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TEACHER IDENTITY AGENCY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract
While there have been separate investigations into language teacher identity and agency, a conspicuous gap existed in the literature as no systematic synthesis had been conducted to unravel the interconnected relationship between these two crucial concepts within the field of language teaching. This study endeavours to bridge that gap, providing a more holistic understanding of what identity and agency truly mean in the context of language teaching and teacher education. Through a meticulous analysis of 29 selected articles, it delves into five pivotal aspects: the diverse forms of identities, the multifaceted manifestations of agency, the circumstances under which language teachers exercise their identity agency, the intricate relationships between identity and agency, and the profound impact of this interplay on language teaching. Notably, one salient finding reveals that identity position emerges as the most extensively examined form of identity, with teachers constantly navigating the dynamic space between their desired and actual identities in response to varying teaching contexts. This finding not only sheds light on the inner workings of language teacher identity construction but also holds implications for how language teacher educators can better support pre-service and in-service teachers in their professional growth.

Keywords: identity agency, language teacher education, language teaching, teacher agency, teacher identity

Introduction
In education, teachers' professional identity and agency have emerged as essential research areas in teaching and teacher education (Beijaard et al., 2004) across varying education levels and systems. Not only that policy change and curriculum reforms at national and institutional level challenge teachers to renegotiate their professional identities and agency, but also that the day-to-day teaching at practical level entails teachers to remain "highly dynamic and flexible" at work (Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009, p. 16). In the stream of constant change at workplaces, teachers' responses to the changes and tensions, manifested through identity (re)negotiation and exercise of agency, could affect their "sense of belonging, notions of commitment, and values regarding education" (Vähäsantanen et al., 2008, p. 132) as well as their well-being. Both concepts have taken up

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important and intertwined roles in teacher development. According to Moate and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2020), the study of teacher identity and agency entails teachers to reflect upon themselves from "previously formed identities - this is *who* I am, and their habitual agency - this is *how* I am" to "who they could be and how they could be" (p. 102). This shift of focus allows teachers to sustain their motivation and commitment to their professional development.

Theoretically, Vähäsantanen et al. (2009) defined agency as "the capability of persons to make intentional choices, and to act on these choices in ways that make a difference in their lives" (p. 396). Teacher identity, "understood as subjects' conceptions of themselves as professional actors" (Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2011, pp. 291-292), has been widely explored through different theoretical frameworks. Different constructs, such as teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge, teacher change, motivation, emotions, and agency have been examined in their relation to teacher identity. The mutual relationship between identity and agency is synthesized by Eteläpelto et al. (2013) that "Agency is needed for reshaping and renegotiating work identities, and the subject's sense of a professional self influences how he/she practises agency at work" (p. 57). This synthesis reveals the reciprocal mediating relationship between professional identity and agency. To further explain, the development of professional identity relies on individuals' agency, "exercised when professional subjects and/or communities influence, make choices, and take stances on their work and professional identities" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 61). At the same time, the exercise of professional agency is triggered by "professional subjects' work-related identities comprising their professional and ethical commitments, ideals, motivations, interests, and goals" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 62). The term – *identity agency* – was therefore coined to refer to "a sense of professional agency related to one's professional identity" (Eteläpelto et al., 2015, p. 665).

In language education, empirical studies, explicitly examining the relationship between teacher identity and agency, have notably increased since 2010. Given the research synthesis on language teacher identity (e.g., Cheung, 2015; Yuan, 2019) and language teacher agency (e.g., Weng et al., 2019), no scholar has explicitly reviewed the interconnected relationship between the two concepts systematically in language teaching. However, a profound comprehension of the relationship between teacher identity and agency is indispensable. Firstly, this comprehension can help language teachers better understand their professional roles and values, enabling them to make more informed decisions in the classroom. Secondly, it empowers language teachers to actively shape their teaching practices, adapt to educational changes, and enhance student learning outcomes. Finally, it contributes to the overall improvement of the educational environment by promoting teacher agency and professional growth (Li, 2023; Weng et al., 2024). Against this background, it is important to deepen our understanding of this research area. Doing so will contribute to a clearer comprehension of what identity and agency mean in language teaching and teacher education, spark further discussion on the subject, and guide the development of pedagogy for language teacher education.

Literature review

Research on teacher identity and agency has witnessed significant shifts. In the early stages of research on teacher identity and agency, theories often centered around how individual personality traits, beliefs, and experiences shaped their identity as educators and their ability to exercise agency in the classroom. However, more recent trends have shifted towards a more social and contextual understanding. Researchers now recognize that teacher identity and agency are deeply embedded in social structures and cultural contexts. Teachers' identities are co-constructed through interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, and the wider community (Beijaard et al., 2004). Similarly, agency is not just an individual trait but is influenced by the resources, policies, and power dynamics within the school and educational system (Weng et al., 2019). Further, there has been a growing trend to incorporate emotions and well-being into the theoretical frameworks. Teachers' emotions play a crucial role in their identity formation and agency (Song & Valentine, 2024). Studies (e.g., Weng et al., 2024) have shown that understanding the emotional dimension of teacher identity and agency is essential for developing more supportive educational environments. In other words, teacher identity and agency are no longer seen as static entities. Instead, they are recognized as dynamic and fluid, evolving over time. This understanding of the dynamic nature of teacher identity and agency has led to a greater emphasis on continuous professional growth and the need for educational systems to support teachers' evolving identities and agency (Weng, 2025).

This following literature review section looks at how existing reviews have explored language teacher identity and agency independently, and what the reviews have found regarding the two concepts separately, thereby laying the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis.

Review on language teacher identity

Common features of identity include its multiplicity, dynamics, context-specificity, and its ongoing construction process, shaped by a range of factors. Informed by the general characteristics of identity, "teacher identity" shifts over time as teachers learn and practice their teaching at different career stages in their life. It is under the influence of substantive factors, consisting of internal factors, like emotion, agency, beliefs, job satisfaction, and self-esteem, as well as external factors, such as interactions with other social participants (e.g., students, colleagues, administrators, and policy-makers) in a particular context, personal and professional experiences, and job circumstances. Although these factors are integral components of teacher identity, they create tensions, which to a greater or lesser extent impact teachers' sense of identity (Day et al., 2006).

Different reviews on teacher identity have been published (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Izadinia, 2013 in general education; Cheung, 2015; Yuan, 2019 in ELT/ TESOL). For example, in general education, Beijaard et al. (2004) review the conceptualization of teacher professional identity (whether the concept is defined and how it is defined) and the features of teacher professional identity derived from 22 selected studies. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) cover the issues revealed in the discussions of teacher identity (e.g., the link with self, emotion, agency, and narrative), and particular attention was given to the identity of pre-service teachers and new practitioners. In addition, Izadinia (2013) collected

29 empirical studies on student teachers' professional identity and reviewed the main foci of research, the adopted methodologies, and major research findings. In ELT/ TESOL, Yuan (2019) critically reviewed 22 research studies on nonnative English teacher identity published between 2008 and 2017, focusing on major themes and methodologies. Another relevant review is Cheung (2015). In her book chapter, Cheung (2015) collected 28 journal articles, published between 2003 and 2013, on the narrative approach to the study of language teacher identity. The review analysed definitions of teacher identities, factors influencing identity formation and development, perceptions of non-native English teachers and novice English teachers, and the significance of contexts on teacher identity (Cheung, 2015). Taken together, these selected studies, as Cheung (2015) concluded in her review, illustrate the multifaceted and dynamic features of identity contextualized in certain situations, and the value of storytelling in understanding teacher experiences and its impact on the (re)construction of teacher professional identity (p. 182).

Review on language teacher agency

Despite increasing studies on teacher agency in recent years (e.g., Kim et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024), few researchers have systematically synthesized research related to teacher agency. For example, Fu and Weng's (2023) review identified key factors influencing teacher agency in bilingual and ESL teaching, particularly after the No Child Left Behind and reinforced by Every Student Succeed Act policy in the U.S. It shows how linguistically diverse students face educational challenges due to policies emphasizing high-stakes testing, limiting teacher agency over instructional practices. Despite such pressures, teachers' previous experiences, beliefs, professional partnerships, and knowledge significantly impact their ability to exercise agency in multilingual education settings. Although ESL and bilingual programs differ, both struggle with restrictive policies and resource limitations. Teachers' emotions also play a crucial role, with negative feelings potentially hindering, but also motivating, advocacy for language learner rights.

In another study, Weng et al. (2019) review teacher agency in ESL, EFL, and bilingual education. Their review shows that teacher agency is often negotiated within policy constraints. Factors influencing agency include personal experiences and reflections, and teacher identity and professional development also interact with agency. Methodological and ethical issues noted are small sample sizes and potential bias due to researchers' relationship with participants. Some studies attempt to address these by ensuring diverse data collection and careful transcription processes. Implications for teacher education and professional development include consideration for local contexts, fostering teachers' critical examination and reflection, offering adequate training policies, providing supportive school environments, and incorporating the notion of agency in teacher education. In conclusion, teacher agency remains a critical yet under-examined factor in language education. Future research is encouraged to widen the range of study contexts, utilize diverse methods, and explore new theoretical perspectives. Implications stress the need for more interaction among stakeholders and continuous support for teacher professionalization. Understanding and enhancing teacher agency is deemed essential for adaptive and proactive teaching in varied educational settings.

The previous reviews have explored language teacher identity and agency separately. However, no reviews have been found so far that discuss the two concepts together. Therefore, this review attempts to address the gap. The following research questions are guiding this systematic review on *identity agency* in language teaching:

1. What forms of identity have been explored?
2. What forms of agency have been investigated?
3. In what situations do teachers exercise their identity and agency?
4. How have the relationships between identity and agency been described in the literature?
5. How does the interplay between identity and agency impact language teaching practices?

By answering these questions, this study intends to shed light on what it means to have identity agency to become a central aspect of language teacher education and professional development.

Method

This section provides detailed information regarding the collection and analysis of the studies.

Literature retrieval

Guiding keywords ("Teacher Identity," "Teacher Agency," and "Language Teaching") were used to search for empirical studies in Web of Science, Scopus, and major journals in the field, including *TESOL Quarterly*, *TESOL Journal*, *Modern Language Review*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, *System*, and *Teaching and Teacher Education*, among others. The initial search resulted in 288 journal articles. The researcher then closely read and screened the articles and only kept the ones that met the following criteria:

- Teacher identity and teacher agency are both conceptualized explicitly in the study.
- The focus is on pre- or in-service language teachers.
- Selected articles are empirical research, not research synthesis or meta-analysis.
- Studies are published in English.

The first criterion is to ensure that teacher identity and teacher agency are explored as main research constructs rather than just sparingly mentioning them in a general sense (Cong-Lem, 2021). Through the rigorous screening process, 29 articles were selected as of October 2024 and marked with an asterisk in the References.

Article analysis

To analyse the articles, the researcher started with close reading and tried to understand the conceptualizations of teacher identity and teacher agency in each article and the major findings in the selected studies. While reading, the researcher documented all the articles and created a table to analyse each article based on the research questions. The retrieved studies demonstrate an international collection;

however, most studies were based upon Chinese and U.S. contexts. After the initial reading and analysis, the researcher further categorized the articles and created multiple tables to better present the findings in response to each research question. The created tables are presented throughout the paper.

Although inter-coder reliability checks are commonly employed in multi-author systematic reviews to enhance consistency in data extraction and analysis, in the context of this review, the limited scope of the research questions, the relatively straightforward nature of the data extraction based on clear conceptual definitions of teacher identity and agency, and resource constraints such as time and availability of additional researchers have led to the lack of inter-coder reliability in this study. To ensure the reliability of the findings, a rigorous review process was implemented. Each step of the analysis, from the initial reading of articles to the final categorization and interpretation of results, was carefully cross-checked, and any ambiguous or uncertain cases were revisited multiple times. Moreover, the findings were compared with key studies in the field to further validate their credibility.

Looking ahead, future research in this area could consider expanding on the current findings by involving multiple researchers and conducting inter-coder reliability checks. Such an approach would further enhance the robustness of the research and provide additional perspectives on the complex relationship between teacher identity and agency in language teaching.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

In this section, more details related to the research questions are provided through visual representation and explanations.

RQ1: What forms of identity have been explored?

In language teaching, four primary forms of identity have been investigated in the literature as shown in Table 1. An essential finding is that no matter which form of identity is explored in relation to agency, teacher identity construction, negotiation, and/or development occurs when their professional identity is in tensions and conflicts with their expectations, beliefs, goals, power, the possession of knowledge, or other aspects, which allows language teachers to leverage their choices and decisions.

Table 1. Forms of identity represented in the studies

Forms of Identity	Studies
Identity position	Ilieva & Ravindran (2018) Ishihara et al. (2018) Kayi-Aydar (2015) Kayi-Aydar (2019) Lai et al. (2016) Neupane (2024) Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove & Zúñiga (2018) Tan et al. (2022)

Forms of Identity	Studies
	Trent (2014) Varghese & Snyder (2018) Venegas-Weber (2018) Warren & Ward (2021) Weng (2023) Weng (2024) Xiong et al (2024)
Preferred vs. Forced identity or Desired vs. Prescribed identity	Ashton (2022) Bowen et al. (2021)* Gao & Cui (2022) Li & De Costa (2017)* Liao (2017) Loo et al. (2017) Nazari et al (2023) Trent (2017)*
Identity emotions	Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak (2024) Miller & Gkonou (2018) Teng (2019) Yuan & Lee (2016)
Identity commitment	Huang (2021)* Tao & Gao (2017)

Note. Articles marked with * include multiple forms of identity. For example, Bowen et al. (2021) include both positioning and ideal and forced identity; Li and De Costa (2017) have both positioning and desired and prescribed identity; Trent (2017) includes both positioning and preferred and imposed identity. Huang (2021) has both positioning and identity commitment.

RQ2: What forms of agency have been investigated?

Vähäsantanen (2015) points out the necessity "to investigate various forms of professional agency in seeking to understand how professional identities are negotiated" (p. 3), and identifying different forms of agency enactment could allow teachers and teacher educators to "create different conditions for teachers' productive work" (Vähäsantanen et al., 2009, p. 403). Table 2 shows different forms of agency examined in the body of literature. All these different forms of agency can be categorized into the eight types: (1) collective or relational agency vs. individual agency; (2) agentic actions vs. lack of agency; (3) strong vs. weak agency; (4) critical vs. uncritical agency; (5) self-initiated agency vs. opportunistic agency; (6) opposition or resistance; (7) positive vs. negative agency; and (8) sense of agency.

Most selected studies focused on individual agency, namely, individual effort in exercising agency, and only few studies (e.g., Huang, 2021; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Weng, 2023, 2024) brought up relational or collective agency, which refers to reaching out for collaboration or support from colleagues, parents, and/or students. In Bowen et al.'s (2018) study, they illustrated a strong relational agency, resulting in a constrained pedagogical agency which means freedom in making

pedagogical decisions. Agentic actions, emphasized in some studies (e.g., Gao & Cui, 2022; Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018; Kayi-Aydar, 2019), underscore language teachers' enactment of agency in decision-making and instructional practice. In contrast, sometimes language teachers' agency was constrained, resulting in their lack of agency. Strong and weak agency mentioned in Tao and Gao (2017) is about varying degrees of agency. Similarly, critical and uncritical agency in Lai et al.'s (2016) study refers to Chinese language teachers' learning or acceptance of Western knowledge and pedagogy critically or uncritically. In addition, opposition or resistance, as one manifestation of agency, means that language teachers resisted the imposition from hierarchical power or top-down policies and intentionally chose not to follow the power command or top-down policies. Further, the positive and negative agency, appearing in Teng's (2019) study, refers to the fact that positive prior teaching or learning experience is more likely to lead to positive agentic behavior in current teaching. The sense of agency mainly refers to language teachers' beliefs in their capability to make a difference in their teaching. The review of the forms of agency has further confirmed that agency is the identity acts, meaning how identities are constructed can only be observed through their agentic actions in and outside of class, revealing the importance of *observing* teachers' actual teaching and agentic actions in practice.

Table 2. Forms of language teacher agency in the studies

Journal Articles	Forms of Teacher Agency
Ashton (2022)	Agentic action
Bowen et al. (2021)	Relational agency Pedagogical agency
Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak (2024)	Pedagogical agency
Gao & Cui (2022)	Agentic actions
Huang (2021)	Proactive agency Collective agency Sense of agency
Ilieva & Ravindran (2018)	Agentic actions
Ishihara et al. (2018)	Pedagogical agency
Kayi-Aydar (2015)	Agentic positions
Kayi-Aydar (2019)	Agentic action
Lai et al. (2016)	Critical agency Uncritical agency
Li & De Costa (2017)	Agentic actions
Liao (2017)	Agentic actions

	Sense of agency
Loo et al. (2017)	Pedagogical agency Opportunistic agency Self-initiated agency Opposition
Miller & Gkonou (2018)	Individual agency Relational agency
Nazari et al. (2023)	Agentic actions
Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove & Zúñiga (2018)	Agentic practices Resistance Reflection
Tan et al. (2022)	Lack of agency
Tao & Gao (2017)	Agentic actions Strong agency Weak agency
Teng (2019)	Agentic actions Positive/Negative agency Sense of agency
Trent (2014)	Possibility of negotiation
Trent (2017)	Role of struggle
Varghese & Snyder (2018)	Sense of agency Agentic moves
Venegas-Weber (2018)	Agentic actions
Warren & Ward (2021)	Agentic actions Lack of agency
Weng (2023)	Pedagogical agency Sense of agency Relational agency
Weng (2024)	Pedagogical agency Relational agency
Xiong et al. (2024)	Strong agency
Yuan & Lee (2016)	Sense of agency Resistance

RQ3: In what situations do teachers exercise their identity and agency?

In literature, situations driving teacher agency are usually divided into policy and non-policy situations. Table 3 shows seven more detailed situations where identity agency occurred, summarized here as structural constraints (e.g., Bowen et al., 2021; Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018; Loo et al., 2017; Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; Varghese & Snyder, 2018; Venegas-Weber, 2018; Warren & Ward, 2021; Weng, 2023, 2024); conflicts between personal professional value and that in the broader community or of other stakeholders (e.g., Ishihara et al., 2018; Li & De Costa, 2017; Liao, 2017; Trent, 2014); curricular reform or educational change (Ashton, 2022; Tan et al., 2022; Tao & Gao, 2017); emotion rules (Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Yuan & Lee, 2016); conflicts between idealized and actual teaching (Gao & Cui, 2022; Huang, 2021; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Teng, 2019); and interplay of different discourses (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Trent, 2017). Specifically, the structural constraints often refer to the sociocultural contexts in which teaching transpired and the various ways these contexts restricted it. For example, in Ishihara et al. (2018), one of the teacher participants' agentive controls was constrained due to his resistance to the social convention on gender expectation for women in the local context.

The conflicts between personal professional values and that in the broader community or of other stakeholders in the selected studies refer to teachers' personal values on language teaching, which were against institutional expectations. To give an example, in Li and De Costa (2017), the teacher participant's notions of the value regarding English language teaching were against the exam-oriented philosophy in the private institutional context. Next, curricular reform means curriculum changes, which might force language teachers to reconstruct their professional identity and proactively seek professional development opportunities. For instance, in Tao and Gao (2017), the teachers had to change their teaching from EAP to ESP, resulting in their career path change and their development of new professional commitment. Identity agency also occurred in the context of emotion rules, in which teacher participants had to align their emotions with institutional expectations, as shown in Miller and Gkonou (2018), for example. In the study, teacher participants illustrated teaching-as-caring, which was considered part of their job responsibilities and school expectations. In addition, the idealized and actual teaching refers to teachers negotiating the gap between reality and ideals in teaching. For example, Yu, the teacher participant in Teng's (2019) study, could not do the spoken activities as she had planned out because she was warned by her mentor to focus on examination preparation. Last is the interplay of different discourses, meaning teachers negotiated their identity across different discourses. For example, in Trent (2017), the teacher participants had to negotiate between the discourse of teaching as an individual accomplishment, highlighting spontaneity and excitement, and the discourse of teaching as a community accomplishment, emphasizing planning and conformity.

Table 3. Situations where identity agency occurred

Journal Articles	Situations where identity agency occurred
Ashton (2022)	Emergency online teaching

Journal Articles	Situations where identity agency occurred
Bowen et al. (2021)	English Medium Instruction (EMI) university where teachers are challenged by what they may not be trained for or accustomed to Diverse student population who was not always prepared for immersive study through English
Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak (2024)	Tension between explicit and/or implicit feeling rules in teachers' workplace
Gao & Cui (2022)	Core pedagogical beliefs and peripheral pedagogical beliefs Emergency remote teaching
Huang (2021)	Different stages of personal–professional development over seven–eight years Mismatch between ideal and actual realities of teaching
Ilieva & Ravindran (2018)	Tensions in professional educational values and local conditions
Ishihara et al. (2018)	Student stereotypes Institutional expectations Social structural constraints
Kayi-Aydar (2015)	Self-positionings in relation to different discourses Assumptions and beliefs
Kayi-Aydar (2019)	Stereotypes and marginalization regarding native and non-native English-speaking status Intersection among race, ethnicity, language background, and power
Lai et al. (2016)	Cross-cultural teaching context: local English language teachers and non-local (Western) English language teachers
Li & De Costa (2017)	Commodified English at a private English school with exam-oriented philosophy The teacher's personal value and belief system
Liao (2017)	Tensions in how NNESTs thought of themselves as legitimate speakers and teachers of English
Loo et al. (2017)	Conflicts in employer's expectations, different perceived self from others, circumstances of students, and interference from other social entities or cultural context
Miller & Gkonou (2018)	Emotion rules in teaching contexts Social expectations of appropriate emotions
Nazari et al. (2023)	Institutional top-down policies and power
Neupane (2024)	The massive impact of micro, meso, and macro contexts
Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove & Zúñiga (2018)	Standardized testing (high-stakes testing environment) Project-based instruction Personal beliefs

Journal Articles	Situations where identity agency occurred
Tan et al. (2022)	Education system change: internationalization of Chinese higher education The experiences and preparedness of the teachers Curricular reform
Tao & Gao (2017)	Curricular reform: EAP to ESP
Teng (2019)	Idealized and actual teaching Unequal power distribution between student teachers and mentors
Trent (2014)	Positioning conflicts between teachers' self-positioning and the positioning by other teachers and students
Trent (2017)	Interplay of discourses regarding how to be, how to act and how to understand their work as teachers Challenging the status quo Conflicts between teachers' values and beliefs and those of the broader school community
Varghese & Snyder (2018)	Multiple figured worlds of teaching Affordances and constraints of the program Linguistic flexibility and personal interest
Venegas-Weber (2018)	Dual language program with a strict language separation model In-between space State-mandated testing
Warren & Ward (2021)	Structural constraints in an online language teacher education program Structural constraints associated with monolingual language policies
Weng (2023)	Knowledge of students, research, EAP writing, and genre pedagogy EAP teachers' education and experience background
Weng (2024)	Prior learning experience and knowledge of subject matter
Xiong et al. (2024)	Contradiction between the monolingual ideology behind the EMI policy and the reality of classroom communication
Yuan & Lee (2016)	Emotion rules related to cultural expectations, social standards, and professional norms of teaching

RQ4: How have the relationships between identity and agency been described in the literature?

Table 4 shows the various relationships of identity agency described in each retrieved study. Even though each individually selected study has different focuses, they all illustrate one principal idea that language teacher identity and agency are inseparable concepts. The relationship between them is co-constructing, reciprocal, and inter-dependent (Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018; Tao & Gao, 2017). Specifically, identity formation, shaped by teacher prior educational and professional experiences, could be a prerequisite for agency initiation and agentic behaviors and influence teachers' willingness to be agentive in their teaching; meanwhile, agentic choices and practices in teaching play a decisive role in influencing the negotiation

and (re)construction of language teacher identity (Teng, 2019). Also, identity position offers the possibilities for agency (e.g., Venegas-Weber, 2018) and the possibilities for agency could potentially lead to teachers' identity transformation (e.g., Warren & Ward, 2021). Hence, the exercise of agency could allow language teachers to construct the identities they desired (Trent, 2014). Furthermore, the selected studies demonstrate that the exercise of agency enabled teachers to enact identities in line with their beliefs and values (e.g., Li & De Costa, 2017; Yuan & Lee, 2016). However, social context could lead to the misalignment.

Table 4. Relationships of identity agency described in the scholarship

Journal Articles	Identity and Agency Relationship
Ashton (2022)	Where there is a gap between an educational change and a teacher's professional identity, teachers take steps to act in accordance with their existing identity
Bowen et al. (2021)	Agency is the mediating tool for identity formation. Prior experience and participation helped to develop a new professional identity
Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak (2024)	Student-teachers' emotions, identities and agency (and pedagogy) as interrelated concepts Emotion–identity–agency triangle
Gao & Cui (2022)	Teacher ideal roles, reflected in their core pedagogical beliefs, exert a powerful influence on negotiating and achieving agency in teaching practices
Huang (2021)	Teachers who exercise proactive agency can stay true to themselves as teachers Teacher agency can strengthen teachers' commitment to develop themselves as teachers and affect their choices and actions in practices and seeking professional development
Ilieva & Ravindran (2018)	There is reciprocal relationship between language teacher identity (LTI) and language teacher agency (LTA) Reflection on local context played an important role in the enactments of LTI and LTA
Ishihara et al. (2018)	An individual's assertion of agency can be considered as identity acts Agency is interwoven with identity negotiation
Kayi-Aydar (2015)	Identity positions shaped teacher agency and classroom practices
Kayi-Aydar (2019)	Identity and agency are not static, but evolving as an individual teacher's knowledge and experience in teaching and learning change
Lai et al. (2016)	Agency is needed to drive identity (re)construction Identities can influence the exercise of agency, namely, identity mediates the exercise of agency. Particularly, varied agency was shaped by their self-positioned identity

Journal Articles	Identity and Agency Relationship
Li & De Costa (2017)	Teacher agency and teacher identity are mutually constitutive Professional identity, representing specific beliefs and ideas, can motivate and guide the exercise of agency; meanwhile, teacher identity can be negotiated based upon goals and interests
Liao (2017)	Teachers acted as enabled agents to position themselves as legitimate English teachers from a disadvantaged to a more powerful position
Loo et al. (2017)	Professional identity was extended through agentic actions The achievement of agency was through reconciliation of teachers' actual professional self, expectations of their professional future, and work experiences
Miller & Gkonou (2018)	Teacher identity and agency are co-constitutive
Nazari et al. (2023)	Identity is an outcome of autonomy and agency
Neupane (2024)	Exercising their agency, they not only learn and develop their identities through everyday practices in life, educational institutions, and workplaces but also strive to create space for enhancing their profession
Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove & Zúñiga (2018)	Identities are constantly shifting, influencing the enactment of agency Teachers' identities are shaped by personal beliefs, ideas, and environment, which might lead to tensions between the ideas they expressed and the practices they enacted in the classroom.
Tan et al. (2022)	The lack of intercultural communication knowledge led to the lack of agency and self-positioning as an incompetent teacher
Tao & Gao (2017)	Identity commitment influences how teachers position themselves and acts towards reforms; a heightened sense of identity commitment will more likely lead to a stronger sense of agency
Teng (2019)	Teacher identity and teacher agency are inseparable as agency shapes teachers' identity construction, and teacher identity navigates their agentic actions
Trent (2014)	The exercise of agency allowed language teachers to attain their desired identity; however, the lack of agency hindered the preferred teacher identity construction
Trent (2017)	Identity construction can be seen as the interplay between constraints to and enablement of teacher agency
Varghese & Snyder (2018)	Professional identity and agency are facilitated or constrained by structural affordances, constraints, and language ideologies
Venegas-Weber (2018)	Possibilities for agency could lead to identity transformation

Journal Articles	Identity and Agency Relationship
Warren & Ward (2021)	Positional identity is traceable through descriptions of actions and offers agency construction
Weng (2023)	A bidirectional relationship between agency and identity positions
Weng (2024)	Identity within professional development is multilayered and dynamic, both informing and being informed by agency and expertise
Xiong et al. (2024)	Teacher agency and identity are rarely examined in isolation as they inform each other through agentic negotiation of the ideas, knowledge, and interests
Yuan & Lee (2016)	The exercise of agency enabled teachers to enact identities in line with their beliefs and values

RQ 5: How does the interplay between identity and agency impact language teaching practices?

Table 5 indicates that agentic teachers are often more responsive to students' needs, advocates for social justice and education equity, and willing to reach out for support to better improve their teaching skills or conditions as illustrated in many studies (e.g., Ishihara et al., 2018; Loo et al., 2017; Varghese & Snyder, 2018). Being agentive seems to be an important qualification for responsible language teachers who are proactive in conquering obstacles in their teaching. Nevertheless, as teacher identity construction and agency are also subject to contextual factors, the constraints influenced how teachers could teach or even impacted their career path. Language teachers are not always afforded agency in teaching. For example, in Ilieva and Ravindran's (2018) study, most teachers in China were unable to enact their perspectives around (non)native speakering and multilingualism due to contextual constraints. Despite contextual constraints, more successful and resilient stories about how language teachers made the effort to overcome those constraints were described in the selected studies. The efforts they made included their commitment to expand their knowledge in different aspects as well as look for professional development opportunities to better meet student learning needs in constrained situations.

Table 5. Identity agency relationship influence language teaching

Journal Articles	The Influence on Language Teaching
Ashton (2022)	Renegotiation of professional role Transformation of teaching approaches Increased pastoral care and support for students
Bowen et al. (2021)	Selective regarding what to teach and how to teach Being facilitative and accommodating in teaching Adopting teaching-as-caring philosophy Reaching out to colleagues for pedagogical support

Journal Articles	The Influence on Language Teaching
Bradshaw & Tezgiden-Cakcak (2024)	A critical reflexivity of her emotion labour and identities and gradually recruited this awareness to transform her emerging pedagogy
Gao & Cui (2022)	Agentive adoption of technology-facilitated activities Innovating teaching strategies during the emergent online teaching
Huang (2021)	Shattered teaching career due to contextual factors
Ilieva & Ravindran (2018)	Graduates in Canada enacting perspectives around (non)native speakering and multilingualism Majority of teachers in China unable to enact perspectives around (non)native speakering and multilingualism
Ishihara et al. (2018)	Getting invited to plan lessons collaboratively Building connections with students and colleagues Informing and enriching pedagogies Drawing on translingual practice
Kayi-Aydar (2015)	Effective and sensitive to English Language Learners' needs despite being constrained by the institutional context
Kayi-Aydar (2019)	Building rapport with her Hispanic students Dealing with subtle racism and discrimination in educational contexts
Lai et al. (2016)	Uncritically embracing Western pedagogy
Li & De Costa (2017)	Incorporating teaching and learning tasks that were not valued by the school and reshaping her job scope of being an English teacher
Liao (2017)	Incorporating linguistic resources into class teaching Improving their own English proficiency Comparing their own English language skills to those of native English speakers
Loo et al. (2017)	Teaching practices suitable to the students' level of proficiency Being inclusive of all students Valuing social justice through discussing controversial topics
Miller & Gkonou (2018)	Relational engagement with students for emotional pleasure Investment in teaching-as-caring
Nazari et al. (2023)	Identity is an outcome of autonomy and agency, and for teachers' identity featured degrees of depersonalization, which negatively influenced their work
Neupane (2024)	The reciprocity of influence and growth Positively impacting students' learning outcomes and evaluation systems
Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove & Zúñiga (2018)	Implementing project-based and student-centered instruction
Tan et al. (2022)	Introducing critical discussions about (Chinese) media biases Reflective and critical interculturality in dealing with questions about the Cultural Revolution

Journal Articles	The Influence on Language Teaching
	Not aware of what constitutes IC teaching
Tao & Gao (2017)	Improving teaching and increasing confidence in teaching Initiating course improvement project Continuing professional development
Teng (2019)	Not becoming active agents in producing a new pedagogic and educational discourse
Trent (2014)	Reaching out to other teachers Distributing materials and instructing students what to do
Trent (2017)	Challenging the status quo Engaging in innovative approaches of language teaching Teaching in a team and following routines
Varghese & Snyder (2018)	Teaching Latinx students and bringing Spanish to the classroom Building connections with students and supporting their cultures and identities in their classrooms
Venegas-Weber (2018)	Leveraging linguistic and cultural resources as pedagogical tools
Warren & Ward (2021)	Positioning teachers' agency as part of their professional responsibility Taking specific actions to promote linguistic plurality
Weng (2023)	An EAP researcher than EAP teacher in teaching second language writing
Weng (2024)	Identity-oriented approach became one of teaching philosophies, shaping expertise development
Xiong et al. (2024)	Exercising moderately strong agency by strategically and creatively dealing with challenges and tensions
Yuan & Lee (2016).	Conforming to the preferences and requirements of the mentor while hiding negative feelings to live up to the mentor's expectations of a student-teacher Attempting to resist the normative discourses in the school, reflecting on his own practice, and initiating positive changes to students' learning that was aligned with his own educational beliefs

Discussion

In the introduction, the identified research gap was the lack of a systematic synthesis exploring the intertwined relationship between teacher identity and agency in language teaching. This review has significantly advanced the field by providing a comprehensive categorization of the forms of identity and agency. By mapping out the primary forms of identity and different types of agency, the study offers a more unified and nuanced understanding of these concepts. For example, the review reveals how identity position serves as a common lens for examining identity agency, and how different forms of agency can co-occur and interact with various identity aspects. This integration of concepts provides a more complete picture of their interconnectedness, which was lacking in the prior literature.

Specifically, this systematic review delves into the relationship between teacher identity and agency in language teaching, with a concentrated look at the concept of identity agency. The review examines five key areas: the various identities discussed in literature, forms of agency studied, contexts where identity agency manifests in language teaching, detailed relationships between identity and agency, and how this relationship impacts language teaching. Findings suggest that identity position is commonly used to investigate identity agency, with teachers navigating between their desired and actual identities based on the teaching context. Additional factors like emotional identity and commitments are also explored. Agency forms have been categorized into eight distinct types that range from collective to individual, strong to weak, and critical to uncritical, among others. These types offer a scale of professional agency, from resistance to critical self-driven agency. The study contrasts with previous research by Chisholm et al. (2019) in which they identified six types of agency— "Professional, Pedagogic, Autonomous, Political, Ethical, and Collective" (p. 36) in the context of teaching English language arts and also different from the forms of agency reported in the qualitative meta-study by Vähäsantanen (2015) on Finnish vocational teachers' professional agency amid an educational reform. The forms of agency identified in the current research synthesis further confirmed that "agency may not always have purely positive connotations" (Vähäsantanen, 2015, p. 3). As an illustration, Lai et al.'s (2016) study shows that agency can manifest as either critical or uncritical. In fact, various forms of agency exist, and what should be emphasized is that these different manifestations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, they frequently occur side by side and can potentially have intricate interrelationships (e.g., individual agency can be weak and uncritical).

Situations prompting identity agency include structural constraints and conflicts between personal values and wider community or curricular reforms, among others, with structural constraints often leading to increased agency actions. Teacher beliefs also play a role in the expression of agency, particularly when misaligned with institutional norms. The study also confirms the intertwined nature of teacher identity and agency, highlighting their co-constructing and reciprocal relationship as Vähäsantanen (2015) stated that "The exercise of agency forms professional identity and establishes its maintenance and transformation; however, professional identity can itself be viewed as a resource for agency" (p. 10). This reinforces the importance of teachers recognizing the role of identity and agency in fostering proactive, responsible teaching and ongoing professional development. Additionally, the study notes that sometimes teachers may recognize their potential agency but find it restricted by their teaching context.

Although overarching trends regarding language teacher identity agency have been identified, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of contradictory or divergent findings among the studies. These inconsistencies not only highlight the complexity of the subject matter but also offer valuable opportunities for further exploration and understanding. One area where divergence emerged is in the relationship between identity and agency in different teaching contexts. Some studies, such as Teng (2019), emphasized a reciprocal and co-constructing relationship between language teacher identity and agency, suggesting that each influences the other in a mutually reinforcing manner. In contrast, other research pointed to more complex and context-dependent interactions. For instance, in

certain high-stakes testing environments described in Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove and Zúñiga (2018), structural constraints were so significant that they limited teachers' ability to exercise agency, even when they had a strong sense of professional identity. The reason for this divergence likely lies in the unique sociocultural, institutional, and policy contexts of each study. Different educational systems and school cultures can either facilitate or impede the interplay between identity and agency, leading to varied outcomes. Furthermore, regarding the impact of identity agency on language teaching practices, there were also varying conclusions. Some research indicated that agentic teachers were always more responsive to students' needs and could bring about positive educational change (e.g., Ishihara et al., 2018). However, other studies showed that even highly agentic teachers could face limitations due to external factors, resulting in less-than-ideal teaching outcomes (Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018). These discrepancies can be explained by the diverse range of variables at play in different teaching scenarios, including available resources, student characteristics, and administrative support.

Overall, through the detailed analysis of identity and agency forms, the contexts of their exercise, the nature of their relationship, and their impact on teaching practices, this systematic review has made substantial progress in filling the existing research gap. The findings offer a more comprehensive, integrated understanding of the relationship between teacher identity and agency in language teaching, laying a solid foundation for educational practice, professional development, and future research in the field.

Pedagogical implications: Identity agency as a central aspect of language teacher education and professional development

Reis (2015) suggests that a strong sense of identity and agency empowers language teachers to feel validated and effective in their classrooms. This empowerment holds particular significance for non-native English-speaking teachers facing *native-speakerism* biases. The study under review recommends that language teacher education prioritize identity agency. Teacher educators could foster a *change-agent mindset* in trainees and practicing teachers, highlighting the pivotal role of agency in addressing daily classroom challenges and advocating for diverse student needs. Teachers can enhance their agency through engagement with relevant readings and discussions, preparing them to handle potential identity conflicts and employ strategic agency in response to those conflicts. Reflective prompts on past experiences, contextual differences, coping strategies, enacted changes, and agency forms can guide teachers in reconciling their ideal and actual teaching identities.

For instance, prompts for reflection could encompass the following:

1) What were your prior language learning and teaching experiences? In what ways did those experiences shape your conception of an ideal language teacher identity?
2) How does your previous learning and teaching context (encompassing elements like language policies, language ideologies, student proficiency levels, and available resources) diverge from your current or prospective language teaching context? What potential difficulties in enacting your ideal teacher identity might arise due to these contextual differences?

3) What possible coping strategies could you employ to overcome the limitations that impede the realization or negotiation of your ideal teacher identity?
4) How might you instigate changes in your classroom, during interactions with diverse stakeholders, or through professional development opportunities to ensure alignment between your ideal and actual teacher identities?
5) What forms of agency can be exercised to bolster your efforts in maintaining or narrowing the gap between your envisioned and actual language teacher identities?

Those questions could proactively prepare language teacher candidates to anticipate the obstacles they may face in their future teaching contexts and assist in-service teachers dealing with current teaching challenges. In doing so, language teacher educators can also increase teachers' sense of agency in constructing ideal teacher identities within their teaching contexts through proactively identifying the factors facilitating or impeding their agency.

Regarding the recognition that agency may not always yield positive outcomes, language teacher educators can guide both pre-service and in-service teachers to engage in the following reflective inquiries:

1) Can you recall a situation where you witnessed or experienced negative agency in a language teaching context? What were the signs and how did it impact the learning environment?
2) Consider your own actions: Have you ever been resistant to a change in language teaching methods or curriculum? What were the underlying reasons? Were they related to personal comfort, fear of the unknown, or something else? How could you have approached the situation differently to turn potential negative agency into positive action?
3) In a team teaching or collaborative project, how can you identify and address negative agency from your peers? What strategies can you use to encourage open communication and a shared vision, rather than resistance or conflict?
4) When faced with institutional constraints that seem to limit your agency, how can you ensure that your response is positive and productive? For example, if you disagree with a new language assessment policy, instead of simply complaining, what steps can you take to advocate for a better alternative while still maintaining a good working relationship with administrators?
5) Reflect on how your own negative agency (if any) might have influenced your students' perception of language learning. What can you do to rebuild their enthusiasm and trust if you realize you've had a negative impact?

Once potential factors influencing the current or future teaching practices of teacher candidates or in-service teachers have been identified, language teacher educators can provide requisite reading texts or other resources to help them devise potential solutions. Consider, for example, that non-native English-speaking teachers form the bulk of the teaching workforce in English language teaching. When these teacher candidates travel to an English-speaking country to pursue

ELT-related degrees, a language teacher education program centered on language teachers' identity agency must assist them in bridging the theory-practice gap, which frequently emerges due to the disparate contexts in which they obtain their degrees and subsequently teach. Additionally, it would be beneficial for language teacher educators to provide some case studies (e.g., Weng & McGuire, 2021) to the teacher candidates or in-service teachers and help them brainstorm potential strategies or solutions together; while at the same time, language teacher educators can introduce different forms of agency. Equally important is that language teacher educators can establish support systems for their student teachers or make them aware of the support systems available to them (Loo et al., 2017) so that they are more likely to enact their relational or collective agency.

Research implications

Most studies highlighted individual agency and identity positions. Other forms of identity and agency should be further explored. Particularly, different forms of agency are not widely explored, and very little is known about how different forms of agency could impact identity construction or negotiation. There is also the need to explore whether a top-down structural constraint that leaves little space for teacher agency, will always have an adverse effect on teaching and professional identity construction. Additionally, this review indicates the importance of collecting classroom observation data in the study of language teachers' performed identities in class as there might be the gap between teachers' perceptions and actual practice, in line with what Vähäsantanen (2015) suggested that "teachers' identity is less open to revision than their actual behavior" (p. 6).

Last, in the current body of literature on identity agency in language teaching, a significant majority of studies are rooted in Chinese and U.S. contexts. The dominance of Chinese and U.S. studies may overlook the rich diversity of experiences and perspectives in other parts of the world. Teachers in less-studied regions might face specific challenges and opportunities related to identity agency that are not captured by the existing research. For example, language teachers in small-island nations or post-conflict regions may grapple with issues such as language revitalization, cultural preservation, and rebuilding educational systems, all of which have a profound impact on their identity and agency. This geographical concentration thus underscores the urgent need for future research in underrepresented settings. By exploring identity agency in a wider range of contexts, researchers can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this complex concept. Such studies can uncover unique strategies that teachers in different parts of the world employ to negotiate their identities and exercise agency, offering valuable insights that can inform language teacher education and policy-making on a global scale.

Conclusion

This systematic review has significantly advanced the understanding of the relationship between teacher identity and agency in language teaching. By addressing the research gap of a lack of comprehensive synthesis, it has mapped out forms of identity and agency, contexts of their manifestation, and their reciprocal relationship. The findings reveal that identity position is a common lens for exploring identity agency, and agency exists in various forms, not always positive.

While there are overarching trends, contradictory findings highlight the complexity of the subject, influenced by diverse educational contexts. The review offers crucial insights for pedagogy, emphasizing the need to center identity agency in teacher education, and suggests directions for future research, including exploring underrepresented contexts and less-studied forms of identity and agency. Overall, it lays a robust foundation for enhancing language teaching practice, professional development, and academic inquiry in this field.

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