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## **Maintaining self while adapting: Chinese foreign language teachers' identity development in an intercultural context**

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### **Citation**

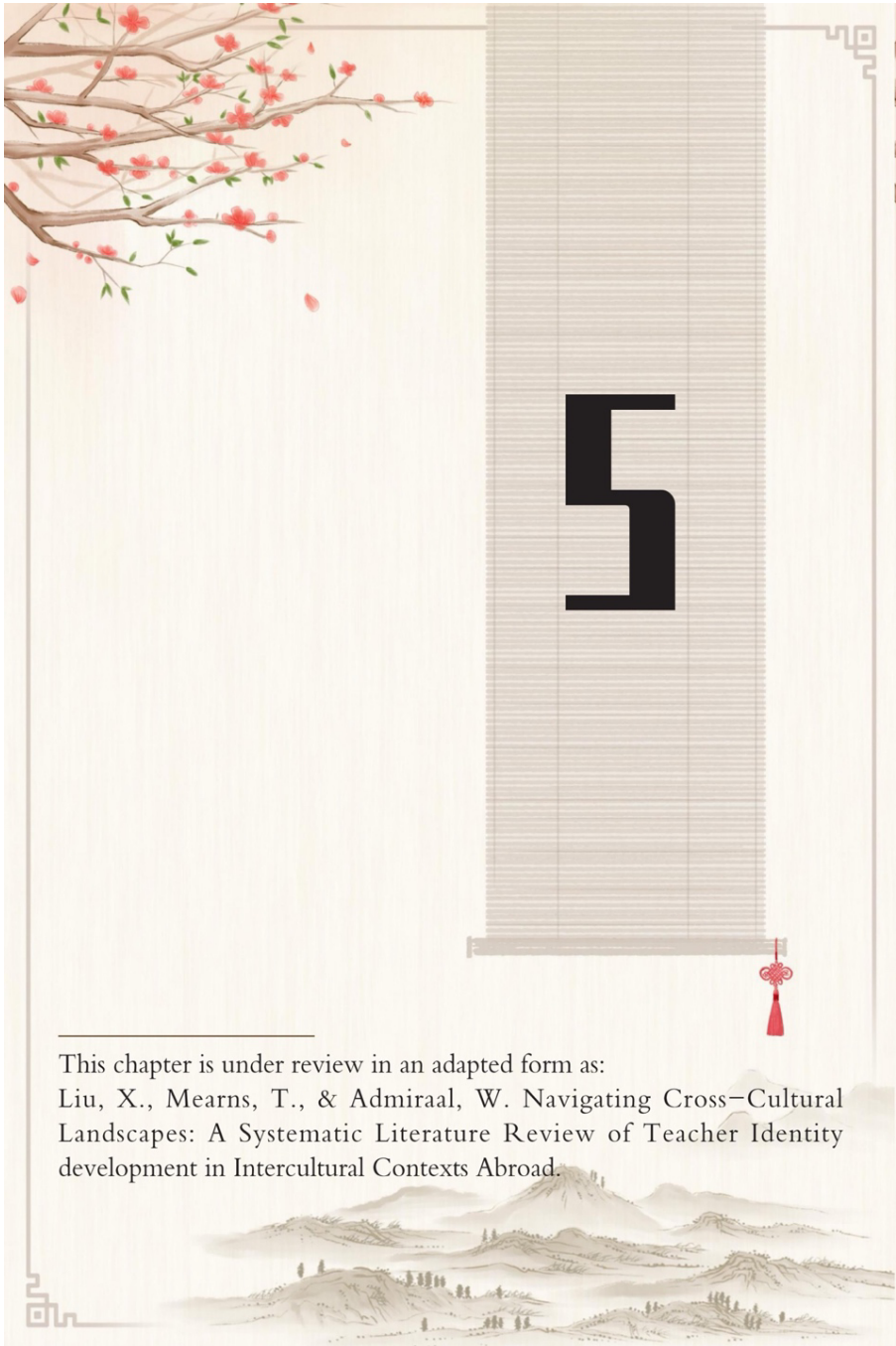
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Landscapes: A Systematic Literature Review of Teacher Identity  
development in Intercultural Contexts Abroad.

## **Abstract**

This systematic review examined research on international teachers' teacher identity development in intercultural contexts based on 38 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2024. The study aimed to investigate how international teachers develop their teacher identity and the processes that underpin this development. Three dimensions of teacher identity, namely personal identity, professional identity, and sociocultural identity were adopted as the framework to explore how international teachers navigate the complexities of cultural adaptation, professional roles, and social integration in intercultural settings. The findings reveal that teacher identity development in intercultural settings is a complex, multidimensional process shaped by personal, professional, and sociocultural factors. Moreover, the findings highlight the dynamic interplay among these dimensions and underscore the importance of continuous adaptation, reflection, and support. The findings show the challenges and opportunities faced by international teachers as they develop their teacher identity, which is both authentic to their personal beliefs and responsive to the intercultural dynamics of their host environments. By addressing the challenges identified in this review and implementing evidence-based interventions, educational institutions can better support international teachers in their transformative journeys.

## 5.1 Introduction

The expanding globalization of education has created more opportunities for teachers to work internationally (Bense, 2016). In the meantime, working abroad brings numerous challenges to international teachers' professional growth and identity development (Poole, 2020). International teachers - those who work in intercultural settings abroad - find their personal and professional selves are often tested, challenged, and transformed in culturally diverse environments (Liu et al., 2024). These teachers are not merely imports of pedagogical methods or instructional strategies from their home countries; rather, they are situated in new educational systems that require them to be reflective, adaptable, and negotiative of their roles (Yip et al., 2019). Teacher identity in such cultural environments is a complex and changing construct that is shaped by interactions of personal beliefs (Ennsen-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2023), cultural norms, institutional rules, and professional experiences (Skerritt, 2019).

Scholars claim that teacher identity plays a crucial role in assisting teachers to understand their roles better (Li, 2022), build rapport with students (Liu et al., 2023), and enhance their job satisfaction (Hanna et al., 2019). Identity is not fixed; it is dynamic and can change through the process of self-reflection, interaction with others, and adaptation to changing contexts (Sahling & Carvalho, 2021). The process of identity construction for teachers who teach abroad is complicated due to the challenge of integrating their home culture with the culture of the host country (Leigh, 2019). The conflict between the

two sets of cultural expectations can be both beneficial and harmful for teachers as they try to reconcile their cultural values with the requirements of their new teaching context (Lee & Jang, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how international teachers experience this process of identity development since it has implications for teachers' teaching efficacy (Poole, 2020), integration (Guo & Sidhu, 2024), job satisfaction, and career advancement (Zheng, 2017).

However, the literature on identity development of international teachers is lacking. This literature review seeks to fill this gap by discussing current research on identity development of teachers working in an intercultural context abroad. The present study aims to offer a deep understanding of how international teachers develop their teacher identity, the characteristics of this process, and the implications for teacher education and support in intercultural educational settings abroad. In the end, the current review seeks to offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers who are interested in supporting international teachers as they work in the diverse contexts of teaching abroad.

## **5.2 Theoretical framework**

In the current study, teacher identity refers to the self-image and the professional position that teachers develop as the result of their life experiences, teaching experiences, and the educational environments they teach in (Beijaard et al., 2004). It is a dynamic construct that can be developed and changed over time, and it influences how teachers

perceive themselves, how they interact with their students, and how they relate to their colleagues and school environment (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Tajeddin and Nazari (2025) argued that the process of becoming a teacher is not a linear one; teachers normally experience changes in their teacher identity when the working context changes, especially when teaching abroad.

Scholars claim that various factors exert influence on international teachers' identity development, such as personal experiences, professional recognition, and cultural adaption (Guo et al., 2021; Wen et al., 2024). These factors refer to three dimensions of teacher identity – personal identity, professional identity, and sociocultural identity. Pennington and Richards (2016), Tajeddin and Nazari (2025) incorporated the three dimensions to explore teacher identity - a multifaceted construct. In their research, *personal identity* refers to teachers' personal beliefs and their emotional responses to cultural challenges. *Professional identity* means teachers' professional expectations and competencies, and also their adaptation to institutional expectations. *Sociocultural identity* refers to social roles shaped by cultural contexts and their interaction with the local community. Pennington and Richards (2016) argue that the three dimensions of teacher identity are not isolated; they interact synergistically, creating a fluid identity that evolves as teachers navigate diverse environments. In intercultural settings, where teachers straddle conflicting cultural norms and institutional expectations, this interconnectedness becomes particularly salient (Leigh, 2019).

The frameworks of teacher identity collectively argue that, to have a more comprehensive understanding of teacher identity development, it is important and necessary to investigate the personal, professional, and sociocultural dimensions of teacher identity. Each dimension provides critical insights into how teachers navigate their roles, manage conflicts, and adapt to changing environments. Considering that the personal, professional, and sociocultural dimensions are intricately related, an in-depth exploration of how they interact in the context of intercultural teaching abroad is essential. As teachers engage with diverse educational environments and cultures, it is necessary to develop a deeper understanding of how they navigate the complexities of cultural adaptation, professional roles, and social integration. Therefore, the following research question is posed to review the scientific knowledge base of international teachers' identity development in intercultural settings:

How do international teachers develop their teacher identity in intercultural educational settings abroad?

### **5.3 Methodology**

The present study is a systematic literature review. The principles of the PRISMA statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) (Moher et al., 2009) were used as a guideline to conduct and report this review work. The eligibility criteria, information sources, search strategy, selection process, data collection, data items, and synthesis process are described in the following subsections.

### ***5.3.1 Search***

Utilising PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009) principles, this study began with an extensive search of the literature using electronic searches and the snowballing method. The federated search service provided by the [removed for blind review] library was used for the electronic search. It is a comprehensive database, whose sources include, amongst others, Web of Science, Taylor and Francis, Elsevier/ScienceDirect and EBSCOhost. Since the latest review study regarding international teacher mobility and migration was published in 2016 and reviewed articles from 2000 to 2015 (see Bense, 2016), we sought peer-reviewed articles published after 2015 to provide an up-to-date synopsis of the current knowledge base on teacher identity in an intercultural context. The last search was carried out at the end of 2024.

The following sets of keywords were used: (1) keywords relating to teacher identity: “teacher identity”, “professional identity of teachers:”, and “teacher professional identity”; (2) keywords relating to the intercultural context: “intercultural”, “international”, “cross-cultural”, “multicultural”; (3) keywords relating to the international teacher: “foreign teacher\*”, “expat”, “teaching abroad”, “teaching overseas”, “teaching overseas”, “teacher mobility”. The first set of keywords and the other two sets were combined using the Boolean operator “AND”, and the second and third strains were combined using the Boolean operator “OR”. The aim was to incorporate articles reporting on teacher identity development in intercultural settings while striking a balance between very broad terms that would find many



articles related to the topic and very narrow terms that would only identify articles that exactly matched with the specific words of the research question. To limit the search to in-service teachers, the Boolean operator “NOT” was used with a list of keywords related to pre-service teachers, including “pre-service teacher\*”, “student teacher\*”, “preservice teacher\*”, “student-teacher\*”. The search for these terms was applied to titles, abstracts, author keywords and Keywords Plus. To enhance transparency and trustworthiness, the authors kept records of the search procedure, including the search string, the language of the search terms, the number of hits, and the date of the search.

### ***5.3.2 Selection***

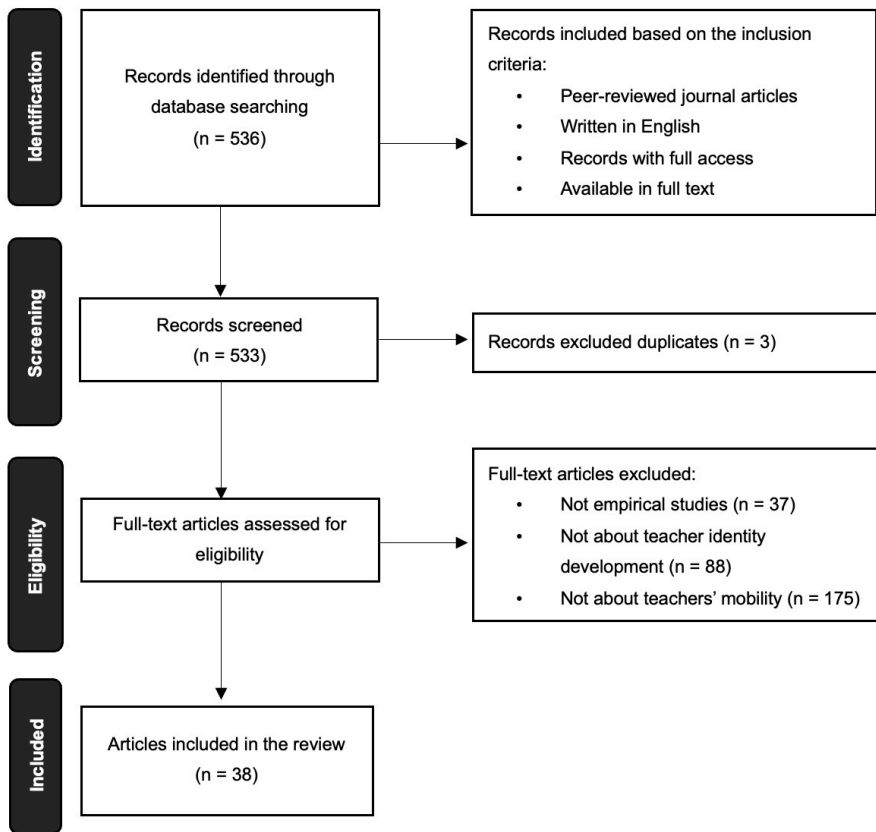
The search on 20 August 2024 rendered 536 articles that were related to teacher identity development in intercultural settings. The title and abstract of each identified study were firstly screened for eligibility. The studies without full text were excluded, and 338 studies remained for further analysis. The search and selection processes were carried out primarily by the first author, the second and third author providing quality control.

Studies were included if they met the following criteria, which were established by the three authors together:

- a) concerned empirical research;
- b) concerned teacher identity development (an ongoing process of teachers interpreting and re-interpreting who they are and who they want to be as teachers);

c) concerned teachers' mobility (teachers move to and teach in abroad).

The articles were firstly read by the first author based on the above-mentioned inclusion criteria. The first author then made the first decision on whether the articles should be included. In the next step, the second and the third author screened all the articles to double-check the first author's decisions. In the screening phase, the first author had doubts about whether to include a subset of six articles regarding teacher assistants. The second and third authors judged this subset on whether they should be included in the full review. The authors discussed the article selection, and consensus was reached. Applying these inclusion criteria reduced our database to 38 studies. The search and selection procedure are illustrated in Fig.5.1.



**Figure. 5.1.** *Search and selection process*

### **5.3.3 Data analysis**

Basic information on the reviewed studies, such as country setting, type of education as identified in the article, and research methodology, can be seen in Appendix A. A deductive – inductive thematic synthesis approach, which combines both theory-driven deductive methods with data-driven inductive methods, was adopted to analyze the selected studies. This approach enabled researchers to perform a structured evaluation of current literature through both predefined themes

connected to teacher identity development (deductive) and flexible exploration of international teachers' experiences (inductive). In the deductive phase, the existing theoretical frameworks of teacher identity, which include three dimensions (personal identity, professional identity, and sociocultural identity), served as an organized framework for initial analysis. The inductive phase that followed aimed to deepen the analysis, enriching and expanding the original theoretical dimensions. The steps of the analysis process are described below.

In the first phase, all 38 studies were reviewed to extract key information that answered the research question. Quotes and information related to teacher identity development, intercultural adaptation, and challenges faced by international teachers were extracted. Then, in the second phase, a deductive coding framework was first applied to categorize data under the pre-defined dimensions of teacher identity (personal, professional, sociocultural). For example, quotes regarding exploring self-image, and decreasing in confidence were categorized under personal identity; patterns about institutional policies, and changes in pedagogical methods were put in professional identity; information about racial discrimination, and cross-cultural repositioning in new contexts were categorized under sociocultural identity. Thirdly, within each deductively derived dimension, open coding was applied to identify emergent patterns across the literature. In the fourth phase, codes were clustered into cohesive sub-dimensions (e.g., "racial discrimination" under sub-dimensions "racial challenges") and mapped their relationships to the framework with three dimensions. The sub-themes were developed through an iterative process during

discussions among the authors to guarantee consistency and to elaborate on the discovered results. Table 5.1 illustrates how the sub-dimensions were related to the three dimensions of teacher identity.

**Table 5.1** *Three dimensions of teacher identity in the reviewed studies*

Reference (author(s), year)	Personal Identity	Professional Identity	Sociocultural Identity
Ballantyne (2024)	Self-dialogue transitional identity	Role enactment in Australian classrooms	Cultural historical mediation of identity
Bailey and Cooker (2019)	Identity negotiation	"Third cultural teacher" identity	Hybridity in international schools
Chesnut (2020)	Gendered self-perception; Emotional frustration	Acceptable professional femininity;	Gendered scrutiny in figured worlds
Emser-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhy (2023)	Being "foreign"; Identity renegotiation	Legitimacy as a migrant teacher	Being a cultural broker
Frimyar (2018)	Stress due to language barrier	Institutional-identity in Kazakh schools Discrepancy between local and foreign salaries	Affinity-identity Cultural negotiation
Guo et al. (2021)	Ethical self-examination	Market influences on teacher identity	Cultural essentialism in China
Gong et al. (2022)	Identity renegotiation; Global citizen	Chinese language teacher identity; School staff member identity	Multicultural identity; Cultural transmitter identity;
Guo and Sidhu (2024)	Identity unbecoming/becoming Cross-cultural experiences	Multilingual teacher identity development	Cultural capital in global contexts
Gras (2024)	Ethnic background influence Emotional frustration	Legitimacy of teachers of color	Structural racism
Huang and Varghese (2015)	Composite identity construction	NNEST legitimacy in U.S. schools	Linguistic marginalization

(continued)

Reference (author(s), year)	Personal Identity	Professional Identity	Sociocultural Identity
Jeongyeon and Young (2020)	Emotional alignment with students	Negotiating teacher authority	Cross-cultural classroom interactions
Leigh (2019)	Motivations; Cultural struggles	Authenticity as foreign teachers	Cross-cultural positioning in China
Lee & Jang (2023)	Emotional labor, Identity denial	Legitimacy as a teacher; Agency in work	Racial discrimination; Belonging strategies
Liu et al. (2023)	Embracing “other” culture; Identity tensions	Teacher-student relationship dynamics	Cross-cultural repositioning in Dutch schools
Lee and Jang (2023)	Identity denial Emotional labor	Devaluation and delegitimization of teachers’ professionalism	Isolation and racial discrimination
Liu et al. (2024)	Different thoughts on self-image Change in self-efficacy	Pedagogical shifts in Dutch schools	Cultural adaptation in the Netherlands
Mutlu & Ortactepe, (2016)	Shift in self-image; Confidence as a native-speaker	Institutional recognition; Shift of pedagogical practices	Cultural adaptation
McAllum (2017)	Emotional displacement;	Development of international academic identity	Linguistic/cultural adaptation
Miller (2021)	Identity renegotiation; Emotional labor	Community of Practice (CoP) phases; Pedagogical shifts	Cross-cultural repositioning
Minagawa & Nesbitt (2022)	Inadequate in English brought emotional labor	Linguistic identity; Rapport with students	Non-native English status; Cultural context

(continued)

Reference (author(s), year)	Personal Identity	Professional Identity	Sociocultural Identity
Ozmatan et al. (2023)	Refugee identity; Motivation factors;	Teacher identity; Professional roots	Systemic barriers; Cultural displacement
Poole (2020)	Preservation of ethnic identity	Resistance to institutional rituals	Cultural capital in Chinese schools
Rosenfeld et al. (2022)	Personal identity development abroad	Agency in school integration ("stepping up" vs. "pushing back")	Cultural identity as teachers return home
Skerritt (2019)	Identity crises; Negative emotions	Autonomy vs. accountability; Institutional pressures	Cultural negotiation in England
Sahling and Carvalho (2021)	Reflective practice; Identity negotiation	Adapting to new educational contexts	Cross-cultural value systems
Sun et al. (2022)	Self-positioning as cultural ambassadors	Institutional positioning as "assistants"	Cross-cultural teaching in the New Zealand
Uzun (2017)	Biographical influences on pedagogical beliefs	Socialization of Fulbright assistants	Dialogic cultural adaptation
Wernicke (2017)	Parental responsibility	Negotiating authenticity as FSL teacher	Native speaker ideologies
Weinmann and Arber (2017)	Native speaker or Non-native speaker teachers	Language teacher visibility; Professional communication	Multilingual trajectories
Weng (2024)	Growth mindset; Relational agency	Online teaching strategies; Mentorship	Role as a transnational scholar



(continued)

Reference (author(s), year)	Personal Identity	Professional Identity	Sociocultural Identity
Walker and Bunnell (2024)	Emotional transition (de-skilled to re-skilled)	MYP program adaptation; Collaborative training	International school community belonging
Wen et al. (2024)	Emotional confidence development	Online teaching adaptation in foreign contexts	Cross-cultural student-teacher dynamics
Yip et al. (2019)	Identity confusion; Stress from adaptation	Cross-cultural teaching challenges	Singaporean vs. Chinese pedagogical norms
Yip and Saito (2024)	Identity renegotiation	Skill recognition; Institutional belonging	Cultural Adaptation
Zheng (2017)	Ethnic identity; Identity renegotiation	Translingual pedagogy	Identity-as-pedagogy in multilingual classrooms
Zacharias (2019)	Identity renegotiation	Native-speakerism in transnational contexts	Resistance to linguistic essentialism
Zang et al. (2024)	Emotion labor; Internalized conflict	Hierarchical mentoring in residencies	Confucian ideologies in teacher training
Zhu and Alsup (2024)	Emotional challenges under COVID-19	Teaching philosophy adaptation	Anti-Asian sentiment; Cultural caution

## 5.4 Results

This systematic literature review investigates how international teachers develop their teacher identity in intercultural settings abroad, focusing on three dimensions: personal identity, professional identity, and sociocultural identity. Based on Pennington and Richards (2016), Tajeddin and Nazari's (2025) frameworks on teacher identity, in this review study, personal identity is an identity drawing on teachers' personal beliefs and their emotional responses to cultural challenges; *Professional identity* refers to teachers' professional expectations and competencies, as well as their adaptation to institutional expectation; *Sociocultural identity* refers to teachers' social roles shaped by cultural contexts, and their interaction with the local community. The findings reveal the interconnections among these dimensions and demonstrate that identity development is a dynamic, ongoing, and context-dependent process. Under each dimension, adaptation, transformation, and negotiation can be observed in the identity development process as teachers navigate their changing roles in new environments.

### 5.4.1 *Personal Identity: negotiating the self in a new context*

Personal identity plays a crucial role in shaping how international teachers navigate their roles in new contexts. Several sub-themes emerge in the development of personal identity, including identity renegotiation, self-efficacy, and emotional labor. Table 5.2 presents the definition of sub-themes in this dimension as well as the examples belonging to sub-themes.

**Table 5.2** *Sub-dimensions of personal identity*

Sub-dimensions	Definition	Examples from reviewed studies
Identity (re)negotiation	The process of reconciling past and present experiences to redefine self-image in intercultural settings.	<p><b>Guo &amp; Sidhu (2024):</b> Multilingual teachers transitioned from "unbecoming" to "becoming," integrating cross-cultural experiences into identity reconstruction.</p> <p><b>Ozmantar et al. (2023):</b> Refugee teachers balanced suppressed identities with emerging professional roles.</p> <p><b>Liu et al. (2024):</b> Teachers shifted from seeing themselves as language instructors to cultural ambassadors. .....</p>
Self-efficacy and confidence growth	Teachers' belief in their ability to navigate challenges and succeed in new contexts.	<p><b>Wernicke (2017):</b> Teachers initially struggled with language barriers but grew confidence through training.</p> <p><b>Weng (2024):</b> Teachers reframed challenges as opportunities, enhancing self-efficacy.</p> <p><b>Walker &amp; Bunnell (2024):</b> Teachers transitioned from "de-skilled" to "reborn" via experimentation. .....</p>
Emotional labor	The emotional effort required to manage cultural dissonance and systemic exclusion.	<p><b>Zheng (2017) &amp; McAllum (2017):</b> Teachers faced frustration and isolation due to being "othered."</p> <p><b>Jeongyeon &amp; Young (2020):</b> Teachers transformed exclusion into resilience through adaptation.</p> <p><b>Ballantyne (2024):</b> Reflective "self-dialogue" helped Chinese volunteers in Australia redefine their roles. .....</p>

#### *5.4.1.1 Identity (re)negotiation*

In intercultural settings abroad, teachers negotiated their teacher identity by integrating their past experiences with present experiences. Guo and Sidhu (2024) illustrate a transformative “unbecoming-to-becoming” trajectory, where multilingual teachers integrated past experiences into identity reconstruction. Similarly, non-native English speaker teachers in the US constructed “composite teacher identity” (Huang & Varghese, 2015), blending linguistic expertise with institutional roles to counter native-speaker biases. For refugee teachers in Ozmantar et al. (2023), identity development involved balancing suppressed refugee identity with emerging professional roles, navigating barriers like discriminatory work conditions.

Furthermore, Liu et al. (2024) report that many teachers reflected on their self-image and motivation, acknowledging the fluidity of their teacher identity as they adapt to unfamiliar environments. Initially, many teachers saw themselves solely as language instructors. However, as they integrated into their new roles, their self-image often transformed into that of a cultural ambassador or mediator. This transformation was gradual and shaped by teachers’ increasing awareness of the cultural differences between their home and host countries. Similarly, Yip and Saito (2024), Ennser-Kananen and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2023) show that teachers often shifted from seeing themselves as mere language instructors to cultural brokers, with their identity evolving as they negotiated between different educational

and cultural expectations. Over time, this change led to the integration of diverse cultural perspectives into their teaching practice.

#### *5.4.1.2 Self-efficacy and confidence growth*

Wernicke (2017) and Guo and Sidhu (2024) show that self-efficacy plays a central role in personal identity development. Initially, many teachers experienced low self-efficacy as they were confronted with unfamiliar teaching contexts, particularly when dealing with language barriers or cultural differences. Similarly, Sahling and Carvalho (2021) indicate that international teachers who are not adaptable and do not acknowledge differing institutional cultures and wider cultural environments are normally low in self-efficacy as a teacher and thus couldn't recognize or realized their value in the new context.

Several of the studies illustrate that, however, over time, teachers' self-efficacy strengthens as they become more comfortable in their roles. Weng (2024) reports that this transformation happened because some teachers reframed challenges as developmental opportunities. For example, teachers in Minagawa and Nesbitt (2022) participated in training and developed self-knowledge and awareness, thus they gained respect and trust from their students and became more confident. Walker and Bunnell (2024) argue that native English teachers moved from feeling "de-skilled" to "reborn" through iterative pedagogical experimentation. Moreover, Miller's (2021) study of international academics also highlights how Communities of Practice (CoPs) fostered self-efficacy through phased development – from

initial nervousness to identity shifts – as teachers internalized new pedagogies.

#### *5.4.1.3 Emotional labor*

Teachers often engage in significant emotional labor, especially when navigating difficult intercultural challenges. For instance, Zheng (2017) and McAllum (2017) discuss how teachers initially experienced frustration and isolation, particularly when faced with the feeling of being “othered” in the host country. Lee and Jang (2023) also discuss the feeling of being “othered”, as the “teachers of color” (page 172) in Korea faced systemic “identity denial”, where their legitimacy was questioned despite qualifications.

Conversely, studies like Jeongyeon and Young (2020) reveal that with increased exposure and adaptation to the new environment, emotional labor became part of the teachers’ learning process. The emotional toll of exclusion or misperceptions gradually transformed into resilience as teachers found strategies to cope with these challenges. Participants in Weng’s study (2024) leveraged institutional resources (e.g., mentors) to navigate online teaching challenges, while Chinese volunteers in Australia transformed their self-perception through reflective “self-dialogue” (Ballantyne, 2024). Emotional engagement with students – such as adopting roles as “mentors” or “friends” – enabled identity shifts, as seen in Jeongyeon and Young’s (2020) study of Korean foreign language teachers who blended compassion with authority. In these examples, emotional labor becomes an opportunity for personal growth as international teachers refine their emotional

responses and develop coping mechanisms that allow them to continue adapting to new cultural and institutional demands.

#### ***5.4.2 Professional Identity: adapting and reconstructing teaching roles***

Professional identity refers to teachers' professional expectations and competencies, as well as their adaptation to institutional expectations. This dimension can be broken down into several subdimensions: shifts of pedagogical practices, institutional recognition and legitimacy, and community integration. Table 5.3 presents the definition of sub-themes in this dimension as well as the examples belonging to sub-themes.

**Table 5.3** *Sub-dimensions of professional identity*

Sub-dimensions	Definition	Examples from reviewed studies
Shifts of pedagogical practices	The adaptation of teaching methods to align with host country norms, blending previous knowledge with local strategies.	<b>Wen et al. (2024):</b> Western teachers in China transitioned from "class teachers" to "learning partners," adopting student-centered online approaches. <b>Liu et al. (2024):</b> CFL teachers in the Netherlands shifted from exam-focused instruction to fostering cross-cultural awareness. <b>Mulu &amp; Ortatepe (2016):</b> Non-native Turkish teachers prioritized student engagement over grammar drills despite lacking formal training. .....
Institutional recognition and legitimacy	The struggle to gain professional validation within institutional structures, often hindered by systemic barriers.	<b>Skerritt (2019):</b> Irish teachers in England faced identity crises due to rigid accountability mechanisms prioritizing standardized testing. <b>Zang et al. (2024):</b> Hierarchical mentoring structures diminished teachers' authority in teaching. <b>Lee &amp; Jang (2023):</b> NETs in Korea were confined to "assistant" roles, limiting curricular influence. .....
Community integration	The process of increasing belonging through engagement with professional communities and local culture.	<b>Rosenfeld et al. (2022):</b> Teachers transitioned from feeling isolated to integrated through community participation. <b>Weinmann &amp; Arber (2017):</b> Teachers overcame exclusion by building relationships with local colleagues. <b>Liu et al. (2023):</b> Intercultural competence enhanced pedagogical effectiveness through cross-cultural peer communication. .....



#### *5.4.2.1 Shifts of pedagogical practices*

Uzum (2017) and Poole (2020) explore how teaching practices develop for international teachers in their new teaching contexts. When first started their teaching abroad, teachers might use their previous knowledge and pedagogical practices in teaching, but over time, they gradually realized the need to change the approaches to the local ones. This change might involve the use of more student-centered approaches (Wen et al., 2024), the use of different methods of instruction to suit the local learners' learning style (Liu et al., 2024), and the adaptation of the classroom management systems (Mutlu & Ortaçtepe, 2016).

In Wen et al.'s (2024) research, western teachers in China adapted to online environments by transitioning from “class teachers” to “learning partners”, focusing on student-centered approaches. Similarly, in Liu et al. study (2024), CFL teachers in the Netherlands shifted from focusing on examination to fostering cross-cultural awareness, which showed a change in the pedagogical approach. Mutlu & Ortaçtepe (2016) observed non-native Turkish teachers who defined their methods to enhance student engagement as opposed to grammar drills, despite lacking formal training. These articles indicate that as teachers continue to gain intercultural experience, they begin to integrate local pedagogical strategies with their teaching methods, therefore, develop a professional identity that reflects both their home and host country's educational culture.

#### *5.4.2.2 Institutional recognition and legitimacy*

A prominent pattern across the reviewed studies was that systemic barriers tended to challenge professional legitimacy. Irish teachers in England (Skerritt, 2019) clashed with the inspectorate's rigid accountability mechanisms, which prioritized standardized testing over their autonomy-focused ethos. This dissonance triggered identity crises as teachers struggled to reconcile their values with institutional demands. Conversely, Yip and Saito (2024) find that immigrant teachers in Australia thrived when their prior qualifications were recognized, enabling them to innovate pedagogically while fostering a sense of belonging. Rosenfeld et al. (2022) also pointed out that recognition in intercultural settings was not a given but rather happened when teachers navigated institutional practices and demonstrated their effectiveness in the new context.

While the recognition of teachers' qualifications and practices can mitigate systemic barriers, institutional hierarchies often exacerbate inequities by restricting authority. Teachers in Zang et al. (2024) study had less authority and legitimacy in the classroom because of hierarchical mentoring arrangements in institutions. Similarly, native-speaker English teachers in Korea (Lee & Jang, 2023) were limited to "assistant" roles, limiting their influence over curricula. These examples highlight how institutional hierarchies perpetuate inequities and require structural reforms.

#### *5.4.2.3 Community integration*

Rosenfeld et al. (2022) argue that teachers' feeling of integration into the community is vital for their professional identity development.

According to Weinmann and Arber (2017), teachers in their studies felt excluded or isolated in the beginning, especially if they are seen as outsiders due to their ethnicity or nationality in schools. However, as teachers participated in community events, built relationships with local colleagues, and engaged with the local culture, their sense of belonging strengthened.

Wen et al. (2024) report that teachers achieved professional confidence by integrating with the local community to deal with changes in cross-cultural settings. Liu et al. (2023) further state that intercultural competence was related to pedagogical effectiveness, and teachers who participated in cross-cultural conversations with peers in communities developed more extensive instructional toolkits. Similarly, Guo et al. (2021) point out that by integrating into the community, teachers felt more supported and less isolated, which benefited their professional development. The above examples highlight the need for inclusive Communities of Practices that embrace varied expertise.

#### ***5.4.3 Sociocultural Identity: belonging and exclusion in intercultural contexts***

Sociocultural identity refers to how international teachers perceive and engage with the cultural and social dynamics of their new environments. This dimension is characterized by cultural negotiation, role adoption, community integration, and exclusion. Table 5.4 presents the definition of sub-themes in this dimension as well as the examples belonging to sub-themes.

**Table 5.4** *Sub-dimensions of socio-cultural identity*

Sub-dimensions	Definition	Examples from reviewed studies
Cultural negotiation and adaptation	The process of mediating between home and host culture values to refine roles and enhance belonging.	<b>Ennsér-Kananen &amp; Ruohotie-Lyhy (2023):</b> Migrant teachers in Finland blended Finnish pedagogies with their cultural expertise. <b>Sun et al. (2022):</b> CFL teachers in New Zealand acted as “cultural bridges”, using Mandarin festivals to bridge cultural divides. <b>Lee &amp; Jang (2023):</b> Teachers integrated local practices into daily teaching, enhancing acceptance. .....
Exclusion and racial/social challenges	Systemic discrimination (racial, linguistic, gendered) that marginalizes teachers and challenges their legitimacy.	<b>Lee &amp; Jang (2023):</b> Black educators in Korea faced “identity denial” due to racial stereotypes. <b>Gras (2024):</b> Teachers of color in ELT encountered hiring biases favoring Whiteness. <b>Chesnut (2020):</b> Foreign women in Korea reclaimed agency through hybrid dress codes to resist gendered scrutiny. .....
Negotiating belonging	Strategic balancing of assimilation and resistance to assert cultural identity.	<b>Poole (2020):</b> An Africaner teacher in China resisted institutional rituals to preserve cultural identity. <b>Yip et al. (2019):</b> Teachers adopted “cultural ambassador” roles to critique essentialist norms. <b>Leigh (2019):</b> Foreign teachers in China framed themselves as “authentic teachers” to legitimize their presence. .....

#### 5.4.3.1 Cultural negotiation and adaptation

Bailey and Cooker's (2019), and Guo and Sidhu (2024) argue that teachers frequently acted as cultural mediators, negotiating between home and host values. For instance, a migrant teacher in Finland (Ennser-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2023) renegotiated their roles by blending host country pedagogies with their cultural expertise. Similarly, CFL teachers in New Zealand (Sun et al., 2022) positioned themselves as "cultural bridges", using Mandarin festivals to foster cross-cultural understanding while adhering to local curricula. These examples illustrate how cultural brokerage serves as a survival way in new educational settings.

As cultural mediation enables teachers to navigate cultural differences, it also facilitates more nuanced identity negotiations that integrate institutional demands and cultural expectations. Fimyar's (2018) study of international teachers in Kazakhstan highlights *affinity identities*, where teachers are aligned with institutional ideologies while retaining personal values. For example, one teacher embraced the school's modest citizen goal while subtly infusing lessons with an international perspective, illustrating how cultural negotiation can fulfill teachers' pursuit of international education. Lee & Jang (2023) further highlight that teachers' sense of belonging and acceptance within the host culture grows as they integrated local cultural practices into their daily lives and teaching. This process of cultural negotiation helped teachers redefine their roles, not only as teachers but as active participants in the local cultural landscape.

#### *5.4.3.2 Exclusion and racial/social challenges*

Despite the positive aspects of cultural negotiation, teachers are also face challenges in terms of exclusion, particularly racial and ethnic discrimination. In the study by Lee & Jang (2023), black educators in Korea were misperceived as “illegitimate”, with their authority questioned because of ethnic stereotypes. Similarly, teachers of color in English language teaching contended with hiring practices structured by racism, where whiteness was a proxy for competence (Gras, 2024). Linguistic hierarchies further marginalize non-native speakers; NNESTs in the US (Huang & Varghese, 2015) had to highlight their pedagogical strengths and avoid letting their identity be defined by their linguistic status.

Gendered discrimination added further to these challenges. Foreign women in South Korea (Chesnut, 2020) were subject to scrutiny of their dress and bodies, which undermined their professional identity. Teachers, however, reclaimed agency by adopting hybrid clothing that blended Western professionalism with Korean modesty, illustrating how resistance can be both subtle and transformative. These experiences of exclusion slowly changed teachers’ perceptions of their sociocultural identity. Teachers in Lee and Jang (2023) study coped with exclusion by being resilient and seeking support from other communities and networks within and outside of work. Zheng (2017) discusses how these challenges triggered identity transformation so that teachers became more self-aware of their function as both teachers and cultural representatives.

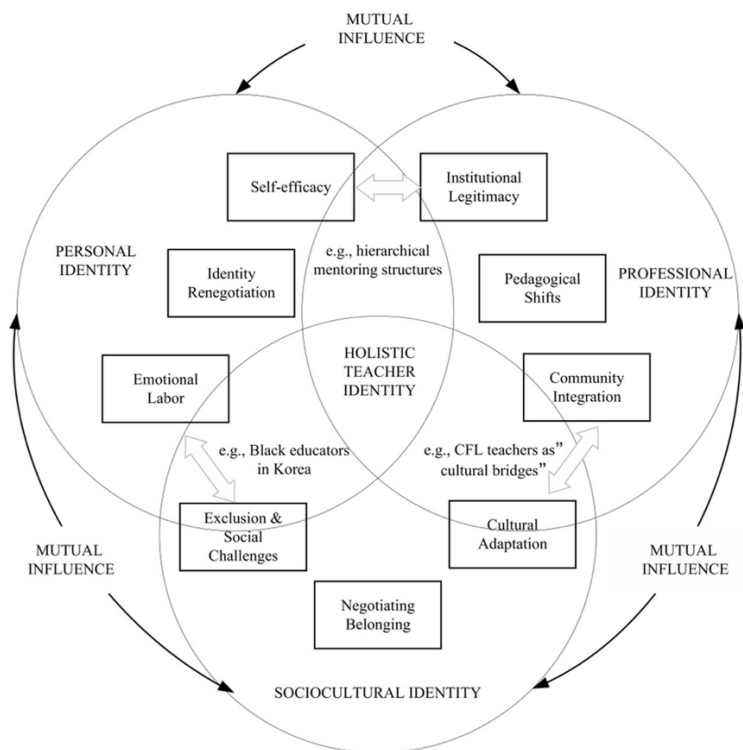
#### *5.4.3.3 Negotiating belonging and resistance*

Zacharias (2019) and Zhu and Alsup (2024) suggest that initially, teachers might feel insecure about their ability to bridge cultural divides. However, over time, as they gained experience and understanding of both their home and host cultures, the teachers found ways to strengthen their belonging. Belonging is negotiated through strategic assimilation and resistance. An Afrikaner teacher in China (Poole, 2020) preserved his cultural identity by staring at the floor during flag-raising ceremonies, a passive act of resistance that asserted his autonomy. Conversely, CFL teachers in the Netherlands (Liu et al., 2023) blended Confucian discipline with Dutch equality, fostering classrooms that respected both traditions. As summarized by Gong et al. (2022), the balance in keeping home culture and embracing host culture enhanced teachers' sense of professional purpose and helped them build rapport and strengthen their presence within the host country.

Building on this interplay of strategic adaptation and cultural preservation, teachers in Yip et al. (2019) study adopted the role of cultural ambassador, through which teacher further negotiated their sociocultural identity. Leigh's (2019) study of foreign teachers in China further reveals how educators navigated belonging through "authentic teacher" roles. By framing themselves as cultural ambassadors, they legitimized their presence while critiquing essentialist expectations (e.g., the "native speaker" ideal). This duality - embracing and resisting cultural norms - highlights belonging as a dynamic, contested process.

#### 5.4.4 Interconnections Among the Dimensions

By illuminating how personal, professional, and sociocultural identity dimensions interact synergistically and antagonistically, the study advances a holistic understanding of teacher identity as a relational ecosystem shaped by power, agency, and context. Figure 5.2 shows the interconnections among the three dimensions during the identity development process in intercultural settings.



**Figure. 5.2.** *International teachers' identity development in intercultural settings*



The framework shown in the figure presents teachers' identity as a complex construct with different dimensions and their interactions being the components of the construct. Each dimension includes several related themes that define teachers' way of steering through the processes of their identity development in intercultural settings. The personal dimension includes aspects like teachers' identity renegotiation, self-efficacy and confidence growth, and emotional labor, which are critical for teachers to develop and perform effectively. The professional dimension is based on shifts of pedagogical practice, institutional legitimacy, and community integration. The socio-cultural dimension focuses on cultural adaptation, exclusion and racial/social challenges, and negotiating belonging. The Venn figure's overlapping areas show that identity is not encased but rather constructed through the processes of negotiation within the interactions between these dimensions. For instance, a teacher's emotional labor (personal) affects their willingness to try new pedagogies (professional), and systemic inequities like racial challenges (sociocultural) restrict their institutional legitimacy (professional).

The interplay between the personal and professional dimensions is shown in cases where teachers' self-efficacy and emotional labor foster pedagogical innovation. For example, the teacher in Weng (2024), used her relational agency (personal) to seek mentorship and overcome challenges of online teaching (professional), which helped her overcome her initial anxiety to become an expert. However, negative examples include institutional legitimacy, such as hierarchical mentoring structures (Zang et al., 2024) that can reduce self-efficacy

(personal) of new teachers who are called “assistants”. This mutual influence model shows that personal development and professional advancement are interdependent but also contingent on environmental factors. Likewise, refugee teachers (Ozmantar et al., 2023) who had suppressed their personalities (personal) had to find their professional identities for the first time, showing how individual paths become professional routes in turn.

The sociocultural dimension engages with both the personal and professional identity dimensions and often functions as a mediator of power and belonging. For instance, Black educators in Korea (Lee & Jang, 2023) experienced racialized exclusion (sociocultural) that affected their professional credibility (professional) and led to identity issues (personal). Moreover, there were teachers who, similar to CFL instructors in New Zealand who positioned themselves as ‘cultural bridges’ (Sun et al., 2022), by virtue of their ability to navigate cultural hierarchies, achieved dual legitimacy of their professionalism by incorporating the norms of the host country as well as their heritage (professional-sociocultural). The central gap of the framework, where all three dimensions meet, is holistic teacher identity – a dynamic state in which educators, including ‘third culture teachers’ (Bailey and Cooker, 2019) move beyond the binary and create unique identities for themselves. This center confirms that teacher identity development occurs when systemic barriers are eliminated, and inclusive communities of practice are supported. In the end, the framework rejects simplistic conceptions of teacher identity, which means that

teacher identity is a sociopolitical process of negotiation, resistance, and transformation.

## **5.5 Discussion**

This systematic review reveals the specific and nonlinear pathways that lead international teachers to construct their teacher identity in the context of intercultural settings abroad. The review contributes to the literature on teacher identity examining the teacher identity construction process through the interplay between personal, professional, and sociocultural dimensions. The findings indicate that teacher identity development is an ongoing, complex, and multifaceted process of adaptation, transformation, and negotiation. The outcome of the study reveals that personal, professional, and sociocultural identities are integrated and interdependent, and that they coalesce to define the overall identity of teacher. Each dimension contributes to the overall development of teacher identity while interacting with the other dimensions.

### ***5.5.1 Identity as a fluid, collective endeavor***

The review reveals that teacher identity is not fixed but rather something that is formed and negotiated through interactions with students, colleagues, and institutional systems. This aligns with Wenger's (1999) theory of identity formation within Community of Practice (CoP), where belonging and legitimacy are negotiated through participation and reification. For instance, teachers who engaged in CoP in Miller's (2021) study demonstrated greater resilience and adaptability, suggesting that collaborative professional networks are

critical for fostering identity development. However, the findings also reveal limitations of CoP in hierarchical contexts, such as the Native English teachers in Lee and Jang's study (2024), whose agency is constrained by their assistant status and lack of local language proficiency. This tension highlights the need for inclusive CoPs that embrace equality and partnership.

The concept of hybrid identity emerged as a central theme in the current review, particularly among "third culture teachers" (Bailey & Cooker, 2019) and refugee educators (Ozmantar et al., 2023). These teachers moved between cultural and pedagogical practices in liminal spaces, problematizing the binary of native and foreigner as expert and novice. For example, CFL teachers in Liu et al.'s study (2024) in the Netherlands combined the best of Chinese exam-focused teaching with Dutch student-centered approaches, which shows how hybrid approaches can enhance pedagogy and foster intercultural communication.

### ***5.5.2 The role of agency in navigating structural barriers***

Agency was identified as an important component to identity development and teachers' adjustment in the new educational context. Teachers exercised agency through strategies such as relational resource-seeking (Weng, 2024), pedagogical experimentation (Walker & Bunnell, 2024), and everyday resistance (Poole, 2020). These acts are in concordance with Priestley et al.'s (2015) definition of agency as a "situated achievement", where people make use of available resources to claim their authority. For instance, teachers in Rosenfeld et al.'s

study (2022) counteracted difficulties in transition in another country by striving to move beyond local school's expectations, thus advancing their professional goals.

Nevertheless, agency is limited by structural factors, including race (Gras, 2024), language (Zacharias, 2019), and employment status (Guo et al., 2019). Such factors include discrimination against non-Western countries' qualifications (Sun et al., 2022) that sustains oppressive practices and limits teachers to support roles. These findings suggest that immediate action is needed on the institutional level, such as implementing anti-racist hiring policies and more favorable visa regulations to address the structural barriers.

### ***5.5.3 Emotional labor: from resilience to systemic exploitation***

The current study reveals that the process of teaching in intercultural contexts is emotionally demanding, as it echoes Benesch's (2017) concept of emotional labor. International teachers experienced dislocation (McAllum, 2017), identity denial (Lee & Jang, 2023), and gendered scrutiny (Chesnut, 2020), yet these challenges provide opportunities for their professional development. Tools like reflective journals (Sahling & Carvalho, 2021) and mentorship (Weng, 2024) helped teachers cope with the alienation and regain their confidence. This is similar to the critical reflection found in Mansfield et al. (2014) study of teacher learning, which suggests that teacher education programs should include reflective practices to address emotional well-being.

In addition, emotional labor should be viewed as a structural issue. Institutions, not teachers, need to take the responsibility to solve the problem of dissonance. For instance, the Walker & Bunnell study (2024) shows that the programs provided by institutions help teachers transform themselves from overwhelmed to reskilled, demonstrating how systemic support can transform emotional labor from an individual burden to a collective asset.

#### ***5.5.4 Limitations and future research***

While the present review provides some valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. One notable limitation of this review is that many studies relied on small-scale qualitative designs, which, while rich in depth, limits generalizability. Additionally, many of the reviewed studies focus on identity construction in Australia, the U.S., or Europe, which may limit the generalizability of its conclusions. Future research could explore the experiences of international teachers in other regions (e.g., Africa, Latin America), as well as examine the long-term impacts of identity development on teachers' professional trajectories and personal well-being. Also, comparative studies between teachers' experiences in different cultural settings could provide deeper insights into the specific challenges and adaptations. In light of the findings regarding the role of reflective professional learning and the responsibility of institutions to support international teachers, future research might investigate effective support mechanisms and professional development opportunities that address the unique challenges of intercultural teaching.

### ***5.5.5 Concluding remarks***

In the present review, international teacher identity is viewed as a sociopolitical process – as a negotiation of power, culture, and belonging. In this regard, the findings of the study show that there is a need to change the paradigm in global education, which defines teachers not as cultural ambassadors or transient workers but as agentic professionals with hybrid identities who can enrich the pedagogical landscape. For institutions, this means that equitable policies, inclusive communities, and sustained support are not just aspirational goals, but ethical imperatives in fostering globally just educational systems.

The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical understanding of teacher identity as a fluid and context-dependent construct. The review further supports dynamic models by describing how internal factors interact with cultural, institutional, and community influences to make teachers become cultural ambassadors, in line with sociocultural theories of learning. Furthermore, integrating emotional labor into theoretical frameworks is important, as it is not only a challenge but also a way to develop, thus increasing the level of teachers' involvement in intercultural processes. Therefore, teachers' ability to cope with emotional challenges, such as exclusion or marginalization, is crucial to teacher identity development, and thus, the emotional dimensions could also be incorporated into theories of professional development in intercultural settings.

In addition, the findings of this review have practical and policy implications for educational institutions and policymakers to support

international teachers. Institutions can offer supportive environments by recognizing international qualifications and offering transition courses to help teachers who are experiencing deskilling and exclusion, thus enhancing their belonging. Besides, bias training, diverse hiring panels, and accountability measures can be used to address structural racism. Institutions could also establish communities of practice that appreciate diverse pedagogies and support collaborative experimentation. Recommendations include pre-deployment training for teachers to learn strategies for dealing with cultural and institutional challenges, and pairing novice teachers with mentors who have similar intercultural experiences to reduce isolation and increase the self-efficacy of international teachers. Maybe ongoing professional development could focus on cultural negotiation skills, collaborative practices, and peer learning, while institutional support could recognize teachers' contributions through mentoring, peer networks, and recognition platforms. These measures may help teachers to overcome challenges such as marginalization and enhance retention by creating positive, inclusive, and dynamic educational environments.



