



# An autoethnographic inquiry into a teacher educator's transnational identity formation: a transnational ecological perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explore the author's identity formation as an Iranian transnational teacher educator (TE) over two years of residence in Istanbul, Türkiye. Data were collected from 12 critical autoethnographic narratives (CANs) written by the author in the given period. The data analysis was conducted using the transnational ecological framework in which three layers emerged: micro-transnational, meso-transnational, and macro-transnational. The results revealed that his identity construction was influenced by different factors in three levels of the transnational ecological framework. The results of this study can motivate transnational TEs to identify commonalities with the concepts explored in this study and record their lived experiences as a tool for reflection. There are also implications for transnational TEs' professional development, encouraging reflection on their identity formation, and providing a model for the creation and collection of their own CANs to enhance their understanding of diverse cultural and educational contexts.

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## Introduction

Teacher identity, as a complex interplay of personal experiences, cultural influences, and self-perception that shapes a teacher's unique sense of self, is among the new trends in language teacher education (Kamali et al. 2024). However, the identity of a teacher educator (TE) as another important player in the teaching arena who has an important role in teachers' and students' academic lives has not gained sufficient attention (Zhang and Yuan 2019).

Moreover, in response to increasing global mobility and online education, transnationality has become a trend in today's education (Cranston and Duplan 2023; Mau and Büttner 2010). Transnationality is defined as a process in which migrants are 'forging and sustaining multistranded social relations that linked their societies of origin and settlement' (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, ix). Transnational professionals share the same fundamental characteristics as those based within a single nation; however, what sets them apart is their readiness and capacity to navigate and operate across or between

the boundaries of state and market bureaucracies (Harrington and Seabrooke 2020). Against this background, there is a growing body of research calling for a new arena of identity investigation on transnational teachers' and TEs' identity (Liao and Maddamsetti 2019). Therefore, a line of research has investigated transnational TEs' identity construction, development, and shift considering that their experience is a more complex interplay of social, cultural, political, and ideological peculiarities of their home country and the society they work in (Barkhuizen 2021; Liao and Maddamsetti 2019; Yazan 2023).

Although this seems necessary to explore the identity formation of TEs, few studies have considered it so far (Liao and Maddamsetti 2019; Yazan 2023). The significance of such research lies in recognizing the transnationality of education and TEs' identity, highlighting the essential role of cross-cultural competence (Kamali 2024a) in preparing educators for diverse and globalized learning environments (Harrington and Seabrooke 2020). In addition, the theoretical framework of this study, i.e. the transnational ecological framework (adopted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979; van Lier 2004), provides a common ground for acknowledging the interconnectedness of various elements within the educational environment, ranging from individual experiences to broader societal and cultural contexts. By adopting this holistic approach, the study can capture the complexity of the transnational educational landscape and provide a thorough understanding of the intricate link between factors impacting TEs' identity formation. Moreover, the unique method this study employed to investigate this added to its significance. Critical autoethnographic narrative (CAN) has been employed because of its unique ability to provide an intimate and reflexive insight into the complex interplay of personal experiences, cultural encounters, and professional development. Through this qualitative approach, the TE can authentically capture the multiple factors in their own identity formation, shedding light on the impact of cultural encounters, challenges, and transformative moments. Therefore, per Yazan's (2019) recommendation of utilizing CAN for examining identity, I attempted to investigate my own transformative journey as a transnational TE by writing 12 CANs in a two-year period.

## Literature review

### *(Transnational) teacher educators' identity*

Transnationalism has experienced unprecedented acceleration owing to advancements in travel technology and the pervasive influence of online tools. There are different conceptualizations of this concept. For example, Koinova and Karabegović (2017) posited four stages in transnationalism, the fourth of which is memorialization, which claims that the identity 'eventually shifted from the national to the supranational and global levels' (212). In education, in the same vein, transnationalism gained momentum in recent years in response to this global demand. This dynamic shift has engaged various stakeholders, including learners, teachers, and TEs, each playing a crucial role in shaping this evolving landscape (Abraham 2021; Kamali and Nazari 2023; Molina 2020).

TEs are considered 'at the core of good teacher education' (Vloet and van Swet 2010, 149), and the quality of prospective teachers in the future is greatly influenced by their efforts (Loughran 2006). The growing attention on TEs is associated with the focus on different aspects of their development, such as identity. Knowing that TEs' identity is not

static but a dynamic concept that develops and changes over time (Barkhuizen 2021), different factors are found to be influential in it such as emotion (Snow et al. 2023), personal background (Skerrett 2008), institutional context (McAnulty and Cuenca 2014), and sociocultural factors (Gümüřok and Seferođlu 2023). In investigating the role of emotion on the identity development of TEs, Snow et al. (2023, 127) argued that ‘Liaison feelings of failure and despair in [their] study influenced the identity development as a teacher educator and boundary crosser in complex times’. In another self-study or autoethnographic research, Skerrett (2008) tried ‘to demonstrate how biography and identity [influence] the lived experience of teaching and the researcher’s stance’ (143) and suggested some practices to develop the identity and performance of TEs.

TEs with a transnational background exhibit specific personal characteristics, including the ability to communicate in multiple languages and diverse educational and cultural experiences (Han 2016; Liao and Maddamsetti 2019). For instance, in an identity investigation, Han (2016), a TE with a transnational background hailing from South Korea, delved into her teaching experience of a diversity course in the US. She discovered that her transnational background presented pedagogical and emotional challenges in the development of her identity. Against this background, this study aims to investigate my identity formation as a transnational TE by delving into 12 CANs written by me during my residence in Türkiye.

### *Critical autoethnographic narrative (CAN)*

Autoethnography is a valuable method of research because it analyses the data ‘to which nobody else would have the same access’ (Yazan 2024, 30). It has a profound effect on our identity as ‘what we write affect[s] who we become’ (Richardson 1997, 295). Originally devised as an anthropological research technique, autoethnography has emerged as a significant tool in directing attention toward narratives. In doing so, it fosters narrative competence: the ability to construct, interpret, and engage with personal and professional stories in meaningful ways (Herman 2018). This competence not only enhances researchers’ reflective capacities but also deepens their understanding of how experiences shape identity and practice. Autoethnography has transcended its anthropological origins, making its mark in social sciences, and eventually establishing a presence in the realms of applied linguistics and Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Yazan 2022). The use of autoethnography has been extensive in literature for various purposes, such as exploring the development of a global professional (Canagarajah 2012), investigating teachers’ identity (Kessler 2023), research mentors (Kamali 2024b), and probing language TEs’ ideologies and practices (Yazan 2019, 2022). These investigations, representing a subset of numerous studies employing this methodology, demonstrate that autoethnography serves as ‘a source of deep reflection and identity work’ (Yazan, Canagarajah, and Jain 2021, 2).

Yazan (2018) initially introduced CAN as a reflective instrument designed to collect insights into the identity and ideology of student teachers in MA TESOL courses. Consistent with its name, CAN consists of three components, each highlighting an essential aspect of identity research. Critical in CAN refers to a way of ‘self-reflexivity to effect transformation and social justice’ (Yazan 2022, 651). The autoethnography segment involves contemplating an individual’s lived experiences

through the reexamination of pertinent past events, existing knowledge, and envisioning future possibilities (Barkhuizen 2016). Finally, in describing narrative in CAN, Yazan posited ‘as narrators, we tend to remember episodes of the past by the emotions they evoked and re-remembering them to write leads us to live those emotions at varying degrees. Then, narrating becomes an act of emotions’ (Yazan 2022, 660).

Utilizing CAN to investigate my own identity construction as a transnational TE is distinctive on three grounds. Firstly, while many scholars, predominantly senior figures and educators in the field, have previously employed autoethnography or specialized forms like CAN (Barkhuizen 2016; Canagarajah 2012; Yazan 2022), this study stands out by exploring the identity formation of a TE, not a well-known scholar. CAN, secondly, ‘defies the boundaries between the researcher and the researched’ (Yazan 2024, 39) which challenges the traditional separation between the observer and the subject. It becomes more significant when it comes to transnational individuals as it allows them to reflect on and articulate their dual identities within the sociocultural norms of both their home country and their country of residence. This method provides an understanding of their lived experiences, capturing the dynamic interplay between their personal and cultural identities as they move between different sociocultural contexts. Lastly, even though CAN was initially designed for use with teachers, this research employs it to delve into the identity development of a transnational TE, considering the parallels in their roles, such as guidance, coaching, feedback, and evaluation.

### *Theoretical framework: transnational ecology*

The present study relies on the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; van Lier 2004) as an underpinning theoretical framework. The literature on the use of the ecological framework in identity formation is rich (Allard 2017; Duff and Van Lier 1997; Edwards and Burns 2016; Kamali and Nazari 2023; Satvati et al. 2025). However, this study adopted a unique tailor-made framework in line with its purpose, which explores transnational TE’s identity, called transnational ecology. Transnational ecology, within the context of this study, serves as the overarching theoretical perspective that guides the exploration of how my identity is shaped and influenced across different ecological layers. Drawing inspiration from ecological systems theory, the study categorizes these layers into micro-transnational, meso-transnational, and macro-transnational, each representing a distinct aspect of the educational environment.

Within the micro-transnational ecology, the focus is on the immediate and direct influences on the individual, such as personal experiences. The meso-transnational ecology explores the connections between various elements within the educational context, such as colleagues and managers, to examine the interactions and relationships that influence TE’s identity construction. The macro-transnational ecology, finally, delves into the broader cultural, societal, and institutional factors that contribute to the shaping of identity.

Overall, through a thematic analysis of 12 critical autoethnographic narratives written by me over the specified period, the study aims to unravel the intricate interplay of these ecological layers in influencing the transnational TE’s identity formation.

## The present study

This study is based on my reflections concerning my experiences as a transnational Iranian TE during my residence in Türkiye and examines the impact of this journey on the development of my identity in this role. Several research endeavors have delved into the utilization of CAN in molding the identity of educators within TESOL courses (Kamali 2023; Liao and Maddamsetti 2019). Yet, the focus of this study in filling a particular gap in the current literature is twofold. First, the study addresses a gap in the literature related to my identity formation as a transnational TE. While there is existing research on TEs' identity (Bullough 2023; Kamali 2023; Kessler 2023; Yazan 2023), especially within TESOL contexts, there is a limited focus on TEs who navigate transnational experiences. The second gap this study seeks to fill is the absence of a transnational ecological perspective in understanding identity formation. By applying a transnational ecological lens, considering micro, meso, and macro-transnational ecological levels, the research goes beyond traditional approaches to identity studies. This novel approach contributes to the theoretical diversity within identity research in education.

Additionally, this study provides a blueprint for transnational TEs to construct their identities in TESOL by presenting a model for conducting comparable research endeavors. Transnational TEs can draw inspiration and practical guidance from the author's experience and may discover similarities that foster empathy and resonate with their own professional journeys. In essence, this study opens up possibilities for transnational TEs' self-reflection and adaptation, contributing to the broader landscape of effective teacher education. Therefore, considering the CANs for gathering data on transnational TEs' identity formation with an eye on the transnational ecological framework, the research questions guiding this study are proposed as follows:

- How did working as a transnational TE in Türkiye affect the identity formation of an Iranian TE?
- How did transnational ecological perspective layers contribute to this?

## About me

Growing up in a middle-class family as the first-born child, I was always encouraged to pursue higher education as a means of achieving success. My parents instilled in me the belief that education was the key to achieving success, and attending university was seen as an essential milestone. However, this path was far from easy. At the time, getting into a university in Iran was highly competitive, and families placed immense pressure on their children to secure admission. This made the process both stressful and challenging. For my undergraduate degree, I was accepted into a lesser-known university in Iran. Although the institution wasn't highly ranked, it marked the beginning of my academic journey. Determined to rise above the limitations of my environment, I dedicated myself to my studies. For my master's degree, I worked tirelessly, putting in long hours of preparation, which led to my acceptance into one of Iran's top-ranked universities. This achievement was a turning point, as I continued my academic journey at the same university for my PhD.

During this period, I began to establish myself professionally as a TE. I gained experience by training a wide range of teachers across Iran, collaborating with numerous institutions to deliver teacher training programs. This experience gave me a deep understanding of the educational landscape in my home country and a strong sense of purpose in developing future educators. In 2015, feeling confident in my skills and eager to take on a new challenge, I co-founded my own language institute in Iran. My role focused primarily on teacher training, where I was responsible for preparing instructors to teach English effectively. However, despite my passion and hard work, the venture encountered significant obstacles. Disagreements with my business partners over critical operational decisions, compounded by the country's worsening financial circumstances and numerous legal and bureaucratic challenges, made it difficult to succeed. The economic instability in Iran at the time further complicated matters, making it nearly impossible to sustain the business. By the time the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the situation had reached breaking point. The pandemic was the final blow, forcing me to think about immigration.

Despite these setbacks, I remained committed to my professional development. I enrolled in the DELTA course offered by Cambridge University, hoping to expand my skills and enhance my credentials as a TE. However, during this period, I faced a personal crisis. The combination of professional disappointments and the strain of managing a failing business took a toll on my mental and physical health. I began to experience depression and a series of health issues, which made it difficult to maintain my usual level of productivity and focus. It was during this challenging time, with the support and encouragement of my wife, that I began considering the possibility of working abroad. The idea of starting fresh in a new country, where I could continue my career while escaping the mounting pressures at home, became increasingly appealing. I applied to several universities, and after multiple applications, some institutions extended an offer. After a thorough interview process, including a teaching demonstration, I was accepted for a teaching position at the university where I currently work in Türkiye.

However, the move was not without its own challenges. One of the most difficult tasks was obtaining my academic degrees and necessary documents from Iran, a process fraught with bureaucratic delays and complications. Additionally, changes to Türkiye's immigration laws created further uncertainty and anxiety for my family and me. We found ourselves in a prolonged state of limbo, unsure whether our relocation would proceed smoothly. This anxiety was only exacerbated by the sharp economic downturn in Türkiye in 2021, which caused daily living expenses to skyrocket. As the primary breadwinner, I felt immense pressure to ensure financial stability for my family during this turbulent time. Despite these obstacles, we eventually made it to Istanbul. After a brief period of rest in a hotel, I visited the university campus for the first time. Stepping onto the beautiful campus, surrounded by welcoming colleagues, I immediately knew that the journey had been worth it. The positive atmosphere and the open-mindedness of the faculty reaffirmed my decision to relocate. I was embraced not only as a colleague but also for the new ideas I brought with me, which further fueled my motivation to succeed.

Although I now reside in Türkiye, I have never severed my ties with Iran. I continue to maintain strong professional connections by offering online teacher training and research courses to Iranian educators. This ongoing cross-border engagement is why I prefer to define myself as a transnational TE rather than using the term migrant educator. To me, being transnational reflects the continuous exchange of knowledge and ideas across

borders, the maintenance of my professional identity in both countries, and the commitment to shaping the educational landscapes of both Iran and Türkiye.

## Method

### *Data collection*

The data of the present study were collected through 12 CANs written by the author in two years of residence in Istanbul between November 2021 and November 2023. Every other month, I wrote a CAN in which I narrated my experience, how it influenced my feelings, and how I saw myself in the new setting (see [Appendix](#)). The CANs consisted of 67 pages, and they were all written in the first person. In these narratives, I critically looked at my experience of working as a TE out of my home country and how it influenced my identity construction. These narratives were shared with two fellow colleagues, both of whom annotated the CANs by asking for clarification and guiding some discussion regarding transnational identity formation, and their questions and comments were replied to and added to the original CANs.

### *Data analysis*

To analyze the data, a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was conducted, considering the underlying theoretical framework of the study, transnational ecology. The analysis involved multiple and iterative readings of the CANs to capture the overarching codes. Followed by perceiving initial codes linked to the micro-transnational, meso-transnational, and macro-transnational layers within the transnational ecological framework.

Moving forward, the next phase encompassed the integration of these codes, shaping them into coherent subthemes that mirrored the intricacies inherent in the ecological perspective. For instance, the codes ‘my son’s challenges at school’ and ‘my wife’s home-sickness’ contributed to the development of the theme ‘Managing family pressures as a transnational TE’. The fusion of codes facilitated the construction of an initial thematic map, presenting a visual depiction of the emergent themes. To fortify the analytical robustness, I sought external validation by sharing the preliminary thematic map with the two colleagues who provided annotations on my original CANs. For example, one colleague challenged the theme ‘receiving managerial assistance in a transnational workplace,’ pointing out that although peer support was present in the codes, it had not been reflected in the theme. Based on this feedback, I revised the theme to ‘receiving managerial and peer assistance in a transnational workplace’ to better capture the nuances of the data. This collaborative step aimed to ensure not only the coherence and resonance of the identified themes but also to establish a shared understanding of the subtleties embedded in the data.

Before turning to the findings, it is important to acknowledge some inherent limitations of autoethnographic research. It should be noted that the aim of autoethnography is to ‘create verisimilitude’ (Grant 2010, 578), meaning that although the events appear in my CANs as I remember them, they may not reflect the exact sequence or objective reality of what occurred. This is because, as Zakeri (2020) reminds us, ‘memory is flawed and, as

storytellers, we are all positioned and partial.’ In other words, the narratives presented are inevitably shaped by my subjective interpretations, selective memory, and personal positioning as a transnational TE. This subjective nature, while offering depth and introspection, also raises valid concerns about the reliability and potential bias inherent in autoethnographic research (Chang 2008). To address these concerns, I adopted several strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the narratives. These included maintaining CANs, engaging in prolonged self-reflection, asking colleagues to annotate my CANs, and revisiting critical incidents through multiple iterations to ensure consistency and coherence. Furthermore, I acknowledge that researcher bias is unavoidable in such deeply personal inquiries; however, I have aimed to embrace this subjectivity as a strength rather than a flaw – one that offers unique insight rather than universal truth.

## Findings

The CAN analysis resulted in codes and subthemes, which were categorized thematically into three groups based on an ecological perspective of transnational identity: micro-transnational, meso-transnational, and macro-transnational ecologies.

### *Micro-transnational ecology*

The initial category encompassing four subthemes associated with my identity formation as a transnational TE was the micro-transnational layer within the educational ecology.

The first subtheme was ongoing identity negotiation and development as a transnational TE. In two CANs, I argued that my experience as a TE was revolutionized by being in an unfamiliar context. The narrative showed how I redefined my professional identity as a TE in two different instances.

I really love being here. Running my first training course, I’m proud to train people from almost 9 countries in one course. I owe the university and my efforts for being in this position. (CAN, No#2)

It’s really challenging with people from different cultures. Some are very hardworking but some are easygoing and I can say some are carefree. In one of the last trainings, one of the trainees believed she couldn’t pass the course on her first attempt because I was not familiar with their situation there and I compared their situation with her classmates which she believes was so much better than hers regarding time and motivation. (CAN, No#6)

Expressing pride in conducting a training course with participants from almost nine different countries acknowledged the contribution of both the university and personal efforts in attaining my current position. The second CAN, however, highlighted the complexities of identity negotiation, where I faced some challenges brought to me by the variety of social and cultural backgrounds the trainees were from. These reflections capture the complex feelings I experienced as I transitioned into a new professional space marked by diversity and cultural multiplicity. The pride I felt in leading a course with participants from nearly nine countries was not just about professional achievement, it also marked a deeply personal affirmation of my journey and efforts. Yet, beneath this sense of accomplishment was an ongoing process of self-adjustment, as I encountered varying learner expectations, cultural interpretations of commitment,

and occasional misalignments in perception. The comment from the trainee about my lack of familiarity with her local context reminded me that even in moments of leadership, my understanding remains partial and evolving. These moments – both affirming and unsettling – shaped how I saw myself as a TE, constantly adjusting, re-evaluating, and responding within a shifting web of interpersonal and intercultural dynamics.

The second subtheme, developing self-worth as a transnational TE, emerged from three CANs, one of which will be described here. This feeling is in line with other psychological traits, such as self-esteem and self-confidence, which can influence someone's rate of success.

This month, I ran my first Trinity CertTESOL course as a course director. Wasn't it a dream for me? I think so. I never forget the sentence I once read somewhere saying that we are so busy sometimes that we forget where we are now is a dream of yesterday. (CAN, No#3)

Stepping into the role of course director for the CertTESOL was not just a professional milestone, it carried deep personal meaning. The moment felt surreal, almost as if I were catching up with a version of myself who once longed for exactly this opportunity. Amid the busyness of managing responsibilities and meeting expectations, I caught myself remembering how far I had come. That quiet recognition, that I was living a former dream, grounded me. It reminded me that beneath all the schedules and performance pressures, there was a personal journey unfolding, shaped by deep emotional investment in the path I have taken.

The third subtheme in micro-transnational ecology which is establishing system adaptability as a transnational TE puts the concept of resilience and reflexivity into the spotlight. The following CAN explains how I adapted a new mindset as a transnational TE.

Starting to work here, I sometimes don't really understand how much help I should provide. I received some feedback at the end of the latest course that I left so much on the trainee's shoulders by letting them discover for themselves. This is how I was trained and mentored in my teacher education courses; however, it wasn't very much appreciated in this context. The trainee who asked me a lot of questions made me realize that I have to provide more help to trainees compared to the context I thrived. (CAN, No#7)

This experience made me pause and question some of the practices I had taken for granted. I was replicating the kind of guidance that once empowered me (such as giving space, encouraging discovery) but I came to realize that what had worked for me did not necessarily translate well into this new setting. The feedback, especially from the trainee who repeatedly sought more support, gently unsettled my assumptions. It was not just about adjusting my methods; it was about becoming aware of the subtle dissonance between who I had been shaped to be and who I needed to become in this space. These moments of uncertainty, though uncomfortable, quietly pushed me to re-examine how I position myself in relation to others. They also reminded me that growing in this role requires not only reflection, but also the resilience to hold space for discomfort and the flexibility to shift, adapt, and rebuild my approaches as I learn from those around me.

Managing family pressures as a transnational TE was the last subtheme that emerged from the CANs and illustrated how balancing work and parenting is challenging and anxiety-provoking.

I couldn't concentrate on designing the sessions. I'm not satisfied with the training sessions I ran this month. My son doesn't want to go to school. He has separation anxiety and doesn't want to be anywhere without his mom. I'm obsessed with this problem and can't focus on my duties well. I hope I can find a way out of it. (CAN, No#1)

The challenges inherent in balancing work and parenting responsibilities are vividly portrayed in the narrative. The struggle to concentrate on designing and running training sessions and the dissatisfaction with them revealed the impact of personal concerns on professional life. My son's separation anxiety hindered my ability to perform my professional duties effectively, highlighting the pervasive challenges of balancing work and parenting roles. The narrative encapsulates the anxiety-provoking nature of attempting to fulfill both personal and professional obligations, exemplifying the intricate balance required to navigate the complexities of family life and career responsibilities.

### *Meso-transnational ecology*

In the second theme of transnational TE identity formation ecology, two subthemes emerged: emotional resilience to cope with challenges and uncertainties in a transnational workplace and receiving managerial and peer assistance.

The first emerging subtheme in this ecology is emotional resilience which is informed by the colleagues' act of approval.

This month I did my fourth in-house training in my workplace. I had my first in-house training in January 2022 and the feelings are not comparable. The doubt and hesitation on my colleagues' faces are changed to trust and support. I'm proud of it. (CAN, No#8)

One of the most prominent shifts I noticed in my professional journey here was how the social fabric of my workplace shaped my resilience. I still recall the tentative atmosphere during my first in-house training; the unspoken doubts in my colleagues' expressions left me questioning whether I truly belonged. Over time, however, with each training session and shared experience, something shifted. The hesitation gave way to trust, and the quiet skepticism was gradually replaced by open support. This transition did not just affirm my role; it strengthened my sense of stability and confidence within the institution. Emotional resilience, in this sense, was not solely an individual achievement; it was cultivated through the evolving relational dynamics and the tacit approval embedded in collegial interactions.

The second subtheme in the second ecological layer is receiving managerial and peer assistance in a transnational workplace which signifies the importance of the environment you work in.

When I came here I wished I could train in a widely recognized teacher training course but now I am directing one. When the manager said that the finances for applying for Trinity were approved, I was over the moon. Wasn't it a dream coming true? I'm very thankful to . . . and . . . for helping me in the process of approval and I'll do my best to run one of the best in the world. (CAN, No#3)

This moment marked a turning point in my professional life, not only because a long-held aspiration was materializing, but also because it revealed how instrumental the surrounding environment had been in making it possible. While the desire to contribute to an

internationally recognized teacher training program was always there, it was the institutional support (especially the managerial decision to approve funding and the guidance from colleagues) that transformed that desire into action. Their assistance went beyond practical help; it conveyed belief in my potential and alignment with my vision. In a transnational workplace, such moments of collective effort and shared commitment carry enormous weight. They reaffirm that meaningful professional achievements are rarely the result of individual will alone; they are embedded in a web of relationships, institutional structures, and timely encouragement that make striving not only possible but sustainable.

### *Macro-transnational ecology*

There are three subthemes in the third theme of transnational TE identity formation ecology, macro-transnational ecology: providing advocacy for inclusivity in a transnational environment, expanding multifaceted social-cultural-political ideologies in a transnational environment, and fostering community engagement in a transnational environment.

The first subtheme, i.e. providing advocacy for inclusivity, emerged from five CANs, one of which is portrayed.

Although I don't like stereotyping the cultures, some discussions seemed very sensitive for some cultures; so, I had to be more cautious. I can remember discussing the use of L1 in education in multicultural contexts when one of the trainees was so angry that I could see his swollen neck vein saying that my son wanted to speak his first language with others who shared the same but the school didn't let them. (CAN, No#9)

This experience underscored how larger social and cultural forces shape the classroom dynamics. While I try to avoid stereotyping cultures, I recognize that deep-rooted beliefs and policies around language use evoke strong emotions and highlight issues of inclusion and exclusion that go beyond individual classrooms. The trainee's visible frustration over his son's restricted use of their first language at school revealed the ways institutional decisions and cultural norms intersect, impacting learners' identities and experiences. It reminded me that advocating for inclusivity is about fostering understanding within the learning environment and acknowledging and challenging the broader systemic factors that influence who feels heard, valued, and represented.

Expanding multifaceted social-cultural-political ideologies in a transnational environment is the second sub-theme in macro-transnational ecology, emphasizing the comprehensive and dynamic approach to exploring and understanding the interconnected dimensions of society, culture, and politics.

I came across a thought-provoking concept today discussing some issues with my observee. I mentioned that her TTT was high with which she disagreed and said the session needed more of my talk since I was presenting a new concept in a language. She, then, said that I might have a 'confirmation bias' coming from my own culture and beliefs which didn't let me accept her opinion. Although I felt insulted at first, reading about confirmation bias I then realized I might have been influenced by it. (CAN, No#11)

This encounter illuminated how deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and cognitive frameworks shape our perceptions and judgments, often in ways we may not immediately

recognize. The observation about ‘confirmation bias’ challenged me to reflect on how my own cultural background and assumptions might have unconsciously influenced my teaching style and openness to alternative perspectives. Initially, the critique felt personal and uncomfortable, but it soon became a motive for broader self-examination. It highlighted the complex interplay of social, cultural, and ideological forces operating within a transnational environment; forces that require ongoing critical awareness and adaptability. Understanding these dynamics is essential for cultivating a more nuanced, flexible approach to teaching that respects diverse worldviews and fosters genuine intercultural dialogue.

The last subtheme in this macro-transnational ecology is fostering community engagement in a transnational environment which highlights the intricate interrelation between individuals and their broader societal context.

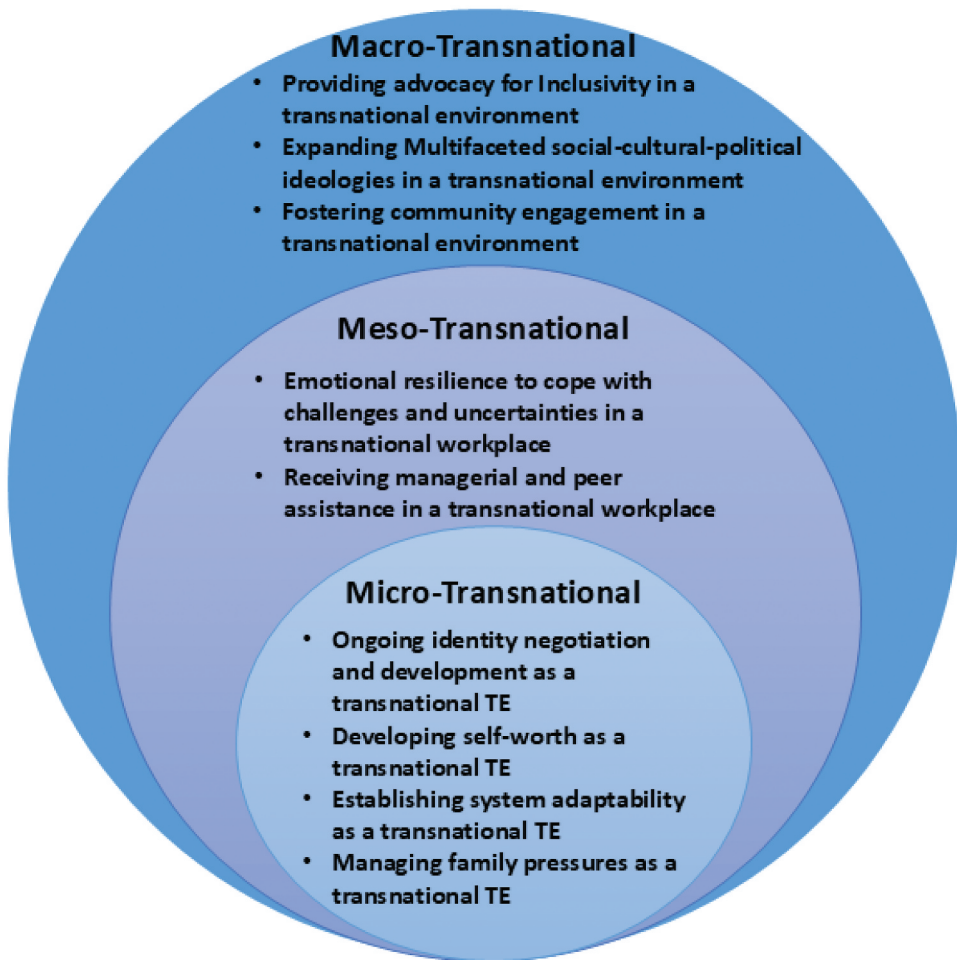
The students attending the trainees’ classes who were Turkish and Arab had a party at the end of the Teaching Practices and brought some food to celebrate with their teachers (our trainees). They brought some homemade food and asked us to have lunch with them. An interesting part for me was when they packed the food at the end and gave it to their teachers (trainees) to take to their dormitory for dinner. Very nice act of generosity. Wasn’t it? (CAN, No#10)

This moment of shared celebration revealed the powerful role that community and cultural exchange play in transcending individual boundaries within a transnational setting. The students’ thoughtful gesture (i.e. inviting their teachers to join a festive meal and generously offering food to take home) symbolized more than just hospitality; it embodied a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and cultural bridging. Such acts highlight how educational spaces are deeply embedded in wider social and cultural contexts, where relationships extend beyond formal roles and foster a communal spirit. This engagement both enriches the immediate learning experience and underscores the interconnectedness between individuals and their broader societal environment, reminding me that fostering community is a vital part of meaningful, transnational educational work.

## Discussion

As I journeyed through the process of identity formation as a transnational TE, the data began to reveal itself in layers, like peeling back the complex skin of my evolving self within this transnational-ecological framework (see [Figure 1](#)). This new lens helped me make sense of the challenges and affordances I encountered, as well as the coping strategies I leaned on to employ and construct a new identity in a new context.

At the micro level of this transnational ecology, I found that my identity was not static but fluid, constantly adapting, growing, and sometimes struggling to balance the familiar roots of my home country with the new soil of the host environment. There were moments when the old and new identities clashed, tugging me in different directions. This echoes the insights of Liao and Maddamsetti (2019), who describe transnational TEs’ identities as ever-shifting, which is in line with Kamali and Nazari (2023) and Song (2022). Yet, what felt particularly striking and personal in my experience (and which I believe adds a fresh perspective to the literature) is how my identity developed a sense of pride. This was not just a byproduct of enduring hardship or managing loss, but a positive



**Figure 1.** Transnational ecological representation of a transnational TE's identity formation.

affirmation of self that blossomed amidst the challenges of transnationality. This contrasts with much of the existing research that often frames transnational identity through a lens of struggle and negative emotion (e.g. Snow et al. 2023; Zembylas 2003). This revelation brought to light the delicate, sometimes paradoxical relationship between transnationality and identity. As I grappled with my shifting sense of belonging, I actively employed coping strategies (Tajeddin and Yazan 2024) – one of which was to consciously alter and negotiate my identities to survive and thrive. This dynamic process, at the heart of this study, highlights identity as both a resource and a site of resistance within the transnational landscape I now inhabit (Nazari 2025).

Moving into the meso layer of this transnational ecological framework, the story becomes more relational, woven through the everyday interactions and subtle undercurrents of my workplace. Here, colleagues, managers, and the broader institutional discourse became active agents in shaping who I was becoming as a transnational TE. These relationships, though often unspoken or nuanced, carried weight (Nazari 2025). They influenced my sense of legitimacy, belonging, and authority in ways that were

sometimes unexpected. What I found aligns with what Nazari, De Costa, and Karimpour (2023) have already suggested that the construction of identity does not happen in isolation but it is dialogic, unfolding through professional relationships and workplace dynamics. As the challenges mounted, I recalled the words of Liao and Maddamsetti (2019), who asserted that ‘institutional support would better promote and sustain ... professional development, including ... identity development’ (290). In my case, this support, or at least the sense of being seen and acknowledged within the institutional fabric, was crucial. Yet my experience diverged from what Yip (2023) observed. Rather than hindering identity development, the workplace dynamics in my context had a largely positive influence. This contrast prompted reflection. Perhaps this difference lies in the nature of global mobility itself. Many transnational educators, including myself, make this move with the hope of accessing better opportunities, leaving behind systems that are under-resourced for ones perceived to offer more stability and support (Cranston and Duplan 2023). In my case, those enhanced conditions created space not just for professional adaptation but for identity growth, a possibility that is often overshadowed by the dominant narratives of loss and struggle in transnational experiences (Kamali and Alpat 2025).

At the macro-transnational level, the story shifts again, this time widening its lens to take in the sociocultural terrain of the host country. Here, broader systems, ideologies, and social norms quietly but powerfully framed my lived experience. Integration was not just a bureaucratic process but a personal endeavor, sometimes invisible, sometimes jarring, and always layered. Like many in my position, I found myself leaning into the desire to belong, to carve a space in this unfamiliar landscape, not just for survival, but to open doors for the future. Engagement with the host community often becomes a necessary act for those of us experiencing new sociocultural worlds (Koinova and Karabegović 2017). In my case, this act of engagement was not only strategic but deeply human. I wanted to be seen *as part of*, not *apart from*. This orientation toward inclusion reflected a deeper thread I noticed in myself, one that aligned with what others have documented (see Kim 2023; Stojanov 2018). Transnationalism in education is not just about mobility; it is about a commitment to inclusivity that is born from lived contrast. Knowing the fact that it is sometimes difficult to see things eye to eye ‘like white light going through a prism’ (Kamali and Alpat 2025, 1) in multilingual contexts (due to different interpretations of one concept depending on individual histories, languages, and cultural references), it is necessary to practice inclusion. Those of us who have known what it means to be marginalized often carry those memories into our career. We remember what exclusion felt like. And perhaps it is this memory, this scar that becomes a compass, urging us not to replicate the same dynamics in our own context.

All in all, the findings have shown that the micro-personal, meso-professional, and macro-social dimensions of my professional life are deeply intertwined, which shows ‘different levels and networks of practice are nested within one another’ (Heikkinen 2020, 35) in this transnational ecological ecosystem. Challenges in one area inevitably ripple into the others, shaping thoughts, actions, and emotional responses in complex ways. What may appear as an isolated personal struggle or a professional shortcoming is often rooted in broader, overlapping systems of responsibility, expectation, and identity. For instance, in the narrative of my CAN NO#1 (see the Findings section), what was happening at home (micro) had a deep and immediate impact on my

professional life (meso). The emotional weight I carried each morning lingered throughout the day, quietly shaping my decisions, interactions, and even the energy I brought into the training room. I tried to keep the two worlds separate, but they were never really disconnected. Perhaps if I had paused to acknowledge how these challenges were part of a larger, more complex picture – one where personal, professional, and even social demands constantly intersect – I might have been better equipped to respond, or at least to be kinder to myself during that time. This transnational ecological framework, then, is not just a map of what I experienced but an invitation to see identity not as fixed or fractured, but as fluid, responsive, and ecologically grounded (Kamali and Nazari 2023). It offers a space to reflect, to reimagine, and to support the professional development of transnational TEs in more holistic and humane ways. In doing so, it echoes the heart of autoethnography itself: writing that does not just inform but transforms.

## Conclusions and implications

In this study, through 12 CANs, I explored my identity formation as a transnational Iranian TE after two years of residence in Türkiye from an ecological perspective which ended in an emergent framework of transnational ecology with three layers: micro-transnational, meso-transnational, and macro-transnational (review Figure 1). Looking back through the lens of this emergent framework, what unfolds is more than a series of findings; it is a story of becoming. This study has shed light on dimensions of transnational TE identity that have often remained in the shadows: the affordances quietly woven into moments of displacement, the subtle and not-so-subtle challenges that persist beneath the surface, and the strategies that make the journey not only possible, but transformative. As transnational TEs, we do not simply carry our pasts with us; we reshape them in response to the contexts we now inhabit. We learn to manage professional shifts and personal reorientations. We also come to see that our in-betweenness, once felt as a fracture, may become a bridge, a vantage point from which to foster inclusion, challenge exclusion, and embrace difference in our educational communities.

The reflections shared in this study may resonate with other TEs navigating similar paths. My experiences (situated, imperfect, evolving) might serve as a mirror for others to explore their own transnational journeys. In reading this narrative, TEs may begin to recognize the subtle shifts in identity that emerge when moving across cultural and educational borders. This work, then, is not just a story; it is an invitation. An invitation to pause, to reflect, and perhaps to write. Engaging in the process of crafting their own CANs can open a space for TEs to revisit and make sense of their personal, national, and transnational experiences. Through such reflection, deeper awareness can emerge, not only of the self, but of the broader professional and cultural forces that shape our work as educators across contexts.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Data availability statement

Data from this study (CANs) are available and will be shared upon request.

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## Appendix

### *Questions guiding my CANs*

What specific experiences have I encountered since moving to Istanbul, and how have they shaped my perspective?

- (1) How do I feel about my transition into this new environment, and what emotions have arisen during this process?
- (2) In what ways have my cultural background and beliefs influenced my adaptation to life in Istanbul?
- (3) What challenges have I faced in my personal and professional life since relocating, and how have I addressed them?
- (4) How do I perceive my identity as a teacher educator in this new context, and how has it evolved over time?
- (5) What connections have I made with local educators and community members, and how have these relationships impacted my experience?
- (6) How have my family members reacted to our move to Istanbul, and how has their experience influenced my own?
- (7) What moments or interactions have had a significant impact on my feelings of belonging or isolation in this new setting?
- (8) How do I navigate the complexities of working in a transnational educational environment, and what insights have I gained from it?
- (9) What reflections do I have on my growth and development as a person and TE since starting this journey in Istanbul?