English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies
ISSN 2640-9836 (Print) ISSN 2640-9844 (Online)
Vol. 5, No. 4, 2023
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/eltls

Original Paper

"What Do I Feel? Who Am I?": Exploring Secondary School EFL Student Teachers' Emotion Labor in Identity Construction from a Post-Structuralist Perspective

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Received: August 11, 2023 Accepted: October 01, 2023 Online Published: October 17, 2023

doi:10.22158/eltls.v5n4p235 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v5n4p235

Abstract

This study examined the emotion labor of student teachers in Chinese secondary schools and explored how they negotiated and constructed their teacher identities, with Zembylas' model of three levels of teacher emotions (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup levels) as the analytical framework. The primary data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with three student teachers who served as interns for fifteen weeks. To ensure data triangulation, emotional diaries, student focus group interviews, classroom observations and relevant documents were also gathered as supplementary data. Findings revealed the inextricably interwoven relationship between teacher emotion labor and identity. Firstly, student teachers' confusion about their identity emerged partly due to their student-teacher equal educational philosophy. Secondly, the prerequisite for natural expressions of emotions is the mutual trust among both parties. Lastly, self-reflections evoked by emotion labor could facilitate student teachers' identity formation and transformation. The implications derived are significant for stakeholders in the field of teacher education.

Keywords

emotion labor, teacher identity construction, student teachers, post-structuralist perspective, English language teaching

1. Introduction

Student teachers are expected to perform additional emotional labor if they wish to successfully complete their internship. This is because teaching practicum has been widely recognized as a crucial phase when student teachers engage in the first front-line teaching and assume teaching responsibilities (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Ulvik, Helleve, & Smith, 2018). During the practicum, student teachers

often face huge challenges and immense pressure, especially when they may find themselves caught between their identity as a student and the responsibilities they must fulfill as a teacher particularly during classes (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Kim & Young, 2020). These contradictions give rise to complex emotions that intertwine with one another (Tian & Zeng, 2021).

Over the past two decades, there has been a consensus that emotions are the central part of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998). Existing studies on teacher emotions have indicated that teachers experience emotions in diverse educational contexts, such as in classroom teaching (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014), professional learning (Gaines et al., 2019; Noddings, 2011), and educational reforms (Lee & Yin, 2011). To abide by institutional rules, teachers employ corresponding emotion regulation strategies to engage in emotion labor (Yin, 2012; Yin, Huang, & Lee, 2017). Studies in this area primarily investigated teachers' emotion labor in relation to their agency (Benesch, 2018), identity formation (Kocabaş-Gedik & Ortaçtepe Hart, 2021; Nazari & Karimpour, 2022), professional development (Song, 2021), and diverse sociocultural contexts (Ding, De Costa, & Tian, 2022; Her & De Costa, 2022; Loh & Liew, 2016).

However, to the best of my knowledge, there are two research gaps. The first one is that research teachers' emotion labor and teacher identity construction taking student teachers as participants is scarce yet worth investigating. Additionally, a dearth of research examining the intertwined nature of teachers' emotion labor and teacher identity construction were conducted in context of China where such research is still at its nascent stage (Ding, 2021), especially in secondary schools (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022; Nazari, Seyri, & Karimpour, 2023; Song, 2021; Warner & Diao, 2022).

This study thus aims to contribute to the existing research on teacher emotion labor, particularly during the process of student teachers' identity construction. It seeks to explore what the emotion labor student teachers performed during the practicum and factors in emotion labor while constructing their professional teacher identity, thereby providing valuable insights into teacher education programs.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Theorizing Teacher Emotion Labor from a Post-Structuralist Perspective

"Emotion labor", a concept initially introduced by sociologist Hochschild (1983), pertains to the strategies employed by professionals in certain service sectors to manage their emotions as expected or required during social interactions. This enables them to (re)negotiate their sense of self and identity, particularly when they are demanded to display some specific emotional performances in the workplace. The process of engaging in emotion labor often gives rise to interconnected dichotomies such as genuine versus masked self, private versus public self, and internal versus external feelings (Benesch, 2017). Worthy of noticing is that while teacher emotion regulation involves managing emotions due to personal factors, emotion regulation among staff, particularly in the service sector, becomes commodified and transformed into emotion labor as a result of organizational rules and social norms rather than personal feelings and demands (Yin, 2017). This means that many true feelings

cannot be directly delivered due to explicit regulations for the practicum program or implicit institutional rules. Emotion labor strategies include Surface Acting (SA) and Deep Acting (DA) to manage feelings and emotional performance. Specifically, SA involves hiding inner feelings or faking unfelt emotions through a succession of deconstructing and reassembling, which is time and energy consuming, while by DA, individuals attempt to feel the desired emotion by utilizing their cognitive skills (Hochschild, 1983). Moreover, James, Meredith and Robin (2005) further proposed the third type of emotion labor strategy: the Expression of Naturally Felt Emotions (ENFE), which was recognized and underscored by Yin (2017).

Diverse conceptualizations of emotion labor in the research of teacher emotion labor lead to distinct theoretical stances, such as a post-structuralist perspective (Benesch, 2017; Kocabaş-Gedik & Hart, 2021), an ecosystem perspective (Zembylas, 2007), and an activity theory perspective (Nazari & Karimpour, 2022). The post-structuralism perceives emotion labor as complex, fluid, and fragmented, as well as language teacher identity as dynamic, socio-cultural, hybrid, and multifaceted (Barcelos, 2017; Zembylas, 2003). In this vein, this theoretical perspective is capable of being utilized to analyze multilayered social-cultural factors such as power relations.

From the post-structuralist perspective, teachers could actively contribute to the reconstruction of emotional experiences by means of narratives and reflective journals. These two methods facilitate self-reflection on the evolving discursive environment, behavioral performance, and interpretation of educational events, ultimately leading to the formation of new self-identities. The emergence of identities is closely intertwined with the narratives individuals create and share about their lives (Song, 2016). Specifically, individuals use narratives not only to communicate their self-perception with others, but also to shape their own self-conception and behave in alignment with their self-narrative (Yuan & Lee, 2016). In this study, Zembylas' (2003) model encompassing the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup levels of teacher emotions, was employed to examine the emotion labor of five student teachers and their teacher identity construction. By eliciting and analyzing their personal narratives, we explored participants' past experiences, current engagement, and career blueprints as teachers, as well as how their identities emerged from their internal emotional experiences, perceptions, and values (Gee, 2001), thus acknowledging the temporal and fluid nature of identity. Moreover, at the interpersonal level, we focused on how participants' identities were shaped through their interactions with people around them, such as students, mentors, and colleagues (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the intergroup level, we considered the influence of the institutional and socio-cultural environment of secondary schools in southern China (junior and senior high, private and public) on participants' emotion labor and identity during their teaching practicum, thereby highlighting the contextual dimension of their experiences. These three levels of Zembylas' model (2003) present an ontological description of emotions and their personal-cultural nature, which is closely tied to the construction of teacher identity. In this model, emotion labor could occur among the three levels and be influenced by factors at each level. These influences, in turn, can promote or inhibit the construction of teacher

identity.

2.2 Research on Teacher Emotion Labor in Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is about being acknowledged as a certain type of person by the teacher self and by others (Gee, 2000). As underscored by previous researchers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004), teacher identity construction is a dynamic and ever-changing process which situated within teachers' professional activities and sociocultural contexts. Additionally, in the context of teaching practicum, it is understandable, that most student teachers will encounter loads of difficulties and even dilemmas arising from the first-time teaching, such as the identity construction influenced by hierarchical power relations (Zhu & Zhu, 2018) and the individual, educational, institutional, and moral conundrums when their identities shift from academic study to classroom instruction (Schutz, Nichols, & Schwenke, 2018). To date, the growing focus has been given to teachers' emotions as a crucial component of their identity construction (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). This is because when learning to teach, student teachers are more vulnerable to experiencing a range of emotions (Timotuk & Ugaste, 2010), and these feelings, both positive (like pride and joy) and negative (like embarrassment and uncertainty), can affect how they interpret different teaching experiences, the development of their expertise and reflective skills (Zhu, 2022) as well as how they come to terms with their identity as teachers (Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Recently, there is an increasing number of studies exploring the correlation between language teachers' emotion labor and identity construction. For instance, Nazari and Karimpour (2022) drew on an activity theory to explore the role of emotion labor in English teachers' identity construction in Iran. The findings disclosed the process how the teachers interpreted and performed emotion labor by virtue of tools, objectives, division of labor, and communities of practice that gradually shaped their multi-faceted identities. In context of rural areas, adopting ecosystem perspective, Shen, Wang and Sun (2020) examined four rural teachers as typical cases through focus group interviews, revealing that emotion labor affects rural teachers' identity and their intention to stay on duty in underdeveloped areas. Additionally, adopting a post-structuralist perspective, Kocabaş-Gedik and Hart (2021) studied two novice native English-speaking teachers in an EFL context in light of weekly journal entries, follow-up interviews, and researchers' field notes, revealing the ways in which emotional work is deeply entangled with ideas about professional identity, communities of practice, burnout, and investment.

Among these studies, there are two research gaps. The first one is the limited number of research aiming at student teachers. By exploring one preservice teacher's emotional responses to her internship teaching experiences, Song (2021) revealed that this native English student teacher's experiencing and managing of her own emotions in relation to teaching may catalyze the transformation of her teacher identity. Drawing on the lens of Community of Practice, Nazari, Seyri, and Karimpour (2023) further revealed that teachers' temporal and spatial emotion labor was either preceded by or followed by identity formation. Nevertheless, there is still a paucity of research on student teachers' emotion labor in identity construction during the practicum. Student teachers are worth investigating since the

practicum is an important opportunity for student teachers to engage in professional development and to explore their identities as teachers before becoming in-service teachers. It is during this period of time that being exposed to diverse teaching methods, one student teacher may be specifically mentored as they transition into a professional role. Whether in opposition to or compliance with practices at internship schools and social conventions, student teachers' emotional challenges with regard to emotion control assist them in negotiating their teaching roles and objectives, which has an impact on how they develop their identities as English teachers. Additionally, there is a paucity of qualitative research conducted in context of China, especially in secondary schools. To fill the gaps aforementioned, the present study thus seeks to answer the following two questions:

RQ1: What kind of emotion labor did student teachers experience at the beginning of, in the middle of and at the end of their practicum?

RQ2: What are the factors that play a role in the emotion labor student teachers performed while (re)constructing language teacher identities during their practicum?

3. Method

3.1 Context and Participants

This study took place in the pre-service English language teacher education program offered by a university in southern China. The four-year undergraduate program seeks to equip proficient English teachers for both elementary and secondary schools through a combination of the coursework and teaching practicum. In the final year, student-teachers are designated to practicum schools for a 15-week teaching practice. According to the program arrangement, an in-service teacher from the practicum school designated as a mentor for each student-teacher, will guide, help and assess the teaching practice of student teachers. Additionally, a university supervisor is arranged to the student teachers in the same practicum school, who regularly visits the practicum school and provides necessary support in collaboration with the school mentor.

Purposive sampling and convenience sampling (Patton, 2002) were adopted to recruit participants in this study. Three most important criteria were employed in process of recruiting potential participants: a) participants will engage in their practicum program and finish it successfully in the end; b) the maximization of variation principle was utilized to identify student teachers with different genders, educational backgrounds, teaching experiences and working in different grades and schools; c) participants are willing to share their own stories. To these ends, the researcher reached out to 25 her acquaintances as potential participants at the outset. After several rounds of confirmation, four of them with the pseudonyms Marry, Vivi, Yisa, and Young agreed to participate and signed the consent form prior to the data collection. But Yisa left in the middle of this study due to her personal factor. Therefore, finally, only the rest three participants (Marry, Vivi, Young) were examined (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Demographic Information of Three Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Qualification	School	Practicum duration	Grade	Teaching experience
Marry	21	Female	Undergraduate	E high school	15 weeks	10	Part-time as a tutor
Vivi	22	Female	Undergraduate	E high school	15 weeks	10	No
Young	22	Male	Undergraduate	N junior school	15 weeks	7	No

Besides the differences showed among the three participants in Table 1, three participants had different educational backgrounds and expectations for the practicum. Marry was born in a countryside. She was told that being a teacher is decent and respectable since she was a child. Therefore, she chose English Education as her major. She did some part-time jobs as an English private tutor during the first three years of her college. During this period, she found herself indeed enjoy imparting knowledge and educating students. Inspired by this discovery, she hoped her teacher identity could be further constructed in the practicum. Similarly, Young was also excited about the incoming practicum. He admitted that his previous teacher in high school encouraged him to become an empathetic and inspiring teacher. Thus he regarded this practicum as a stepping stone for his future teaching career. Unlike Marry and Young, Vivi confessed she was not enthusiastic about becoming an English teacher. It is the decent social status and stable income that attract her most, instead of the passion for teaching. She may turn to other professions if she still does not like the teaching profession after the practicum.

3.2 Data Collection

The triangulated approach was employed to collect and analyze data from multiple sources including: a) Participants: semi-structured in-depth interviews and reflective journals; b) Students: focus group interviews; c) Other relevant supplementary materials: classroom field observations, teaching materials, and any relevant documents.

Before the semi-structured individual interviews, participants were asked to sign a written consent form that outlined the purpose of this research, privacy protection policy, and recording notification. Each participant underwent two-round interviews, conducted at the mid-term and end of the practicum. The interview objectives were as follows: a) Elicit participants' critical emotional incidents; b) Gather participants' perspectives on the "appropriate" feelings and expressions of teacher emotions in different situations during the practicum; c) Examine the strategies and underlying reasons for participants' emotion labor in identity construction. In addition to the interview questions outlined in the interview protocol, other questions derived from field observations and relevant documents were also asked. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to naturally and spontaneously share their personal

stories by setting the interview place at somewhere they were familiar with, such as the classroom or the office. However, if participants deviated significantly from the topic, the researcher would skillfully guide them back on track (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Furthermore, worthy of noticing is that the researcher also engaged in personal communication with the participants through platforms such as WeChat (similar to WhatsApp), phone calls, and informal meetings. These informal interactions helped establish rapport with the participants to elicit personally meaningful and significant stories and feelings.

3.3 Data Analysis

Inspired by Miles and Huberman (1994), the process of analyzing the collected interview data and reflective journals in this study involved following six steps: a) Transcription and translation: the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim in Chinese and then translated into English. b) Open Coding: the category construction process began with open coding. Segments of the data related to teachers' emotions and emotion labor (such as "happy, confuse, smile, pretend, control my anger"), as well as identity construction (such as "feel like one member of these students when I attend experienced teachers' class", "maybe I am not a qualified teacher", and "shoulder more responsibility as a teacher") were identified. c) Axial Coding: these pieces of data showed similarities in a certain period and they thus were grouped into categories in chronological order, namely, at the beginning of, in the middle of and at the end of the practicum. This is the reason why the findings section of this study will be displayed as these three periods. In each period, emotion labor and identity construction will be examined separately in the findings at first and then they will be discussed together in the discussion section. d) Peer Review: the author' colleague in this field conducted a peer review by examining a selection of raw data, transcripts, codes, and categories. Any differences in coding categories were handled through discussion and negotiation until an agreement was reached. e) Case Profiles: for each participant, case profiles that include all of the background information, coded data and associated categories were developed. Each profile was shared with the corresponding participant to invite their comments, validating and enriching the results. f) Cross-Case Analysis: these three participants were compared across cases to find patterns and differences within each period and category.

Regarding the supplementary data, including focus group interviews with students, classroom field observations, teaching documents, and materials, the researcher initially coded and categorized them in the same way. And the other researcher then checked the coding and categorization. Next, the coded data was used to discover any discrepancies regarding teachers' emotion labor and identity between participants' self-reports and anyone else's perspectives. Any identified discrepancies were further explored and verified in the final-round interview with the participant.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Emotion Labor

Answering the first research question regarding the types of emotion labor performed by student teachers, we found that the student teachers displayed distinctive emotion labor when faced with different emotions at the beginning of, in the middle of and at the end of the practicum.

4.1.1 At the Outset: Both Naturally and Deliberately Express Positive Emotions

Prior to and at the initial stage of the practicum, all three student teachers expressed great expectations for their upcoming career as teachers. During the interaction with the students, these student teachers could not help but express their delight when they received positive feedback from the students, such as answering questions actively. When students came to ask questions after class, the student teacher smiled due to feeling respect and recognition as a formal teacher. Meanwhile, students' sincere gratitude will empower the student teacher to reap a great sense of achievement.

> "Sometimes I feel that being a teacher is indeed pretty good! Because students' positive response and feedback greatly satisfied my sense of achievement, which makes me feel that my existence is valuable, even with a sense of mission." (Marry)

It shows that positive feedback from students further strengthened student teachers' confidence and belief in pursuing a career in teaching. Furthermore, this generation of student teachers has been brought up with a pedagogical philosophy of fostering equal teacher-student relationships, and an encouragement-centered education rather than the traditional oppressive style. Therefore, sometimes even if a student wandered off in class or delivered incorrect answers, these teachers did not immediately show displeasure or anger, not to mention to embarrass, blame or even punish the student. Instead, these teachers with their disappointment concealed, always smiled at students to encourage them.

> "Given the embarrassment and helplessness I had experienced in person, I would not blame my students for not being able to answer the questions I asked. Instead, I would smile and reassure them." (Young)

This excerpt shows that both sociocultural factors and personal past experiences of being a student, pushed Young to be more patient and kind to his students, although sometimes he received students' negative feedback. In other words, student teachers' act of showing positive emotions to students as much as they could is not only influenced by the contemporary pedagogical philosophy, but also by their past experiences as students.

4.1.2 In the Middle: Deliberately Suppress or Disguise Negative Emotions

However, under the hierarchical system of the practicum school and the whole society, these student teachers were confronted with loads of challenges such as being afraid of unqualified as a teacher, lack of teaching experience, lack of confidence in their linguistic competence when required to speak English throughout the entire class (Song, 2016) as well as unequal mentorship. Even at these moments, they had to suppress and disguise negative emotions and meanwhile to show positive emotions. During

the struggling process, they may gradually become confused and even self-questioned whether they are suitable or qualified to be a teacher.

Shocked by the reality within practicum schools, these student teachers had to perform emotion labor to deal with dissonance between teaching theory and practices by deliberately suppress or disguise negative emotions. Take Vivi as an example.

> "It seems that the whole educational pattern of secondary schools did not change at all for the past years. I felt a great sense of disparity, sadness and frustration then." (Vivi)

However, they were merely student teachers who did not have the ability or power to reverse this situation. Instead, they were required to carry out "cramming teaching" by implicit rules of their practicum schools although they did not approve of it from the bottle of the heart. Consequently, most of the time, student teachers adopted their superficial compliance with the school's exam-oriented implicit rules, as a cover for their internal reluctance and inability to fight against.

Additionally, interning at a junior high school in a coastal city of China, Vivi thus assumed that the students' English proficiency should be pretty great, at least higher than the average levels, but it's the other way round. Therefore, most of her preset classroom activities were put on hold during the actual lesson, as students could not even understand her classroom instructions.

> "I was really really embarrassed then and tried to pretend to be composed, yet failed. We were just looking at each other, eyeball to eyeball." (Vivi)

Despite her efforts to conceal nervousness and show calmness, the results were not satisfactory due to her limited experience and abilities. In fact, it was found that as long as the actual situation was different from the student teachers' presumptions, their inner world would be filled with contradictions and clashes. Take Young as another example. He admitted that collective lesson preparation could relieve the burden on new teachers, making them faster and easier to get started by playing the "safety card". However, this may restrict teachers in aspect of selecting what and how to teach. It contradicted with Young's expectation that a teacher has the autonomy to be innovative in teaching content and format. It also reflected the current largely homogeneous teaching content in Chinese secondary schools.

Furthermore, disappointed by the undisciplined junior high school students, Young did not break the implicit rules of always smiling at students until his indignation reached its peak. The poor discipline like whispering made Young feel that he was not treated with the same respect as an in-service teacher, and his fledgling teacher identity was thus greatly challenged. "My rage must have been gradually accumulated and then it erupted all of a sudden like overly inflated balloons", he claimed. At this moment, Young's educational philosophy of approaching kids with positive emotions was overwhelmed by indignation and frustration, which drove him insane.

4.1.3 In the End: Change Myself by Deep Acting

If these student teachers always remained superficially pretending that they had no negative emotions, they may suffer greater damage to their mental health and may thus turn to other professions when

practicum ended. Therefore, changing the mindset and allowing partial compromise by deep self-reflection (namely, deep acting), promoted them to change themselves with their cognition reversed, thereby facilitating their own phoenix-like rebirth and reconstructions of their identity as teachers.

In fact, many student teachers adopted the strategy of deep acting, either consciously or unconsciously, in order to get through their practicum more smoothly. For example, in class, one of Marry's students told Marry that he did not understand the word "persistence" written on the board because Marry just skipped it without any explanation. Marry said she was rather shocked at that moment but didn't show it. After class, Marry asked other students for further confirmation and found that most of them did not know the meaning of "persistence". Later she figured out that it was not a word included by the syllabus. This incident triggered Marry's self-reflection. She was a little frustrated when she realized that there was something wrong with her teaching. But on a second thought, she could pay more attention to this aspect in the future teaching. Therefore, she confessed that she treated these negative emotions as positive valuable reflective driver and materials, pushing her to grow better and faster as a qualified teacher.

Additionally, when faced with something that they cannot change, some student teachers may persuade themselves. They would reinterpret the incidents to relieve their inner negative feelings. Young persuaded himself by thinking, "after all, they are just teenagers."

Furthermore, he convinced himself that for his own health, he should always try to divert himself. He often engaged in positive self-reminders, as he demonstrated "being angry is unhealthy and pointless".

4.2 Factors in the Emotion Labor Performed While (re)Constructing Language Teacher Identities

In response to the second research question about the factors that play a role in the emotion labor student teachers performed while (re)constructing their language teacher identities during the practicum, we found that factors at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup levels (Zembylas, 2003) exert influences during the practicum.

4.2.1 Intrapersonal Factors

This study found that at the intrapersonal level, student teachers' different educational backgrounds, language competence (capability and confidence in speaking English throughout the entire class), teaching experience (a private tutor or none), professional expectations (dreams or just jobs), and career plans (continue to become an English or not) could function as the internal factors.

Given three participants' various personal backgrounds aforementioned in section 3.1, their present engagement in the practicum could be influenced accordingly. Vivi considered the teaching profession as a decent job rather than a career full of great passions. She thus merely accomplished the assignments required by her university and practicum school. Compared with Vivi, Marry and Young were more willing to design extra class activities as a supplement, attend experienced teachers' lessons, collect online teaching sources to improve their teaching skills as a teacher. Additionally, these student teachers' career plans were also influenced by their past educational experiences. Young emphasized

that his high school English teacher, was quite close to his ideal teacher who offered extra-curricular materials for students to role-play and other interesting and meaningful classroom activities.

As student teachers, they may occasionally lose sight of the fact that they are teachers when observing the lessons given by other experienced teachers. They may still think and behave as students do, rather than a teacher. This may be attributed to the fact that they hadn't systematically learned how to observe other teachers' lessons as a teacher. As Vivi put it, "I feel like I often switch between the identities of a high school student, university student, and student teacher, but I can't tell which me I am?" Such circumstances could leave student teachers being highly perplexed and questioning their current professional identity.

4.2.2 Interpersonal Factors

At the interpersonal level, we focused on how participants' emotion labor in constructing identities were shaped through their interactions with people around them, such as students, mentors and other student teachers in the same practicum school, the practicum supervisor in the university.

The confusion and self-doubt about the teacher identity can arise not only when alone, but also from the interaction with students. As Vivi said,

> "I felt like my memory of junior high school life still remained vivid. So I couldn't adapt this sudden changing identity at all, in a full swoop. I am not sure how to get along with students with which identity." (Vivi)

Marry also expressed a similar confusion. When she went to supervise students' evening study sessions, "the whole class was as chaotic as a grocery market". Even when she stood at the podium, there were still some students walking around. As she put, "it felt like I was completely treated like air".

However, what was unexpected is that some students trusted these student teachers as much as they trusted their in-service teachers. For instance, after the report cards of the mid-term exam were released, the class monitor of Marry's class approached her at recess and complained about how badly he had performed and how confused he was.

> "I was shocked then but I didn't show it. Because this was the first time I had gained such unconditional trust from students, pushing me to work harder to live up to their trust. Although I felt sad for him in my heart, I still smiled and encouraged him to believe that he could make it next time." (Marry)

Marry acknowledged that this genuine confession means students' recognition of her identity as a teacher, which inspired her to shoulder even more responsibilities. In addition to students, other student teachers also influenced these student teachers' emotion labor in the professional identity negotiation and construction. As Marry mentioned,

> "Vivi performed poorly in her first open lesson so she was depressed for a while, even questioning whether she could become a qualified teacher in the future. This also evoked my self-reflections: am I suitable to be a teacher or not? Is my current ability sufficient to become a qualified teacher?" (Marry)

From Vivi's perspective, relationship with other student teachers (competitive or cooperative) could greatly influence her emotion labor and identity negotiation.

> "At the beginning, my teaching progress was out of sync with the other two student teachers, and even my mentor said that we were in competition. I was thus really anxious. Especially after listening to Marry's lesson, I didn't believe that I was a qualified teacher. But when I worked with Marry as a partner, I felt relieved without competition with her. Especially after talking to Marry, I found that the profession of teaching was not so unattainable." (Vivi)

In addition to the interactions with students and other student teachers that directly influence these student teacher's identity negotiation, the relationship with their mentor also matters. Due to the unequal power relations within the hierarchical system of the practicum school, these student teachers felt that the relationship between their mentor and them was more like that between superiors and subordinates such as bosses and employees. These student teachers thus often felt oppressed by their mentors and are forced to survive in a crevice. Moreover, certain mentors treated student teachers quite unfriendly sometimes. For instance, Marry never expected that the biggest challenge she may encounter during her internship would be how to get along well with her mentor.

> "She was always suppressing me, similar to so-called 'PUA' (Pick-Up Artist). She was the person who said that I should add an extra page when editing the exam questions, but when students didn't finish in class, she blamed me for arranging too many questions for students. Seriously? But I could say nothing, she was my mentor." (Marry)

In the same vein, Vivi's mentor directly interrupted her lesson and pointed out that this point was unimportant or wrong, which made Vivi almost lost her esteem. On the one hand, she was a student when interrupted by her mentor in front of the students. On the other hand, she was considered an English teacher who stood at the podium imparting knowledge to students. There was even once when her mentor yelled at her outright, pointing out that what she was speaking was totally incorrect, which would mislead her students. This made her feel quite aggrieved and embarrassed, but what she could do was to conceal her embarrassment with a smile. After discussing with other student teachers, she decided to treat her mentor as her boss (although some student teachers and their mentors got on as intimate as friends). After all, at this practicum school, the mentor was an in-service teacher with many years of teaching experience, whereas Vivi herself was just a student teacher who stayed here for one semester.

However, some mentors also set a role model for student teachers. In the final interview, these student teachers admitted that their negotiation of teacher identity had in fact been dynamic and ever-changing.

> "Before the internship, I believed that I was a half qualified teacher. But after listening to my mentor's class, I realized my immaturity as a teacher. My mentor's advanced educational philosophy and skillful handling of emergencies enlightened my professional development." (Marry)

Throughout the practicum, Marry's identity as a teacher went through a complex cycle of being broken

and rebuilt.

4.2.3 Intergroup Factors

Under such a “rigid” hierarchy, excessive power distance (Zembylas, 2014) could put student teachers in disadvantaged positions where they generated negative emotions but were unable to show them. Take Marry as an example.

> “They (In-service teachers) often shared various teaching resources within their internal Wechat group of in-service teachers. Moreover, some meetings are only attended by their in-service teachers. I still remembered that I was taking a seat before the meeting when the director told me seriously that interns were not allowed to attend this meeting. This made me feel awkward, like an ‘outsider’ here. Like most reserved Chinese people, I had never argued for my own rights.” (Marry)

This bash from director’s condescension put Marry in an awkward position, making her feel being sidelined (Li et al., 2018). However, due to the introverted nature shared by most Chinese people and the fact that she was only a student teacher at the bottom of the hierarchy, Marry did not argue with anyone about the unfairness she encountered. Instead, she just got over it by herself. Nevertheless, Young said that he would fight for it if the same situation happened to him. He could not bear this unfair treat, although he was also merely a student teacher. It seemed that he was not restricted to the power relations within the practicum due to his own personality and gender. Moreover, regarding the reserved nature shared among most Chinese people aforementioned, Vivi also emphasized,

> “China is a nepotism society that values the relationship between seniors and juniors. Besides, this school was my own Alma Mater. This office I stayed was also home to my former English teacher. So when I sat in the office, I was afraid to speak aloud.” (Vivi)

5. Conclusions

Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that the types of emotion labor performed by student teachers, and factors that play a role in the emotion labor student teachers performed while (re)constructing their language teacher identities during whole the practicum.

Firstly, in terms of Zembylas’ model of three levels of teacher emotions (2003), it was found that at intrapersonal level, student teachers’ different educational backgrounds, language competence (capability and confidence in speaking English throughout the entire class), professional expectations (dreams or just jobs), and career plans (continue to become an English or not) could function as the main factor; at interpersonal level, teacher-student relationship (student-oriented, teacher-oriented or equal relationships), relationship with mentors (friends, mentors and apprentices, superiors and subordinates), relationship with other teachers (friends or insiders and outsiders), relationship with other student teachers (competition or cooperation) could exert influences; at intergroup level, institutional support from practicum school and university, and Chinese “reserved” traditional culture could help explain something. In this study, factors at intergroup level influence student teachers’

emotion labor while constructing their identity most, which underscored the significance of building good rapport with people surrounded.

Secondly, from a post-structuralist understanding, student teachers' efforts to display required emotions could result in corresponding emotion labor and strategies, thereby triggering a process of deeper self-reflection. This reflexivity, in turn, has the potential to facilitate emotional development and student-teacher identity transformation. This discovery coincides with Song (2021) whose participant was one native English student teacher. It thus could be inferred that reflexivity plays a key role in transformation from student teachers' negative emotions to positive emotional growth and transformation, reconstructing their professional identity development (Zembylas, 2014). This process is consistent with "critical emotional reflexivity" (Zembylas, 2007), echoed by Nazari, Seyri, and Karimpour (2023), and corroborated in this study.

Additionally, this study uncovered that a prerequisite for the natural expression of emotions is a sense of trust in each other. If the relationship between student teachers and anyone who even stands higher under the hierarchical system of school is so close that they get along well with each other like intimate friends, then they are more likely to express emotions, even including negative ones. Lastly, most student teachers felt confused about their identities. This could be partly attributed to their student-teacher equal educational philosophy, which appear to be obviously different from their counterparts who grew up under the thoughts of teacher-oriented teaching. They themselves could clearly recognize the boundary between in and out of class, yet most students could not. Some disruptive behaviors of certain students in class thus, in turn, made these teachers question their identity and abilities.

For implications of this study, in a theoretical sense, it contributed to research on language teacher emotion labor and identity construction by delineating factors in student teachers' emotion labor while constructing their professional identity. Additionally, it enriched the research groups of research on teacher emotion labor and teacher identity. In this study, three student teachers with different genders, educational backgrounds, different practicum duration, and from different school types were studied, which filled the research gap among these groups. Practically, the implications of this study were of great significance for stakeholders: a) for policy makers, this study provides reference and inspiration for the arrangement of Pre-service Training Program; b) for teacher educators, this could help them improve emotion regulation courses for EFL students, provide on-time and sufficient support, and conduct follow-up surveys; c) for practicum schools, this study encourages them to consciously pay more attention to student teachers' emotions when assigning tasks; d) for student teachers, carrying out emotion labor especially for negative emotions, may become a critical turning point to promote their teaching reflection and teacher professional development.

The scope of this study included only one developed city in southern China. Thus it would be helpful if future research examines whether other developed or underdeveloped regions would yield same discoveries. Additionally, given teachers' emotional labor performances influence teaching practices

and teachers' well-being, future scholars could further explore the nexus between emotion labor and language teacher identity (or teacher agency, teacher beliefs and teacher learning, etc).

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