The Emotional Landscape of EFL Internships: Challenges and Growth Through *Perezhivanie*

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Abstract

The transition from student to teacher in EFL contexts involves significant emotional and identity challenges, yet existing research often overlooks how affective experiences mediate professional growth. This study investigates the emotional challenges and professional identity development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) interns during teaching practicums, framed through Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie*—the dialectical interplay of emotion and cognition in lived experiences. Employing a longitudinal qualitative design, the research traces four Chinese EFL interns over a four-month internship via reflective diaries, recall interviews, and mentor narratives. Findings reveal that interns faced multifaceted challenges, including non-English teaching assignments, classroom emergencies, cultural adaptation pressures, and role ambiguity. These tensions, however, catalyzed growth through *perezhivanie*-driven reflection. Critical incidents (e.g., student conflicts, pedagogical failures) prompted cognitive reframing, enabling shifts from scripted imitation to agentic, context-responsive teaching. Structured mentorship and institutional scaffolding emerged as pivotal, enabling interns to transition from performative imitation to agentic, context-responsive teaching. Urban interns with systematic support achieved ethical coherence, while suburban/rural counterparts grappled with role fragmentation due to resource constraints. The study underscores the need for teacher education programs to integrate emotional scaffolding, context-sensitive mentoring, and communal recognition rituals to transform affective struggles into developmental resources. By reconceptualizing professional identity as a socioculturally mediated process, this research advocates for holistic internship models that bridge theory-practice divides and foster ethically resilient educators.

Keywords: Teacher Identity Formation; *Perezhivanie*; Emotional Experiences; EFL Interns; Longitudinal qualitative study

1. Introduction

The shift from student to teacher constitutes a critical juncture in professional growth. Student teachers (or pre-service teachers) are individuals undergoing formal teacher education programs, often participating in practicums or internships to transition from theory to practice. Novice teachers are newly qualified educators in their initial years of professional practice. Transitioning from a student teacher to a novice teacher entails going from supervised training to autonomous decision-making. Over the past few decades, research on student teachers and novice teachers has investigated the impacts of prior learning, participation in teacher education programs, and initial professional development on their growth. Overall, insights from this body of research emphasize the variable and changing characteristics of their work associated with identity and emotional resonances (Agnoletto et al., 2020; Beijaard et al., 2004; Dang, 2013; Darby, 2008; Flores & Day, 2006; Karimi & Mofidi, 2019; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019; Rojas et al, 2025).

The importance of "teacher emotion" in pedagogy and curriculum has been addressed in recent research (Day & Leitch, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998). Good teaching brims with positive emotion. It's more than mastering the subject or skills. These fledgling teachers negotiate intricate sociocultural dynamics wherein classroom practices frequently diverge from idealized pedagogical frameworks, thereby precipitating identity dissonance, yet identity development was mainly propelled by individual teachers themselves (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019). Such struggles are compounded by the undervaluation of reflective practice among student teachers, despite its recognized role in bridging mental frameworks and classroom implementation (Borg, 2009; Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019). It is imperative to recognize that these tensions are not solely cognitive in nature, but are deeply imbued with emotional dimensions which fundamentally influence the developmental trajectories of educators. Research in language teacher education has begun using Vygotsky's perezhivanie (Perezhivanie, a Vygotskian concept describing how individuals emotionally experience and interpret events) to explore teacher emotion and identity (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Agnoletto et al., 2022; Barahona & Toledo-Sandoval, 2025). Within Vygotsky's sociocultural framework, emotion and cognition are theorized as an inseparable dialectical whole, emerging from collective sociocultural practices. When mediated effectively, this interconnectedness can serve as a catalyst for fostering professional growth in language teacher development (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Johnson & Worden, 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

EFL interns (pre-service teachers of English in a non-native English context) are typically student teachers engaged in supervised teaching practice within EFL settings, whose role bridges academic preparation and professional teaching. The study of EFL teacher identity has become one of the hot topics in the field of language teacher education (Barahona & Toledo-Sandoval, 2025; Lim, 2011; Zhu et al., 2022). While many studies examine pedagogical skills in internships, few have explored how emotional experiences (perezhivanie) contribute to teacher identity development. China's preservice EFL teacher research is nascent; future research should use multi-source data, conduct qualitative and longitudinal studies, focus on identity development and practice (Yang, 2023). The implications are significant: failure to resolve identity conflicts during

internships is associated with increased attrition rates and a reduction in pedagogical agency. This highlights the necessity of investigating how affective and cognitive processes interactively shape professional development during transitional phases.

This study addresses three questions:

RQ1: What emotional and practical challenges do EFL interns encounter during their teaching internships, and how do these challenges shape their early professional identity negotiation?

RQ2: How do critical incidents (perezhivanie) during the internship catalyze emotional resilience, pedagogical adaptation, and shifts in professional self-concept among EFL interns?

RQ3: What factors influence the crystallization of professional identity among EFL interns by the conclusion of their internships, and how do contextual disparities mediate these outcomes?

These RQs collectively frame the study's exploration of emotional, experiential, and systemic dimensions in EFL teacher development, grounded in longitudinal qualitative data and theoretical frameworks. It examines how emotional challenges and growth experienced by EFL interns, analyzed through the Vygotskian lens of *perezhivanie*, mediate the dialectical reconfiguration of teacher identity. Such an analytical framework has implications for designing teacher education curricula that conceptualize emotional upheaval as epistemic assets rather than pedagogical impediments. Employing a longitudinal qualitative design, this research combines narrative analysis and comparative case studies to trace four EFL interns' emotional trajectories across a 4-month practicum. Data triangulation(including reflective diaries, recall interviews, and mentor narratives) allows for a granular examination of how participants restory identity conflicts through *perezhivanie*-driven meaning-making (Golombek & Johnson, 2021).

2. Literature review

2.1. Sociocultural Theory: Vygotskyan Foundations and Critical Extensions

At the core of understanding teacher development through a sociocultural lens lies Vygotsky's(1994) concept of *perezhivanie*, briefly defined as "[...] how a child becomes aware of, interprets, [and] emotionally relates to a certain event" (Vygotsky, 1934:345). It's a dialectical unity of emotion and cognition within lived experience that positions affective and cognitive processes as co-constitutive rather than hierarchical (Newman, 2018). Contemporary scholarship has extended this framework to language teacher education, underscoring how teachers' *perezhivanie* mediates their navigation of institutional constraints and pedagogical ideals (Agnoletto et al., 2022). For example, theory of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) aligns with Vygotskyan thought, casting internships as liminal spaces where novices engage with communities of practice to forge professional identities (Wenger, 1999). Yet, critics contend that sociocultural accounts often prioritize cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al, 1991) while under-theorizing the emotional labor inherent in boundary-crossing activities (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) focus on assisted performance, for instance, overlooks how emotional dissonance (e.g. conflicts between personal teaching philosophies and institutional mandates)

shapes the trajectories of identity formation. This oversight highlights the need to re-establish *perezhivanie* as a dynamic mediator of EFL interns' affective-cognitive integration.

2.2. Integrating Teacher Cognition and Emotion: From Dichotomy to Dialectic

The relationship between cognition and emotion in teacher development has evolved from a bifurcated focus to integrative models. Seminal work on language teacher cognition (Borg, 2009) identifies beliefs and knowledge as core components, yet early frameworks marginalized emotions as disruptive forces. Golombek and Doran (2014) challenge this dichotomy, proposing that emotional content structurally indexes cognitive development, particularly in instances of ideal-reality dissonance (Newman, 2018). For EFL interns, such dissonance emerges when pedagogical theories clash with classroom realities—a tension often dismissed as "practice shock"(Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019). Emotional ecology framework further bridges this divide (Zembylas, 2007), arguing that affective knowledge intersects with pedagogical content knowledge to inform decision-making. However, while studies acknowledge the role of emotions in cognition (Wolff & De Costa, 2017), few investigate how emotional challenges catalyze conceptual reframing. This omission perpetuates reductionist models that separate affect from agency, limiting our understanding of interns' identity reconfiguration.

2.3. Teacher Narratives and Identity Construction: Restorying the Self

Narrative inquiry has emerged as a critical tool for unpacking the temporal and relational dimensions of teacher identity. Golombek and Johnson's (2021) concept of "recurrent restorying" positions narrative as both a tool and outcome of professional development, enabling interns to reinterpret experiences through dialogic reflection. Similarly scholars frame identity as an activity-driven process, shaped by contradictions within practicum systems (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019). Yet, while narratives illuminate identity trajectories(Rojas et al, 2025), they often overlook the emotional textures embedded in these stories. Britzman focus on "uncertainty" in teacher education captures affective turmoil but lacks specificity in linking emotional tensions to sociocultural mediators (Britzman, 2007). Tripp's (2002) critical incident analysis offers a partial solution, yet its episodic focus risks fragmenting the holistic *perezhivanie* of interns' lived experiences. This highlights the need for methodologies that trace how emotions, embedded in narrative, recursively shape identity across time and context.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study proposes an integrative theoretical framework to examine the interplay between emotional experiences and the professional identity development of EFL interns. Grounded in Vygotsky's *perezhivanie* (emotional experience), narrative identity theory (Bruner, Jerome Seymour, 2009), and narrative case study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the framework conceptualizes identity formation as a dynamic, emotionally mediated process embedded in sociocultural contexts.

Perezhivanie illuminates the dialectical unity of emotion and cognition, positing that every professional decision or reflection is infused with affective resonances. One of the basic ways of thinking for human beings proposed by Bruner (1986) is narrative mode, which means to organize experience and build identity through stories. The key proposition is that identity is not fixed, but dynamically constructed through continuous telling and revising personal stories. It enlightenments the study of teachers' professional identity (TPI). Through the narrative of the teacher's identity, TPI is formed through the following narrative practices such as reflective writing (such as teaching diary), professional dialogue (such as the teaching and research group sharing "key events"), and career stories (such as the narration of motivation from teaching). The evolution of teachers' identity can be captured through narrative interviews or life history analysis. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) define narrative case studies as qualitative research analyzing lived experiences through storytelling. This approach explores meaning-making via personal narratives, emphasizing temporally structured accounts over objective event descriptions. Specific narrative inquiry approach uses three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework, including temporality (examining how past, present, and future shape a person's story), sociality (considering interpersonal and institutional influences) and spatiality (analyzing how physical and cultural contexts). Researchers then restory these accounts, identifying key themes, tensions, and turning points that reveal identity development.

Collectively, these theories offer a cohesive lens to explore how EFL interns' emotional encounters (encompassing pedagogical triumphs, institutional pressures, and cultural adaptations) shape their evolving professional identities.

Vygotsky's *perezhivanie* anchors the framework, emphasizing that emotional experiences are central, not peripheral, to cognitive and identity processes. For EFL interns, this means moments of classroom anxiety, mentorship validation, or cultural dissonance are not merely transient emotions but critical junctures in identity negotiation. TPI theories extend this by framing identity as a sociocultural project, where interns reconcile personal pedagogical ideals with institutional mandates (e.g., standardized curricula) and cultural expectations(e.g., hierarchical mentorship norms). Narrative inquiry operationalizes this synthesis, using temporally structured stories to map how interns' emotional highs and lows coalesce into coherent identity trajectories.

This framework challenges reductionist approaches to EFL internship research by integrating affective, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions. It demonstrates that fragmented theoretical perspectives—such as stress models or role adaptation theories—are subsumed within *perezhivanie*'s dialectical logic, offering a holistic explanation of how emotion-driven interactions shape professional becoming. Ultimately, the framework advocates for pedagogies and policies that recognize emotion as a legitimate and transformative force in teacher development, fostering environments where interns can leverage emotional experiences as resources for growth.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

This longitudinal investigation uses Clandinin and Connelly's narrative case study method to track four EFL interns through a four-month teaching internship across urban and suburban Beijing schools (September-December 2024). We collected field texts and analyzing them as narrative reconstructions rather than objective facts. Then these accounts were restoried, identifying key themes, tensions, and turning points that reveal interns' professional identity formation. Field texts include reflective diaries, recall interviews and mentor narratives applied by the social and cultural perspective to critical thematic analysis. By mapping specific emotional tension to the identity negotiation model, our framework transcends the general "emotional factors" and reveals the specific development path. The intensity of positive emotional experience during internship such as pride in students' progress or recognition of tutors is positively correlated with the accelerated formation of professional identity among individual EFL interns.

4.2. Participants and Context

Four participants (pseudonyms: HFZH, ZTY, HFY, ZHY) were voluntarily chosen from the English Department of a Teacher's College in Beijing. This research obtained informed consent from the interns by assuring confidentiality. According to its syllabus of the English teacher training, final-year undergraduates start a 16-week educational internship from September to December, carrying out the important teaching practice of integrating theory and practice in teacher education in the centralized internship site, the decentralized internship site and the Fangshan (suburbs) on-the-job internship site to gain front-line teaching experience through observation, listening to lectures, lecturing and listening to each other's lectures. During the internship of the four participants in 2024, the 123 students gave good feedback on entering the school, listened to lectures, lectured, managed classes, and carried out class meeting activities, and had good contact with the instructors of the internship school and the instructors of the department, and there were no problems with feedback.

Participants were selected according to their usual academic differences, the representative internship sites, and the possibility of author as the mentor to guide their whole intern ship process. The four participants were placed in urban, suburban, and rural suburban schools, teaching grades 1-6. Their teaching responsibilities span grades 1-6, including subject (English teaching) and interdisciplinary roles (such as mathematics, art), in order to capture the diverse ecological impacts on identity development. Through this 16-week educational internship, the four interns were familiar with the situation of English education in primary schools in urban and suburban areas of Beijing, initially grasped the rules of English education in primary schools, and cultivated the ability to independently engage in English education and teaching. None of them dropped out of the internship halfway through, leaving the tracking information of the four participants complete.

4.3. Data Collection

To examine the professional identity formation of four EFL interns during their four-month-long internship at public primary schools in China, this study adopts a tripartite data collection framework to capture the emotional and cognitive dimensions of identity negotiation through longitudinal qualitative surveys. Data spans the entire internship to capture change over time.

Data collection includes triangular narrative sources (reflective diaries, recall interviews, mentor narratives) to track the trajectory of identity over time and emphasize the transformation of self-conception and attribution patterns.

Reflective Diaries include weekly reflective diaries and post-internship reflective internship reports.

Recall interviews (audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and stored encrypted) include mid-point ethical experiences reflective interviews and post-internship reflective interviews.

Mentor narratives include the mentor (sent by the teachers' college)'s weekly logs with detailed insights into scaffolding strategies to capture the multidimensionality of the guidance process and identity formation and the final comments from the mentors of the internship school.

The triangulation evaluated with mentors provides external verification of identity trajectories. By using time brackets and continuous comparative analysis of identity statements during the internship phase, the rigor of the methodology has been enhanced, putting individuals under institutional pressure to balance exam preparation and progressive teaching tasks.

4.4. Data Analysis

The narrative data analysis involved verbatim transcription of interviews followed by thematic coding using DeepSeek's NLP tools to enhance textual pattern recognition. Initial coding focused on emergent emotional challenges and developmental growth instances within each participant's account. Narrative profiles were constructed for individual interns, prioritizing the chronological reconstruction of their internship trajectories while identifying pivotal emotional turning points. Cross-source triangulation was systematically applied by comparing coded themes from interviews with parallel entries in reflective journals. Episodes marked by intense emotional descriptions were isolated for targeted analysis through the lens of perezhivanie, exploring how these affectively charged experiences reshaped teaching perceptions or practices. To ensure coding reliability, 20% of the data underwent independent peer verification, resolving discrepancies through iterative discussion. Thematic consistency across participants was then mapped against site-specific contextual factors (e.g., urban vs. suburban school dynamics). Findings interweave individualized chronological narratives with cross-cutting thematic patterns, reflecting both unique internship journeys and shared identity negotiation processes.

5. Results

5.1. Thematic Analysis of Emotional and Identity Development

The internship journeys of four EFL trainees, captured through 64 reflective journals and in-depth interviews, unveiled intricate dynamics between emotional upheaval and professional self-concept evolution. Longitudinal analysis of approximately 85,000 words of qualitative data, employing a multi-phase analytical approach, identified persistent motifs of uncertainty, self-questioning, and developmental breakthroughs. These insights contest conventional linear frameworks of educator progression, instead depicting a cyclical progression characterized by emotional confusion, adaptive reorientation, and eventual self-definition.

5.1.1. Initial Emotional Disorientation (Weeks 1–4)

Early journal entries underscored psychological disarray, marked by heightened anxiety and marginalized roles within school settings. Trainees navigated acute stress and limited integration during their initial weeks. Personal accounts frequently detailed bodily expressions of insecurity, exemplified by one participant's candid reflection: *"My hands tremble when addressing the class."* This phase prioritized strict adherence to institutional protocols, with novices mimicking mentor practices to manage classroom interactions. For example, ZTY's verbatim replication of a reward system (*"I duplicated Ms. Li's incentive model exactly"*) reveals coping mechanisms tied to self-doubt. Emotional exertion at this stage focused on cultivating professional facades rather than pedagogical innovation, exposing the clash between aspirational educator ideals and the unpredictable demands of actual teaching environments.

These observations resonate with RQ1's focus on early-career emotional hurdles. Interns' conflicts with hierarchical dynamics, rigid curricula, and perceptions of being "temporary outsiders" reflect the gap between academic preparation and on-ground realities. As Britzman (2007) theorized, novices occupy a *"marginal space between existence and becoming,"* a liminality evident in their reliance on mimicry and fear of deviation.

5.1.2. Negotiation Through Critical Incidents (Weeks 5–12)

The intermediate phase of the internship marked a pivotal shift, where significant incidents spurred profound professional reevaluation. Two contrasting experiential categories—affirmative validation and disruptive dilemmas—acted as *perezhivanie* catalysts, fundamentally altering trainees' self-concepts. For instance, HFY's receipt of an unprompted student gift (*"When Amy painted me, I suddenly belonged here"*) solidified her educator identity, resonating with Wenger's (1999) concept of "existence verification." In contrast, pedagogical setbacks prompted adaptive reflection. Following a mismanaged group task, ZHY remarked: *"I learned to simplify tasks through scaffolding instead of overwhelming students."* Such incidents transformed teaching into *"emotional problem-solving"* (Hargreaves, 1998), merging theoretical frameworks with situational ingenuity.

These accounts respond to RQ2, which examines growth through critical experiences. The transition from apprehension to measured assurance highlights *perezhivanie*'s role in cultivating

resilience. HFZH's mediation of a classroom dispute — *"Balance authority and kindness; adapt teaching to different classes"*—reveals how destabilizing events activated Mezirow's (2018) *"transformative learning,"* enabling ethical recalibration.

5.1.3. Identity Crystallization (Weeks 13–16)

The concluding phase witnessed trainees moving from routine instructional methods to asserting their core professional identities. Participants exercised autonomy through innovative pedagogy, exemplified by HFY's tailored materials for neurodiverse students: *"Redesigning flashcards for Ming with autism—his smile is my victory."* Emotional narratives transitioned from skill mastery to ethical engagement, encapsulated in one intern's insight: *"Teaching is not about perfect courses. It's about seeing every child, even the 'invisible' ones."* This progression signals a conceptual realignment—from performative compliance to morally grounded, learner-focused praxis.

These outcomes address RQ3's focus on identity crystallization. Interns' accounts emphasize the dynamic interaction between institutional support structures and individual initiative. While HFZH and ZHY attained consistency via mentor guidance, ZTY's self-description as a *"survivor"* unveils lingering conflicts between institutional mandates and personal ambitions.

5.2. Case Study Synthesis: Moral Identity Formation

Interviews cross-referenced with syllabus criteria uncovered fluid identity development, influenced by systemic pressures and ethical conflicts. Early disorientation (weeks 1–4) was marked by role uncertainty, as HFZH vacillated between *"teacher authority and peer-like familiarity."* ZTY's difficulty applying *"gentle methods"* in chaotic classrooms highlighted the tension between idealized approaches and practical realities, resonating with Britzman's (2007) *"imagined vs. implemented selves."* These insights contextualize RQ1, framing initial struggles as clashes between aspirational ethics and institutional pragmatism.

Mid-phase *perezhivanie* episodes (weeks 5–12) reshaped moral orientations. HFY's incremental modifications for disengaged student Xiao Ming solidified her identity as a *"guide, not just a lecturer,"* whereas ZHY's prioritization of *"Protecting well-being now replaces course planning"* underscored institutional duty over curricular adherence. These pivotal moments, framed within Mezirow's (2018) theory of disorienting dilemmas, demonstrate how reflective practice translates abstract ethics into lived pedagogy. ZTY's strategy of *"balancing warmth and firmness"* further demonstrates adaptive strategies, addressing RQ2 by illustrating how instability drives identity reevaluation.

By the final phase (weeks 13–16), contrasting paths became evident. HFZH and ZHY found coherence between ideals and institutional expectations via mentorship, while ZTY maintained her identity as a *"survivor, not yet a teacher."* HFY's self-concept coalesced around learner-centered commitments: *"Xiaoming's progress confirms my goals as an educator."* These results emphasize how emotional affirmation and communal acknowledgment mediate outcomes, answering RQ3 by positioning moral identity as socially constructed ontology.

5.3. Triangulation with Mentor Scaffolding

Mentor narratives unveiled graduated support approaches mirroring interns' emotional progression. Initial observational tasks (weeks 1–4), including documenting classroom interactions, reduced task-related stress. HFY's journal entry — *"Professor Wang's intentional 'waiting time' changed my understanding of student participation"*— embodied Collins (1991)'s cognitive apprenticeship principles, aligning with RQ1 by showing how guided observation demystifies tacit professional norms.

Intermediate scaffolding (weeks 5–12) harmonized independence and mentorship. ZTY's revision of a mentor-crafted unit (*"weather"*) exemplified controlled innovation, while HFZH's reflection — *"My mentor's trust affirmed my position"*—signaled evolving relational assurance. These methods, interpreted through Wenger's community participation model, demonstrate how technical abilities mature into community-endorsed roles, responding to RQ2 via incremental autonomy.

Concluding rituals (weeks 13–16), like HFZH joining faculty meetings (*"Occupying the Teacher's Desk eliminates my 'impersonator' status"*) or ZTY's validation through pupil confidence (*"A true teacher keeps a secret"*), codified professional acceptance. These rites, theorized as identity consolidation, address RQ3 by connecting communal acknowledgment to ontological transformation.

5.4. Challenges, Growth, and Implications: A Synthesized Perspective

The examination of four EFL interns' journeys, synthesized from diaries, interviews, and mentor accounts, highlights a multifaceted relationship between obstacles, developmental adaptation, and contextual limitations. The following "Table 1" consolidates these patterns, demonstrating both common difficulties and varied trajectories influenced by institutional settings and individual initiative.

Table 1. Challenges and Growth in EFL Internships

Category	ZTY	HFZH	ZHY	HFY
EFL Internship Challenges	**-Language barriers**: Mixed Chinese-English teaching hindered pronunciation improvement. **-Cultural adaptation**: Integrated Christmas with Chinese New Year via shared symbols (snowmen). **-Teaching pressure**: Assigned non-major	**-Language barriers**: Shifted British to American accents for student comprehension.; slowed speech pace. **-Cultural adaptation**: Avoided sensitive Western topics, focused on activity-based cultural lessons. **-Teaching pressure**:	**-Language barriers**: Struggled translating terms (e.g., "Oriental Pearl") in mid-class.; students challenged her knowledge. **-Cultural adaptation**: Prioritized familiar Chinese festivals (National Day) over Western holidays.	**-Language barriers**: Pronunciation doubts for advanced vocabulary (e.g., sixth-grade words). **-Cultural adaptation**: Localized Western concepts (e.g., "dragon" as Chinese cultural symbol). **-Teaching pressure**:

	subjects (math, Chinese) initially; chaotic schedules and workload.	Struggled with time management and student engagement in 40-minute lessons.	-**Teaching pressure**: Stress from sudden textbook changes; anxiety about classroom safety after a student injury incident.	Struggled with classroom management for disruptive students (e.g., a child undressing in class).
Growth via "*Perezhivanie*"	-**Emotional resilience**: Adapted to unexpected assignments (teaching multiple subjects) and chaotic schedules. -**Key turning point**: Felt like a "real teacher" when students performed well on exams.	-**Emotional growth**: Transitioned from overly lenient to balanced authority; learned to handle student conflicts. -**Key turning point**: Realized her role as a teacher when students sought her help during revision sessions.	-**Emotional growth**: Improved classroom safety awareness after a student injury incident. -**Key turning point**: Fulfillment from students' trust (e.g., asking questions after class).	-**Emotional growth**: Developed adaptability (e.g., managing disruptive students with rewards). -**Key turning point**: Felt like a teacher during district-level research presentations and student interactions.
Case Studies & Reflections	-**Case**: A student defecated in class; learned to handle emergencies but regretted not comforting the child privately. -**Reflection**: "Stay humble; don't rush results."	-**Case**: A student injured his mouth with a straw; handled first-aid but relied on the head teacher for follow-up. -**Reflection**: "Balance authority and kindness; adapt teaching to different classes."	-**Case**: A student's eye injury due to classroom neglect; realized the priority of safety. -**Reflection**: "Safety first, teaching second."	-**Case**: A special-needs student disrupted class; learned empathy and classroom inclusivity. -**Reflection**: "Teaching requires flexibility and understanding diverse student needs."
Suggestions for Improvement	-Avoid assigning interns to remote outskirt schools in. -Reduce non-English teaching tasks. -Provide clearer guidance for classroom management.	-Adjust thesis deadlines to avoid overlapping with internships. -Emphasize practical training in lesson time management. -Strengthen intern preparation for cultural adaptation.	-Prioritize safety training for interns. -Maintain professional boundaries with students (e.g., avoid one-on-one interactions).	-Encourage participation in public recruitment processes for experience. -Promote adaptability for cross-subject teaching (e.g., PE, art).

Notes:

(1) *Perezhivanie*: Refers to the emotional and cognitive experiences shaping personal development.

(2) **Cultural adaptation**: All interns emphasized integrating Chinese cultural elements into EFL teaching.

(3) **Common challenges**: Language barriers, classroom management, and balancing authority/kindness were recurring themes.

5.4.1. Navigating Multifaceted Challenges

All interns faced persistent obstacles linked to linguistic hurdles, cultural adjustment, and classroom governance. ZTY's bilingual teaching context intensified pronunciation anxieties (*"hindered pronunciation improvement"*), while HFZH adjusted speech patterns to enhance student understanding (*"slowed speech pace"*). Navigating cultural integration proved pivotal, particularly when reconciling Western educational content with local traditions. For example, HFY recontextualized symbols like dragons within Chinese cultural frameworks, whereas ZHY emphasized regional festivals over Western observances to sustain student engagement. These efforts epitomize interns' navigation of *"cultural hybridity"*—a friction between global EFL methodologies and localized teaching realities.

Instructional demands additionally intensified these difficulties. ZTY's responsibilities in non-specialized subjects (*"math, Chinese"*) and erratic schedules heightened role uncertainty, while HFY contended with behavioral disruptions like a pupil removing clothing during lessons. Such episodes underscore the gap between idealized educator roles and the spontaneous requirements of everyday teaching, mirroring Britzman's (2007) concept of *"becoming in crisis."*

5.4.2. Growth Through Perezhivanie

Critical incidents operated as *perezhivanie* catalysts, stimulating emotional and instructional metamorphosis. ZTY's adaptability in managing unforeseen tasks (*"teaching multiple subjects"*) reached a defining juncture: *"Felt like a 'real teacher' when students performed well on exams."* This shift from self-doubt to legitimacy mirrors Wenger's (1999) "identity as negotiated experience," where external validation fosters belonging. Similarly, HFZH's transition from leniency to balanced authority ("handle student conflicts") embodies Mezirow's (2018) transformative learning, wherein destabilizing events trigger cognitive restructuring.

For ZHY, a classroom safety incident (*"prioritize safety over curriculum"*) became an ethical pivot, redefining her vocational focus. Her assertion — *"Safety first, teaching second"*—demonstrates how *perezhivanie* connects principled ethics to applied pedagogy. Concurrently, HFY's flexibility in addressing behavioral challenges via incentive frameworks (*"developed a daptability"*) highlights emotional scaffolding's role in managing uncertainty.

5.4.3. Case Reflections and Institutional Implications

The interns' reflections on critical incidents reveal nuanced ethical negotiations. ZTY's regret over not comforting a child privately ("learned to handle emergencies but regretted lacking empathy") exposes the tension between procedural competence and relational care. In contrast, HFZH's tactical establishment of professional boundaries (*"avoid one-on-one interactions"*) illustrates practical concessions driven by systemic limitations.

These experiences stress the urgency of formalized support frameworks. ZHY's push for *"safety training for interns"* and HFY's plea to *"encourage participation in public recruitment processes"* accentuate institutional obligations in fostering career development. Simultaneously, ZTY's proposal to *"reduce non-English teaching tasks"* critiques role ambiguity, advocating focused specialization to counteract professional fragmentation.

5.4.4. Synthesis with Theoretical Frameworks

The interns' developmental paths resonate with Vygotsky's *perezhivanie*, wherein affective encounters mediate professional evolution. Urban participants such as HFY, supported by resource-abundant settings and mentorship, developed cohesive identities (*"student-centered growth narratives"*). Conversely, rural trainees like ZTY encountered structural impediments (*"role fragmentation"*), exposing how institutional resources mold ethical identity formation.

These insights contest skill-centric paradigms, reframing teacher development as *relational ontology*—a dynamic interplay of individual initiative, emotional engagements, and systemic rituals. Mentorship strategies, including incremental autonomy and communal validation practices (*"attending staff meetings"*), embody Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation, where procedural skills evolve into socially validated professional identities.

5.5. Conclusion of Integrated Analysis

This longitudinal study positions EFL internships as emotional apprenticeships, where professional identities emerge through dialectical tensions. Initial disorientation—marked by anxiety and mimicry—evolves into adaptive growth via *perezhivanie*, such as student recognition or classroom crises. These transformative experiences, analyzed through sociocultural and transformative learning frameworks, reveal teacher development as non-linear, ritualized negotiation. Mentorship and institutional scaffolding mediate outcomes, reconciling moral ideals with systemic realities. While shared challenges (e.g., language barriers) persist, contextual disparities shape divergent trajectories. The findings advocate embedding structured reflective practices into teacher education, normalizing ambiguity as a catalyst for ethical identity work. By aligning emotional apprenticeship with contextualized support, programs can cultivate resilient educators attuned to systemic and relational complexities.

6. Discussion

Four interns exhibited varied experiential patterns akin to Rodrigues & Mogarro's (2019) concept of *"reality shock"* or emotional exhaustion. When an EFL intern encounters an emotional experience during an internship, this is a key point in triggering their own growth. These emotional experiences can be both negative and positive. The negative may be a challenge to one's knowledge by students or peers, or it may be a question of one's ability to manage and communicate. Positive ones may also be the loving care of students, the recognition of peers, and the affirmation of mentors. Whether it's positive or negative, it's all about whether the intern is touching themselves in the face of these experiences. Positive emotional experiences can quickly

contribute to the establishment of TPI among interns, while negative emotional experiences that are not positively confronted and properly handled will affect the professional beliefs and firm beliefs of EFL interns.

It is important to note that the moment when interns feel that they are a real teacher is not the moment when they end their internship, but is related to the moment of emotional experience they feel after entering the internship school, and it is further strengthened by the continuous emotional experience in the later stages. Finally, when they have obtained their graduation certificates, teaching qualifications, and have gone to work (to be recognized by society), the self-image of "I have become a real people's teacher" is finally established. This discovery echoes the slow and recursive process of the transition to a developed English language teacher identity shaped by multiple interactions and situations of conflict in practice (Barahona & Toledo-Sandoval, 2025).

Consistent with Vygotsky's notion of *perezhivanie*, the interns did not simply endure events; they experienced them in a deeply personal way that transformed their development. All four EFL interns have faced challenges during their internships, and they have all grown in the face of challenges. See table 2 below：

Table 2. Emotional Challenges and Growth in EFL Internships

Intern	Key Challenges	Growth Through *Perezhivanie*
ZTY	-Assigned non-English subjects (math/Chinese). -Chaotic schedules and workload. -Classroom emergencies(e.g., student injury).	-Developed resilience in teaching diverse subjects. -Improved crisis management skills. -Found fulfillment in student exam success.
HFZH	-Balancing authority and kindness. -Time management in 40-minute lessons. -Cultural sensitivity in lesson design.	-Transitioned to balanced classroom discipline. -Enhanced adaptability in lesson pacing. -Prioritized student psychological safety.
ZHY	-Sudden textbook changes caused stress. -Student safety oversight (e.g., eye injury incident). -Translating complex terms.	-Prioritized safety awareness. -Built trust through student interactions. -Strengthened improvisation skills.
HFY	-Managing disruptive/special-needs students. -Public speaking anxiety (district-level presentations). -Pronunciation doubts.	-Adopted inclusive teaching strategies. -Gained confidence in formal settings. -Refined linguistic accuracy through verification.

Core Themes:

(1) **Challenges**: Non-English teaching, classroom emergencies, cultural adaptation, time management, safety oversight.

(2) **Growth**: Resilience, adaptability, trust-building, crisis management, linguistic refinement.

(3) *Perezhivanie*: Emotional struggles (e.g., anxiety, stress) catalyzed professional maturity and self-efficacy.

Note: "*Perezhivanie*"(emotional-cognitive experiences) drove interns to navigate challenges, fostering resilience and pedagogical identity.

Intern ZTY's intense frustration with assigned non-English subjects (math/Chinese), chaotic schedules and workload, and classroom emergencies (e.g., student injury) and subsequent problem-solving aligns with *perezhivanie* as a catalyst for reconceptualizing her teaching role. Her growth through *Perezhivanie* is that she developed resilience in teaching diverse subjects, improved crisis management skills and found fulfillment in student exam success.

Intern HFZH's struggle to balance authority with compassion, manage time within strict 40-minute lessons, and incorporate cultural sensitivity into lesson design reflects how *perezhivanie* shaped her pedagogical evolution. Her emotional-cognitive journey enabled her to establish balanced classroom discipline, refine adaptability in pacing lessons, and prioritize students' psychological well-being, illustrating the transformative role of emotional challenges.

Intern ZHY's stress from abrupt textbook changes, vigilance over student safety (e.g., addressing an eye injury incident), and difficulties translating complex terminology became pivotal *perezhivanie* experiences. These fostered heightened safety awareness, trust-building through student engagement, and enhanced improvisational skills, underscoring how adversity catalyzed professional growth.

Intern HFY's challenges—managing disruptive or special-needs students, anxiety during district-level presentations, and doubts about pronunciation—were integral to her *perezhivanie*-driven development. By adopting inclusive teaching practices, gaining confidence in formal settings, and refining linguistic accuracy through meticulous verification, she transformed emotional struggles into pillars of self-efficacy and pedagogical identity.

For every participant, emotional challenges (e.g., stress, anxiety) functioned as *perezhivanie* milestones, fostering resilience, adaptability, and a reconceptualized grasp of their roles as educators.

By examining the affective and moral dimensions of EFL trainees' professional identity formation during practicums, the analysis demonstrates that pivotal incidents (e.g., classroom conflicts, ethical dilemmas) serve as transformative thresholds where emotional discord triggers cognitive restructuring and identity recalibration. In addressing RQ1, results indicate frequent struggles with self-doubt, instructional management pressures, and unclear professional roles. For example, ZTY's involvement in non-English disciplines (*"math/Chinese"*) and disorganized timetables heightened her uncertainty, while HFY confronted behavioral disruptions among pupils and pronunciation-related insecurities. These challenges reflect the dissonance between theoretical preparation and classroom realities, positioning novices in Britzman's

(2007) *"marginal space between existence and becoming."* Early professional identity negotiation was thus marked by performative imitation (e.g., mimicking mentor strategies) and emotional labor aimed at impression management rather than authentic pedagogical experimentation.

In addressing RQ2, findings indicate that engaging with affectively intense experiences enabled trainees to cultivate adaptive mechanisms and solidify professional self-concepts. For instance, HFY's affirmation through a student's impromptu artwork (*"When Amy painted me, I suddenly belonged here"*) emerged as a critical *perezhivanie* juncture, propelling her shift from mechanical instruction to ethical relationality. Conversely, ZHY's adaptive response following a safety crisis (*"Safety first, teaching second"*) illustrates how destabilizing incidents activated Mezirow's (2018) *transformative learning* processes. These occurrences—whether validating or disruptive—operated as affective frameworks, empowering interns to redesign pedagogical approaches (e.g., differentiated scaffolding, harmonizing authority/empathy) and navigate identity evolution amid systemic limitations.

To answer RQ3, this study emphasizes the interconnected roles of mentorship, institutional practices, and contextual resources in shaping professional identity. Urban trainees such as HFY, supported by systematic mentorship and well-resourced environments, cultivated cohesive professional identities anchored in student development narratives (*"Xiaoming's progress confirms my goals as an educator"*). Conversely, rural participants like ZTY encountered systemic obstacles (*"role fragmentation"*), facing challenges in aligning multidisciplinary responsibilities with personal aspirations. Mentorship approaches—such as incremental autonomy (e.g., ZTY modifying a mentor-designed *"weather"* unit) and legitimization practices (e.g., HFZH's participation in faculty meetings)—embody Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation, where procedural skills evolve into socially validated professional identities. Variations in resource accessibility and institutional backing mediated identity trajectories, highlighting the necessity for context-sensitive scaffolding in teacher preparation programs.

The affective trajectories of trainees were profoundly influenced by their sociocultural contexts. For example, mentorship frameworks guided responses to classroom crises (e.g., *student injuries*) and harmonizing authority with empathy, empowering interns like HFZH to refine crisis protocols and cultivate disciplined yet compassionate instructional approaches. Institutional emphasis on structured 40-minute lessons and cultural sensitivity, pushed interns to adapt lesson pacing and prioritize psychological safety, fostering pedagogical flexibility. Peer collaboration further contributed to collective resilience; joint efforts in interpreting specialized terminology or managing abrupt curricular shifts enhanced collaborative problem-solving, evident in ZHY's adaptive problem-solving skills and rapport-building with students. These elements—mentorship, institutional conventions, and peer networks—collectively shaped trainees' *perezhivanie*, converting emotional challenges into catalysts for professional growth and identity consolidation.

This research expands sociocultural frameworks by conceptualizing *perezhivanie* as a bidirectional mechanism: emotional disruptions simultaneously challenge and fortify professional

identity formation, necessitating deliberate support systems. Symbolic validation rituals (e.g., *awarding classroom keys*) operationalized Lave and Wenger's (1991) *legitimate peripheral participation*, materially affirming trainees' communal membership. Critically, emotional resilience stemmed from systemic enablements rather than individual tenacity; inconsistent mentorship or role misalignment heightened burnout risks, exemplified by interns assigned to non-specialized instructional duties.

Reflective practice helps emotional processing. This can be seen from the students' weekly diaries and final internship reports and interviews, interns grew through reflection. However, the challenges faced by student teachers are further intensified by the inadequate recognition of reflective practice, even though its critical function in harmonizing theoretical knowledge with practical classroom execution is widely acknowledged. Borg (2009) and Rodrigues & Mogarro (2019) found that the reflective practice were undervalued among student teachers. This was also common among the four interns who began their weekly dairy with full description of the internship schools and enthusiasm about their teaching but slowly reduced to a half page of the weekly records of their deeds and rough reports about their relationship with the pupils.

Our findings align with recent work by Barahona and Toledo-Sandoval (2022), who also observed that language teaching interns' emotional turmoil can lead to identity growth. We extend this knowledge by providing a longitudinal perspective, showing how these processes unfold over an internship. The theoretical contribution challenges the ability-based paradigm by positioning the teacher identity as a moral project formed through the daily consultation of moral intentions, systematic constraints and emotional labor. Findings advocate for programmatic reforms as structured critical incident debriefing to transform emotional turbulence into pedagogical insight, differentiated mentorship addressing contextual disparities(urban mentors fostering ethical innovation vs. suburban/rural mentors clarifying role expectations), pre-practicum resilience training in stress navigation and adaptive decision-making, and policy alignment between internship roles and institutional ethics frameworks to mitigate identity dissonance.

Based on the interns' experiences, one implication might be that teacher education programs should incorporate structured emotional reflection sessions or mentorship programs focusing on emotional support. Supervisors be trained to discuss emotional coping strategies with interns with curricula including topics on teacher resilience, such as ZTY's being assigned non-English subjects (math/Chinese), ZHY's stress caused by student safety oversight, and HFY's managing disruptive/special-needs students.

Our study demonstrates the utility of *perezhivanie* as an analytic lens in teacher education, highlighting the inseparability of emotional and cognitive development in learning to teach. By reconceptualizing *perezhivanie* as a scaffolded apprenticeship in ethical praxis, this study urges teacher education to reimagine partnerships with schools, co-designing internships that balance systemic needs with developmental imperatives. Ultimately, it posits that nurturing ethically agentic educators requires honoring vulnerability as pedagogical resource—transforming affective trials into opportunities for resilient, context-responsive professional becoming.

Effective teacher training programs should prioritize reflective practices that enable pre-service educators to critically analyze their internship experiences. For instance, integrating narrative-based activities—such as structured reflections on "the most impactful lesson I taught"—can deepen their understanding of pedagogical challenges and personal growth. Such methods not only foster self-awareness but also bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world classroom dynamics. Concurrently, policy frameworks must create environments where teachers' professional voices are amplified rather than constrained. This involves designing "meaning-making spaces" that move beyond rigid metrics like standardized performance indicators, allowing educators to articulate their experiences and insights authentically. By valuing narrative autonomy, policies can mitigate the risk of reducing teaching excellence to quantifiable outcomes, thereby nurturing a culture of collaborative inquiry and adaptive expertise. Together, these strategies underscore the need to align training and policy with the organic, often non-linear nature of professional development in education.

7. Conclusions

This study found that EFL teaching interns undergo intense emotional challenges, and through guided reflection (perezhivanie), these challenges can become opportunities for significant professional growth and identity formation. By applying Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie in a longitudinal internship context, this research illuminates the dynamic interplay between emotion and learning-to-teach, an area previously underexplored in the literature. Teacher identity forms through a socioculturally-mediated process. In this process, critical incidents and emotionally charged lived experiences serve as catalysts for ethical professional development, which depends on systemic scaffolding. Ultimately, acknowledging and harnessing the emotional landscape of internships can transform short-term challenges into long-term professional resilience for novice teachers.

The study extends prior work and provides first evidence and study of EFL interns in China. The findings advocate for holistic internship models that integrate structured emotional support, context-responsive mentoring, and communal rituals of recognition. This study reconceptualizes teacher development as a dialectic between personal agency and institutional support. Practical implications include the design of temporally sequenced mentoring frameworks—balancing skill acquisition, emotional attunement, and identity validation—to bridge theory-practice divides while cultivating educators with pedagogical grounding and ethical resilience.

The findings call for teacher education programs to integrate emotional support mechanisms, such as mentorship and reflective writing, into internship curricula to better prepare interns for the affective realities of teaching. Emotional training must be overhauled in all teacher education. Teacher educators and policy-makers should recognize that learning to teach is not just cognitive but emotional; thus, providing safe spaces for interns to process challenges can enhance their growth.

8. Limitations

Serving as both mentor sent by the college and researcher, my dual role could influence interpretations of participants' internship outcomes. To minimize bias, I kept detailed journals documenting selection criteria (academic diversity and site variation) and consulted colleagues for external perspectives. Close observation allowed nuanced tracking of professional development, yet I prioritized triangulating interns' self-reports with school evaluations. Empathy was tempered by systematic analysis, and potential role conflicts were acknowledged through explicit disclosure of methodological constraints in findings.

Meanwhile, this study contains two key limitations. First, because it's qualitative and narrative and the researcher was also the participants' instructor, results are interpretive. Another researcher might highlight different facets of the same stories. Second, the small, homogeneous sample consisting of three from four interns from urban schools restricts the study's generalizability to rural or diverse educational settings.

To address these limitations, future research could: (1) longitudinal studies following interns into their first teaching jobs to see how these early emotional experiences impact retention or teaching style; (2) comparative studies in different cultural contexts (since emotional norms can be culture-specific in teaching.

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