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

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

Because of the increasing interest in the Chinese language globally, more and more CFL teachers are now teaching in intercultural contexts abroad. Nevertheless, most of these teachers are likely to encounter challenges, such as adapting to different educational systems and (re)constructing their teacher identity in a new cultural context. Teacher identity is important for CFL teachers because it influences their teaching efficiency in an intercultural context. However, there is currently little research available on how these teachers negotiate and develop their teacher identity when working abroad. Understanding this process is important as it will help provide the necessary support and resources to CFL teachers who are facing these unique challenges while teaching in intercultural settings. Through four interrelated studies, this research therefore aims to gain deeper insight into CFL teachers' identity development in the intercultural context.

To picture CFL teachers' teacher identity development in an intercultural context, we employed three frameworks on teacher identity: poststructuralist perspective of teacher identity; Hanna et al.'s (2019) six domains of identity; personal, professional, and sociocultural dimensions of teacher identity. Overall, these frameworks all reflect that teacher identity is developed in the process of negotiation between the individual and professional self and sociocultural environment (Varghese et al., 2005).

Based on the descriptions of the CFL teachers' teacher identity in an intercultural context and prior conceptual frameworks, four

studies were designed. The first study was an empirical study that examine how CFL teachers perceive their identity in intercultural contexts. By following this line of inquiry, the second study investigates the construction and reconstruction process of teacher identity and identifies the factors that shape this process. By extending the insights from the first two studies, I explore, in the third study, how CFL teachers' teacher identity development is influenced by their interactions with students. Finally, a systematic literature review provides an overview of how international educators construct and reconstruct their teacher identity in intercultural settings.

Chapter 2: Understanding Chinese Foreign Language Teachers' Identity in an Intercultural Context

In this Chapter, the way Chinese foreign language (CFL) teachers perceive their teacher identity in an intercultural environment in the Netherlands was explored. By adopting Foucault's poststructuralist theory of identity as the theoretical framework, the purpose of this chapter was to contribute insights into CFL teachers and enrich existing research on language teachers' identity. The primary research question was as follows:

How do native-speaker CFL teachers perceive their identity in the intercultural context in the Netherlands?

This study involved semi-structured interviews with 21 CFL teachers working in the Netherlands. The interview outline was based on poststructuralist theory. The data were analyzed using an inductive-deductive thematic approach, drawing upon the six domains of identity

in Hanna et al. (2019) study: self-image, motivation, self-efficacy, task perception, commitment, and job satisfaction. The generalized categories under six domains showed good reliability and validity.

The current study found that CFL teachers' identity (re)construction is a non-linear process that is influenced by teachers' previous beliefs and also teaching context. Furthermore, teachers stressed the importance of maintaining self while adapting to meet new contexts' expectations. Although CFL teachers faced many challenges while working abroad, they demonstrated strength and were willing to grow professionally. Some practical implications were drawn from this study. The implications involve developing professional development programs, build collaborative CFL teacher community and provide the necessary teaching materials.

Chapter 3: Construction and reconstruction of Chinese foreign language teachers' identity in an intercultural context: A longitudinal multiple case study

This chapter aims to investigate the processes by which CFL teachers construct and reconstruct their teacher's identity in an intercultural context. In the context of increasing globalization and teacher mobility, this study focused on the specific issues that CFL teachers face in an intercultural context in the Netherlands. Two research questions were addressed:

- 1) How do CFL teachers develop their professional identity in an intercultural context?
- 2) What factors influence CFL teachers' identity development

in an intercultural context?

This study used a longitudinal design to examine three Chinese language teachers over two years. Reflective journals, oral narratives, interviews, and storylines were primary sources of data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data.

The findings showed a three-stage trajectory, referred to here as the ‘survival’ stage, the ‘exploratory’ stage, and the ‘proficient’ stage. Throughout all three stages, three clusters of factors (context, secondary characters, incidents) have been found to have a significant impact on participants’ identity construction in the intercultural context.

The findings showed that identity construction is a long term and complex process. The participants changed from adaptive to reactive, and then proactive. CFL teachers showed strength in incorporating intercultural experiences to refine their teacher identity despite barriers. The study also found that CFL teachers’ identity development is a process of negotiation between individual’s agency and contextual factors. These findings may be of assistance to both policymakers and educational institutes in designing more inclusive and effective teaching environments.

Chapter 4: Teacher-student relationship as a lens to explore Teacher identity in an intercultural context

In this chapter, teacher identity - the inner side of teaching, is explored through teacher-student relationship – the outer side of teaching. Using the teacher-student relationship as a lens to explore and interpret

teacher identity provides a new perspective to investigate teacher identity. The research question was:

How can Chinese foreign language (CFL) teacher identity be characterized based on their teacher-student relationship, in an intercultural context?

In this cross-sectional design, semi-structured interviews, survey, and classroom observations were used as the primary source of data. Fourteen native-speaker Chinese language teachers and one hundred and ninety-two Dutch secondary school students participated in this study. Data analysis was divided into two phases. Firstly, survey data was analyzed via SPSS 26 to identify teacher participants' interpersonal profiles. Then, inductive content analysis was adopted to analyze the interview data.

The findings revealed that the new teaching environment provided teachers a space to reposition their roles and enhanced their teacher identity. Across all teachers, identity construction involved embracing the “other” culture and retaining some original beliefs. Despite this, the findings indicate that teachers' pathways of identity construction varied according to their interpersonal profiles. This chapter may prove beneficial for aiding those who are just starting as teachers in an intercultural context. Moreover, suggestions were offered to teacher education and institutions to develop a more supportive teaching environment for international teachers.

Chapter 5: Navigating Cross-Cultural Landscapes: A Systematic Literature Review of Teacher Identity development in Intercultural Contexts Abroad

A systematic literature review of international teachers' teacher identity development in intercultural settings was conducted in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to investigate the formation, transformation of teacher identity in diverse educational settings, as it has implications for teachers' teaching efficacy, integration, job satisfaction, and career advancement. The following research question is posed to review:

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

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 principles of the PRISMA statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) (Moher et al., 2009) were used as a guideline to conduct and report this review work. Three dimensions of teacher identity, namely personal identity, professional identity, and sociocultural identity were adopted as the framework.

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.

Chapter 6: General discussion and conclusions

The final chapter of this dissertation provides a general discussion and conclusions of the four studies. To begin with, I summarize the main findings of the four studies. Following that, the main and interesting findings were identified and discussed in further detail. The following three aspects were discussed: influence of intercultural contexts on teacher identity development; personal, professional, and sociocultural dimensions of teacher identity; Similarities and differences between CFL teachers and their international peers. Following this, I discussed the major limitations of this dissertation and directions for future research. In addition, the practical implications for teacher education, schools and institutions, and international teachers were discussed. Lastly, I wrote a conclusion to summarize the main goal of this dissertation and provide some take-home messages.

In conclusion, this dissertation calls for a global education system that not only embraces cultural diversity, but also makes best use of it to improve international teaching and learning. Through maintaining self while adapting, international teachers would fulfill their professional development in today's global education contexts.