generalisation. The flexible, participant-responsive data construction process reflects the dialogic nature of classroom identity negotiation, which MIA is well-suited to capture through attention to real-time multimodal interaction (Christensson, 2021).

A growing body of research confirms the suitability of Multimodal (Inter)action

Analysis (MIA) for analysing classroom teaching. Students and teachers use multiple modes—gesture, gaze, posture, and voice—to make meaning in digital and science classrooms (Adams, 2015; Wilmes & Siry, 2021). Bernad-Mechó (2023) focused on novice EFL teachers' coordination of gaze and gesture, while Papen and Peach (2021) emphasised that classroom discourse is always multimodal, shaped by embodied and affective dimensions. Brône et al. (2017) further showed that gaze synchronises with speech and turn-taking, regulating classroom participation. Complementing these findings, Bezemer and Jewitt (2018), Kress (2011) and Lim (2024) highlighted the pedagogical significance of spatial layout, image, and movement. Norris and Maier (2014) extended MIA to case-based research, reinforcing its value for capturing identity formation and interaction in educational contexts. Together, these studies validate MIA as a robust framework for examining the multimodal nature of classroom pedagogy and teacher identity.

As mentioned above, these theoretical and methodological components position MIA as a uniquely suited framework for investigating the performative, dynamic, and semiotically rich nature of teacher identity in the classroom. It enables the tracing of how pedagogical practices, symbolic resources, and institutional discourses converge in the embodied enactment of professional roles.

5.3 Study Design

This study was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC Ref: 22/243). Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers. No students appeared in any visual recordings; classroom videos exclusively focused on teachers' pedagogical behaviours. While incidental student voices were captured during interactions, these were neither analysed nor processed (aligned with AUTEC's exemption for non-identifiable incidental data, Article 4.7). Institutional consent was secured from department heads prior to recruitment, and all procedures adhered to research ethics protocols for participant confidentiality and voluntary participation.

To address ethical concerns regarding power dynamics and participant

vulnerability, the study was designed with reflexivity and protection in mind. To protect participant anonymity and avoid the risk of indirect identification, the two focal participants are referred to throughout the paper as Teacher A and Teacher B. After data analysis, participants were invited to member-check selected excerpts and interpretations. These post-study debriefings allowed them to clarify intent, verify accuracy, and ensure respectful representation.

Participant recruitment was conducted between March 1 and July 19, 2022, at a second-tier university in Anhui Province, China. Four early-career English teachers were initially recruited based on three key criteria: (1) they were novice teachers within the first five years of their teaching careers; (2) they were voluntarily participating in the study; and (3) they were teaching the College English curriculum at the research site. These criteria ensured consistency in institutional and pedagogical contexts while respecting participant agency. Such alignment enabled meaningful comparison of identity trajectories across shared teaching practices.

For each participant, three 45-minute lessons were recorded at the beginning (first recorded session), the middle (second recorded session), and the end of the semester (third recorded session), totalling 135 minutes per participant. Data analysis followed the systematic steps of NIA (Norris, 2019), including data delineation, visual transcription, micro-analysis, and the application of analytical tools to identify higher-level actions (HLAs) performed by the participants.

While all four teachers demonstrated varying degrees of pedagogical development, two participants (Teacher A and Teacher B) exhibited more substantial and sustained shifts in multimodal and student-centred practices. Their trajectories offered the richest insights into the study's core aim: understanding how novice teachers develop multimodal pedagogies in EFL contexts. Thus, purposive sampling was employed to focus detailed analysis on these two cases. Initial analysis of all four participants ensured that these selected cases the selected cases were representative and illustrative of broader patterns observed across the cohort.

Regarding generalisability, this study follows a qualitative tradition that prioritises analytic generalisation over statistical generalisation (Yin, 2009). Rather

than aiming for population-wide claims, it offers theoretically grounded insights that may inform future research and pedagogical training in comparable EFL contexts. The two focal cases provide depth over breadth, illustrating key processes in multimodal and identity development across a semester of classroom teaching.

Visual transcripts were constructed by extracting key moments from video stills and transcribing verbal and non-verbal modes (e.g., gaze, gestures, posture). This comprehensive approach provided insights into teaching strategies, classroom management, and intercultural activities, highlighting how modes contribute to meaning-making and identity construction. By using Norris's (2019, 2020, p.16) transcription conventions and tools, such as waveforms and font size to represent intonation and loudness variations, the analysis revealed the interplay of discourses and practices within mediated actions and engagement sites.

To analyse multimodal interactions, it is crucial to understand how each mode contributes to meaning-making. A mode is "a system of mediated action with regularities"(Norris, 2013, p. 156). Micro-analysis of modes—such as spoken language, layout, gesture, gaze, head movement, and facial expression—reveals how discourses and practices intersect within a site of engagement (Matelau & Sagapolutele, 2023). These modes collectively shape identity construction and classroom communication. Norris (2019) provides transcription conventions for spoken language, using commas for slight rising intonation, periods for lowering intonation, and dashes for glottal stops. Multimodal transcription incorporates tools like rhythmic pattern waveforms and font size for loudness variations (Norris, 2019). The following subsections explain how different modes can be analysed:

Pitch is a mode of auditory modulation. Pitch enhancement can facilitate adult vocabulary learning across different visual contexts (Filippi et al., 2014). By altering the pitch range, secondary school learners can be subtly guided without direct feedback (Sikveland et al., 2021). This study used Praat's software to automatically generate pitch and intensity contours, enabling precise analysis of acoustic properties such as pitch (frequency) and intensity (amplitude) over time (Boersma & Weenink, 2023).

Layout: "A mode that informs people about the distance between objects, the environment, and the people (inter)acting" (Norris, 2019). In a classroom, layout is reflected in how tables and chairs are arranged, along with elements like pictures, a blackboard, and a screen.

Gesture: "A mode that tells us how individuals hold and move their arms, hands, and fingers" (Norris, 2019). Teachers' gestures in the classroom involve natural interactions with students or teaching tools, such as a blackboard, computer, or mouse(Liu et al., 2022).

Gaze: "A mode that tells us how individuals look at something or someone" (Norris, 2019). For example, when a teacher notices a student playing with their phone in class, he or she will look at the student to inform them not to do so.

Head movement: "A mode that tells us how individuals hold and move their heads" (Norris, 2019). For example, if the teacher wishes to explain the knowledge points in a PowerPoint, they move their head from the students to the screen.

Facial expression: "A mode that tells us how individuals maintain and change their expressions on the face" (Norris, 2019). For example, when the teacher asks students questions, they always wear a smile to foster a sense of closeness.

For data analysis part, all data were transcribed and analysed by the author following the MIA framework as outlined by Norris (2019).

To enhance credibility and reduce subjective bias, two external researchers with training in multimodal interaction analysis independently reviewed 20% of the transcriptions and modal coding. Inter-coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa=0.85) was calculated, ensuring interpretive reliability. Discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached, ensuring inter-coder reliability. Member checking was conducted with both focal participants after preliminary findings were produced, allowing them to comment on interpretations and adjust any misrepresentations of intent.

5.4 Findings

Drawing on sociocultural perspectives of teacher identity (Beijaard et al., 2004;

Trent, 2016; Yuan & Zhang, 2020), this article identifies three evolving identity states—compliance, experimentation, and dialogic enactment—to capture the transformation observed in novice teachers' classroom practices. These categories are empirically derived from repeated viewing and multimodal coding of classroom video data, rather than imposed as theoretical abstractions. The compliance phase involves textbook-centred instruction, minimal student interaction, and monologic delivery (Zhukova, 2018). Experimentation is marked by emerging, though inconsistent, use of praise, feedback, and student prompts—suggesting a negotiation between established routines and new pedagogical expectations (Chee et al., 2014; Taylor, 2016). Dialogic enactment, by contrast, features the co-construction of meaning, sustained dialogic exchanges, spontaneous feedback, and embodied engagement through smiling, head nods, gaze, and posture shifts (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Lucero-Babativa, 2024). This three-phase development shows how teacher identity evolves through social interaction in specific classroom contexts. By tracing these identity shifts through fine-grained multimodal patterns, the study contributes to understanding how novice EFL teachers gradually move from performative instruction toward relationally and dialogically grounded teaching.

5.4.1 Shared Beginnings: Teacher-centred Practices and Passive Knowledge Transmitters

In their first recorded sessions (Session 1), both teachers showed similar teacher-centred multimodal patterns. These practices show that both participants acted as passive knowledge transmitters. These behaviours aligned with the "chalk and talk" model, often seen as ineffective by students due to its monologic and disengaging nature (Trent, 2018).

Figure 12 Excerpts of Teacher A's Teacher-centred Modality in Session 1

*In all excerpt figures, multimodal elements such as gaze (yellow arrows), gesture (red circles), head movement (red arrows), and posture (directional shifts) are annotated to highlight their temporal and spatial alignment with verbal discourse. This visualisation strategy follows MIA conventions (Norris, 2019) to reveal shifts in identity performance.

Figure 13 Excerpts of Teacher B's Teacher-centred Modality in Session 1

In Figure 12, Teacher A asks, "In general, do people tend to have more confidence in themselves or others?" but answers them herself without inviting student responses. Her gaze was mostly directed at the textbook, with only brief eye contact (frames 1-7). Similarly, in Figure 13, Teacher B states, "You have finished listening to the text, and try to find the main idea of the message." Without using nonverbal communication as a powerful tool to enhance interaction and knowledge transfer (Yuan, 2024). Teacher B remains focused on the textbook, with minimal eye contact or body language directed toward the students (frames 2-9). Moreover, the heavy reliance on textual content with minimal student interaction reflects a lack of confidence in managing classroom dynamics (Pan, 2014; Sadler, 2013). In frames 8 to 11, Teacher A pauses for about a minute before posing a rhetorical question: "It seems like it's more towards others, right?" The direction of the arrow in frame 9 shows her continued focus on the textbook, and the timestamp indicates her lack of fluency during the lecture. Studies have shown that fluency in teaching positively affects student learning outcomes (Wilford et al., 2020), with smoother speech

patterns and fewer pauses enhancing vocabulary comprehension (Zhou & Gu, 2024). Teacher A's frequent pauses and reliance on the textbook suggest a lack of fluency, which could hinder students' understanding and retention of the material. In frame 12, Teacher A's self-adaptive gesture—brushing her hair in frame 12—suggests anxiety or self-soothing behaviour typical of low teaching confidence (Nicoladis et al., 2022)

In all excerpt figures, multimodal elements such as gaze (yellow arrows), gesture (red circles), head movement (red arrows), and posture (directional shifts) are annotated to highlight their temporal and spatial alignment with verbal discourse. This visualisation strategy follows MIA conventions to reveal shifts in identity performance (Norris, 2019).

These teacher-centred patterns reflect the use of grammar translation and audio-lingual approaches during Session 1, both of which prioritise controlled input and linguistic accuracy over communicative use. Notably, the primary instructional language was Chinese, which teachers used for vocabulary explanation, grammar clarification, and general instruction. English was used only intermittently, for isolated lexical items or reading aloud, rather than as a medium of sustained classroom interaction. This limited use of the target language may hinder students' exposure to authentic input and reduce opportunities for language acquisition through use (Xie, 2017). The dominance of Chinese also reflects teachers' early-stage identities as content deliverers, marked by a focus on correctness and authority rather than on fostering student engagement or fluency in English. Such practices are standard in Chinese tertiary EFL contexts, where exam-oriented curricula and teacher authority norms often discourage the extensive use of English in class (Zhao, 2023). Overall, the teacher's attention throughout this sequence is primarily on herself and the textbook rather than the students. This reflects a teaching approach characterised by instructional dominance, with a primary focus on content delivery rather than student participation.

5.4.2 Teacher A's Identity Trajectory: From Compliance to Dialogic Enactment

At the outset, Teacher A exhibited a compliance-oriented identity, characterised

by textbook-driven instruction, rhetorical questioning without student response, limited eye contact, and monologic delivery. By the end of the semester, Teacher A demonstrated a clear shift toward dialogic enactment, guiding her students to critically reflect on their learning and encouraging them to co-construct rather than passively learn the knowledge (Wu, 2023). This change reflects the broader pedagogical shift towards critical thinking and collaborative learning, where teachers are no longer just transmitters of knowledge but partners in the learning process (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020).

Figure 14 Excerpts of Teacher A's Facilitation of Intercultural Discussion in Session 3

In Figure 14 (frames 1-5), Teacher A asks, "In the context of cross-cultural interactions, when facing cultural conflict, what attitude should we adopt?". Teacher

A's question goes beyond traditional language-focused topics such as vocabulary, sentence structure, and translation. Instead, it reflects a deeper understanding of intercultural awareness, which is not merely about recognizing cultural differences but requires critical reflection on one's biases and the ability to adapt flexibly in cross-cultural settings (Deardorff, 2006). By asking students to consider appropriate attitudes, Teacher A encourages them to analyse the underlying values, beliefs, and social norms that shape cultural conflicts, fostering intercultural competence. Her question aligns with the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 2020), which emphasises the importance of self-awareness and the ability to shift perspectives in intercultural interactions. By encouraging students to consider underlying values and social norms, she fosters higher-order thinking through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Wasik & Bond, 2001). Such questioning techniques are critical for promoting critical and creative thinking, a central goal of culturally responsive pedagogy (Nappi, 2017). Her multimodal orchestration becomes more evident in frames 7–18. She calls on multiple students sequentially, using a smiling, sustained gaze, and encouraging intonation (Hofkens et al., 2023; Kuang et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2016). In frames 19 and 20, Teacher A repeats the student's explanation while looking up, a practice known as "revoicing" (Chapin et al., 2003). This repetition acknowledges the student's contribution, validates their response, and allows the entire class to engage with and expand on the idea, ultimately transforming it into shared knowledge (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Following this, in frames 22 to 24, she offers explanation feedback—not simply judging correctness, but deepening understanding, a strategy known to enhance long-term conceptual learning (Butler et al., 2013).

5.4.3. Shifts in Scales of Actions and Modal Configurations: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher A

Figure 15 compares the scales of actions in Teacher A's first and third recorded sessions. In the first recorded session, Teacher A's HLAs during the lecture consisted of two primary actions: asking a question and answering the question. In contrast, in

the third recorded session, her actions expanded to include asking a question, waiting for an answer, asking a student, and summarizing answers.

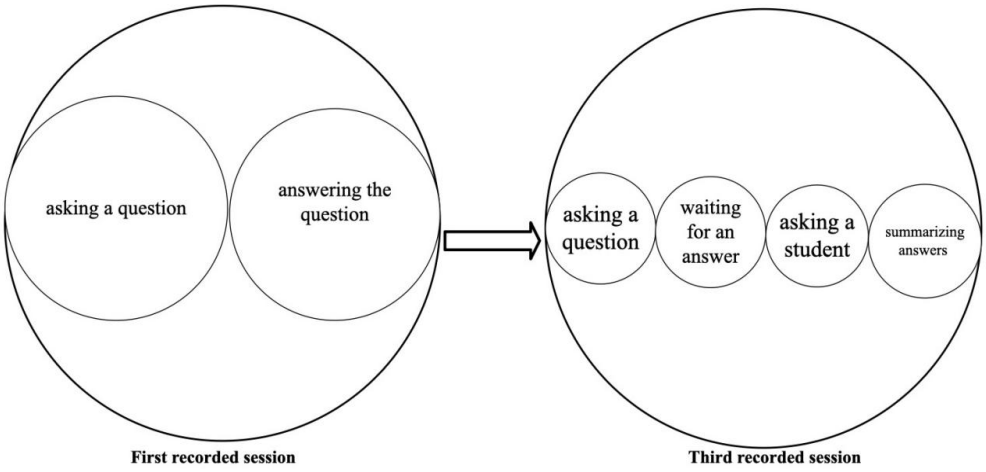

Figure 15 From Monologic to Dialogic: Changes in Teacher A's Scales of Actions

Figure 16 illustrates the comparison of modal configurations in these two sessions. In the first recorded session, when Teacher A asks and answers questions by herself, object handling, gaze at the textbook, and spoken language function together. In contrast, gaze at students does not overlap with other modes. This pattern reflects a traditional, teacher-centred approach, where information is transmitted one way with limited engagement (Chilwant, 2012). However, the third recorded session demonstrates a notable shift in modal configurations. Teacher A's spoken language, facial expressions, gaze toward students, and head movements became more pronounced when addressing students, particularly during discussions. This transformation aligns with student-centred learning principles, emphasising active participation and improved learning outcomes (Biggs, 1999).

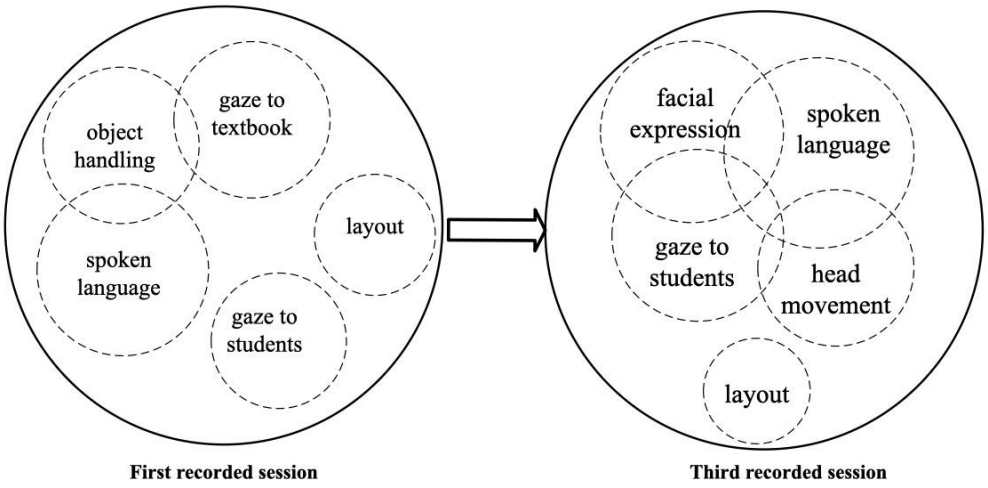

Figure 16 From Isolated Modes to Connected Modes: Progression in Teacher A's Modal Configuration

* Each circle represents a communicative mode, with its sise indicating the degree of prominence in each teaching moment—larger circles denote dominant modes, smaller ones represent supporting modes. Overlapping circles signify simultaneous use. For instance, when a teacher speaks, maintains eye contact, and points to a slide, spoken language and gaze may dominate, while gesture supports, forming a cohesive multimodal ensemble.

The following figures present the spectrograms of Teacher A's first session (Figure 17) and third session (Figure 18), illustrating the development of her sound wave, pitch, and intensity while she delivers lectures.

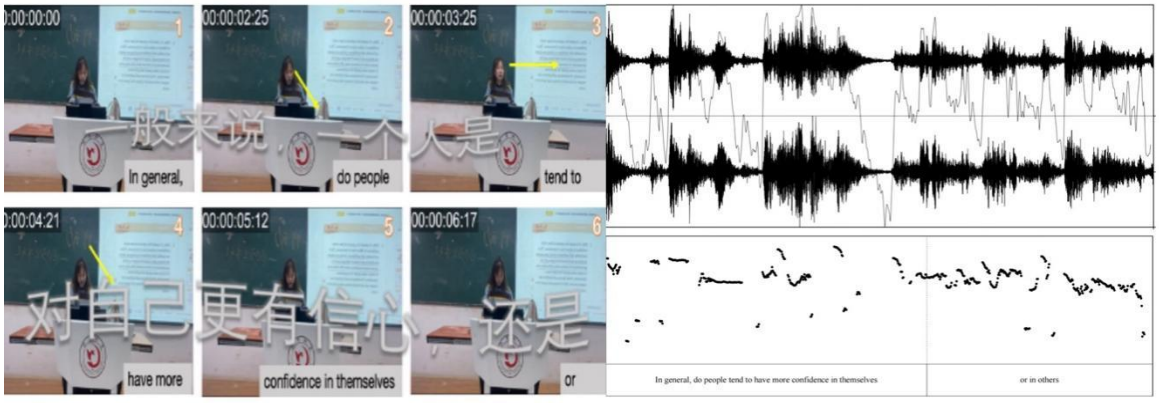

Figure 17 Flat Pitch and Intensity in Teacher A's Session 1

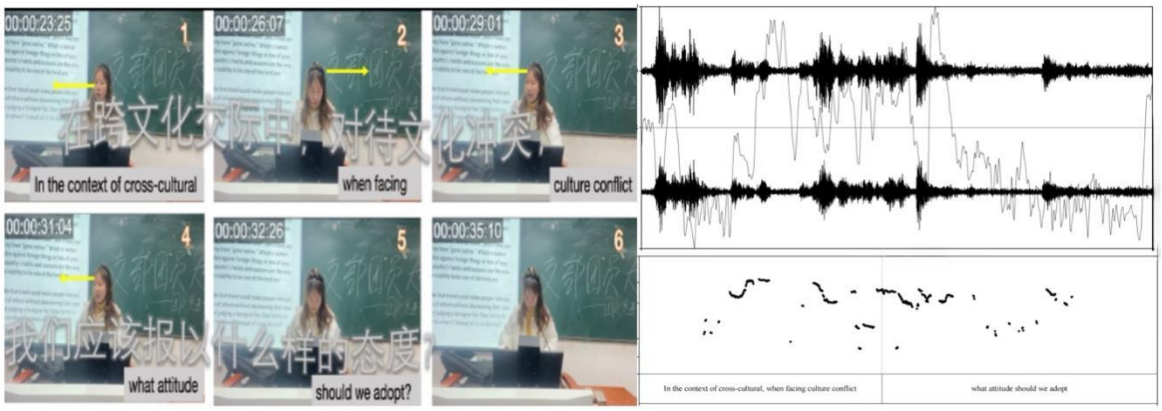

Figure 18 Wider Pitch and Expressive Range in Teacher A's Session 3

The comparison between Teacher A's first and third recorded sessions highlights a significant evolution in her vocal delivery patterns, as shown by Praat-generated spectrograms and acoustic analysis. In the first session (Figure 17), Teacher A's speech was restrained and formally neutral, characterised by a narrow pitch range (180-220 Hz) and stable intensity levels (±2 dB), reflecting a teacher-centred lecturing style focused on clarity and authority. By the third session (Figure 18), her vocal patterns shifted notably during the question "What attitude should we adopt?": her pitch range expanded (150-300 Hz), and intensity variation increased (±6 dB), indicating heightened emotional investment and a more conversational tone. This enhanced vocal expressiveness aligns with a student-centred approach, fostering interactive discussions and critical thinking through dynamic vocal engagement (Hämäläinen et al., 2018). The widened pitch contour and intensity peaks (Figure 18) further illustrate her transition from knowledge transmission to active learner involvement.

5.4.4. Teacher B's Identity Development: Navigating Experimentation to Enacted Dialogism

Teacher B's professional growth similarly unfolded across distinct identity configurations. Initially, her instructional identity aligned with compliance, marked by monologic delivery, fixed gaze on the textbook, and minimal interpersonal engagement. As her confidence developed, she entered a phase of experimentation, where she tentatively incorporated student praise, evaluative feedback, and personal

storytelling. In the final phase, Teacher B achieved dialogic enactment by fostering reciprocal interactions between students and teachers (Geurts et al., 2024; Lv & Sun, 2023).

Figure 19 Excerpts of Teacher B's Increased Interaction and Multimodal Responsiveness in Session 3

This transformation is exemplified in Figure 19. In frames 1–6, Teacher B acknowledges student responses through a relaxed body posture, direct gaze, and affirming language, such as "Very good." These verbal and nonverbal cues, including head tilting, eye contact, and a calm demeanour, not only reinforce student

participation but also model approachability and support(Akinola, 2014). In frames 7 to 8, Teacher B adds praise, “very constructive suggestions”, while sweeping her gaze across the room to engage the whole class. Such explicit evaluative language, like “very constructive suggestions,” effectively reinforces student contributions and encourages broader participation (Margutti & Drew, 2014). In frames 13 to 18, she shares an anecdote about a previous student majoring in data science, highlighting his success with social media posts that have garnered hundreds of thousands of likes. Sharing such personal stories helps bridge the gap between teachers and students, making the classroom environment more relatable and fostering engagement (Lee et al., 2013; Shank, 2006).

As the semester progressed, both teachers began to experiment with more student-centred practices, reflecting a gradual shift in both pedagogical orientation and professional identity. These changes were closely associated with the adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT) (Canale & Swain, 1980) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) strategies (Van den Branden, 2006). Specifically, we observed increased use of open-ended questions, more frequent opportunities for peer discussion, and the incorporation of real-world topics into classroom tasks. Importantly, these interactions were conducted primarily in English, marking a notable departure from the Chinese-dominant instruction observed in Session 1. This linguistic shift not only increased students’ exposure to authentic language input but also signalled the teachers’ growing confidence in facilitating learning through target language use. Such practices align with what Littlewood (2007) describes as “communicative-oriented competence” and reflect a move away from transmission toward interaction as a core instructional mode.

5.4.4 Shifts in Scales of Actions and Modal Configurations: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher B

Figure 20 compares the scales of actions in Teacher B’s first and third recorded sessions. In the first session, Teacher B’s HLAs primarily involve asking a question. In the third session, the actions expand to include not only asking questions but also

giving feedback and sharing stories.

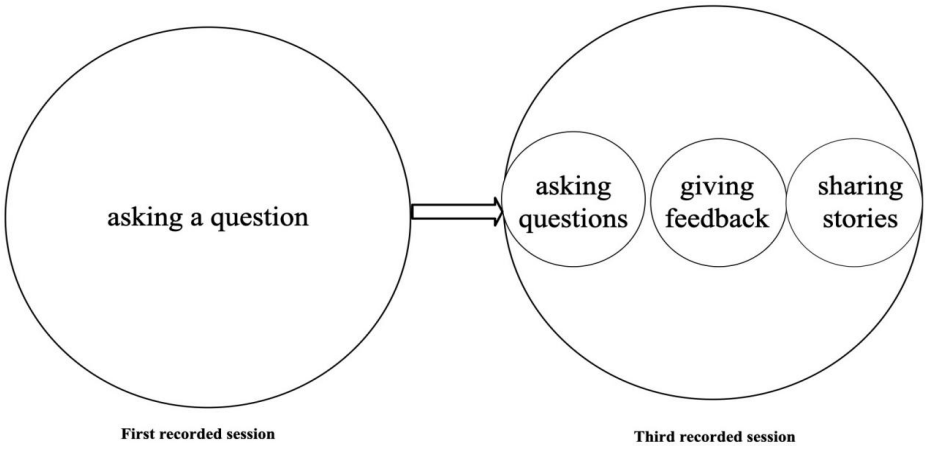

Figure 20 From Questioning to Connection: Changes in Teacher B's Scales of Actions.

Figure 21 illustrates the modal configurations in Teacher B's HLAs across sessions. In the first session, Teacher B adopted a teacher-centred approach, relying heavily on the textbook, with object handling, gaze at the textbook, and spoken language functioning together, leading to limited student interaction. By the third session, she shifted to a student-centred approach, integrating gaze on students, facial expressions, spoken language, and head movement into a cohesive modal aggregation, fostering direct interaction. This progression underscores Teacher B's professional growth, highlighting the value of interactive techniques for early-career teachers to enhance teaching effectiveness and cultivate an adaptive teaching identity.

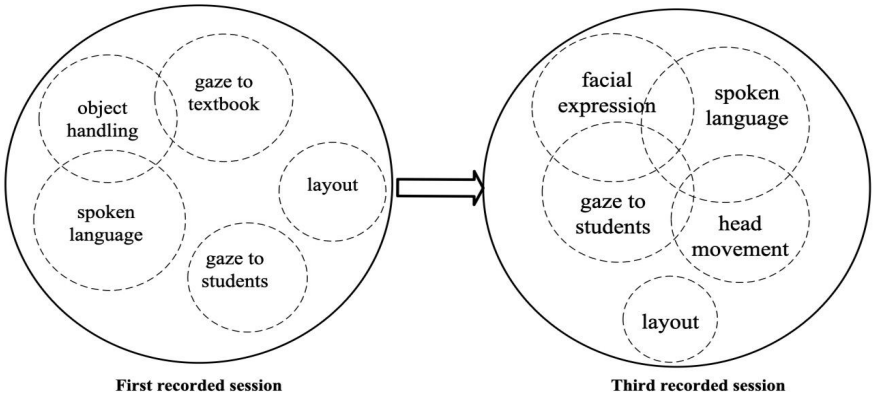

Figure 21 From Isolated to Coordinated Interaction in Teacher B's Modal

Configuration

The following Figures present the spectrograms of Teacher B's first session (Figure 22) and third session (Figure 23), illustrating the development of her sound wave, pitch, and intensity while she delivers lectures.

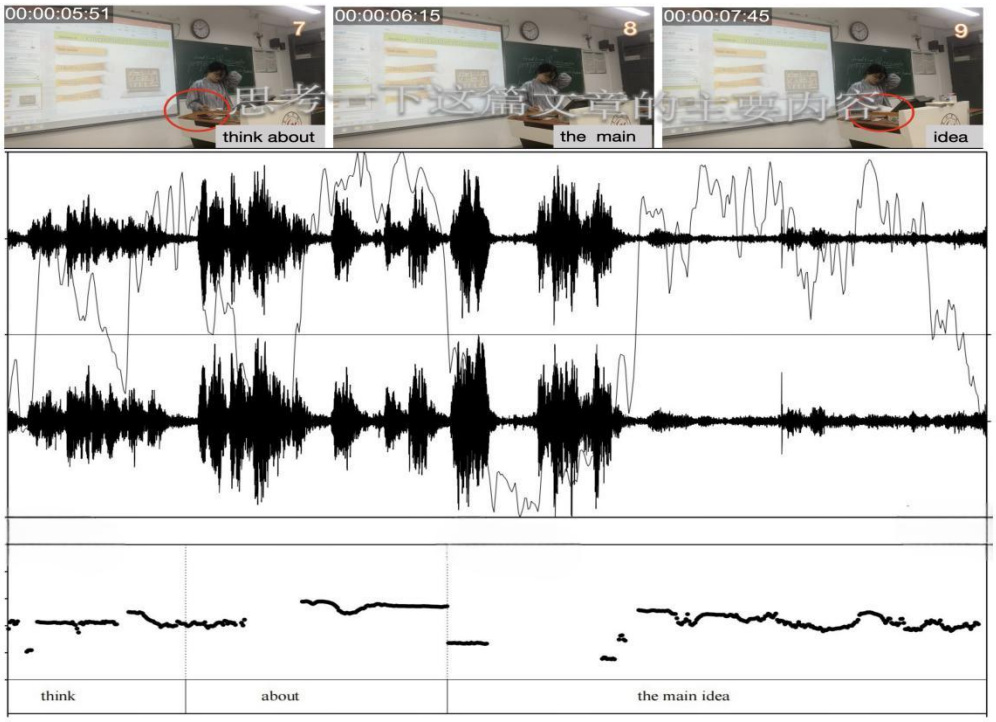

Figure 22 Restrained Vocal Delivery in Teacher B's Session 1

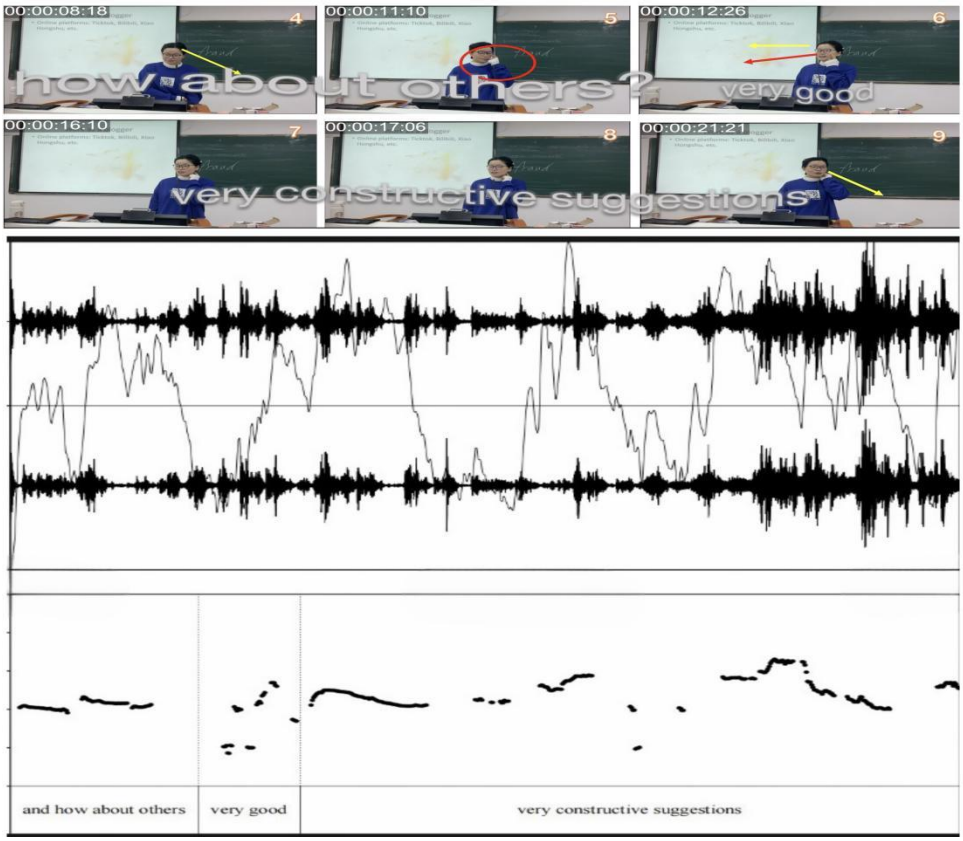

Figure 23 Dynamic and Expressive Delivery in Teacher B's Session 3

In comparing Teacher B's voice intensity and pitch between the first and third sessions, notable changes can be observed. In the first session, the teacher's tone remains relatively flat with minimal variation in both pitch and intensity. However, in the third session, there is a marked increase in pitch, particularly when Teacher B says, "Very good, very constructive suggestions". This shift in pitch and intensity variations suggest a more dynamic and engaged teaching style.

By comparing Teacher B's vocal patterns between the first and third sessions, distinct shifts in delivery emerge. During the initial session, her speech maintains a restrained quality, marked by a narrow pitch range and steady intensity levels, consistent with a formal, teacher-centred approach. By the third session, however, her vocal dynamics shift notably, particularly during interactive exchanges such as her response, "This insight really pushes our discussion forward". Here, her pitch rises sharply (e.g., expanding from a baseline of 100 Hz to 250 Hz) alongside pronounced intensity fluctuations (±8 dB), reflecting heightened expressiveness and emotional investment. The comparison highlights the evolution of Teacher B's

teaching approach over the semester, possibly reflecting greater enthusiasm and adaptability in response to student interaction (Haider et al., 2023).

Table 8 Comparison of Modal Frequencies in Session 1 and Session 3 (Based on 10-minute excerpts from each session)

Total modal shifts	Teacher A S1	Teacher A S3	Teacher BS1	Teacher BS3
Teachers' talk time	9 mins (mostly lecture)	6 mins (more dialogue)	6mins (3mins playing listening recording)	5mins (more peer discussion)
Student-directed Gaze	2	9	2	11
Gesture (self-adaptors excluded)	3	10	2	12
Feedback moves	0	3	1	6
Open question	0	3	0	3
Students' response	0	3	0	5

As shown in Table 8, both Teacher A and Teacher B exhibited increased multimodal complexity and interactivity in Session 3. Notably, student-directed gaze, use of gestures, and open questions all rose significantly, indicating a shift toward dialogic, student-centred teaching.

5.5 Discussion

This study introduces a novel three-phase model of professional identity transformation—compliance, experimentation, and dialogic enactment—derived from longitudinal classroom observations of novice EFL teachers. This framework offers a new lens for understanding how teachers negotiate institutional expectations and pedagogical reform through multimodal strategies, including gaze, gesture, spatial positioning, and voice modulation. By applying MIA to capture higher-level actions, action scales, and modal configurations, the study demonstrates how novice teachers orchestrate these semiotic resources to reposition themselves from traditional knowledge transmitters to facilitators of collaborative meaning-making.

First, this study contributes to theoretical understandings of novice teacher identity by demonstrating how multimodal classroom practices mediate professional

growth. Whereas much of the identity literature conceptualises identity as narratively constructed or discursively negotiated (Varghese et al., 2005), this study advances the field by illustrating how identity is materially enacted through the fine-grained orchestration of communicative modes. Unlike most studies employing MIA, which primarily focus on students' learning processes (Mejía-Laguna, 2023; Wigham & Satar, 2024), this research uniquely centres on novice teachers' professional identity development. For instance, Teacher A's increasing use of sustained gaze, open-ended questioning, and embodied feedback. For instance, Teacher A's transition from a passive knowledge transmitter towards a facilitator identity, exemplified by her focus on intercultural discussions, underscores the importance of guiding students beyond content mastery towards developing global awareness (Barany, 2016). Likewise, Teacher B's development of a story-sharing identity was enacted not through formal instruction, but via personal anecdotes, embodied enthusiasm, and positive evaluative feedback (Nickel & Zimmer, 2019). These findings expand symbolic competence models (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008) by showing how multimodal conduct becomes central to enacting and transforming professional identities.

Second, this study offers practical insights for enhancing EFL teacher education, particularly in non-Western, exam-driven contexts. Building on Morell's (2020) findings, which emphasise the importance of raising teachers' awareness of multimodal classroom interaction and fostering systematic reflection on teaching practices, our data further suggest that novice teachers benefit most when they are explicitly supported in developing both multimodal sensitivity and reflective routines. While de Oliveira and Barbosa (2023) and Veliz et al. (2024) underscored the value of multimodal strategies, they seldom explore how these strategies transform teacher self-positioning in real-time. This research addresses that gap by showing how modal frequency, pitch variation, and multimodal alignment reflect and facilitate shifts in pedagogical stance. To support such transformation, teacher education programs should cultivate novice teachers' awareness of how gaze direction can regulate interaction (Sharma et al., 2016), gestures can scaffold abstract content (Stam & Tellier, 2022), and vocal modulation can enhance student attention and classroom

affect (Sikveland et al., 2021). Although many studies have identified the early years of teaching as a period marked by identity confusion (Hong et al., 2017), pedagogical insecurity (McLean & Price, 2019), and even regression (Sun et al., 2022), the present study demonstrates how multimodal strategies can instead foster confidence, promote pedagogical agency, and enable early-stage positive identity development. In contrast to reflective models grounded in verbal or written self-reporting (O'Halloran et al., 2018; Rachmajanti et al., 2021), this study proposes that conscious attention to multimodal conduct offers an alternative route for identity development, especially in cultural contexts where explicit self-disclosure is less normalised.

Third, this study makes a methodological contribution by operationalising MIA in longitudinal classroom settings. While many teacher identity studies rely on interviews, reflective journals, or thematic discourse analysis (Barkhuizen, 2016; Yuan & Mak, 2018), this research demonstrates how visual transcripts, pitch spectrograms, and fine-grained multimodal coding reveal transformation processes that are otherwise difficult to capture. Furthermore, unlike many multimodal studies that focus on student learning (M. Li, 2020; Tan & Matsuda, 2020), this study centres teachers' multimodal agency and demonstrates that novice teachers reposition themselves—often unconsciously—through micro-interactional adjustments. The findings thus affirm and extend MIA's proposition that identity is formed through mediated action and semiotic layering over time.

5.6 Conclusion

Through MIA, this study has illuminated how two novice university EFL teachers in mainland China navigated evolving identity configurations—compliance, experimentation, and dialogic enactment—as they embraced increasingly interactive and student-centred pedagogical practices. Situated within an institutional culture heavily influenced by examination-oriented traditions, both participants initially adopted authoritative, textbook-driven roles that positioned them as knowledge transmitters rather than facilitators. As the semester progressed, however, sustained

engagement with multimodal strategies such as sustained gaze, vocal expressiveness, embodied feedback, and interactive questioning enabled them to reconfigure their teaching identities, moving toward more relational, interculturally responsive, and pedagogically adaptive roles.

While the study focuses on two novice EFL teachers at a single Chinese university, the findings may be transferable to other exam-driven and resource-constrained EFL contexts, such as rural Chinese institutions or Southeast Asian universities. The identity shifts observed—from compliance to dialogic enactment—reflect challenges common to novice teachers navigating pedagogical reforms. However, transferability is shaped by local cultural and institutional conditions, including teaching traditions and assessment pressures. As such, while the analytical framework and identity phases proposed may inform teacher education elsewhere, adaptation to context is essential.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size and single institutional setting restrict the generalisability of the findings. Second, this investigation predominantly emphasises teachers' practices without incorporating student voices or broader institutional factors that undoubtedly influence identity transformation Third, the timeframe was limited to a single semester, providing only a temporal snapshot of an inherently dynamic and prolonged developmental trajectory.

Future research should address these limitations by investigating a broader array of institutional contexts, incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives, especially those of students and institutional policymakers, and adopting longitudinal methodologies to capture identity transformations more holistically. Exploring how novice teachers negotiate their identities over extended periods and across diverse educational settings would further enrich our theoretical and practical understanding of teacher development.

This chapter analyzes how two novice teachers construct their professional identities through multimodal interaction in the classroom, focusing on the shift from traditional teaching methods to more interactive, student-centred practices. Chapter 6

will present the third article, examining how novice EFL teachers balance the competing demands of teaching and research within China's performance-driven academic environment.

CHAPTER SIX ARTICLE III: BALANCING DUAL ROLES: MULTIMODAL INSIGHTS INTO EFL TEACHERS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA'S PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN ACADEMIA

Zhou, J. (2025). Balancing Teaching and Research: Multimodal Insights into Novice EFL Lecturers' Identity Development in China's Performance-Driven Academia. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 14(3), 260-281.

Article III extends the analyses in Articles I and II by examining how novice university EFL teachers navigate identity tensions generated by the dual demands of teaching and research. It addresses all three research questions, with particular emphasis on RQ3—how institutional and sociocultural discourses mediate professional identity trajectories in performance-oriented academic settings.

Drawing from the broader literature on academic performativity and neoliberal reforms in higher education (Clarke & Knights, 2014; Sang, 2022), the article situates its inquiry within China's second-tier universities-institutions, where early-career teachers face intense pressure to meet research-based evaluation criteria while managing heavy teaching workloads and navigating limited institutional support (Lai et al., 2016; Zheng & Choi, 2024).

The data consist of longitudinal, video-stimulated interviews with four novice university English teachers: Caroline, Daisy, Mandy, and Yable. Their narratives and embodied responses—such as shifts in tone, posture, and gesture—reveal how identity is performed and contested through interaction. By applying MIA (Norris, 2011, 2019), the article analysed identity work across three interconnected discourse layers: the outer layer (institutional discourses and policy), the intermediary layer (collegial and professional interactions), and the central layer (personal beliefs and self-understanding). The article distinguished four identity trajectories: (1) embodied resistance (e.g., Caroline), where the participant maintained a teaching-oriented identity despite institutional pressure to prioritise research, (2) strategic adaptation (e.g., Yable), involving alignment with research mandates while temporarily downplaying teaching engagement, (3) strategic balancing (e.g., Mandy), who negotiated institutional expectations while sustaining pedagogical values., and

(4) aspirational resistance (e.g., Daisy), who initially resisted but gradually sought support through mentorship, enabling partial reconfiguration.

This article demonstrates that identity construction is not linear nor uniform; rather, it is shaped by an interplay of individual agency, institutional constraints, and access to relational support. Even those who outwardly conformed to performativity demands expressed ambivalence and emotional dissonance—confirming that emotional labour and embodied performance are central to identity negotiation (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022)

In summary, Article III enhances current understandings of academic identity development in performativity-driven educational systems. First, it illustrates how novice teachers navigate teaching-research tensions through multimodal performances that reflect both strategic compromise and principled resistance. Second, it underscores the importance of institutional support and mentoring in fostering more sustainable identity configurations. By foregrounding embodied identity work in institutional discourse contexts, this article advances theoretical accounts of agency and provides empirical grounding for more holistic support models for early-career educators.

Abstract: This study examines how novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in a Chinese second-tier university construct their professional identities while navigating competing institutional expectations for teaching and research. Situated within the broader context of neoliberal higher education reform, the study draws on three rounds of video-recorded interviews with four early-career teachers. Using Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, it identifies four evolving identity trajectories: (1) embodied resistance, where participants reject dominant research imperatives to preserve a teaching-centred ethos; (2) strategic adaptation, in which individuals align with institutional expectations for research advancement; (3) strategic balancing, characterised by efforts to integrate teaching and research through institutional collaboration; and (4) aspirational resistance, where participants desire a research-oriented identity but are constrained by insufficient support structures. The

findings demonstrate that identity is not only discursively negotiated but also performed through embodied modes, such as gaze, gesture, and spatial positioning, across three interrelated levels: institutional, relational, and individual. These insights illuminate the complex and situated nature of teacher identity formation in under-researched, non-elite higher education contexts, highlighting the importance of mentoring, workload reform, and evaluation systems that support the development of multidimensional identities.

Keywords: Teacher identity; Novice EFL teachers; Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis; Identity trajectories; Institutional support

6.1 Introduction

Amid intensifying global competition in higher education, universities are increasingly prioritising research output as a key measure of institutional prestige and success, aligning with global academic benchmarking and ranking systems (Lu & Zhang, 2023). In response, Chinese universities have reformed their faculty evaluation and promotion criteria, shifting the emphasis from teaching to research performance (Dai et al., 2021). While teaching once played a central role in faculty assessments, under the new system, research publications, grants, and citations have become primary indicators of career advancement (Gu & Levin, 2021). This shift has significantly increased competition among academics, who must prioritise research to secure promotions and funding. Consequently, internal academic management practices have been reshaped, placing additional strain on faculty who struggle to balance teaching and research responsibilities, often leading to identity tensions and hindering professional development (Nickel & Crosby, 2022). Furthermore, the growing influence of a market-driven academic model has exacerbated this pressure, forcing academics to navigate the tension between traditional educational values and performance-driven institutional demands (Elkington & Lawrence, 2012). For early-career academics, this negotiation often involves an ongoing transition between the competing identity positions of educator and researcher. These formative

experiences shape their long-term professional self-concept (Sang, 2022). Such identity fluidity is particularly evident among novice EFL teachers, who frequently struggle to reconcile the pedagogical demands of language instruction with institutional expectations for research productivity, thereby navigating a complex and often conflicting set of professional roles (Khalid & Husnin, 2019).

Despite increasing research on academic identity, significant gaps remain in understanding how early-career English as a Foreign Language (EFL) faculty in China navigate their professional roles. This study sheds light on early-career EFL teachers working in Chinese second-tier universities, a demographic often overlooked in academic identity research. Their experiences offer critical insights into how neoliberal academic pressures unfold outside elite institutions, challenging assumptions about where such tensions are most visible. This group is especially significant given the vast scale of English language education in China: nearly all university students are required to take College English, and the number of EFL teachers exceeds tens of thousands across higher education institutions (Wen & Zhang, 2020). As such, understanding their identity formation is theoretically relevant and essential for improving language education nationwide. First, prior studies often treat early-career academics as a homogeneous group, overlooking their diverse identity trajectories. While some researchers enthusiastically embrace their role, others struggle with the tensions between institutional demands and personal pedagogical commitments (McAlpine et al., 2014). However, these varied pathways, from seamless integration of dual roles to persistent identity conflict, remain insufficiently documented. Second, there is a lack of integrated analysis on how institutional policies, academic networks, and personal agency interact in identity formation. Existing studies examine structural pressures (e.g., publish-or-perish mandates) separately from interpersonal and individual responses, thereby missing the complex interplay among macro, meso, and micro levels (Huang et al., 2018; Lu & Yoon, 2024). Finally, a methodological gap exists in the study of academic identity, with most research relying on interviews and textual narratives, neglecting the multimodal aspects of identity construction. Identity is expressed verbally and enacted through

gestures, gaze, posture, and spatial interactions in everyday academic life (Dailey-O'Cain & Sluchinski, 2023; Mondada, 2016). The absence of multimodal analysis limits our understanding of how identity is performed and negotiated in practice, particularly in high-stakes professional environments. Addressing these gaps, this study employs Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA) to analyse the verbal and non-verbal expressions of academic identity development among four novice EFL teachers. MIA provides a novel and embodied perspective on identity negotiation, addressing recent calls for more material and interaction-sensitive approaches in professional identity research. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question:

How do novice EFL teachers in a second-tier Chinese university construct and negotiate their academic identities within a performance-driven institutional environment?

6.2 Literature Review

6.2.1 Academic identity: a reflexive and fluid construct

Academic identity is widely conceptualised as a reflective and fluid construct shaped by the interplay between individual agency and socio-institutional structures (Dugas et al., 2020; Laiho et al., 2022). It evolves as academics navigate the overlapping domains of teaching, research, and service, often balancing intrinsic motivations, such as pedagogical commitment and intellectual curiosity, with extrinsic institutional demands, including performance metrics and accountability reforms (Henkel, 2005; Marino, 2021). A critical dimension of identity negotiation lies in the teaching-research nexus, where academics face conflicting priorities. While teaching is traditionally recognised as a social mission (Fernández-Fernández & Fraile, 2016), contemporary reforms increasingly privilege research output as the primary marker of professional legitimacy (Collins et al., 2022). This tension manifests as a misalignment between identity-in-discourse (institutional narratives of the "ideal academic") and identity-in-practice (lived experiences of balancing roles) (Flowerdew

& Wang, 2015; Perkins, 2019). For instance, teaching-focused academics often encounter systemic barriers, such as limited access to research networks and institutional marginalisation, which fragment their professional identities (Zeng & Fickel, 2021). Conversely, prioritising research can lead to pedagogical disengagement, revealing a core paradox of performance-driven academia: metrics intended to boost productivity may undermine holistic professional identities (Bak & Kim, 2015). Standardised demands and evaluation pressures often produce moral conflict and self-alienation, as educators struggle to align their teaching practices with their professional values, resulting in a cumulative emotional toll (Fleming, 2019).

Rather than viewing this tension as inherently harmful, recent scholarship has reinterpreted it as a site of potential reflexive identity integration. Mägi and Beerkens (2016) demonstrated that intrinsic engagement with both teaching and research, rather than mere research productivity, predicts innovative pedagogical practices. Similarly, Uaciquete and Valcke (2022) proposed a reciprocal enrichment model, suggesting that teaching informs research questions while research deepens curricular content, indicating that the fluidity of academic roles can itself become a source of professional resilience. These findings underscore the need to reconceptualise academic identity not as a zero-sum competition for roles, but as a reflexive process of meaning-making across interconnected scholarly activities. However, much of this literature remains theoretical or focused on high-resource academic environments, with less emphasis on how such integrations are implemented within constrained or policy-intensive contexts.

6.2.2 Academic identity in Chinese higher education: policy pressures and identity paradoxes

In China, academic identity construction is uniquely shaped by global neoliberal trends and localised policy regimes. The “Double First-Class initiative”, a national policy introduced by the Chinese government to elevate selected institutions and disciplines to world-class status, and the “up-or-out” evaluation system, which mandates early-career academics to meet strict research benchmarks within fixed

periods or face dismissal, epitomise the quantification of scholarly worth, reducing academic legitimacy to publications in high-impact journals (Teng, 2024; Wu, 2025). Such policies create a schism between academics' pedagogical values ("good practice") and managerial imperatives ("good metrics"), forcing early-career scholars into survivalist strategies—from passive compliance to strategic hybridisation of roles (Bao & Feng, 2023).

However, these pressures are not evenly distributed. Disciplinary and institutional contexts shape policy impacts. For instance, EFL academics encounter distinct challenges in reconciling national research mandates with institutional realities, often resorting to fragmented adaptations (Gu et al., 2025; Lu & Tang, 2025). Meanwhile, regional universities exacerbate inequities by prioritising "quick wins" (e.g., publication quotas) over sustainable support systems, leaving early-career faculty isolated in their negotiations over teaching and research (Lai et al., 2014). Paradoxically, the very constraints imposed by these systems can also generate opportunities for identity reconfiguration. For instance, Ni and Wu (2023) demonstrated that the policy-induced tension between teaching and research can lead to reflexive identity reconfiguration, rather than passive compliance. Their study shows how educators actively reclaim professional legitimacy by integrating teaching and research practices.

Nevertheless, while a growing body of research has explored structural pressures in Chinese academia, relatively little is known about how early-career faculty enact and embody their academic identities in everyday professional contexts. Specifically, the interaction between institutional mandates, collegial environments, and moment-to-moment multimodal performances remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by examining identity formation through the lens of MIA, offering a more situated and embodied account of how academic roles are performed, contested, and redefined.

6.2.3 Teacher Education and the Development of Academic Identity in EFL Contexts

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognised that teacher education plays a central role in shaping novice EFL teachers' academic identity—particularly in contexts where professional legitimacy is tied to both research productivity and pedagogical excellence. While early-career academics often experience identity tensions due to competing institutional expectations, effective teacher education programs can provide essential scaffolding to support this process of identity development.

Trautwein (2018) conceptualises identity development as a dynamic progression through three phases: "taking on the teacher role," "settling into the teacher role," and "finding a new role as a teacher." This phased model highlights identity construction as a longitudinal process that profoundly influences the success of teaching development initiatives. Three key forms of support essential to this process were proposed, including apprenticeship into academic roles, participation in communities of practice, and structured development of scholarly competencies such as academic writing and publication (White et al., 2014). Lopes et al. (2014) proposed an ecological approach to the research-teaching nexus, arguing that differing constructions of "practitioner identity" among lecturers shape how they integrate teaching and research. Their work highlights that teacher education should consider diverse identity positions and disciplinary expectations when designing professional learning pathways. Moreover, in the institutional context, Flecknoe et al. (2017) stressed the importance of mentorship, recognition, and transparent career progression pathways, particularly for educators in Education-Focused (EF) roles.

Taken together, these studies affirm that identity development is not simply an internal or individual process, but one deeply embedded in the structural, relational, and pedagogical environments fostered through teacher education. Yet, few studies have examined how such scaffolding operates in performance-driven systems like China's, where institutional priorities may undervalue teaching identities. The present study contributes to this gap by exploring how novice EFL lecturers in Chinese universities negotiate academic identity through multimodal and discursive practices across a semester of teaching.

6.3 Theoretical Framework: Identity in Sociocultural and Social-Semiotic Perspective

This study conceptualises academic identity as discursively and materially constructed within sociocultural activity. It draws on Goffman's (1983) notion of the interaction order, Scollon's (2001) mediated discourse theory, and Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotics, which together foreground how identities emerge through participation in socially mediated practices. Within this view, identity is not a fixed attribute, but an ongoing accomplishment shaped by institutional structures, cultural tools, and individual agency. These perspectives provide the theoretical grounding for examining how early-career teachers make sense of and perform their roles in a performance-driven academic environment.

6.4 Analytical Framework: Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (MIA)

This study employs MIA (Norris, 2004, 2019, 2020) as its analytical framework to investigate the development of academic identity among early-career university academics. As Norris (2011) mentioned, (inter)action potentially encompasses each action that an individual produces with tools, the environment, and other individuals. Norris defined MIA as a philosophical, theoretical, and analytical framework. In Norris (2019), (inter) action is defined as social actors(s) acting or interacting with others, the environment and/ or objects. Figure 24 below explicates the philosophical and theoretical background. We refer to people as social actors, and the mediational means or cultural tools can include language, thoughts, memory, emotion, the body, environment, objects, culture, practices, or discourses. The mediated action is defined as social actor(s) acting with/through mediational means/cultural tools, and each action that people perform is mediated in multiple ways (Scollon, 1997).

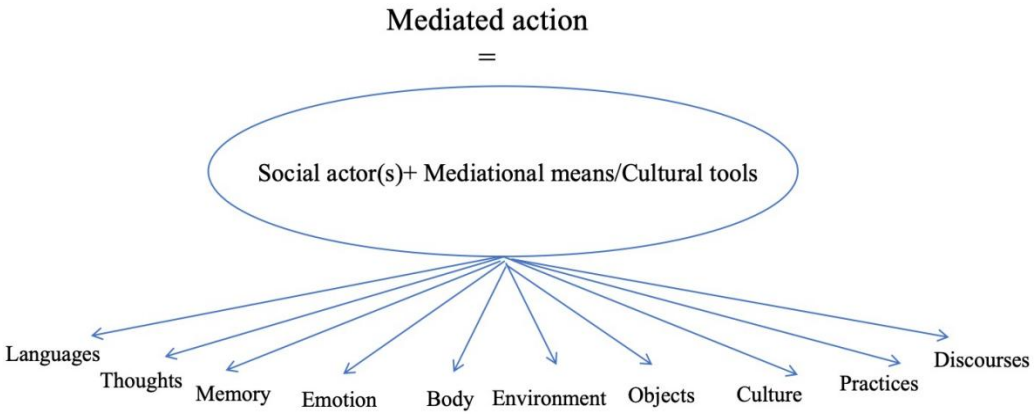

Figure 24 The Philosophical and Theoretical Background of MIA
Adapted from Norris (2019, p. 39)

Furthermore, the concept of mediated action was proposed by Wertsch (1991) and is largely based on Vygotsky (2012). Based on that, Scollon (2002) argued further that '[t]he mediated action (within a dialogical chain of such social actions as well as within a hierarchy of simultaneously occurring practices) is the focus of mediated discourse analysis. Norris (2004) divided mediated actions into three categories that together form the analytical basis of MIA:

Higher-level actions (HLAs) are complex activities, such as interviews or class sessions, bracketed by openings and closings, and composed of chained lower-level actions. For instance, an EFL teacher discussing her perception of being a researcher constitutes a higher-level action.

Lower-level actions are the smallest units of interactional meaning, including micro-gestures, gaze, or brief vocal shifts.

Frozen actions refer to material artefacts such as posters, drawings, or classroom objects, which retain traces of prior mediated actions and identity expressions.

This study focuses primarily on the higher-level actions of novice EFL teachers to understand how academic identities are constructed through extended verbal and embodied performances.

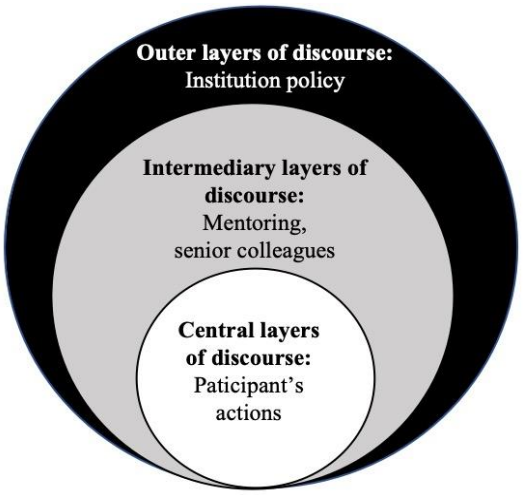

Figure 25 Example of Vertical Layers of Discourse Producing Academic Identity Elements

In addition, Norris (2011, 2019) discussed the notion of vertical layers of discourse, which operate simultaneously across identity formation. Figure 25 illustrates an example of vertical layers of discourse that produce elements of academic identity.

The outer layers of discourse contribute to the general identity of a social actor, where macro-discourses (e.g., institutional policies prioritising research outputs) enforce external expectations, aligning individual identities with organizational goals. The intermediary layers of discourse, composed of meso-level networks (e.g., mentorship, peer collaborations), produce a continuous identity by providing ongoing guidance and support, thereby fostering professional growth and a sense of belonging. Finally, the central layers of discourse construct the immediate identity through micro-interactions and mediated actions (e.g., the participant's personal actions of balancing teaching and research roles), reflecting moment-to-moment identity negotiations. Together, these layers capture the dynamic interplay of structure and agency in academic identity formation.

MIA has emerged as a robust framework for capturing the embodied nature of identity construction in educational settings. Unlike traditional discourse analysis, MIA examines how speech, gesture, gaze, and spatial arrangements work together to

produce identity in interaction (Norris, 2011; Norris & Matelau-Doherty, 2022). It is particularly effective for tracing how individuals construct narrative coherence over time (Geenen, 2023) and how embodied stance-taking enacts professional roles in classroom contexts (Haataja et al., 2025). Prior research has applied MIA to teacher education (Christensson, 2019), intercultural collaboration (Liaw & Wu, 2021), and identity shifts in reflective narratives (Ahn, 2019), affirming its value in analysing layered identity performances. In contrast to traditional linguistic or discursive approaches, the multimodal perspective enables researchers to capture the embodied and material dimensions of identity in interaction.

This study employs MIA to analyse how participants' academic identities are produced and negotiated across various discursive layers through interviews. This enables a multilayered understanding of how early-career EFL teachers in China perform, contest, and reconstruct their professional identities in response to competing institutional expectations.

6.5 Research Design

6.5.1 Research site and participants

This study was conducted at a second-tier university in Anhui Province, China. Ethical approval was granted by the ethics committees of the researchers' home institutions and the participating university (AUTEC Ref: 22/243).

Four early-career EFL teachers were initially recruited based on the following three key criteria: (1) they were novice teachers within the first five years of their teaching careers; (2) they were voluntarily participating in the study; and (3) they were teaching the College English curriculum at the research site. These criteria ensured consistency in institutional and pedagogical contexts while respecting participant agency. Such alignment enabled the meaningful comparison of identity trajectories across shared teaching practices. Table 9 gives a brief description of the four participants.

Table 9 A Brief Description of the Participants

Name	Major	Background	Duration of Teaching
Yable	Linguistics	Master's degree in Linguistics, 985 University (2018)	From September 2018
Caroline	Translation	Master's degree in Translation, UK University (2018)	From September 2019
Daisy	Translation	Master's degree in Translation, Chinese University (2019)	From September 2019
Mandy	Literature	Master's degree in Literature, 211 University (2021)	From September 2021

While the study initially recruited four early-career EFL teachers to capture diverse academic identity trajectories, MIA was conducted across all four participants to ensure theoretical saturation. Using Norris's (2011, 2019) framework of vertical discourse layers, the study identified recurring patterns of identity tension—particularly between teaching-focused values and research-oriented institutional expectations—across all cases. These patterned responses, though varied in form, indicated analytic adequacy for tracing identity development processes within the given institutional context. In qualitative research, sample sufficiency is determined not by numerical representativeness but by the richness, relevance, and explanatory power of the data (Yin, 2009). Thus, the selected four participants were deemed sufficient to generate deep, theoretically grounded insights into the multimodal enactment and negotiation of academic identities in Chinese EFL higher education.

6.5.2 Data collection

Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers. In addition, each participant signed a separate media release agreement, explicitly granting permission for the use of identifiable facial images in academic publications.

This procedure was reviewed and approved by the university ethics committee and complied with AUTEC's protocols for the use of visual data. Institutional consent was secured from department heads prior to recruitment, and all procedures adhered to research ethics protocols for participant confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Each participant engaged in three semi-structured interviews across the semester. Interviews were conducted in Chinese to avoid second-language interference (Tsui, 2003), each lasting approximately 60 minutes in private settings. All sessions were audio-and video-recorded. Interview questions (see Appendix G) were designed to elicit reflections at different points in time, aligning with the MIA framework (Norris, 2011, 2019).

The researcher guided participants and elicited their responses, contributing to the intermediary layer of discourse in the identity formation process (Pirini, 2017). While the interaction may have sparked reflections on identity development, it was not the focus of the study. Member checking was used to validate participants' intended meanings, thereby enhancing trustworthiness.

6.5.3 Data analysis

Data were analysed in four interconnected phases, following the theoretical and methodological principles of MIA (Norris, 2019).

In Phase 1, the researcher closely reads interview transcripts to identify and categorise HLAs related to academic identity development. This involves segmenting the data into meaningful utterances and interpreting their functions in terms of identity work, with each action linked to a specific discourse layer—outer (institutional and societal), intermediary (community and collegial), or central (individual experience). For example, "personal actions" are associated with the central layer, illustrating how self-reflection and personal narratives shape academic identity.

Building on this foundation, Phase 2 quantified the frequency of general, continuous, and immediate identity elements shaped by different layers of discourse. For instance, institutional pressures negatively shape Caroline's continuous academic identity. This phase highlights how discourse layers mediate identity trajectories.

Following this, Phase 3 involves selecting five representative excerpts that exemplify how different layers of discourse interact to shape participants' academic identity development. These excerpts illuminate individual trajectories and serve as focal points for the subsequent multimodal analysis.

Finally, in Phase 4, the researcher conducts a detailed micro-analysis of video episodes to explore how participants enact HLAs through various modes. A mode is defined as "a system of mediated action with regularities" (Norris, 2020, p. 16), and this analysis reveals how discourse and practice are embedded in mediated actions within specific sites of engagement (Matelau & Sagapolutele, 2023). The study focuses on transcribed modes, including spoken language, layout, gesture, gaze, head movement, and facial expression, each of which contributes to constructing meaning and identity in classroom settings. Spoken language is transcribed using Norris's (2019) multimodal conventions, incorporating prosodic features such as intonation and loudness through waveforms and font variations. Layout reflects the spatial arrangement of classroom elements (Norris, 2019, p. 205); gesture involves the use of hands and arms in instructional interaction (Norris, 2019, p. 240); gaze reveals attentional focus (Norris, 2019, p. 243); head movement indicates instructional shifts (Norris, 2019, p. 245); and facial expression conveys emotional stance and interpersonal dynamics (Norris, 2019, p. 248). These four phases provide a comprehensive and layered understanding of how academic identity is discursively and multimodally constructed across social, institutional, and individual contexts.

To enhance credibility and reduce subjective bias, two external researchers with training in multimodal interaction analysis independently reviewed 20% of the transcriptions and modal coding. Intercoder reliability (Cohen's Kappa=0.85) was calculated, ensuring interpretive reliability. Discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached, ensuring intercoder reliability. Member checking was conducted with both focal participants after preliminary findings were produced, allowing them to comment on interpretations and adjust any misrepresentations of intent.

6.6 Findings

This section examines how four early-career EFL teachers in China navigate tensions related to academic identity across three discourse layers: outer (institutional/societal), intermediary (community/network), and central (individual/interactional). A multimodal analysis of interviews reveals four evolving identity trajectories: (1) embodied resistance, where participants reject dominant research imperatives to preserve a teaching-centred ethos; (2) strategic adaptation, in which individuals align with institutional expectations for research advancement; (3) strategic balancing, characterised by efforts to integrate teaching and research through institutional collaboration; and (4) aspirational resistance, where participants desire a research-oriented identity but are constrained by insufficient support structures.

6.6.1 Trajectory 1: Embodied Resistance—Caroline

Caroline's academic identity is marked by persistent resistance to the researcher role and a strong attachment to teaching. Across all three interviews, she views research as a psychological burden that detracts from her pedagogical focus and frames the pursuit of a PhD as a forced necessity rather than a personal goal. Her disengagement is compounded by a lack of institutional support and collegial collaboration, which leaves her navigating research expectations in isolation. This sustained disconnect reinforces a fragmented identity misaligned with institutional ideals.

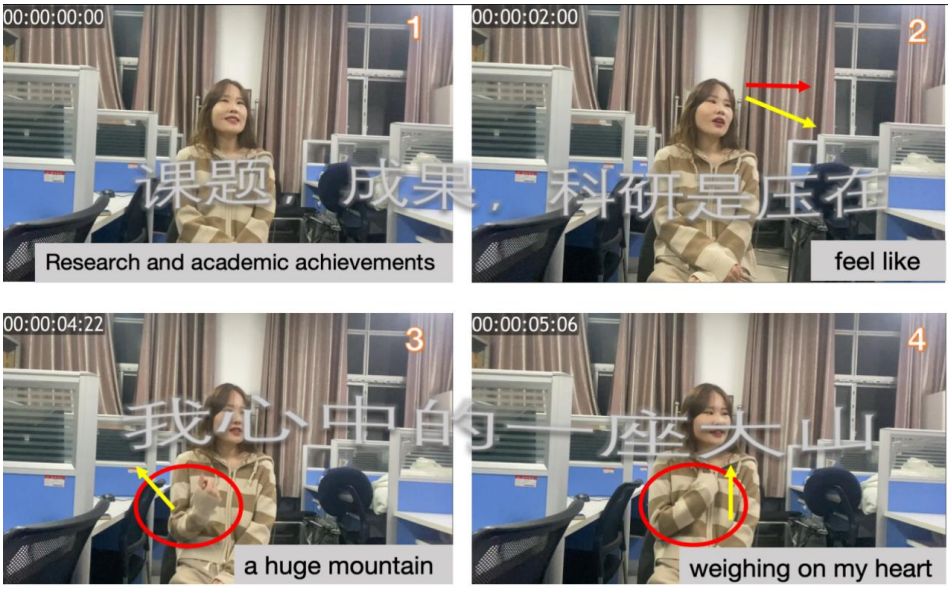

Figure 26 Conflict Between Caroline's General Academic Identity Element and Immediate Academic Identity Element

Figure 26 presents a transcribed excerpt from Caroline's first interview, in which she reflects on her experience with academic research. In frame 2, when mentioning "feel like", she gazes at the interviewer, revealing her emotional load. Studies on nonverbal emotional signalling in professional settings suggest that gaze direction and facial expressions are mechanisms for projecting vulnerability and seeking collegial validation (Haataja & Salonen, 2025). In frame 3, Caroline employs a metaphoric gesture (raising her hand) and a slower speaking rate to describe research as "a huge mountain." According to Cienki and Müller (2008), metaphoric gestures, especially those involving vertical hand movements, are frequently used to convey psychological burden and institutional pressure. McNeill et al. (2015) further argued that such gestures are not merely add-ons but integral to discourse, serving as visual representations of abstract challenges. This suggests that Caroline's raised-hand gesture is a nonverbal manifestation of her perception of research as an insurmountable challenge. Moreover, Caroline's deictic gesture (pointing to her chest in Frame 4) while saying "weighing on my heart" further emphasises the personal toll of research expectations. Such inward gestures are closely linked to self-reference and identity construction, especially in contexts of vulnerability (Hart, 2024). The deictic gesture is a multimodal expression of internalised stress, revealing how identity is

shaped through embodied response to academic pressure. The transcript illustrates that Caroline's professional identity remains fragmented, situated between a teaching-oriented self-concept shaped by the central layers of discourse and the institutional pressures arising from the outer layers of discourse. Her multimodal actions—especially gesture, gaze, and vocal modulation—underscore the dissonance between institutional mandates and her personal pedagogical values. This case reflects a deeper conflict between her general academic identity, aligned with institutional expectations, and her immediate identity, grounded in everyday professional experience and self-perception.

Caroline exemplifies an embodied resistance trajectory, where institutional research discourse is experienced as misaligned with personal values, and multimodal data reveals an emotionally and physically expressed rejection of academic norms.

6.6.2 Trajectory 2: Strategic Adaptation—Daisy

Daisy also grapples with institutional research pressures but responds differently. Throughout three interviews, her attitude towards research shifts from viewing it as a peripheral obligation hindered by heavy teaching loads to acknowledging its necessity for career advancement amidst increasing pressures, such as doctoral recruitment policies. Initially, she attributes her limited research engagement to a busy teaching schedule and her own lack of initiative, framing research as a low priority despite its potential benefits for teaching. Over time, she internalises institutional expectations, although her research efforts remain solitary due to limited collaboration, reinforcing her sense of isolation. By the third interview, Daisy pragmatically accepts her dual role as a teacher-researcher, adapting to institutional demands while grappling with the tension between her teaching-focused values.

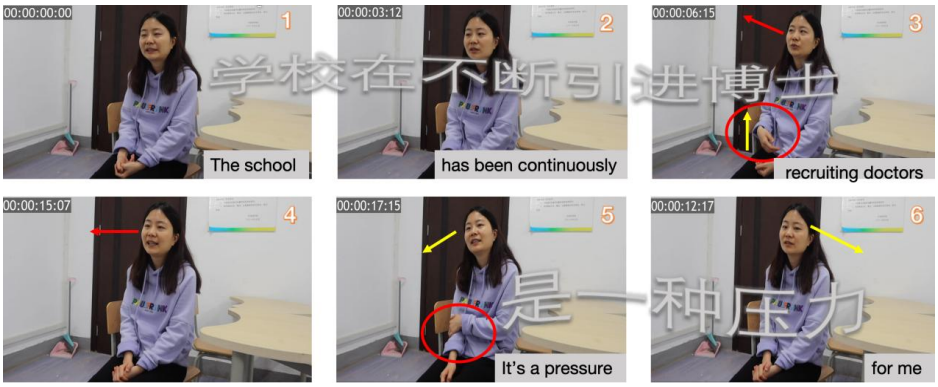

Figure 27 Conflict between Daisy's General Academic Identity Element and Immediate Academic Identity Element

Figure 27 presents a transcribed excerpt from Daisy's second interview, discussing her perception of institutional policies. In Frame 3, Daisy raises her hand, saying "recruiting doctors". This gesture marks the beginning of a mediated action and highlights the institutional policy being referenced. In Frame 5, Daisy places her left hand on her right elbow, stating, "It's a pressure for me." This self-adaptor gesture, a category of nonverbal behaviour often associated with emotional regulation and anxiety management, functions as a self-soothing mechanism (Maki & Sekine, 2024). It reflects her internalisation of institutional pressure and reveals an effective response to the increasing expectations she faces. In frame 9, her vocal emphasis on "me," marked by increased volume, further signals personal struggle. Paralinguistic shifts like volume change often express strong emotion or highlight key points (Xu & Armony, 2021). Daisy's embodied actions and vocal modulation illustrate the tension between competing identity narratives. On the one hand, she aligns with a pedagogical ethos grounded in teaching as a social mission; on the other, she is compelled to conform to an institutional logic driven by research output and performance metrics. This conflict illustrates a tension between her general academic identity, aligned with institutional goals of research productivity, and her immediate identity, shaped by her pedagogical values and everyday teaching practice.

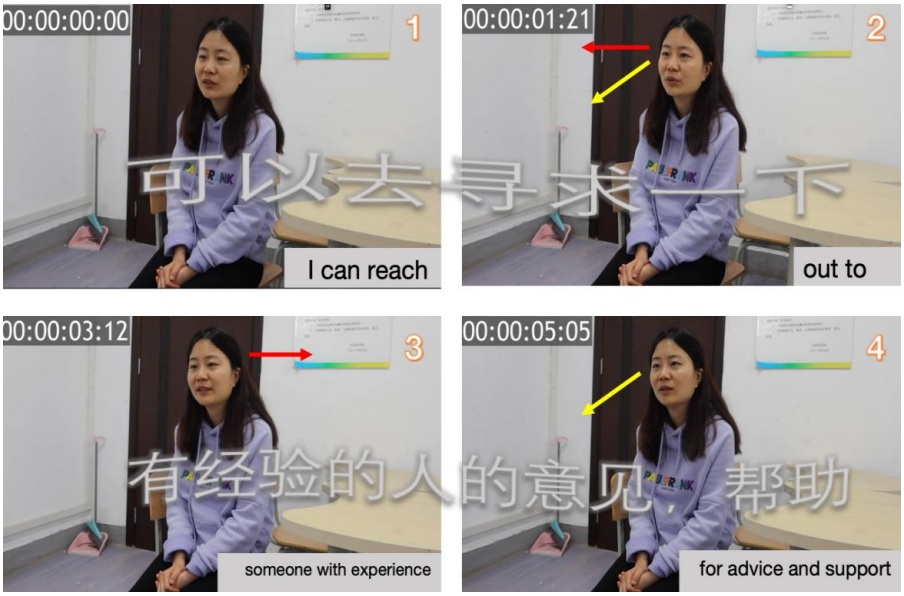

Figure 28 Development of Daisy's Integrated Academic Identity Element

Figure 28 presents an excerpt from the later part of Daisy's second interview, illustrating the development of her integrated academic identity. Her adaptive strategies emerge as a performative negotiation of institutional constraints, exemplified by her deliberate engagement with mentorship networks and incremental goal setting. In Frames 1-2, Daisy's lateral head movement while stating "I can reach out to..." visualises the metaphor of reaching beyond oneself, signalling a shift from isolation to openness. The gesture embodies intentionality toward seeking support (Bezemer & Kress, 2015). In Frames 3-4, her gaze turns to the interviewer as she adds "someone with experience for advice and support", forming a multimodal alignment that reinforces her willingness to seek guidance and subtly positions the interviewer as a potential source of recognition. This reflects relational scaffolding in identity negotiation, where personal agency is enacted through socially situated interactions (Goodwin, 2018). Daisy strategically navigates institutional contradictions (e.g., research-teaching tensions) by proactively seeking collaborative support from colleagues, transforming structural pressures into resources for identity reconfiguration. Drawing on Arvaja's (2018) concept of identity bricolage, Daisy creatively reconfigures institutional tools such as mentorship frameworks to align with her pedagogical values. By seeking help from senior colleagues, she carves out a

third path between institutional compliance and resistance. This form of collective agency, grounded in solidarity, allows her to construct an integrated activist teacher-scholar identity and reclaim narrative autonomy within the constraints of a neoliberal academic environment.

6.6.3 Trajectory 3: Strategic Balancing—Mandy

Mandy presents a trajectory where teaching and research are not seen as mutually exclusive. In three interviews, she allocates 80% of her effort to research, described as a "happy and painful sweet burden", and 20% to teaching. Initially, she views research as her passion, finding intrinsic satisfaction in academic achievements despite the challenges that come with it. Over time, she recognises the importance of teaching, evolving from a 90% researcher identity to a more balanced approach. This shift is aided by institutional mentorship, including her mentor's advice on teaching competitions and research projects. By the final interview, Mandy accepts the need for balance, acknowledging that institutional realities require compromise, even as her preference remains for research.

Figure 29 Mandy's Perception of Balancing Teaching and Research

Figure 29 illustrates Mandy's perception of balancing teaching and research from the third interview. In frames 2–3, her direct eye contact with the interviewer while stating, "we definitely need to teach, but you…" demonstrates how gaze serves as a tool for asserting confidence and positioning herself within a scholarly community (Brône et al., 2017). The use of "we" connects to the intermediary layer of discourse, signalling solidarity with fellow early-career teachers who face similar struggles in

China's competitive academic environment. This collective stance resonates with her gesture in frame 6, an open-handed movement synchronised with "trying to strike a balance," which visually reinforces her emphasis on equilibrium and mirrors findings that gestures amplify abstract ideas during speech (Oben & Brône, 2015). Together, these multimodal elements—gaze, gesture, and inclusive language—reveal Mandy's negotiation of identity across three levels: her central layer reflects personal research ambitions (e.g., pursuing academic research), while her performance of balance addresses the outer layer's institutional demands (e.g., teaching quotas). This dynamic interplay highlights how early-career academics creatively adapt to structural pressures, resisting simplistic dichotomies between "teacher" and "researcher" through embodied agency.

Mandy's identity development demonstrates strategic balancing—a dynamic, embodied negotiation between personal academic ambitions and institutional expectations that fosters a more integrated academic identity over time.

6.6.4 Trajectory 4: Aspirational Resistance—Yable

Yable's case reveals a divergent path—one marked by progressive detachment from institutional values and a growing commitment to external academic validation. Yable's academic identity is shaped by a progressive disengagement from institutional expectations and a resistant aspiration for external academic validation. Throughout three interviews, she shifts from critiquing the fragmented support offered by institutions, highlighting that "70–80% of progress comes from personal effort," to viewing teaching as a transactional duty ("fulfil responsibility when on duty"), while strategically pursuing a PhD as an escape from institutional metrics. Initially disillusioned by superficial collaborations among colleagues ("no one takes empowerment meetings seriously"), she later prioritises her doctoral studies over job title aspirations, stating that "these things [PhD] are more important." By the third interview, she separates her professional identity from her passion for teaching, characterizing it as a "job" that provides "time and social status." Yet, she directs her agency into scholarly autonomy through meticulous organization of literature for her

doctoral preparation. This trajectory illustrates a tension between rejecting institutional priorities and reclaiming intellectual legitimacy through external academia.

Figure 30 Yable's Perception of Pursuing a PhD

Figure 30 shows a transcribed excerpt from Yable's second interview, where she shares her perspective on pursuing research. In Frame 2, when she says "compared to leaving for a PhD", Yable extends her hands outward, a metaphoric gesture that spatially represents abstract concepts such as departure and separation (Ferré, 2012). This gesture visually underscores the notion of "leaving", grounding a metaphor of distance and transition (Zdrazilova et al., 2018). In Frame 4, as she adds "or further studies," her hands move inward toward her body, suggesting a moment of reflection. This inward motion contrasts with the previous outward gesture and may signal an emotional or cognitive turn inward, what Cuffari (2012) described as the gesture's role in enacting unspoken meaning. Here, the gesture supports a shift from external action (leaving) to internal motivation, driven by a desire for growth.

In Frames 5–7, as Yable says "professional titles are less of a priority," she uses an open-palm gesture to visually downplay the importance of institutional ranking (Cartmill & Goldin-Meadow, 2016; Duan & Liu, 2020) In Frame 8, this shifts to a

beat gesture as she taps her thigh while stating “for me,” emphasising personal conviction. The transition from an expansive to a focused gesture marks a shift from distancing herself from external expectations to affirming internal academic values. These embodied actions align with findings in gesture studies that highlight how gesture shapes meaning in identity negotiation (Masi, 2020; Vignozzi, 2019). Despite these institutional constraints, Yable conveys a strong personal motivation for academic research and pursuing a PhD. This interaction reflects a central layer of discourse, where her academic aspirations and passion for research shape her academic identity. Although she acknowledges structural challenges, her commitment to academic inquiry stems from an intrinsic love for learning and a clear vision for her future academic path. This contrast between institutional expectations and personal agency highlights the complex, multimodal negotiation of academic identity within higher education.

Yable exemplifies aspirational resistance, her identity is shaped by a desire for scholarly legitimacy and growth, but in tension with the institutional environment. Her multimodal expressions convey a resistant, yet self-motivated trajectory grounded in personal agency.

6.7 Discussion

This study identifies four distinct identity trajectories among early-career EFL academics, which can be grouped into two pairs based on their predominant identity strategies. Caroline and Daisy struggle to reconcile the conflicting demands of teaching and research, reflecting a teaching-centred identity under pressure. However, Daisy also begins to recognise the need for academic development, gradually shifting from passive resistance to proactive help-seeking, particularly in relation to research engagement. In contrast, while both Mandy and Yable demonstrate a stronger inclination toward research, their approaches diverge: Mandy actively seeks balance and institutional alignment, whereas Yable aspires to a more research-intensive path, driven by a desire for doctoral study and hindered by insufficient institutional support.

6.7.1 Caroline and Daisy: Contrasting trajectories of identity struggle

Figures 31 and 32 visualise the development of Caroline's and Daisy's academic identity elements across the central, intermediary, and outer layers of discourse, as revealed through three rounds of interviews.

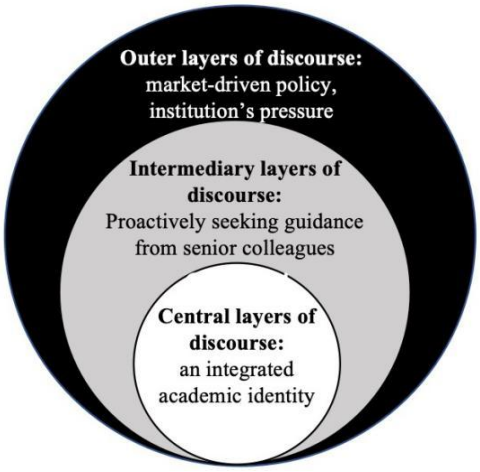

Figure 31 Caroline's Conflicted Academic Identity

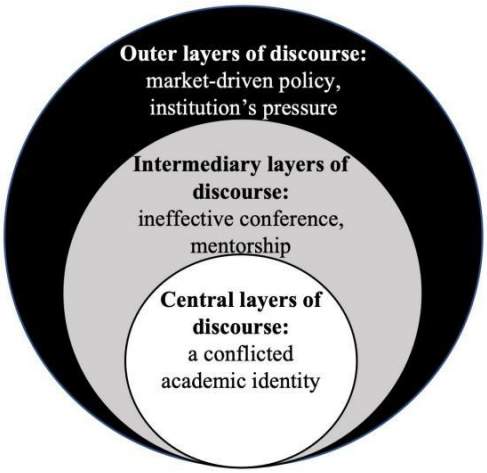

Figure 32 Daisy's Integrated Academic Identity

At the outer layers of discourse, market-driven policies that prioritise research output over pedagogical development force academics into untenable choices (Clarke & Knights, 2014; Sarpong, 2023). Both Caroline and Daisy view their universities as placing research metrics above teaching quality and personal aspirations, which reflects findings that managerial reforms reduce academic identity to economic utility (Vican et al., 2020). Caroline's metaphor of research as an "huge mountain" illustrates the identity fragmentation experienced by early-career academics when institutional mandates conflict with pedagogical values (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015).

At the intermediary layer of discourse, access to mentorship and professional networks emerges as a crucial factor in shaping the professional development of early-career academics (ECAs) (Marino, 2021). However, Caroline and Daisy experience these resources as insufficient and poorly aligned with their needs. This disconnect contributes to their growing sense of marginalisation. Recent studies further affirm that inadequate mentorship and fragmented academic networks often lead to professional isolation and hinder identity formation among ECAs (McNaughton & Billot, 2016; Zemichael, 2020). Yet in Daisy's second interview, her expressed intent to actively seek help, whether through institutional resources or collegial support, marks a key shift at the intermediary layer of discourse. Rather than resisting or internalizing the pressure, she begins to engage in support-seeking as a strategy for navigating institutional demands. Such proactive help-seeking has been identified as a catalyst for identity transformation, enabling ECAs to reconcile tensions between institutional expectations and personal academic values (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2024).

At the central layer of discourse, both Caroline and Daisy experience emotional strain as their teaching-centred identities clash with institutional research demands. Caroline describes "research as suffering" and "teaching as passion," highlighting emotional dissonance and job dissatisfaction (Yang et al., 2021). Daisy also struggles with a heavy teaching load, but gradually shifts from passive resistance to proactive engagement, recognizing the need for integrated academic development. Their experiences show how institutional pressure can both constrain and prompt identity transformation.

6.7.2 Mandy and Yable: Constructing Research-Oriented Academic Identity

Figures 33 and 34 visualise the development of Mandy's and Yable's academic identity elements across the central, intermediary, and outer layers of discourse, as revealed through three rounds of interviews.

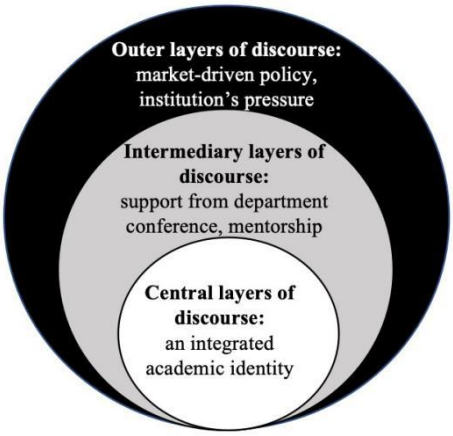

Figure 33 Mandy's Integrated Academic Identity

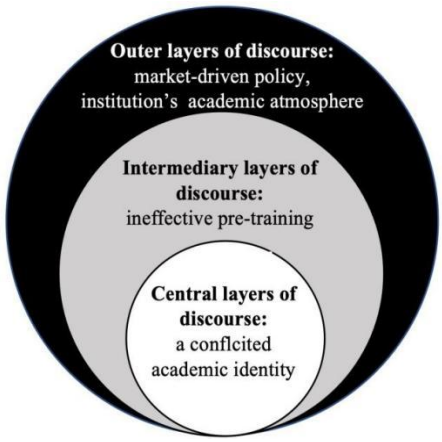

Figure 34 Yable's Conflicted Academic Identity

At the outer layers of discourse, although both encounter the same institutional devaluation of teaching, their responses diverge. Mandy strategically aligns with research networks, leveraging international collaborations to build an integrated academic identity, a tactic consistent with studies on ECAS' strategic compliance (Zhang & Gong, 2024). In contrast, Yable's frustration with inadequate research infrastructure (e.g., conferences, training) reflects findings on how institutional neglect fuels attrition (Othman & Aljuhaish, 2021).

At the intermediary layers of discourse, Mandy's participation in international academic communities enhances her professional development, providing external validation and reinforcing a research-focused identity (Meihami, 2023). Her experience highlights the vital role of academic networks in bridging institutional gaps, giving alternative spaces for professional growth and identity negotiation (Huang & Guo, 2019). In contrast, Yable faces growing institutional pressures

without adequate support or mentorship. Although she strives to meet teaching and administrative responsibilities, she increasingly experiences academia as a transactional space, rather than one of intellectual fulfilment. This finding is consistent with research on faculty retention and career trajectory shifts in under-supported environments (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017). Over time, her desire to pursue doctoral studies intensifies, not only as a career move but also as an attempt to reclaim a meaningful academic identity, a pattern consistent with transition narratives among unsupported early scholars (Stratford et al., 2024).

At the central layers of discourse, Mandy benefits from departmental support, academic conferences, mentorship, and peer connections, which enable her to balance teaching and research. Through these experiences, she gradually realised that her academic life need not be defined by an either/or binary between teaching and research. Instead, she developed an integrated academic identity that allowed her to integrate both domains harmoniously and sustainably (Lu & Peng, 2025; Yin & Mu, 2023). In contrast, Yable's central layer of discourse reveals a conflicted academic identity that differs significantly from that of Caroline. Whereas Caroline's identity tension arises from a value-based commitment to teaching in a research-driven environment, Yable's conflict stems from institutional barriers that hinder her pursuit of a research-focused career. Yable's experience illustrates how institutional inadequacies can disrupt personal motivations and professional commitment, potentially altering career trajectories (Lieff et al., 2012). This dual commitment, while challenging, shows that mentorship and institutional support are crucial for navigating early academic challenges (Rachmajanti et al., 2021; Sargent & Rienties, 2022).

These findings collectively respond to the research question by illustrating how novice EFL teachers navigate complex institutional expectations and construct academic identities through embodied, strategic, and relational practices.

6.8 Conclusion and Implications

By examining how novice EFL teachers in non-elite Chinese universities

construct and negotiate their academic identities under performance-driven institutional demands, this study contributes to a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of professional identity formation in teacher education. This study identifies four evolving academic identity trajectories among early-career EFL scholars in China: embodied resistance (Caroline), strategic adaptation (Daisy), strategic balancing (Mandy), and aspirational resistance (Yable). Through MIA, this study reveals how academic identity is negotiated not only through discourse but also through embodied action—gestures, gaze, and posture—across three interrelated layers: outer (institutional policy), intermediary (mentorship and networks), and central (individual meaning-making). While some participants actively resisted dominant research-oriented norms, others strategically aligned with institutional expectations or sought integrative approaches. These findings highlight the complexity of academic identity construction in second-tier Chinese universities, where neoliberal imperatives intersect with individual values and uneven access to support systems.

This study contributes to EFL teacher education in three key ways. First, it moves beyond binary typologies (e.g., teacher vs. researcher, Y. Xu, 2014) by conceptualising identity as fluid trajectories, addressing recent calls for dynamic models of novice teacher development (Lu & Zhang, 2023). Second, it introduces a multi-layered identity framework, mapping how institutional constraints, collegial relationships, and personal agency interact—extending ecological models of teacher identity (e.g., Chen, 2024). Third, methodologically, it innovates by applying MIA to the Chinese EFL context, integrating discourse and embodied modes of identity performance. Its focus on non-elite institutions fills a critical research gap and offers practical implications for teacher education, including the need for structured mentorship, emotional support, and more balanced evaluation systems (Li & Zhang, 2025).

Taken together, Chapters 4 to 6 have examined novice teacher identity from three complementary angles: the tension between imagined and practised identities, the embodied negotiation of identity in classroom practice, and the institutional

mediation of longer-term professional trajectories. The following chapter moves beyond the individual articles to synthesise these findings at the thesis level, drawing out the broader theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the study as a whole.

CHAPTER SEVEN DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter synthesises findings across the three empirical studies to construct a cumulative, theoretically robust and globally relevant account of how novice university EFL teachers in mainland China develop their professional identities within a hierarchical, performative, and reform-driven higher education system. By analysing identity as multimodally performed, agentively negotiated under constraint, and socio-institutionally situated, the chapter proposes an integrated framework that contributes not only to the Chinese context but also to broader understandings of teacher development in high-stakes, culturally hybrid, and performative educational regimes. Drawing on MIA (Norris, 2004, 2011, 2019, 2020), the discussion moves from identity change across contexts (7.1), to multimodal strategies of identity negotiation (7.2), to reframing professional development (7.3), to finally to a focused synthesis on agency as the key cross-study contribution (7.4), and to practical and policy implications for novice teacher development (7.5).

7.1 Trajectories of Becoming: Identity Change across Contexts

Across the three articles, novice EFL teacher identity emerged not as a linear progression from "novice" to "expert", but as an iterative, contingent, and multimodally enacted process shaped by institutional hierarchies, performance metrics, and personal aspirations. While this resonates with critiques of staged models of teacher development (Trent, 2020), the present research extends prior work by showing how these trajectories are materially and multimodally performed in real time rather than inferred solely from narratives or self-reports.

One recurring pattern was embodied resistance, most vividly illustrated by Caroline (Articles I & III). Initially committed to dialogic pedagogy, Caroline gradually encountered institutional expectations that emphasised deference, compliance, and measurable output. In contexts shaped by Confucian hierarchies and performance metrics (Jiang Fu, 2024), her professional identity became fragmented. Her downcast gaze, slowed gestures, and elongated silences served as nonverbal

enactments of discomfort and institutional dissonance, aligning partially with notion of "emotionalised agency" (e.g., Burger, 2024). However, unlike Burger's focus on affect in interview accounts, the present study documents such resistance as it unfolded in live classroom interaction, revealing the embodied micro-signals through which institutional misalignment is negotiated.

By contrast, Mandy and Yable (Article II) exemplified embodied pedagogical adaptation. Both shifted from textbook-driven, teacher-fronted instruction to dialogic, student-centred engagement—marked by increased classroom mobility, open-handed gestures, and reciprocal gaze. While Christensen et al. (2022) conceptualised this as "practical sense," this study extends the construct by demonstrating how practical sense develops under high-stakes. In these Confucian-heritage conditions, teacher authority is historically codified (e.g., Han, 2023).

Article III examined the development of academic identity among four novice university English teachers, crystallizing four distinct patterns: embodied resistance (Caroline), strategic adaptation (Daisy), strategic balancing (Mandy), and aspirational resistance (Yable). Daisy 's tactical conformity, in which she outwardly met institutional expectations while retaining personal pedagogical values, mirrors Wang et al. (2024) "strategic compliance" but extends it to show how compliance itself can be multimodally staged to satisfy evaluators while signalling alternative commitments to students. In contrast to Caroline's emotionally charged but static position, Daisy negotiated institutional expectations with greater strategic flexibility.

This cross-case comparison reveals that while all four teachers encountered similar constraints—Confucian hierarchy, performativity, and research-teaching tensions—their responses were shaped by differing levels of institutional support, personal values, and semiotic repertoires. Caroline's resistance was primarily affective and embodied, Daisy's was pragmatic and strategic, Mandy balanced institutional demands with dialogic teaching, while Yable channelled her identity through aspirational storytelling and researcher alignment.

Taken together, these findings show that identity formation is never a purely internal process; it is a continuous performance of self in relation to power, space,

and multimodal semiotic practice. In contrast to earlier work that treats identity primarily as a discursive construct (Liontas, 2020), this research demonstrates how identity change is embodied, materially mediated, and institutionally inflected—an extension that opens new possibilities for analysing professional becoming across diverse cultural and policy regimes.

7.2 Identity Negotiation through Multimodal Strategies in Teaching and Institutional Spaces

The studies also reveal that identity negotiation is inseparable from the multimodal strategies teachers deploy in classrooms and institutional spaces. While previous research has shown that teachers use discursive positioning to manage institutional demands (e.g., Alemi & Maleknia, 2022; Yazan, 2022), this thesis extends the field by mapping how such negotiation occurs through embodied, spatial, and material resources in situation.

In Article II, Mandy and Yable's transformation from transmission-based teaching to dialogic, student-centred practice involved distinct shifts in bodily orientation, gesture range, and spatial mobility. Mandy's broadened gestures, more open posture, and lateral movement across space not only invited student participation but also redefined her authority as facilitative rather than hierarchical. Yable's orchestration of group discussions through layered hand gestures and dynamic pacing illustrates a multimodal re-authoring of teacher authority that goes beyond previous accounts of "interactive pedagogy" in Chinese classrooms (Liu & Wong, 2025).

Gaze and prosody also functioned as key semiotic resources for managing professional presence and navigating emotional investment. In Articles I and III, Caroline enacted what may be read as resistant agency through muted prosody and gaze aversion—subtle cues that indexed discomfort with institutional expectations for performative teaching. These behaviours—downcast gaze, elongated silences, restrained gestures—operated not as pedagogical failure but as embodied refusals, aligning with observations on non-discursive resistance under constrained conditions

(Leigh, 2018). In contrast, Daisy's strategic use of firm eye contact and carefully modulated intonation allowed her to project confidence and alignment with institutional norms without entirely abandoning her pedagogical values. These affective calibrations—produced through micro-adjustments in multimodal behaviour—represent what might be termed pragmatic agency, where novice teachers negotiate institutional survival without complete internalisation of its logic.

Storytelling, as both discursive and embodied practice, also emerged as a salient strategy for navigating identity (see e.g., Valencia et al., 2020). In Article III, teachers used narrative episodes to manage classroom relations while simultaneously negotiating their institutional positioning. Yable's storytelling about her research frustrations—delivered with deliberate pacing, animated gesture, and self-deprecating humour—allowed her to perform what Kramer (2018) termed "aspirational agency": a forward-looking stance that aligns with institutional value hierarchies while emotionally distancing the self from an undervalued teaching role. These embodied narratives were not only relational tools but also reflexive acts—re-scripting the self in ways that reframed professional status within constrained systems

To integrate and synthesize these findings, Figure 35 visually summarizes the developed MIA framework and the agency negotiation process across the three layers of identity production: central, intermediary, and outer. The diagram illustrates how identity is not only shaped by embodied actions in the classroom but also continuously influenced by feedback from professional networks and institutional forces. The arrows in the diagram represent the reciprocal relationships between these layers, showing how each layer influences and is influenced by the others.

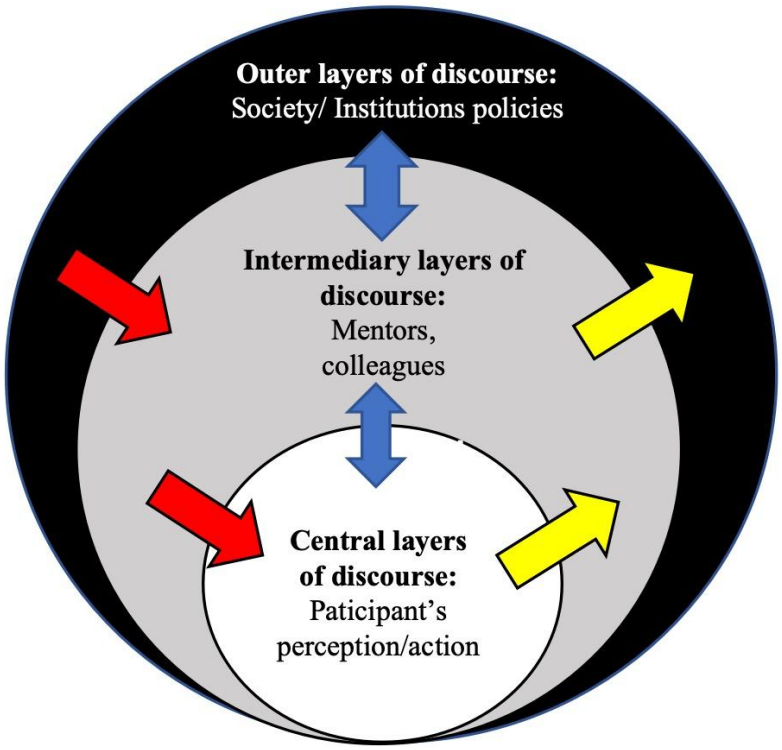

Figure 35 The MIA Framework: Reciprocal Negotiation of Agency Across Identity Layers

The outer layer encompasses broader institutional forces such as performance metrics and cultural ideologies that influence what is considered "effective" teaching or "successful" research. These general identity elements impact the teacher' s academic identity, as seen in Article III, where Caroline and Daisy navigated the tension between teaching and research roles, influenced by institutional pressures. The arrows pointing from the outer layers to the intermediary layer represent how institutional expectations and societal pressures affect professional networks, such as feedback from mentors and colleagues, which in turn shape the teacher' s identity over time within the intermediary layer. For example, in Article 3, Caroline' s experience reflects how the outer layer (institutional pressures) impacts her professional identity as a teacher. While she faced the pressure to focus on research output, this pressure was mediated by feedback from her mentors and colleagues (intermediary layer), which influenced her professional identity. Similarly, Daisy navigated this tension through strategic adaptation, responding to institutional demands while maintaining her personal pedagogical values, showcasing how feedback and institutional pressures interplay to shape professional identity.

Furthermore, the bidirectional arrows between the layers represent the ongoing negotiation where the teacher's embodied resistance or adaptation can both reflect and challenge broader institutional expectations, continuously reshaping their professional identity. For instance, Caroline's resistance, such as her downcast gaze and slowed gestures in Article 3, reflects her discomfort with institutional expectations, while Daisy's strategic adaptation shows how feedback from professional networks can help a teacher align with institutional pressures while maintaining personal pedagogical values.

The intermediary layer plays a significant role in shaping the central layer, where teachers' embodied actions are enacted in the classroom. Feedback from mentors, colleagues, and professional networks—represented in the intermediary layer—has a direct influence on how teachers perform in real-time interactions. The arrows pointing from the intermediary layer to the central layer demonstrate this flow of influence, showing how feedback and expectations from colleagues and mentors shape the teacher's immediate actions and classroom behavior. For example, in Article II, Mandy and Yable's transition from teacher-fronted to student-centred pedagogy was influenced by feedback from their colleagues and mentors. Mandy's increased reciprocal gaze, open gestures, and lateral movement were directly shaped by the feedback she received from her professional network, helping her redefine her role from a traditional lecturer to a more facilitative teacher. Similarly, Yable' s orchestration of group discussions using layered hand gestures and dynamic pacing reflected a re-authoring of her teaching identity, shaped not just by her internal pedagogical values but by her interactions with colleagues who encouraged a more dialogic approach to teaching. These immediate changes in their classroom practices were a direct result of feedback loops originating from the intermediary layer, which influenced how they embodied their professional roles in real-time teaching.

At the central layer, immediate identity elements are enacted in real-time classroom interactions, where teachers' embodied actions (such as gestures, gaze, and posture) directly shape their teaching identity. The arrows from the central layer to the outer layers, arrows pointing outward represent the teacher' s agency. The

teacher's embodied actions—such as gestures, gaze, and posture—serve as forms of resistance, adaptation, or compliance to the broader institutional norms and cultural ideologies. For example, in Article I, Caroline's embodied resistance, such as her downcast gaze and slowed gestures, reflected her discomfort with the performative expectations of her institution. These embodied actions are linked to the intermediary layer, where feedback from mentors and colleagues influences the teacher's professional identity over time.

Figure 35 encapsulates these findings by showing the interconnectedness of the central, intermediary, and outer layers, with the arrows indicating how the negotiation of agency occurs across these layers. This visual representation highlights the multimodal strategies (such as gaze, gesture, voice modulation) that teachers use to navigate institutional expectations and personal aspirations, demonstrating how agency is multimodally enacted in real time. By mapping the agency negotiation process in this way, the diagram provides a clear summary of the dynamic and reciprocal nature of identity formation in novice EFL teachers, emphasizing how social actors and institutional pressures interact with embodied actions to shape professional identity.

Together, these findings reveal that multimodal strategies play a critical role in how novice teachers enact agency across layered institutional settings. Through gesture, gaze, spatial configuration, silence, narrative, and text, teachers negotiate who they are and who they are allowed to be within the sociocultural and evaluative logics of Chinese higher education.

7.3 Reframing Professional Development in Chinese Higher Education

The three studies collectively challenge technocratic models of professional development that reduce teacher growth to the acquisition of competence or measurable output. Existing research on professional development in China often emphasises structural constraints—such as hierarchical governance (Yujie Zhang, 2025), Confucian role expectations (Liu & Wong, 2025), and performativity pressures (Si, 2024). It tends to portray novice teachers either as constrained

implementers of policy or as resistant actors (Li, 2024). My findings confirm these structural influences but challenge this binary framing by showing that development unfolds as a multimodally negotiated trajectory of becoming, where growth occurs even within narrow institutional affordances.

Article I revealed how power asymmetries embedded in Chinese universities shape professional growth. Caroline's narrative exemplified the structural silencing of pedagogical agency under hierarchical governance, where institutional gatekeeping and the lack of meaningful mentorship reflect broader Confucian traditions of deference and role obedience (Lau et al., 2024). Within such contexts, novice teachers are often expected to earn legitimacy through prolonged compliance, rather than through dialogic engagement or pedagogical experimentation. However, Article II offered a counterpoint by foregrounding the embodied, multimodal aspects of teacher development, where growth was enacted through gesture, gaze, voice, and material interaction with students. Mandy and Yable's transitions, from scripted textbook delivery to dialogic, co-constructed engagement, were not simply cognitive shifts, but bodily performances of changing identity. These findings resonate with Christensen et al. (2022), who stress that teacher professionalism is anchored in "practical sense"—a bodily, felt understanding of classroom presence, particularly salient in high-pressure contexts.

Article III extends existing critiques of institutional performativity by highlighting how regimes of accountability shape which forms of academic development are legitimised, rewarded, or rendered invisible. As argued by Peng (2025), performative systems in higher education increasingly normalise narrowly defined outputs—particularly international publications—as proxies for academic success. Within this landscape, Caroline and Daisy's narratives reveal the ethical and emotional strain of reconciling the conflicting demands of teaching and research in a system that values publication metrics while sidelining pedagogical excellence. This tension is not unique to individual cases. Li and Li (2023) documented how research-dominant evaluation regimes produce chronic stress and self-doubt among early-career lecturers. Wang et al. (2024) further illustrated how young academics in

China oscillate between principled resistance and strategic compliance, often at the cost of professional coherence and emotional well-being.

Crucially, this performative logic contributes to a growing bifurcation of academic identity. In many Chinese universities, particularly outside elite tiers, institutional cultures systematically prioritise research productivity over teaching effectiveness, fragmenting the roles expected of faculty. Bao et al. (2024) showed how teacher-researchers must navigate contradictory expectations, often relegating their pedagogical commitments to a secondary status. Echoing this, Zhang (2024) found that novice EFL teachers in private institutions struggle to reconcile institutional pressure for research with their values of student-centred teaching. Yan et al. (2023) argued that this imbalance leads to professional stagnation, particularly among mid-career female academics at regional teacher education universities.

The comparative patterns across cases sharpen this critique. Caroline's developmental opportunities were curtailed by hierarchical silencing, while Daisy found partial room for manoeuvre by strategically performing institutional alignment. In contrast, Mandy and Yable enacted professional growth through embodied transformation in the classroom, illustrating that even within the same performative structures, multimodal strategies can generate different developmental outcomes. This comparative reading underscores that professional development trajectories are not uniform, but differentiated by teachers' semiotic repertoires, value commitments, and strategic positioning.

This reframing echoes Lambert and Grey (2020), who argued that professional development is never apolitical or disembodied but is always enacted through—and often in tension with—the "outer layers" of discourse. Accordingly, policy and institutional practice in China must move beyond competence-based frameworks to recognise multimodal practice as a site of identity transformation, acknowledge affective and ethical labour as integral to teacher growth, and legitimise agency-under-constraint as a valid form of professional enactment. While grounded in the Chinese higher education context, these findings have global relevance for other high-power-distance, performance-driven systems—whether in East Asia, the

Middle East, or neoliberal Western universities—where structural constraints coexist with teachers' everyday acts of multimodal negotiation. By centring the embodied, affective, and situated dimensions of growth, this research advances professional development theory toward a more holistic and politically attuned account of teacher learning.

7.4 Enacting Agency: Between Resistance and Adaptation

In this thesis, agency is conceptualised, following Biesta and Tedder (2007), as something achieved in and through situated action, rather than a fixed individual trait. While prior research on teacher agency in China has primarily focused on discursive negotiation or strategic adaptation under constraint (e.g., Liu & McVee, 2025; Xu & Tao), this study extends previous work by demonstrating that agency is also multimodally enacted in real time through bodily orientation, gesture scope, gaze engagement, and prosodic modulation. These semiotic resources do not simply communicate pre-formed intentions; they actively constitute agentive positioning, allowing novice teachers to reshape their professional roles within the very moments of classroom and institutional interaction.

Caroline's trajectory (Articles I & III) exemplifies resistant agency, voicing a strong commitment to pedagogical values but lacking the institutional power to implement change. Her embodied hesitation, reflected in nonverbal cues such as downcast gaze or slowed gestures, revealed affective dimensions of her resistance. This emotional ambivalence aligns with recent research on novice teachers navigating restrictive educational environments, where resistance is often communicated through subtle affectives, as illustrated in Li (2023). Similar emotional ambivalence is also noted in Zhang (2025), who emphasised the affective cost of resisting performance-oriented norms. Daisy, by contrast, transitioned from a similarly constrained position to strategic agency, seeking mentorship and aligning herself more pragmatically with institutional goals. Her trajectory resonates with findings by Tan et al. (2022), who argued that social-professional networks and "third space" mentoring enable new teachers to reconcile personal beliefs with

institutional pressures. These differences underscore the importance of supportive networks in enabling agency.

Meanwhile, Mandy and Yable illustrate agency through classroom-level pedagogical innovation (Article II) and broader career strategy (Article III). In Article II, their movement from scripted, teacher-fronted delivery to dialogic, co-constructed pedagogy parallels Tran and Li's (2025) findings that reflective practice and collaboration support agency and identity transformation. However, my study advances these arguments by identifying multimodal strategies, such as Mandy's increased gaze reciprocity and lateral movement among student groups, or Yable's orchestration of group talk through layered gestures and dynamic pacing, as the micro-mechanisms through which these shifts occur. These micro-transformations echo Pantić et al.'s (2022) claim that agency is often exercised in everyday acts rather than grand reformist gestures. Still, here they are empirically linked to specific embodied practices.

In Article III, Mandy's development reflects reconciliatory agency, adapting her practice to institutional realities while preserving core values. In contrast, Yable's trajectory embodies aspirational agency, embracing a researcher-oriented identity to counter the perceived low status of teaching. This latter stance generated both professional momentum and emotional strain, underscoring that agency, while enabled by strategic positioning, can also intensify internal tensions. Study III's portrayal of these divergent strategies extends Wang et al.'s (2024) "principled resistance" versus "strategic adaptation" dichotomy by adding a multimodal dimension and highlighting the role of embodied stance-taking in career identity work.

Table 10 below maps the key multimodal strategies used by each participant and their corresponding identity outcomes.

Table 10 Mapping Multimodal Strategies to Identity Outcomes

Participant	Key Multimodal Strategies	Identity Outcome	Types of Agencies

Yable	Dynamic pacing, animated storytelling, layered gestures, humour	Aspirational researcher identity	Aspirational Agency
Caroline	Downcast gaze, muted prosody, minimal movement, reliance on scripts	Fragmented identity, resistance	Resistant Agency
Daisy	Firm eye contact, modulated voice, script alignment + subversion	Strategically compliant teacher	Pragmatic Agency
Mandy	Reciprocal gaze, open gestures, lateral movement, interactive visuals	Balanced dialogic teacher identity	Reconciliatory Agency

Taken together, these findings reposition agency in Chinese higher education as an embodied, affective, and improvisational process that is embedded in institutional structures yet enacted through the fine-grained semiotics of everyday practice. This perspective challenges models that treat agency solely as discursive or cognitive and opens new possibilities for analysing how teachers navigate high-power-distance, performance-driven systems through the subtle but powerful resources of the multimodal body.

7.5 Practical and Policy Implications for Novice Teacher Development

The findings of this thesis suggest that novice university EFL teacher development in Chinese higher education needs to be understood in broader terms than the acquisition of pedagogical technique alone. Rather than positioning professional development as a largely individual and skills-based matter, the study shows that novice teachers' professional growth is shaped through the interaction of embodied classroom practice, identity negotiation, collegial relations, emotional experience, and institutional conditions. The implications that follow are therefore discussed across several interconnected levels: first, the nature of professional development itself (e.g., Smith & Wyness, 2024); second, the relational and emotional conditions that support early-career teacher learning (e.g., İnceçay & Dikilitaş, 2025, Christensen & Weissmann, 2025); and third, the institutional and

policy environments within which such development takes place (e.g., Du et al., 2025; Uras Eren & Atay, 2025).

At the level of professional development, the study points to the need for more identity-sensitive forms of support. Recent scholarship on university teacher development has argued that effective professional development is typically sustained, practice-relevant, and strengthened by collaborative and dialogic forms of engagement rather than one-off technical training. This broader understanding is particularly important in the present study, where novice teachers' trajectories were closely tied to tensions between imagined and practised identities, to their developing awareness of how they positioned themselves in interaction, and to their efforts to make sense of teaching within demanding institutional contexts. Professional development, from this perspective, should support not only what novice teachers do in classrooms, but also how they come to understand themselves as teachers within the profession.

A further implication concerns the place of embodied and multimodal awareness within teacher development. One of the central contributions of this thesis is to show that teacher identity is not only narrated in interview accounts but also enacted through gaze, gesture, posture, voice, movement, and spatial orientation in situated classroom interaction. If identity is partly accomplished through such embodied resources, then professional learning should also create opportunities for novice teachers to notice and analyse how these resources shape pedagogy, authority, responsiveness, and professional self-presentation. Recent work on peer observation, video-enhanced reflection, and reflective technology use in teacher education suggests that close attention to interactional detail can deepen pedagogical awareness and strengthen reflective engagement with practice. In this sense, classroom video and other multimodal reflection tools may be particularly valuable, not simply as mechanisms for technical correction, but as resources for more reflexive and identity-aware forms of pedagogical learning. In this respect, the findings of Article II are particularly relevant, as they show that pedagogical development was inseparable from changes in how teachers used multimodal resources to position

themselves in relation to students and classroom activity.

The findings also indicate that novice teacher development cannot be understood only at the level of individual reflection or classroom practice. Across the thesis, identity trajectories were shaped not only by teaching itself, but also by relationships with senior colleagues, departmental hierarchies, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and the wider evaluative culture of the institution (e.g., Yang & Si, 2025). This suggests that support for novice teachers must also be understood relationally. Research on higher education identity and early-career university teachers similarly indicates that professional agency and identity are deeply influenced by workplace climate, recognition, participation, and the institutional conditions under which academic work is organised. This implication is especially clear in Article I, where belonging and recognition were central to the participant's struggle between imagined and practised identities. The relational dimension of support is also emotional: identity tensions in this study were often experienced affectively, particularly when novice teachers encountered hierarchy, marginality, uncertainty, or heavy expectations. Emotional support should therefore be understood as part of professional support rather than as something external to academic work.

Closely related to this is the question of mentoring and collegial culture (e.g., Li & Liu, 2026). The findings suggest that collegial inclusion should not be treated as incidental to academic work, because it directly affects whether novice teachers are recognised as legitimate participants in professional communities or positioned at their margins. Recent studies of mentoring and peer support in higher education indicate that more structured forms of mentoring can help reduce uncertainty, strengthen professional learning, and support inclusion, whereas weakly structured or purely informal arrangements often provide uneven support. The relational dimension of support also has an important emotional aspect (e.g., Bao et al., 2026; Marques et al., 2024). In this study, identity tensions were often experienced affectively, especially when novice teachers encountered hierarchy, marginality, heavy expectations, or uncertainty about their professional worth. Emotional support

should therefore be understood as part of professional support rather than as something external to academic work. This implication follows directly from the thesis' s wider argument that teacher development is not only cognitive or technical, but also emotional and embodied. Recent studies on language teacher identity and emotion similarly show that emotion regulation, vulnerability, and supportive dialogic spaces are central to teachers' professional becoming, particularly in contexts marked by institutional pressure and transition. Viewed in this way, opportunities to process uncertainty, tension, and change are not supplementary to professional development, but part of its core conditions.

These implications point beyond individual support to the institutional and policy conditions under which novice teacher development takes place. The findings suggest that novice teacher development in Chinese higher education should not be framed simply as an individual adjustment problem, but as a process shaped by evaluative regimes, workload arrangements, mentoring structures, and broader professional cultures. In particular, strong performance pressures, research output demands, and publish-or-perish expectations can intensify identity fragmentation among early-career academics. This was especially evident in Article III, where identity trajectories were shaped by the competing demands of teaching and research and by the ways participants adapted to, balanced, or resisted institutional expectations. More balanced expectations around teaching and research, clearer mentoring support, and evaluation systems that do not reduce novice teachers to short-term measurable outputs may therefore better support sustainable professional growth.

Overall, the findings point to the need for an integrated support framework for novice university EFL teachers in Chinese higher education. Such a framework would bring together identity-sensitive professional development, opportunities for multimodal and video-supported reflection, structured mentoring, collegial inclusion, emotional support, and more sustainable institutional conditions. Supporting novice teachers, therefore, is not simply a matter of improving technique. It requires recognising that teacher development is embodied, relational, emotional, and

institutionally mediated, and that sustainable professional growth depends on the interaction between individual agency and systemic support. Chapter 8 builds on this discussion by considering the broader implications of these findings for language teacher identity research, novice teacher support, and higher education policy, while also outlining the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION

This thesis examined how novice university English teachers in China constructed and negotiated their professional identities through interaction and multimodal practices. By drawing on MIA, it demonstrated that identity work was not only discursively articulated but also embodied and enacted through gesture, gaze, spatial orientation, and material engagement within institutional contexts.

8.1 Summary of chapters

Each chapter contributed to this overarching inquiry. Chapter 1 (Introduction) established the research problem of novice university English teachers' identity development in the Chinese higher education context, highlighting global performativity pressures and the unique challenges of a high-power-distance academic culture. Chapter 2 (Literature Review) synthesised scholarship on teacher identity, emphasising conflict, agency, emotion, and institutional culture, and identified a gap in understanding identity as embodied and multimodally enacted. Chapter 3 (Theoretical and Methodological Orientation) introduced MIA as the analytical framework, explained the longitudinal case study design, and reflected on validity and researcher positionality.

The three empirical chapters each offered distinct contributions. Chapter 4 (Article I) presented Caroline's case, revealing tensions between imagined and practised teacher identities under hierarchical university structures. Chapter 5 (Article II) analysed classroom interaction to show how Mandy and Yable shifted from teacher-centred to student-centred pedagogy, highlighting the role of multimodal strategies in identity development. Chapter 6 (Article III) compared the four participants' negotiations of research–teaching tensions, identifying divergent identity trajectories ranging from resistance to adaptation and integration. Chapter 7 (Discussion) synthesised these findings, arguing that professional identity development is best understood as a multimodally negotiated trajectory across outer

(policy), intermediary (collegial), and central (interactional) discourses. Finally, Chapter 8 outlined limitations, directions for future studies, and the overall significance of the research.

8.2 Theoretical and methodological contributions

This thesis makes an original contribution to language teacher identity research by reconceptualising novice teacher identity as a multimodally enacted, interactionally achieved, and institutionally mediated process. Rather than treating identity primarily as a narrated self-understanding or a discursive positioning retrospectively reported by teachers, this study demonstrates that identity is also produced in and through embodied action, material engagement, and context-specific interaction. By focusing on novice university EFL teachers in Chinese higher education, the thesis further shows that identity formation must be understood in relation to the particular institutional and sociocultural conditions in which teachers work, including hierarchical collegial relations, performance evaluation regimes, and tensions between teaching and research.

Theoretically, the thesis contributes to the field in three key respects. First, it brings embodiment to the centre of teacher identity research by showing how gesture, gaze, posture, movement, spatial positioning, and the use of artefacts are integral to the enactment of professional identity. Second, it extends teacher identity scholarship beyond predominantly Western and discourse-centred accounts (Mason & Chik, 2020; McCune, 2021) by offering a contextually grounded analysis of identity development in a non-Western, performance-driven university setting. Third, it develops a more layered understanding of identity as a dynamic and uneven trajectory shaped by tensions between imagined and practised identities, institutional compliance and agentive resistance, and personal aspiration and professional demand.

Methodologically, the thesis extends the use of MIA (2019, 2020) in teacher identity research by adapting it across classroom and interview data and by operationalising a set of analytical tools for tracing identity development

longitudinally. Through concepts such as vertical identity production, scales of action, modal configuration, modal aggregation, and higher-level mediated actions, the study provides a systematic and replicable framework for examining how identity is negotiated across interactional, interpersonal, and institutional dimensions. The methodological contribution therefore lies not simply in applying MIA to a new topic, but in demonstrating its value as an analytically robust framework for linking fine-grained embodied interaction with wider sociocultural and institutional discourses.

8.3 Limitations

Like all qualitative research, this thesis has several limitations. First, the study was based on four participants from a single second-tier Chinese university, which limits the transferability of the findings to other institutional and national contexts. Second, although the study examined classroom interaction and interview data in depth, it did not include systematic analysis of broader institutional materials such as policy texts, managerial documents, or formal evaluation records. As a result, institutional discourse was examined primarily through participants' accounts and interactional evidence rather than through document-based analysis. Third, the study was conducted over a relatively short period and therefore captured only the early stages of professional identity development rather than longer-term identity trajectories.

A further limitation lies in the study' s observational and analytical design. While this approach made it possible to generate fine-grained insights into how novice university EFL teachers negotiated professional identity in classroom and institutional contexts, the study did not implement or evaluate specific interventions such as mentoring programmes, professional development initiatives, or structured reflective practices. It can therefore offer grounded implications for teacher support and institutional practice, but it cannot make causal claims about the effectiveness of particular support models.

These limitations point to several directions for future research, including larger

and more diverse participant groups, comparison across institutional settings, the inclusion of documentary data, and longer-term or intervention-based designs to explore how professional identity develops over time and in response to specific forms of support.

8.4 Directions for future research

Several avenues for future research emerge from this thesis. First, future studies could examine larger and more diverse groups of novice teachers across different institutional types, disciplinary settings, and national contexts to explore how identity trajectories vary under different sociocultural and organisational conditions. Second, longer-term longitudinal research would be valuable for tracing how professional identity develops beyond the first stage of employment, particularly as teachers move through promotion systems, changing institutional roles, and shifting commitments to teaching and research. Third, future research could incorporate additional forms of institutional data, such as policy documents, appraisal materials, and departmental communications, to provide a fuller account of how institutional discourse shapes identity work. Fourth, comparative analysis across sites of engagement would be especially fruitful. In particular, future studies could examine more systematically how identity is differently produced in interviews, classroom interaction, and other professional settings, such as meetings, mentoring conversations, or research-related activities. Such cross-context comparison would deepen understanding of how identity is not expressed uniformly, but shifts according to the social, material, and institutional conditions of interaction. Finally, intervention-based research, including mentoring programmes, multimodal video reflection, or professional development initiatives, could build on the present findings to explore how novice teachers might be more effectively supported in negotiating identity tensions over time.

Taken together, the eight chapters of this thesis show that professional identity development among novice Chinese university EFL teachers is neither linear nor internally determined. Rather, it is a complex, uneven, and ongoing process shaped by the interplay of embodied practice, institutional pressure, interpersonal relations,

and personal aspiration. While performance-driven academic regimes often intensify tension and fragmentation, the findings also reveal that novice teachers are not merely constrained by such conditions. Through their multimodal and embodied practices, they create spaces for agency, adjustment, and transformation. By bringing these dynamics into view, this thesis offers a more holistic account of teacher identity as something lived, enacted, and continually negotiated across classroom and institutional life. It is hoped that this work will contribute not only to scholarly debates on language teacher identity, but also to the development of more humane and context-responsive forms of support for novice teachers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A ETHICS APPROVAL

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee(AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology

D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ

T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316

E: ethics@aut.ac.nz

www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

28 November 2022
Sigrid Norris
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Sigrid

Re Ethics Application: **22/243 The development of Chinese novice university English teacher professional identity in interaction: a multimodal (inter)action analysis**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 25 November 2025.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: amyzhoujing@126.com; amyzhoujing2050@gmail.com; tmatelau@gmail.com

Appendix B PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date Information Sheet Produced:
26 September 2022.

Project Title

The development of Chinese novice university English teacher professional identity in interaction: A Multimodal (Inter)action analysis

An Invitation

This project was carried out by Jing ZHOU, a PhD student at AUT. She will study the development of novice English teachers' professional identities as part of her PhD thesis. The researcher is doing this as part of their PhD qualification at AUT, in New Zealand.

We invite you to participate in a study into professional identity in interaction about Chinese novice university English teacher. Teachers' professional identity isn't only about what society believes and

expects of them, but also what they value in their professional work and lives based on their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds.

Your involvement in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time. You will also be able to review any data involving you before the completed report is published.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose is for the attainment of a qualification at AUT, New Zealand

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

This research will mainly study Chinese novice English teachers, so teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience will be selected. Since you have less than 5 years of teaching experience, I hope to recruit you as my potential participants.

A reply from your email has suggested that you be invited to participate in this research because you may take great interest to see how novice teachers ' professional identity develop.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You can reply to this email confirming your agreement to participate in the interview and the video ethnography.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

There are two parts to this research project, video ethnography and interviews.

For the video ethnography, Jing ZHOU will spend 45minutes for 3 times during

the research (once at the beginning of the semester, once in the middle and once at the end), collecting video data of your teaching in class at times that are convenient to you during video ethnography data collection. Jing

ZHOU will video record you to investigate how your professional identity/ties are constructed in your class-teaching.

Specifically speaking, as the following picture has shown, a visual transcript that will be collected in class-teaching like this is necessary in the study of identity using Multimodal Inter(action) Analysis as we can observe the teachers' gestures, gaze movement, posture, etc.

For the interview, you will be interviewed face to face in an open place (e.g. office or classroom). For this, Jing ZHOU will conduct an interview with you which will last 60 minutes. During the interview, she will ask questions relating to your professional identity/ties. The interview data will be transcribed and analysed.

Specifically speaking, as the following picture has shown, a visual transcript that will be collected in interview like this is necessary in the study of identity using Multimodal Inter(action) Analysis as we can observe the teachers' gestures, gaze movement, posture, etc.

You are invited to participate in both parts of the project.

Throughout the analysis process we will seek feedback from you in order to ensure the accuracy of the analysis in order to benefit you. You will be given transcripts and will be asked to give feedback on the accur acy of the analysis of the

transcripts. Data will be used to create journal articles and/or a book and/or book chapters and/or conference presentations. Excerpts of audio data may be shared at conferences. Your name will not be used. Instead a pseudonym will be used. The data will also be stored for 6 years and shared with experienced professionals in an academic teaching and learning context.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You may feel uncomfortable being recorded during the interviews or being recorded during the video ethnography sessions.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Recording of the interviews and video ethnography will not begin until you have freely given permission. If during recording there are any times when you wish the video to be turned off, it will be. Also if you say or do anything during recording which you would rather was not used in the research, then your wish will be respected.

If you feel the need to talk to a counsellor due to being involved in this research, you can reach your mentors for help.

What are the benefits?

The research will be beneficial for you as it will allow you to explore your own identity route development through participating in the study.

The study of professional identity of novice teachers will facilitate their transition from student- teachers to expert teachers.

How will the organisation's privacy be protected?

For the interviews and video ethnography, recording will not begin unless you have freely given permission.The data will be used for journal articles, a book, book chapters, and/or conference presentations. Before any material from the observation month and interview is shared with anyone, you will have the chance to review the material. The data will also be stored for 6 years and shared with experienced professionals in an academic teaching and learning context. If during filming there are any times when you wish the camera to be turned off, it will be. Also, if you say or do anything during filming which you would rather was not used in the research, then your wish will be respected.

If we decide to use any videotaped material then your identity cannot be kept confidential where your face and other identifying features are visible. We will however once again give you the opportunity to review any footage that may be used in presentations or publications.

In any written transcript of the interview or video ethnography, your identity will be kept confidential. We will not use your name. You will be given the opportunity to review anything we write about you.

The interview questions will focus on how you have constructed your professional identity/ties. If you make irrelevant personal comments they will be discarded from the transcript. If at any time you wish to move 'off-the-record', or provide information on ' background', recording will be stopped so that you can discuss the issue with the researcher and reach an agreement on how the information is to be treated in the final report.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The interview will take 60 minutes for 3 times, and the recording of class-teaching will take 45 minutes for 3 times. If you choose to participate in the research, you will be asked to give approximately 5 hours to the project.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have one to two weeks after receiving the initial email to respond whether you are interested in this project.Then if you do not reply within the time, Jing ZHOU will email a second time to gauge your interest. You will have one to two weeks after our meeting(discussing about the information sheet and consent form) to share your decision about being involved.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will be asked to review interview and video data and/or analysis that pertains to you. You will also receive a report summarising the findings of the research with a memory stick containing data pertaining to you.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the primary supervisor, Sigrid Norris, sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz,(+649) 921 9999 ext 6262.

And concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:
Jing ZHOU
Email:amyzhoujing2050@gmail.com Mobile: +86 15861323931
Project Supervisor Contact Details:
Sigrid Norris
Director: Multimodal Research Centre AUT University
Email:sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz Phone: (+649) 9219999

Appendix C INCIDENTAL PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project title: The development of Chinese novice university English teacher professional identity ininteraction: A Multimodal (Inter) action Analysis

Researchers: Jing ZHOU, Sigrid Norris

Date Information Sheet Produced:
26 September 2022.

An Invitation

This project was carried out by Jing ZHOU, a PhD student at AUT. She will study the development of novice English teachers' professional identities as part of her PhD thesis. The researcher is doing this as part of her PhD qualification at AUT, in New Zealand.

We invite you to participate in this project. Your teacher has agreed to be part of my study and is the participant. I will be observing and filming her. You, the student, are an incidental participant. Your involvement in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may

withdraw from the research before the findings have been produced. Please note your teacher will not know who is participating in this research.

What is the purpose of this research?

This project aims to analyse the development of novice college English teacher professional identity in(inter)action in China. To do this, I will recruit four novice English teachers and interview them and observe their teaching on three occasions.

What is expected from me?

As an incidental participant, the focus of this research is not on you. Instead your interaction with the participant will be video-recorded and analysed in order to study the participant.

Although a video camera will be used to record the class, you will not be visible in the video. If you speak during the class, your voice will be audible in the recording. Participants is voluntary and will not affect your grades.

What will happen in this research?

During video ethnography data collection, the teacher will be video recorded over three classes, once at the beginning of the semester, once in the middle and once at the end. The participant will control when recording occurs and what is recorded but you choose whether or not to participate as an incidental participant.

The purpose of the video recording is to investigate how the development of

Chinese novice university English teacher professional identity are constructed in their teaching. If you give your consent, when you are present, this recording may include your voice, but your face will not be recorded.

Data will be used to create journal articles and/or a book and/or book chapters and/or conference presentations. Excerpts of audio data may be shared at conferences. Your name will not be used. Instead, a pseudonym will be used. The data will be stored for 6 years.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You may feel uncomfortable being recorded during the video ethnography sessions.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

The primary researcher will attend a class to explain the research. The primary researcher will explain what the study is about, what will be studied, and where the cameras will be placed. The primary researcher will then hand out the information sheet, and you will have one week to consider the research. One week later, the primary researcher will visit the class and let students who are comfortable sign the consent form without their teacher present.

If you choose not to be involved in the research project, during data collection, the primary researcher will make sure to pause the video recording whenever you interact the teacher.

What are the benefits?

This study hopes to provide an in-depth understanding of the development of novice college English teacher professional identity in (inter)action. To be noticed, there is no benefit to the participant and the researcher benefits from receiving a PhD qualification;

How will my privacy be protected?

Your words may be included in visual transcripts of the class recording but your image, name or any other identifiable details will not appear in any research output. These following images are excerpted from a lecture explaining how to present your project on a website.

Explanation about visual transcripts as following:

This lecture is very similar to the project that the researcher will undertake (the teacher is teaching the class).

We can tell from the pictures that the teacher is the focus of the transcript. A

visual transcript like this is necessary in the study of identity using Multimodal Inter(action) Analysis as the researcher can observe the teachers' gestures, gaze movement, posture, etc. In addition, students' privacy has been ensured since their faces cannot be seen.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Participating in the research will require you to allow the researcher to video-record three classes that you participate in. You may be audible in the video recording but you will not be visible.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have two weeks to consider this invitation.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to the researcher. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Research mentor,
Sigrid Norris, sigrid.norris@aut.ac.nz,+(649) 921 9999 ext 6262.

And concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz,(+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:
Jing ZHOU
Email: amyzhoujing2050@gmail. com Mobile: +86 15861323931
Primary Researcher Contact Details:
Sigrid Norris
Director: Multimodal Research Centre
AUT University
Email: sigrid. norris@ aut. ac. nz Phone: +(649) 9219999 ext 6262

Appendix D PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title: ***The development of Chinese novice university English teacher professional identity in interaction: a multimodal (inter)action analysis***

Researchers: ***Jing ZHOU, Sigrid Norris***

Date Consent Form Produced:
19 July 2022

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 19 July 2022.
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

Data collection- Interviews

- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be video-recorded and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that I may be identifiable in visual transcripts of the video recorded interview data.
- ○ I understand that the information freely given by myself during the interviews will be made available to me for checking and that I can ask data to be deleted at that point.

Data collection- Video ethnography

- ○ I understand that I will be video recorded for 3 times interviews (60 minutes each), 3 times class-teaching practices (45 minutes each) over 4 months period of a semester.
- ○ I understand that I may be identifiable in visual transcripts of video data.
- ○ I understand that I may withdraw myself from video ethnography data collection at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ If I withdraw, I understand that all video ethnography data will be destroyed.

Use of data

- I understand that the photographs and video recordings will be used for academic purposes only and will not be published in any form outside of this project without my written permission.

Withdrawing from the study

- ¡ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

Consent

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes¡ No¡

Date :
Participant's name:
Participant's signature :
Participant's email :
Participant's phone number:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the AUTEC Reference

Appendix E SUPPLEMENTARY CONSENT FOR IMAGE AND VIDEO PUBLICATION

I give my permission for identifiable images and/or video recordings of me, collected as part of this study, to be used in academic publications, conference presentations, and other scholarly outputs, including journals, books, and educational media.

I understand that:

• The public may view these materials.

• My image and/or video may be published in a way that makes me identifiable, including showing my face.

• I may withdraw this consent at any time by contacting the principal investigator, unless the material has already been published.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix F OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Project title: The development of Chinese novice university English teacher professional identity in interaction: a multimodal (inter)action analysis

Researchers: Jing ZHOU, Sigrid Norris

Before observation begins the researcher will:

- Plan with the participant in advance appropriate times for video ethnography data collection sessions.
- Organise and check required data collection tools such as video recorder, audio recorder and notepad as well as print incidental participant information sheets and consent forms.
- Contact the participant to confirm data collection time, duration and location.

At the beginning of the observation the researcher will:

- Greet the participant and negotiate the plan for data collection.
- "Hi, how are you? How is you day going? What will you be working on/doing while I am here today? Will there be any times that you do not want me to be recording? Does the planned data collection period fit within your plans for the day?"
- Locate and set up appropriate area to observe and video record from which ensures the research will not be interrupted .

During observation the researcher will:

Observe from a location that does not impede the participant in their work.

At the end of the observation the researcher will:

- Inform the participant/s that the data collection session is coming to an end.
- Pack up all data collection tools.
- Thank the participant/s for their time that day.
- "Thank you so much for your time today. Do you have any questions about today's session?"
- Negotiate the next observation session with the participant.
- "What time suits for our next observation session? Where will you be?"

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the ???? AUTEC Reference ????

Appendix G INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Three rounds of interviews will be conducted during the research period, and five questions will be put forward during every round of interviews.

The first round of interview questions:

1.Can you briefly introduce yourself, focusing on education background and working experience?

2.Why chose to be a university/English teacher?

3.Do you have any plans or goals this term about teaching?

4.What problems you've encountered during the first class? And what have you enjoyed about teaching during the past week?

5.Please use several words to describe yourself as a teacher, and explain why?

The second round of interview questions:

1.Who are some qualified teachers whose work you are admiring? And why?

2.How about your process of your plans or goals about teaching?

3.What kind of help did you get from the school, mentors, workshops or experienced teachers?

4.what kind of help did you give to other novice teachers?

5.How do you think of your teaching life at this period?

The third round of interview questions:

1.Can you tell me about moments from the term that maybe significant for your teaching, maybe positive or negative?

2.How about the outcome of your plans or goals about teaching?

3.Please use several words to summarize yourself after a term teaching, and explain why?

4.Do you have any future plans or goals about teaching?

5.If you have a second chance, will you continue being a teacher, and why?