

LOCAL BELIEF AND THE NEGOTIATION OF EFL TEACHERS' IDENTITY IN AN ASIAN COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This study investigates the local belief and the negotiation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' identity within the Asian context.

Methods. Framed within the Martha Pennington (2014) model, this qualitative research examines the complex interplay between local beliefs and the participants' identity formation through in-depth interviews. The data was collected from three (3) EFL teachers operating at local Asian schools.

Results. The findings reveal the significance of local beliefs in shaping teachers' instructional practices, classroom interactions, and professional identities. This research sheds light on the dynamic nature of EFL pedagogy in culturally diverse settings as it underscores the dialectical process through which EFL teachers negotiate their identities within the local cultural and educational milieu.

Conclusion. It can be concluded that this research contributes to the field of EFL education by highlighting the need for teacher training programmes that address the diverse cultural and contextual factors that influence the formation of EFL teachers' identities.

Keywords: local belief, negotiation, EFL teachers, identity, Asian context

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become a crucial component of educational systems internationally. An EFL Teacher is someone who has a high level of competence in educating non-native English speakers in their language skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. As English continues to be a global lingua franca, EFL teachers are vital in facilitating language learning and cross-cultural communication. Atik Sri Rahayu (2018), in fact, labelled EFL teacher's teaching style as an essential aspect that is linked to student participation in the classroom.

Interestingly, David Crystal (2003) admitted that the increasing clamour for learning English increases the demand for English teachers. Yasemin Bayyurt (2006), however, noted that the demand appears to go beyond the current availability of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs)—opening the way for non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) to fill in the necessary vacancies.

As they appear, the dynamics of EFL teaching are not homogenous across different contexts, and the unique sociocultural environments in which EFL teachers operate can significantly influence their pedagogical practices and professional identities. In light of English language teaching, there is a growing interest in language teacher identity as it is assumed to significantly contribute to a teacher's professional development and ability to negotiate his or her identity towards different cultures.

Judyth Sachs (2005) describes that a teacher's professional identity is essential to teachers in the construction of their perceptions of themselves, their professional practice, and their niche in the society. He continued that identity is continuously negotiated through the network of relationships, myriad experiences, and the sense resulting from them. Identity, therefore, is a "continuously ongoing process" subject to changing educational environments (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122; Kubanyiova & Crookes (2016).

Alastair Pennycook (2001) claims that identity is essential as it determines how one negotiates relationships with the world. Anselm Strauss (1978), on the other hand, uses the metaphor of the actor to show how cultural identity can be negotiated among individuals. As actors have different influences on each other's role in forwarding a scenario, different individuals in a context have such influence on one another. Douwe Beijaard et al. (2004) also admit that the research on teachers' professional identity formation also contributes to our understanding and acknowledgment of what it feels like to be a teacher in today's schools, where many things are changing rapidly, and how teachers cope with these changes. [illustrates how individuals might negotiate their cultural identity using the metaphor of the actor. According to him, distinct individuals within a setting exert distinct influences on one another, just as actors have varied effects on each other's roles in advancing a situation. The study of teachers' professional identity formation, according to Beijaard et al. (2004), also advances our knowledge

of what it's like to be a teacher in the quickly evolving educational landscape of today's classrooms and how educators adapt to these changes.

This study sheds light on the local view of EFL teaching and the negotiation of EFL teachers' identities in a host Asian country. While previous research has extensively explored EFL teaching from a Western perspective, there is a notable gap in understanding the experiences and perspectives of EFL teachers in Asian contexts, where English is learned and taught as a foreign language within distinct cultural and educational frameworks.

The specific focus of this study is to examine how EFL teachers navigate their professional identities and engage with the local context while teaching English in a host Asian country. We can gain valuable insights into the complex interplay between pedagogical practices, cultural norms, and individual experiences by exploring how EFL teachers negotiate their identities within this context.

PENNINGTON'S (2014) MODEL OF TEACHER IDENTITY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYTICAL LENS

In understanding how the participants negotiate their identity as they engage in EFL teaching in a host Asian country, this study is framed within Martha Pennington's (2014) model of TESOL teacher identity as a theoretical framework and analytical lens. This model serves as a valuable theoretical framework and analytical lens for understanding the complex dynamics involved in the negotiation of EFL teachers' identity within diverse cultural and educational contexts. The model explores the multifaceted nature of teacher identity and emphasises the significance of local beliefs in shaping teachers' instructional practices, pedagogical choices, and professional development.

To give an overview of this model, Pennington splits the frames into two – the practice-centred frames and the contextual frames. This explains how this model addresses the dynamic nature of teacher identity, highlighting the interplay between individual, contextual, and sociocultural factors in shaping teachers' identities.

Table 1*Pennington's (2014) Frames of teacher identity in TESOL*

PRACTICE-CENTERED FRAMES	
Instructional identity	The emphasis of instructional identity is on the content, teaching strategies, resources, technologies, roles, and interactions between teachers and students.
Disciplinary identity	A teacher's academic affiliation, credentials, areas of expertise, research, and scholarship are all considered to be part of their disciplinary identity.
Professional identity	The main components of a professional identity include standards and ethics, teacher preparation and growth, working environment, political influence and power, and collegiality.
Vocational	Volunteer work, student needs, department, institution, and field support, as well as a teacher's client care and helper function are all included in vocational frame.
Economic frame	The term "economic frame" describes the pay, efficiency and accountability of teachers, cost-effectiveness, customer happiness, recruiting, and advancement of teachers.
CONTEXTUAL FRAMES	
The global frame	The global frame includes international orientation and activities pertaining to international trade in people, capital, information, technology, ideologies, and languages.
Local identity	The term "local identity" describes how a teacher is located in their profession within a department, institution, community, country, particular teaching group, and student body in a given location.
Sociocultural frame	The sociocultural frame encompasses the racial, ethnic, and gender identities of educators in relation to how they present themselves.

Source. Adapted from Pennington (2014)

This investigation particularly situates itself within the professional component of the practice-centred frames and the local component of the contextual frames. The current study aims to comprehensively explore the local view of EFL teaching and the negotiation of Asian EFL teachers' identities, particularly in a host Asian country. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the following research questions:

What is the prevailing belief of the local schools on EFL teaching?

How do Asian EFL teachers negotiate their identity with the local culture?

By illuminating the experiences and perspectives of EFL teachers within this context, we hope to advance knowledge and practices in EFL education while promoting a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between language, culture, and identity in language teaching contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Negotiating Identity

There is increasing attention to language teacher identity as a crucial factor in a successful Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE). Richard Jenkins (1996) described identity as a “socially constructed phenomenon that can be constructed and reconstructed when an individual participates in social interactions.” This means that identity is an ongoing process of construction. This has been presumed to be a driving force to teachers’ progress in performing their academic roles, especially in the capacity to negotiate their identity and thrive in different cultures. As Pennycook (2001) puts it, teacher identity is an essential aspect of teaching as it determines their capacity to relate to others, negotiate, and build relationships with the world.

Several studies have been conducted that probed teachers’ identity development and its impact on their motivation to teach, the quality of their teaching, career commitment, overall well-being, and career development. There have been numerous researches that looked into how the development of teacher’s identity has a direct impact on their career commitment, overall well-being and career advancement. However, Paul Schutz, Dionne Cross, Ji Hong, and Jennifer Osbon (2007) argue that these studies still fell short of understanding how teacher identities are formed, the factors, and the challenges that influence identity formation.

A study conducted by Amy Tsui (2007) probed the complexity of an EFL teacher’s identity development by collecting the teacher’s lived experiences to examine the narratives from her participant for six years. The results revealed “complex relationships between membership, competence, and legitimacy of access to practice; between the appropriation and ownership of meanings, the centrality of participation, and the mediating role of power relationships in the processes of identity formation” (p. 657) should be identified as the complexities of identity development for the EFL teachers.”

Yasuko Kanno and Christian Stuart (2011), for their part, investigated the identity development of two novice ESL teachers. Collecting and analysing narratives and journals authored by the two teachers, the study revealed results that there is a direct relationship between novice ESL teachers’ identity development and their practices in their classrooms. Sue Lasky (2005) focused on probing the development of teacher identity, agency, and professional vulnerability using sociocultural theory. In this study, ten secondary teachers were interviewed to examine the role of vulnerability in their identity development. Kanno and Stuart (2011) examined the identity development of two ESL teachers who were considered neophytes in the field. Through the collection and analysis of the teachers’ diaries and narratives, the study concluded that the practices of these teachers in the classroom and their identity development are directly related. Lasky (2005), on the other hand, examined how teacher identity, autonomy,

and professional vulnerability emerge as viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory. Ten secondary teachers were interviewed for this study in order to look at how vulnerability affected the way each of them developed their identity. The findings showed that teachers find it difficult to maintain an open working environment by being transparent with their students. The working environment that these educators describe is one of “managerial profession with increased accountability pressures” (p. 899).

Rui Yuan (2016), on the other hand, conducted a narrative inquiry to examine the relationship between publishing academic papers and the professional identity of novice EFL teacher educators. The study results indicated that novice EFL teacher educators think of themselves as teacher-researcher and believe that conducting research is part of their professional identity. Yuan (2016), on the other hand, employed a narrative investigation to look at the relationship between neophyte EFL teachers’ professional identities and their publication of scholarly works. The study’s findings showed that these teachers consider themselves to be teacher-researchers and that doing research is an integral aspect of who they are as professionals.

An interesting area being explored is the negotiation of the identity of an ESL teacher in a foreign learning environment. Given the importance of negotiation in cultural identity development, it is necessary to define it. According to Strauss (1978), negotiation is a way to accomplish things. The point is that negotiation has something in its essence that interaction does not have, and the agreement is involved in the negotiation. Determining the meaning of negotiation is essential given its significance in the formation of cultural identities. Negotiation is a procedure for reaching goals, according to Strauss (1978). It is the essence of negotiation that distinguishes it from interaction, and it involves the agreement.

However, it is not necessarily a part of the interaction. Pennycook (2001) purported a growing interest in language teacher identity as it is assumed to significantly contribute to a teacher’s professional development and ability to negotiate his or her identity towards different cultures. Identity is essential as it determines how one negotiates relationships with the world.

Fichtner and Chapman’s (2011) qualitative study as cited in Hussein Meihami and Naser Rashidi (2020) explored how teachers affiliated themselves with a culture other than their own. Using semi-structured interviews, the findings revealed that they did not do the same for each other. Moreover, Rashidi and Meihami (2017) investigated the role of negotiation about cultural issues on EFL student teachers’ cultural identity development. They collected and analysed the narratives authored by three student-teachers. The results indicated that the cultural practices of the EFL student teachers changed after participating in the negotiation sessions. ...teachers blend with a foreign culture. The analysis of interview data revealed that the participants did not reciprocate in the same way. Additionally, Rashidi and Meihami (2017) looked into how the development of EFL student teachers’ cultural identities was impacted by negotiations regarding cultural issues. Three participants wrote narratives, which they

gathered and examined. The findings showed that after taking part in the negotiation meetings, these participants' cultural practices changed.

Brian Morgan (1998) shared his initial experience as an ESL teacher in the Chinese community. He found that being part of the foreign teaching community has been challenging as efforts in communicative innovations of teaching English were not appreciated. An incorrect utterance was rarely treated as part of the growth in learning the language. Still, rather a sign of blunder and shame followed by non-participation as well served to explain the "underdevelopment of the Chinese economy" (Morgan, 1998, p.4). With this, the author sought the assistance of his Chinese students; he tried to be innovative on how he would present the learning materials to them. In the process, the author realised that after witnessing the responses from his students, it made him question his own set of beliefs along with the plethora of concepts, materials, and methods that he was immersed in. He found himself living the opposite of the constructs he has made of what his life in EFL teaching should be like. He realised that the traditional 'Western' techniques have fallen short when applied to the cultural context where he is. With this, he recommended that the current strategies and methods be scrutinised for suitability in any diverse social and cultural contexts. He said that "this sense of going beyond a fixed body of methods and techniques, responding to the needs of a specific group of students, particularly when their values challenge your own, all the while questioning one's own assumptions, is what I now see as the most important approach to being an ESL teacher."

To sum up, studies often explore the influence of cultural and professional factors on the formation of EFL teachers' identities. Asian cultural values, such as respect for authority and the importance of harmony, may shape teachers' professional roles and practices. The tension between traditional teaching methods and the desire to incorporate more communicative and student-centered approaches can impact teachers' professional identities. This current study, in particular, seeks to understand how local belief helps define the Asian EFL teachers' identity in the Asian country in the context of EFL teaching.

Asian Identity

Crystal (2003) purports that the increasing clamour to learn English increases the demand for English teachers. However, Bayyurt argues that this increasing demand exceeds the current availability of native English-speaking teachers (NEST). This has opened the way for non-native English teachers to fill that need.

Some Asian countries, for example, have a high level of proficiency in the English language. Crisdella Frederiksen (2014) even described one of these countries as a close 'representative' of the English language, which means that although English is not its native language, it mainly uses English as a medium in the learning instruction and

business communication. With this, it is unsurprising that this country has supplied many teachers abroad with excellent Maths, Science, English, and Special Education competencies. He found competence, dignity, and a reputation with high moral values, setting a high standard for them, especially in English Language Teaching.

A paper by Frederiksen (2014) probed the motivation behind Asian EFL Teachers working abroad and why these teachers are being given high premiums in non-English speaking countries. The investigation revealed that these teachers have clarity in their purpose in teaching communication and literacy skills. They also exhibit a positive attitude towards teaching English. More importantly, it brought to the fore the reasons for working abroad, which include higher salary rates and better working conditions. Another study by Mark Ulla (2019) among 56 Asian EFL teachers in Thailand has shown positive experiences in their work but has expressed experiencing challenges such as a perceived lack of teachers' professional development programmes, cultural differences, language barriers, and absence from family celebrations and other important occasions. More findings revealed that these teachers had encountered personal and professional issues, including those that stemmed from their status as 'non-native speaker teachers' (NNEST) of English. ... perceived absence from family holidays and other significant occasions, cultural disparities, language challenges, and a lack of professional development programmes for educators. The analysis also indicated that these educators had to deal with both personal and professional problems, some of which were related to their position as "non-native speaker teachers" (NNEST) of English.

Ulla (2019) further explored nine Asian universities and college English teachers and their perceptions of teaching English as a foreign language in Thailand. The same findings were revealed. Asian teachers expressed positive perceptions in their designations. However, they sounded off experiencing difficulty in teaching as students display a lack of interest in learning English, exacerbated by the lack of a supportive environment, the vague direction of the English curriculum, and a lack of programmes for teacher professional development.

In summary, it may be difficult for these Asian EFL teachers working in an Asian country to strike a balance between their own cultural identity and the cultural norms of the host nation. In incorporating aspects of their own culture where appropriate, they might need to modify their teaching strategies to conform to the cultural norms of the area. Finding a middle ground between upholding their Asian identity and honouring regional traditions and customs may be necessary for this negotiation. Additionally, these teachers may need to navigate their linguistic identity in an EFL context because they are not native English speakers themselves. Despite their great English language abilities, individuals could run across prejudices or expectations that favour teachers who speak English as their first language. In these situations, they might need to make a case for their abilities and show that they are good EFL teachers while

highlighting their particular understanding of the difficulties experienced by English language learners.

THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The researchers employed a qualitative method to understand how the participants negotiated their identity with the local culture while engaging in EFL teaching. As Michael Patton (2002) would put it, qualitative research contributes to understanding the human condition in different contexts and perceived situations. It also explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. Studied through Pennington's (2014) Model of TESOL Teacher Identity as the Analytical Lens, this qualitative investigation gathers the EFL teachers' experiences, perceptions, and behaviour through in-depth interviews. According to Shari Dworkin (2012), in-depth interviews are not concerned with making generalisations to a larger population of interest and do not tend to rely on hypothesis testing but rather are more inductive and emergent in their process. Dworkin (2012) claimed that in-depth interviews are more inductive and emergent in their approach rather than attempting to generalize a wider population of interest or dependent on hypothesis testing.

Instead, interviews as a data collection technique yield categories from the data, and researchers can analyse the relationships between them while looking into how the participants' narratives make sense to them.

Three Asian teachers were purposively chosen to participate in the in-depth interviews. They were currently teaching in 3 different government schools in an Asian country at the time of the interview. The participants were between 26-45 years old. Two of them were female teachers, and all of them have so far taught in the local schools for more than five years. The participants were interviewed on Zoom. They were purposely chosen based on the following criteria: (a) English teacher by profession; (b) is currently teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a local school; and (c) willing to be interviewed. Being an English teacher by profession would allow the participant to discuss in depth what it is like to be an EFL teacher in this Asian country. Also, being currently connected with a local school at the time of the interview would allow the participants to share their close association with the "world they are in".

Before conducting this study, the researchers sought and received the approval from the University's Ethics Committee. Individual permission from each participant was also obtained before the researchers could start collecting the data. The data from the interviews were examined for thematic analysis.

Analysis

The analysis is guided the Pennington (2014) model which provides a comprehensive framework for examining the complexities of teacher identity in TESOL contexts. It recognises the interplay between individual beliefs, enacted practices, and external perceptions, highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of identity formation. By adopting this model as an analytical lens, researchers can explore the intricate relationships between local belief systems, cultural contexts, and the negotiation of EFL teachers' identities.

After the gathering of data, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. This involved converting the audio or video recordings into written texts. The interview data was thematically analysed. Analysing interview transcripts typically involves several steps to understand the information collected. We employed Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis to make sense of the data.

Initially, we had to read and reread the transcripts to become familiar with the data. We had to note that we were looking into the locals' views on EFL teaching. It was also interesting to note the key points on how the participants negotiated their identity in a host country as they engaged in EFL teaching. We had to highlight the critical pieces of information that appeared to answer the research questions. Similar codes were grouped together to form categories as we looked for connections and relationships between different codes and categories. We also had to condense the data by summarising or selecting the most relevant excerpts from the interview transcripts. This involved creating summaries, extracts, or quotes representing each category's key points or findings.

The coded data were again revisited to identify the overarching themes or patterns. It is essential to look for categories' similarities, differences, and relationships. The recurring themes from the data were also categorised into meaningful segments. Themes are broader concepts that capture the essence of the data. The emerging themes and patterns were then interpreted in alignment with the research questions. We then analysed the implications of the findings and considered their significance within the context of our study. Finally, the findings were presented in a clear and organised manner. We used quotes, examples, and supporting evidence from the interviews to illustrate our points. Most importantly, we had to make sure that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants throughout the analysis process were maintained.

RESULTS

This section discusses the belief of the local schools on EFL teaching. The analysis of the interview data surfaces 'White-skinned teachers as the most qualified English teachers.'

The Belief of the Local Schools on EFL Teaching

This section discusses the answers to the research question, “What is the prevailing belief of the local schools on EFL teaching?”

Native Speakers as the Most Qualified English Teachers

The local belief, native-speaking English teachers are viewed as the most qualified English teachers, whereas schools, in most cases, use ‘white-skinned’ or non-Asian teachers as poster individuals to attract more students. Teacher-A, an EFL teacher in this host country for many years, claims that the skin colour of the EFL teacher is seen as one of the most visible qualities of a native-speaking English teacher. Local schools and students appear to look for these teachers who are engaged in teaching English as a Foreign Language. When pressed to comment on these teachers, she had this to say.

In this country, just because their skin is white (referring to the native-speaking English teachers), they can teach. Unfortunately, many of them are not trained teachers. Most of the schools, in fact, appear to be under pressure as parents would want their children to learn English with native speakers. My observation is that, local culture sees a school with ‘white-skinned’ teachers as ‘standard.’ These schools are popular because they use these teachers for marketing purposes, things like that.”

For most locals, when a school has white-skinned teachers, they admire it as a very good learning institution because of the presence of native speakers. Unfortunately, they associate any white-skinned individuals with anyone being ‘native speakers’ of English. Teacher-C, another teacher in another province in the country, narrates what he calls ‘the local belief’ on the phenomenon of EFL.

Normally, whenever parents see that a school has white-skinned teachers, their perception is that, the school is of good quality. It also appears that these schools would hire these westerners to teach English as a marketing strategy to attract more students. The power of the ‘word of mouth’ works among potential invites. In my case, I teach in a high school in the area and I happened to join trips outside to invite graduating Grade 6 students to study in our school. As we invite them, we emphasise that we have ‘farangs’ (foreigners) as English teachers. This is to convince both the students and the parents to send the former to our school.

For some professional teachers, their view on EFL teaching may differ from the local’s, the schools in particular. Teacher-B, another elementary school teacher from another province, shares what she considers her own experience at a local school. To her, the school’s view on education is reflected in its practices.

Sometimes, I feel bad about how my school handles academic-related matters. The way it looks at itself [is like] an institution for business, not as an institution for learning. This is their

mindset. This is where our views start to clash. For example, the school keeps on accepting enrollees even beyond the capacity of our classrooms.

When asked to expound her statement further, she claims that her school seems to look at the business side of education. This supports the earlier statement of Teacher-A, where schools use poster teachers to attract more students. Despite this, however, English language learning remains an essential aspect of the school management's agenda.

Actually, for them, English is important. They want us to teach our students to learn [the necessary] vocabulary, conversation, reading, etc. but they fail to look at the other factors that would affect students' learning, especially the environment. For instance, the number of students goes beyond the capacity of the classroom. That should be fine if all students are all fast-learners. But in our case, our students have a mix of good and poor academic performance.

Based on the narratives of the EFL teachers who are currently based in Thailand, it appears that the foreigners from the West look more appealing in the eyes of the local schools than those from Asia and other countries. This is may be because of the former's English accent and white skin. Historically, the Western countries, the English-speakers in particular, may have had a significant impact on education systems in many parts of the world. As a result, there may be a perception that native speakers of English from predominantly 'white' countries possess superior language skills and teaching expertise.

How the Participants Negotiated their Identity with the Local Culture

This section discusses the answers to the research question, "How do Asian EFL teachers negotiate their identity with the local culture while engaging in EFL Teaching?" Our analysis surfaces the following: (a) Stopping at the level of their students, (b) they show a sense of commitment towards their work, (c) they are friendly to locals, (d) they are patient and resilient to challenges, and (e) they are flexible.

Making their Classes Fun and Engaging

One of the many reasons Asian EFL teachers are known in the classroom is that they make their classes fun and engaging. They ensure every student is allowed to participate and express themselves in English. Teacher-C, a teacher for eight years, for example, does his best to let his students get engaged. Teacher C recalls:

I usually find a way to make my class engaging, and easy to understand for the students.

This allows me to give my students more opportunities to talk and then I remind them of the

saying “no harm in trying”. What I also tell them is not to worry about the ‘grammar rules’ as these can be checked later on. That is why if they talk, I write the words on the board.

When pressed to comment further on the strategies he employs in the classroom to make everyone get interested in listening to the teacher and learn, Teacher C had this to say:

First, I employ activities that students will enjoy – for example, integrating games or singing into the lessons. Sometimes, the use of technology like ‘Kahoot’ engages them that they forget they are also learning English. They think all the while they are only playing. Secondly, the students don’t get bored in my class because I also do move-drills. Students find them fun that they forget they are learning English. To them, it is their first time to experience the popping of balloons with questions – answering them in English. To them, English language learning before was more on copying on the board and written exercises.

For her part, Teacher-B, a teacher for seven years in another province, shares how she starts her lesson so she can impose her rules and standards in the classroom. To her, she makes sure that her students pay attention while engaged at the same time. Teacher B shares:

I usually start my class with warm-up activities and drills that catch my students’ attention. Once they are settled, I start imposing my class rules. When I teach, I also integrate friendly competition and enjoyable activities into my lessons as most of them find these class interactions fun and exciting. Sometimes in my other classes, I let them try to do the work by themselves after I give them a few examples. They like it when they are challenged by the class activities that we give them.

Teacher-A, a teacher for about ten years, is teaching in another province. She teaches in a high school where students are expected to use the target language in the classroom. According to her, “What I do in my guided teaching class, it is a speaking and listening course, I prepare PowerPoint slides. As I present the content of the PowerPoint, my students are very much involved in the talking.”

Teacher-C also enjoys his life as a teacher in a foreign country. To him, teaching should be fun and not dull. That is why his students are continuously engaged throughout the lesson, leaving everyone excited and attentive.

The students really enjoy when I employ fun activities in class. Others even forget to check the time, and they forget that they are also learning English. Then when it is done, they start telling their friends ‘I earned 10 points’, ‘what about you?’ They just simply can’t get over because they enjoyed the class. The kids really had a positive response to my teaching in the classroom. For example, in one of my classes, we had WH-questions, where I prepared ‘popping of balloons’ as our main activity. The balloons when popped yielded complete questions where students get to read them and share their answers. They really had fun because they earned points from the game.

As it appears in the analysis, the use of a fun and engaging teaching style by Asian EFL teachers in the local classrooms may be driven by a desire to adapt to the needs and preferences of their students, build positive relationships, and enhance the learning experience. By incorporating interactive and participatory methods, creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment, and making learning more memorable and enjoyable, these teachers can help to facilitate learning and promote academic success among their local students.

Walking an Extra Mile

Teaching in the classroom comes with challenges. That is why, the participants do their best to walk an extra mile to achieve their goal – that is, students learn. Teacher-C, for his part, is willing to go back to the teach the target language on a ‘word level’ if this is what the students need.

Sometimes, there are students who don’t know how to spell some words. As a teacher, I start with the most basic, just like the phonetics. I start with simple sounds so it would be easier for them to follow and understand. They normally go back, translate and reread. It is difficult for me and at the same time challenging but it is our job to make our students learn. We should always find a way to make them try or at least able to speak one or two sentences in English at the end of the semester.

Teacher-B, for her part, feels accomplished whenever she hears positive feedback on her teaching. To her, the attachment her students show makes her happy and fulfilled.

For me, my happiness is with the children. I am happy if I am with them. I used to take care little kids back in the days when I served ‘catechism’ in the church even up to college. In my own observation, the feedback from both the parents and their kids is okay. As a teacher I could also feel the attachment of my students to me. So far, I have not heard of any negative issues raised against my teaching and the way I deal with my students.

If Teacher-A were to describe the Asian EFL teachers, she simply labels them as ‘trained teachers’ who are ready to teach anytime, anywhere.

Besides we are brilliant and trained teachers back home. In fact, we underwent practice teaching that trained us to be resilient to school work. So, when we came here to teach, everything turned out to be a lot easier, that’s us!

The commitment that the participants like Teacher-C, Teacher-B, and Teacher-A show towards their teaching roles in the local schools may be driven by a combination of cultural values, professionalism, and gratitude. By bringing a strong work ethic, a sense of vocation, and a commitment to excellence to their roles in local schools,

they can make a positive impact on the lives of their students and contribute to the development of education of the host country.

Befriending their Local Students and Colleagues

One thing that Teacher-A bears in mind is her being 'friendly' to the locals. To her, establishing friendly relations with the locals is the key to a successful teaching career in a foreign country.

I try to build personal relationships with other people. This means that as foreign teachers, we should also be open to connecting with others as we cannot do everything on our own. I capitalise on this and I noticed 'life away from home' is easy. To me, working with the locals is smooth and easy if you are friendly to them. Friendship is easier [to maintain] especially at work if you can get along working with them. Because having to work with someone you cannot work along with, could affect your productivity and you could be at the losing end. So, I suggest, develop a good working relationship with the locals. It is the key to maintaining a peaceful workplace, peaceful work environment.

As foreign workers, Teacher-C, on the other hand, suggests that we should not take things seriously. On top of maintaining friendly 'mood' with the local colleagues, getting to blend and adjust with the local culture is an important act.

In teaching, one important thing is professionalism. Try not to take everything seriously. It means that, as teachers, we have good days and bad times but we need to maintain our composure because some locals are [just] difficult to understand sometimes. As foreigners, we need to blend and adjust with their culture and be patient, too.

For Teacher-B, speaking the local language is a good start in establishing friendly relations with her co-workers. To her, communication is the key to a good working environment.

I find working with my local colleagues okay because I speak a little of their local language, and some of them can also speak English, so the communication is smooth. If there are any work-related issues with my local and foreign colleagues [teachers], we just try to sort things out by talking to those directly concerned. We always keep our communication lines open.

In addition, Teacher-A connects the success of any teacher to the relationship he/she establishes at work, especially with the students and colleagues. To her, wearing a 'smile' at work gives her a positive vibe while performing her job.

In the classroom, the success of a teacher does not depend on his/her intelligence solely. A good relationship with the students also matters, especially in an intercultural classroom. With this 'relationship', I can easily connect with them because students also think the same way ordinary people do. No matter how brilliant the teacher is, as long as the students cannot feel him/her, successful teaching will be hard to achieve in the classroom. Students respect

their teacher and learning takes place smoothly if the latter is able to establish good working relationship with the former. So, what I normally do is that, I wear my 'smile' when I teach and at the same time, I encourage them to talk and participate in the class, whether their answers are correct or not. It does not matter as long as they speak and actively participate in class activities.

Asian EFL teachers are generally known for their warm and hospitable nature. This cultural trait may translate into the way these teachers interact with their local students and colleagues, as they strive to build positive relationships and create a welcoming and inclusive environment. By being friendly and approachable, these teachers can help to establish trust and rapport with their students and colleagues, which can facilitate communication and collaboration.

Showing Patience and Resilience to Challenges

Many people say that patience is a virtue. This is may be the reason why Teacher-A had to be patient and resilient to challenges at work. To her, the teachers working in a foreign land may need to walk an extra mile to survive.

I also experience stress at work due to our workload and other school-related activities. It is really tiring but I never complain because I am paid for this job. So, for me, having a stressful job is not really a problem. In terms of work, we should not complain a lot because that later on becomes our weakness. Let's just have to think that we are here to work and working anywhere comes with challenges. So, for as long as we are treated right and fairly, I suggest that we do our best in everything we do, unless we are not treated fairly, we complain. Walk an extra mile if needed. Our patience level is different from the others. For us, we can afford to reteach and do a few more repetitions until our students understand what we teach. Other 'nationalities' just move on to the next topic even if students do not fully understand the lesson.

For Teacher-C, his patience is seen on the way he treats his students. As their teacher in the classroom, he shows them his 'empathy' and 'sympathy' for them.

Based on my own observation as to why they hire [us] is because we have 'empathy and sympathy' for our students. Our patience is there. In other words, we treat their students the way they treat their own children or siblings.

In addition to her earlier statement, Teacher-A shows that patience is indeed a key factor to a successful teaching career. She claims that as a teacher she needs to be nice to the locals, especially to her students who she meets every day in the classroom.

There are times that I feel upset. My students could notice this but I really try my best to control my emotions. As a teacher, I cannot afford to show my anger as students will see this as our weakness. What I do, is that, I try my best to deal with in a way that my actions do not

affect my working relationship with the students. I could be upset now but I could also be as friendly and nice as everyone else. I try my best to be nice at all times. We are typically sweet and friendly. We know how to relate and connect with our students in the classroom because of our natural qualities.

As the teacher participants have mentioned, being patient and resilient is essential for them who working in Thai classrooms. By staying committed to their goals, adapting to new challenges, and maintaining a positive attitude, they can overcome the challenges they face and make a positive impact on the lives of their students and the education system of the host country.

Demonstrating Flexibility

As foreign teachers, Teacher-B believes she and her colleagues need to be flexible at all times. This is because apart from their teaching jobs, they also have other responsibilities during lunch time. “In our school, I clean and also help assist in feeding the students at lunch. This is okay because this is for the children that we teach,” Teacher-B claims.

For Teacher-A, she tries her best to find ways to teach students whose level of English proficiency is low.

Then the ones studying in the rural areas, their level of English is really low. That is why it is very challenging to teach them. In this case, I usually think of strategies that match their needs for learning to take place. So they would be able to understand what I teach them.

When asked what their school principal mentioned about employing Asian EFL teachers, she quoted the school head as saying ‘trained teachers’ which could also mean flexible teachers.

In one of our meetings, the school principal had mentioned about hiring ‘Asian teachers’. According to her, she hired us because of our teaching credentials, that we are trained teachers, that students like us, and that our English ‘accent’ is easy to comprehend in the classroom, among other reasons.

For Teacher-C, when pressed to respond to the question ‘why his school hires Asian teachers,’ he had this to say.

They hire us maybe because of our culture that we are Asian neighbours with Asian culture. We are not difficult to work with because we are also flexible. We can also match other nationalities’ performance in terms of teaching styles. Besides, the students find it easy to understand our English.

Looking at the narratives of the participants, it appears that flexibility is an important trait for them working in the local classrooms. By being willing to learn, adapt, and

adjust to new teaching methods, cultural practices, and work responsibilities, they can be successful in their roles and make a positive impact on the lives of the locals they work with.

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated the host country's local belief in EFL teaching. The analysis surfaces the locals' preference for 'Native English-Speaking Teachers' (NESTs) as the most qualified teachers to teach English. The investigation by Abdul Qadeer (2019) appears to confirm this belief, saying the "a proper screening process for the selection of native English-speaking teachers is not carried out following the requirements of the profession of English language teaching" (p. 138). According to him, in the Arab context, it is also perceived that regardless of teachers' professional teaching aptitude and qualifications, their first language (L1), nationality, and travel document (Passport) are considered essential for their selection as a language teacher. He moved on and cited a few cases below. According to Dworkin, 2012, the Arab context seems to attach great importance to teachers' first language, L1, nationality, and passport and not to the professional teaching skills and qualifications. Dworkin proceeds with examples to support such assertion.

A few examples can be referred, such as an American fellow was working as a male nurse in a hospital but his hiring company made him a language teacher. One fine Canadian fellow had been in different ventures such as soldiering and taxi driving but his recruiting company brought him as a language teacher. Likewise, many other fellow native English-speaking teachers studied and worked other than the English language teaching before joining the profession of teaching (2019, p. 138).

What makes the current study more interesting, though, is that the local belief looks at 'white-skinned' foreigners as 'native speakers' of English regardless of their country of origin. This makes them the most 'sought' English teachers among local schools. For some institutions, these teachers are used as 'posters' to attract more students to study with them.

Asian teachers, on the other hand, are also into EFL teaching. Unlike the 'white-skinned' foreigners, these teachers negotiate their identity to match the locals' preference for NESTs. What they do, highlights typically their strengths as Asian English teachers (being non-NESTs). In the local classrooms, they make their classes fun and engaging; they show a sense of commitment towards their work; they befriend their students and local colleagues; they show patience and resilience to challenges; and they demonstrate flexibility.

The studies by Frederiksen (2014) and Ulla (2019) appear to confirm the current investigation. Frederiksen (2014) noted the reasons as to why Filipino teachers are

given high regard in some non-English-speaking countries. The former pointed out that these teachers have clarity in their purpose in teaching communication and literacy skills. This is on top of their positive attitudes towards their teaching jobs, as confirmed by Ulla's (2019) study.

The above negotiations make the Asian EFL teachers the stand-alone classroom teachers of the English language among local schools as they, later on, get the approval of their colleagues and students. These negotiations prompted the local schools to change their views on EFL teaching that the latter is not only for 'white-skinned' foreigners or native speakers of English but also for Asian teachers who are professionally trained to teach English – who have the necessary skills, attitude towards teaching, and teaching qualifications to teach English as a Foreign language to local students.

CONCLUSION

This study employed Pennington (2014) model to investigate the local belief and the negotiation of EFL teachers' identity within the Asian context. Pennington's (2014) model serves as a valuable theoretical framework and analytical lens for understanding the complex dynamics involved in the negotiation of EFL teachers' identity within diverse cultural and educational contexts. The model also explores the multifaceted nature of teacher identity and emphasises the significance of local beliefs in shaping teachers' instructional practices, pedagogical choices, and professional development. The in-depth interviews with the participants explain the local belief that labels the Native-English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) as the most qualified teachers to teach English. This local belief allowed the participants to negotiate their identity in the local Asian context. These include: making classes fun and engaging, walking an extra mile, befriending their local students and colleagues, showing patience and resilience to challenges, and demonstrating flexibility. This research sheds light on the dynamic nature of EFL pedagogy in culturally diverse settings as it underscores the dialectical process through which EFL teachers negotiate their identities within the local cultural and educational milieu.

Implications

The implications of this research contribute to the field of EFL education by highlighting the need for teacher training programmes that address the diverse cultural and contextual factors that influence the formation of EFL teachers' identities. Ultimately, this study offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of EFL teaching and the importance of recognising and respecting local belief systems in educational settings.

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