



Transnational language teachers' emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction: an ecological perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite the recent growth of attention to language teachers' emotional vulnerability, little research has explored emotional vulnerability and identity construction among transnational teachers. Drawing on an ecological theoretical lens, we explored the emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction of transnational language teachers working in the context of Turkey. Data were collected from open-ended questionnaires, narrative frames, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis revealed that across the three classroom (micro), institutional (meso), and sociocultural (macro) ecologies, the transnational teachers experienced contextually-invoked emotional conflicts that positioned their identities in a vulnerable state. Most notably, we found that transnational teachers need to become contextually adaptable to the three ecologies in order to develop professional coping strategies that safeguard them against the chronicle stressors of their profession and context. We situate such adaptability within implications calling for holding preparatory courses that facilitate transnational teachers' transition to the new setting with the hope of positively contributing to their effective professional identity construction.

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Introduction

In recent years, studying language teachers' emotion and identity construction has received exponential growth (e.g. Nazari & Karimpour 2023; Song 2016). The major reason for such augmented attention is the increasing empirical acknowledgement of the substantial role that emotion and identity play in teachers' personal sense-making, institutional membership, and sociocultural performances (Barkhuizen 2016; Wolff and De Costa 2017; Yazan and Lindahl, 2020). This developing body of knowledge highlights that emotion and identity construction are tightly interwoven with contextual particularities, and internal/external peculiarities could impose on teachers emotional/identity tensions that substantially influence their effective professional growth. The latter perspective has been largely discussed in the form of emotional vulnerability, a state in which teachers feel largely affected by contextual factors, power asymmetries, and ideological rules (Gao 2008; Lasky 2005; Song 2016).

A less-researched dimension of language teachers' emotion and identity construction is transnational settings in which teachers could face a host of professional challenges complicating their effective emotional and identification processes (Ruohotie-Lyhty, Aragão, and Pitkänen-Huhta 2021; Vázquez Mora and Trejo Guzmán 2023; Yazan, Pentón Herrera, and Rashed 2023). Such challenges could stem from a wide range of personal, organisational, and sociocultural factors,

which could position transnational teachers in a vulnerable position due to the emotional pressures that such factors could impose on teachers. However, little, if any, research is available on transnational teachers' emotional vulnerability and its contributions to their professional identity construction. The present study aimed to explore this issue among transnational teachers working in the Turkish context. Adopting the theoretical standpoint of ecological perspective, we report how teaching in Turkey served as both an impediment and facilitator of transnational language teachers' emotional vulnerability and identity construction.

Literature review

(Transnational language) teacher emotional vulnerability and identity construction

With the advent of emerging physical and virtual transportation technologies such as planes, the Internet, and international communications, moving beyond borders has become more common, especially in relation to job opportunities. The international mobility in search of a job has become pivotal due to the lack of workforce in most of the developed countries, which has arisen from a decrease in the birth rate in recent decades (Marois, Sabourin, and Bélanger 2019; World Health Organization 2023). This mobility across borders is more common in education in general and particularly in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), which originally came into existence to (literally) blur the boundaries and accelerate globalisation through facilitating intercultural communication. However, the concept of *transnational* teacher is not very old and was not even 'socially imaginable two decades ago' (Norton and de Costa 2018, 90). The impact of globalisation on transnationality is undeniable where post-nationalism, post-colonialism, and even post-methodism emphasise the critical role that multicultural contexts can play in the growth of students' learning (Poort, Jansen, and Hofman 2023; Schwarzenenthal et al. 2020). Nonetheless, the process of virtual transnationality gained momentum with the outbreak of COVID-19 where a boost in telecommunication technology was observed. Parallel with the outburst of the pandemic, teachers realised that they are not restricted to their physical and geographical boundaries but can teach internationality via virtual platforms. In this study, our understanding of transnational teachers aligns with Yazan, Penton Herrera, and Rashed's (2022) understanding that 'transnational practitioners and learners tend to demonstrate hybrid and complex language use, culture, identity, practice, and voice' (4), a condition that is also likely to bring the teachers vulnerabilities and conflicts.

One of the most evident socio-psychological phenomena significantly affected by such transnationality has been language teacher identity (LTI) construction. Identity is a dynamic, intersectional, and complex phenomenon that is constructed in connection with critical elements such as age (Mason and Chik 2020), race (Jenks and Lee 2020; Motha 2014), gender (Sabbe and Aelterman 2007), religion (Karimpour, Jafari, and Nazari 2022; White 2009; Wong and Mahboob 2018), media (Carpenter et al. 2019), self-expression (McMahill 2001; Riley 2006), and future career trajectory (Moodie and Greenier 2023; Schutz, Cross Francis, and Hong 2018). As a factor that increases multicultural and multilingual encounters (Liu and Li 2023), transnationalism makes LTI even more complex and interconnected with various social, cultural, and political peculiarities. Moreover, as a process 'mediated by contesting discourses and practices emerging out of heterogeneous and dynamic communities beyond the nation state' (Sánchez-Martín 2022, 557), LTI is (re)shaped by teachers' encounters with multicultural learners, colleagues, and institutions (Bar-khuizen 2016; De Costa and Norton 2017).

In an ethnographic study, Jackson (2016) found that language teachers continuously shift to multiple identities to thrive and work in an unfamiliar setting. In another study, Ruohotie-Lyhty, Aragão, and Pitkänen-Huhta (2021) found revolutionary differences in the social status of the teaching profession in Finnish and Brazilian contexts, which influenced teachers' professional identities as well. In a more recent study, Vázquez Mora and Trejo Guzmán (2023) investigated the

transnational mobility experienced by two Mexican language teachers in the US and the UK. The findings of the study showed the complex relationship among different factors influencing teachers' LTIs. Moreover, Liu and Li (2023) reviewed the literature on LTI and concluded that there are three factors highly influencing LTIs, namely, native speakerism, the 'pecking order' that is a hierarchy of group status 'deeply ingrained in one's sub-consciousness' (Zhu and Kramsch 2016, 377), and teachers' transnational and multicultural experiences.

Of particular importance in the factors influencing LTI construction, specifically within the context of transnationalism, is emotion (Barcelos et al. 2022; Song 2016; 2022). The literature acknowledges emotion as a critical factor in the construction and development of LTIs (Nazari and Karimpour 2022; Benesch 2012; Song 2016; Weng and Troyan 2023; Wolff and De Costa 2017). In general education, Zembylas (2003) asserted that teacher identity is at bottom affective in that emotions stick to discourses and practices to (re)structure teachers' identities, a point also voiced by Benesch (2012). Our understanding of emotion in this study aligns with an ecological perspective that considers emotions as both intrapersonally and interpersonally constructed (see Nazari, Karimi, and De Costa 2023; Van Lier 2011). This perspective opens room for understanding how teachers personally make sense of their emotions and how emotions are constructed in light of external forces, which resonates with the affective states that transnational teachers often experience (see Yazan, Penton Herrera, and Rashed 2022).

A central thread within the line of thinking on teacher emotion is when contextual particularities clash with teachers' emotional sense-making and position them in a vulnerable state. Emotional vulnerability refers to the 'multidimensional, multifaceted emotional experience that individuals can feel in an array of contexts' (Lasky 2005, 901). Lasky went on to suggest that emotional vulnerability 'is a fluid state of being that can be influenced by the way people perceive their present situation as it interacts with their identity, beliefs, values, and sense of competence' (901). Emotional vulnerability is a double-edged sword, having openness and trust on one side as its positive dimension and powerlessness or defenselessness on the other as its negative side (Gao 2008; Kelchtermans 1996; 2009). These two dimensions occur in different situations for teachers. On the one hand, teachers undergo open vulnerability in an environment where they are safe and feel confident to take risks and, on the other hand, experience protective vulnerability when they feel anxious and stressed (Song 2016). The experience of emotional vulnerability often occurs for teachers when a gap between 'what they try to feel' and 'what they actually feel' exists (Zembylas 2002, 196).

Recent literature has explored teachers' (emotional) vulnerability and how it contributes to their identity formation (Alsup 2018; Cutri and Whiting 2015; Gao 2008; Song 2023; Uitto et al. 2016; Yip 2023). This body of knowledge shows that emotional vulnerability plays a key role in teachers' identities through shaping their professional relationships (e.g. Gao 2008), their ability to adapt to the existing policies (e.g. Florida and Mbato 2020; Holappa et al. 2022), and their reflexivity as non-native English-speaking teachers in navigating online teaching (e.g. Song 2022). This line of thinking and research is consistent with the earlier discussions that attest to the role of emotional challenges and tensions in teachers' process of identity construction (see Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Beijgaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Yazan and Lindahl 2020). Thus, emotional vulnerability could substantially reconstruct teachers' identities when identities and meaning-making processes clash with contextual ecologies, including personal, institutional, and sociocultural issues. From this perspective, unpacking how such ecologies shape teachers' emotional vulnerability provides a comprehensive understanding of the way emotional vulnerability shapes teachers' identity construction.

Theoretical framework: an ecological perspective

Ecology found its way into education through the works of Bronfenbrenner (1979) who considered education as a nested ecosystem including different layers. Later, Bronfenbrenner (1993) characterised this phenomenon by relating four stages to it: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, which are interconnected. Rogoff (1995) visualises a classroom in which participants are busy

walking, talking, and socialising where three layers are recognisable, namely, institutional, interpersonal, and personal layers. Van Lier (2011) suggests that these layers correspond with three participation structures including ‘Apprenticeship, guided Participation, and Participatory Appropriation’ (391) where the first entails a long time scale of working with a master or a guild; the second denotes ‘particular patterns of master–apprentice interaction’, and the third ‘refers to the moment-to-moment microgenesis of cognitive understandings resulting from interactional dynamics’ (391). Considering these three levels of participation, the three of the layers suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1993) as the micro, meso, and macro become vital in defining the complex ecology where teachers and learners are situated. This is evident in the work of scholars like Zembylas (2002) who conceptualised teacher emotions based on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup perspectives, which are aligned with personal, interindividual-institutional, and sociocultural dimensions.

There is a rich literature on applying an ecological framework in the field of TESOL and applied linguistics (e.g. Nazari, Karimi, and De Costa 2023; Allard 2017; Duff and Van Lier 1997; Edwards and Burns 2016; Garner and Borg 2005; Tudor 2003). This scholarship shows that an ecological perspective facilitates capturing the complexity and layered nature of teachers’ experiences and meaning-making processes because these processes are embedded within communities that are in turn influenced by larger ecologies. Thus, using an ecological framework is helpful in unpacking how emotion and identity, as inherently ecological constructs, dialectically shape teachers’ professionalism, a purpose that we seek in this study in relation to transnational language teachers.

Therefore, it becomes critically pivotal to find out how teachers’ emotional vulnerability in microsystem (classroom), mesosystem (institution), and macrosystem (sociopolitical factors) can impact their identity construction and development. It is noteworthy that this study aims to explore this framework on transnational language teachers’ identity as they encounter different social, cultural, and political norms of the multicultural context in which they work. However, little, if any, research is available on the emotional vulnerability of transnational teachers and its associated effects on their professional identity construction. The present study aims to address this gap through the following questions:

- (1) How do pedagogical, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies influence language teachers’ emotional vulnerability?
- (2) How does such emotional vulnerability contribute to the teachers’ professional identity construction?

Method

Participants and context

The study was conducted in the Turkish context where tourism has a wide impact on its social, cultural, political, and educational policies and practices (Aygün Oğur and Baycan 2023; Ozturk and Van Niekerk 2014). The Turkish higher education system including state and private universities experienced a transformation that led to having more international universities where learning English became a prominent requisite for their teachers and students (Birler 2012; Uştuk and Yazan 2023). Therefore, universities started providing English courses in prep schools where the students learn English one year before entering their faculties. These courses emerged to help university students with their linguistic needs for their academic endeavours. Based on this aim, these courses claim to adopt an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) approach and focus specifically on the skills that these students need in their academic life such as writing essays, response papers, note-taking, and the like. In this context, teachers from different sociocultural backgrounds taught the students, which was the main reason for selecting this context for conducting the study.

The participants of the present study were all foreigners teaching in one of these prep schools at a university in Istanbul, Turkey. Bosnian, Dutch, British, Indian, Syrian, Iraqi, American, and two

Iranian teachers participated in the study. They had been teaching English for more than 5 years and held BA, MA, and PhD in English-related subjects, Management, and Education (see [Table 1](#)). It should be mentioned that the first author invited the participants and once they stated their approval, the process of data collection started. Thus, participation in the study was completely voluntary.

Design and data collection

We adopted an exploratory, qualitative research design in exploring the transnational participants' emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction because this design helps explore under-researched topics and in pristine contexts ([Ary et al. 2014](#)) both of which were the case with our study. Guided by this design, the study was conducted by collecting data from three sources.

As a first step and because of the multinational configuration of the research setting, we aimed to understand how different ecologies of teaching result in the teachers' emotional vulnerability. Thus, we designed an open-ended questionnaire ([Appendix A](#)) that asked the teachers to list the range of factors that positioned them in an emotionally-vulnerable state. The teachers were asked to respond to the following question: 'Please list the pedagogical, institutional, and social-cultural factors that can put you, emotionally, in a condition that you become negatively influenced as a transnational teacher'. This question captured the ecological perspective we had in mind and examined the emotional vulnerability of the teachers.

Since emotion and identity are processes closely connected to teachers' historicity and backgrounds ([Benesch 2012](#); [Song 2016](#); [Zembylas 2003](#)), we aimed to examine the teachers' concrete experiences where they have faced emotional vulnerability. Thus, we designed a narrative frame ([Appendix B](#)), which is an effective tool for exploring teachers' emotional and identification processes (see [Nazari et al. 2023](#); [Barkhuizen and Wette 2008](#); [Kayi-Aydar 2021](#)). The frame asked the teachers to (1) share one of their most-remembered experiences influencing their emotions as a transnational teacher, (2) the reason for mentioning the particular experience, (3) the factor (s) underlying the experience, (4) how the experience influenced their self-perceptions, and (5) how the experience shaped their relationships and pedagogical performances. The teachers completed the frame in English and sent them to us via a goggle form.

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the teachers' emotional vulnerability and LTIs across the three ecologies, we conducted a semi-structured interview with them ([Appendix C](#)). The interview aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how being a transnational teacher could position the teachers in a vulnerable state and the associated effects on their professional identity construction. The interview protocol had five questions including (1) how the teachers felt as transnational teachers, (2) what classroom-level factors could position the teachers in a vulnerable state and how such factors shaped their identities, (3) what institutional factors could position the teachers in a vulnerable state and how such factors shaped their identities, (4) what

Table 1. Demographic information of the transnational teachers.

Teacher	Gender and age	Education	Years of teaching	Nationality
T1	Female 40	B.A. English Literature	15	Bosnian
T2	Male 32	M.A. (Applied Linguistics)	5	Dutch
T3	Male 39	M.A. (TESOL)	12	British
T4	Male 28	M.A. (Management)	7	Indian
T5	Male 40	M.A. (TEFL)	15	Syrian
T6	Male 34	M.A. (English Literature)	10	Iraqi
T7	Female 52	M.A. (Education)	22	American
T8	Female 42	M.A. (TEFL)	14	Iranian
T9	Female 51	Ph.D. (TEFL)	22	Iranian
T10	Female 40	M.A. (ELT)	16	Russian

sociocultural factors could position the teachers in a vulnerable state and how such factors shaped their identities, and (5) what major emotional tensions transnational teachers experience in the Turkish context and how they influence teachers' professional identity construction. The interviews were scheduled on Zoom, and they lasted on average 30 min as conducted in English.

Data analysis

In analyzing the data, we followed the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) since we aimed to develop codes and themes that could effectively show the focal transnational teachers' emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction. Thus, after transcribing the data, we engaged in developing the initial codes. This was done by the first author who was an educator in Turkey, a factor that positioned him as an individual familiar with the context so that he could interpret the findings in light of sociocultural particularities of this context. Additionally, he was also a transnational teacher, which was highly effective in analyzing data based on his own membership in the educational system of Turkey and in extracting effective codes and themes.

We thus developed initial codes that tapped how context and the three ecologies shape transnational teachers' emotional vulnerability (featuring here as tensions and clashes) and their associated identity construction processes. In this regard, we developed codes per classroom, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies, which have been presented below. For example, when the teachers referred to cultural differences between their own and students' understanding of certain words and the associated impacts on their emotions in terms of complicating their practice, this was coded as 'cultural differences as a source of practice-related emotional vulnerability'. Or, when the teachers referred to organisational behaviours that challenged their belonging, this was coded as 'transnationalism as a source of identity conflicts'. It must be pointed out that we coded the three sources separately in the first stage of analysis. In this regard, we first coded the questionnaires to unpack the factors influencing the teachers' emotional vulnerability and then coded the narrative frames. Then, we analyzed the interviews to expand on the two earlier sources, which involved integrative analysis of the data sources.

Additionally, we extracted the contextual sources that resulted in the teachers' emotional vulnerability and how such vulnerabilities contributed to the teachers' identity construction. This process was repeated across the three data sources in an integrative process so that we could mingle the sources. Then, we developed themes that could represent the codes and were illustrative of how context shapes transnational teachers' emotional vulnerability and identity construction. We also engaged in peer discussions to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis and the write-up procedure. The following section presents the study findings.

Findings

Data analyses revealed that a myriad of classroom, institutional, and sociocultural factors influenced the teachers' emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction, which have been schematically represented in Figure 1. Regarding Figure 1, it should be clarified that the three micro-pedagogical, meso-institutional, and macro-sociocultural levels are the major themes, which include codes that posed on the teachers' emotional vulnerability. Furthermore, the right column involves codes relating to the effects of emotional vulnerability on the teachers' professional identity construction.

Micro-pedagogical factors

Regarding the micro-pedagogical ecology (i.e. in-class events), four codes emerged from the data: unfamiliarity with students' backgrounds, material inappropriateness, different standards, and demotivated students. All participating teachers concurred that pedagogical factors were a major

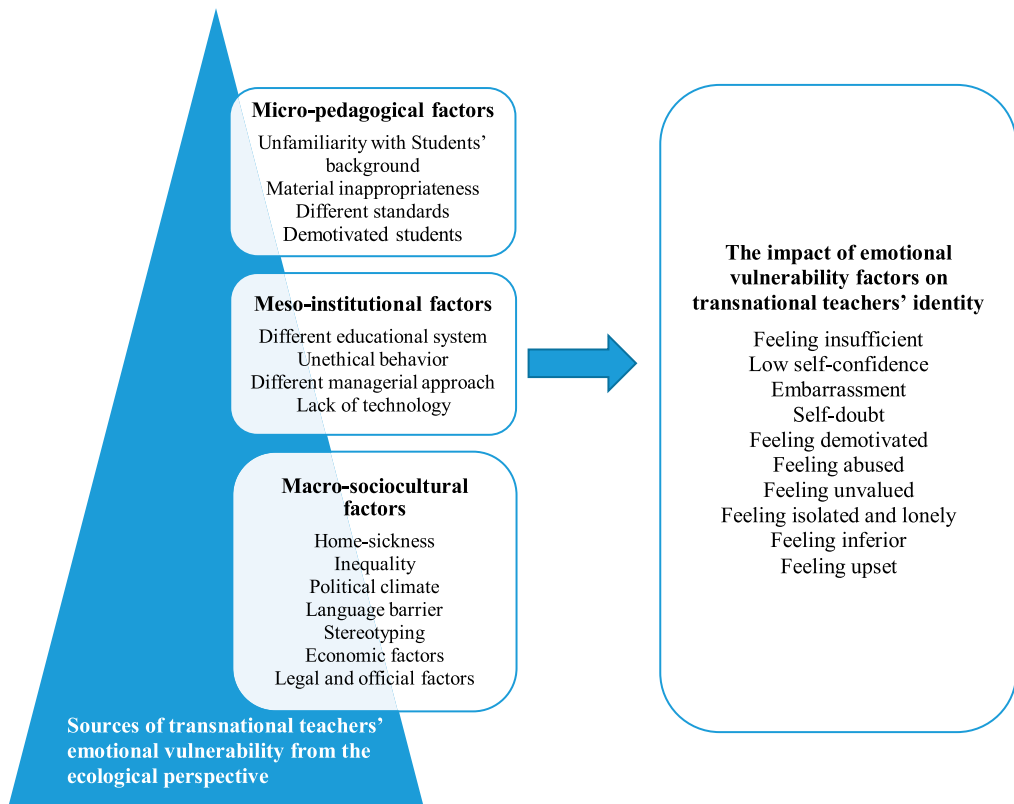


Figure 1. Sources of transnational teachers' emotional vulnerability and their impact on teachers' identity.

source of their emotional vulnerability. T8 narrated a story of what had happened to her in one of her first experiences in the current teaching context. She explained how teaching the false friend (i.e. word pairings that are phonetically similar but semantically different) of Zarf in Persian (the official language of Iran) and Turkish (it means a container in Farsi and an envelope in Turkish) made her feel incompetent about her abilities when she found out she made a mistake in teaching that new word. T3, additionally, stated in the interview that materials sometimes waste his time in the class. He asserted that the materials designed and produced by Western scholars feel 'like a tool for the interests of the white middle class' (T3, Interview). He believed that he wastes valuable time adapting the material to suit his teaching context, and it becomes more time-consuming when teachers have little knowledge about the culture at which they teach. Furthermore, teachers felt that they could be frustrated and even burned out by different standards of education and the diverse needs of students as experienced by transnational teachers in multicultural communities. T5 expressed this issue in a narrative as follows:

One of my most remembered experiences when an issue extremely and negatively influenced my emotions was coping with a large class and diverse learning needs. I mention this particular experience because it was very challenging to teach large classes with different proficiency levels of students for almost two years at the university. The major factor underlying this experience was the unrealistic expectations of the administration. This experience influenced me by reading more about teaching large classes and differentiation. It also influenced my teaching by taking formal training courses such as CELTA [Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults] and DELTA [Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages]. (T5, Narrative Frame)

Although T5 expressed the negative emotions that he experienced in that specific class, it led him to develop professionally and learn how to deal with similar situations. T9 also admitted that

institutional factors ameliorated the situation when, in the interview, she stated ‘The major factor underlying this experience was the unrealistic expectations by the administration’ (T9, Interview). Students’ demotivation was the last pedagogical factor that resulted in the focal transnational teachers’ emotional vulnerability. T9 wrote in his narrative:

It’s difficult to deal with unmotivated students. They are from different cultures and they are motivated differently. So, it’s difficult to keep them motivated all the time. I can remember that it affected me negatively in one of my classes because I just wanted to teach the lesson and finish it. I didn’t like the feeling but I couldn’t do anything. I just passed the time to finish the class. (T9, Narrative Frame)

Nevertheless, these factors had positive effects on the teachers’ professional identities since they made teachers reflect on their own actions, cognitions, and emotions, leading to their enhanced criticality. T9 asserted that although she had suffered from demotivating students in her classes, it made her reflect upon her teaching style and try to find ways of dealing with students’ demotivation. Relatedly, T3 shared a narrative of how students had asked him to shave his beard, which initially came out as a challenge, yet he attempted to look on the positive side of the experience:

This experience influenced me by making me feel like an imposter, well to some extent; I have learnt to cope with it. It also influenced my job as I had often worked harder to prove that I was a ‘real’ teacher. (T3, Narrative Frame)

Meso-institutional factors

The second dimension of the teachers’ emotional vulnerability spotlighted institutional factors. Four codes defined the teachers’ emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction, including different educational systems, unethical behaviours, different managerial approaches, and lack of technology.

Different curricula, managerial expectations, and differences in educational systems were the sources of emotional vulnerability, resulting from different expectations of teachers and students. T6 pointed this out by saying ‘... I don’t really know what my students expect from me; they sometimes call me too serious while in my culture I was considered a lenient teacher’ (T6, Interview). This issue markedly revealed a difficulty that transnational teachers can face as it positioned T6 in a state of feeling upset. Gossiping and backbiting were also unethical behaviours that two of the participant teachers disclosed, as shared in a narrative by T7:

One of my most remembered experiences when an issue extremely and negatively influenced my emotions was when I worked at a different school. Other teachers ignored me and gossiped about me with my students. I mention this particular experience because it was traumatizing. The major factor underlying this experience was jealousy (I believe teachers were jealous over salary differences). This experience influenced me by discouraging and demotivating me. I didn’t work as hard as I should. It also influenced my job/relationships/teaching, etc. by demotivating me. I didn’t have any friends or people to talk to. I felt alone and depressed. (T7, Narrative Frame)

Inadequate awareness of the duties and of managerial expectations were other sources of emotional vulnerability for the teachers. Among all the qualities of the managerial approach which made the teachers emotionally vulnerable, lack of support, unclear duties, micro-management, nepotism, over-criticising, gossiping, backbiting, and revealing secrets stood out. For instance, T10 compared her workplace to a dark ocean where she was left alone with no guidance and support. The last code that emerged in this theme was the lack of technology. T1, complaining about the lack of investment in technology, argued that ‘without technology, teaching becomes boring for both teachers and learners’ (T1, Interview). Such a lack of technology affected her emotionally in not being able to use new technological advancements.

T8 stated that high expectations of the institution from teachers led her to feel abused, negatively shaping her professional identity investment. She asserted in a narrative that it is a type of exploitation by which the employer tried to get an advantage from her, which led to quitting the job:

... gaining a feeling of unwelcomeness and being a second-rate citizen, in turn reducing my workplace motivation to nigh-on zero. Having to do CELTA last-minute and online on top of a full workload, having no time or care to actually prepare or put energy into lessons, frequent verbal fights with management when trying to address the issue, and soon after completion quitting my job. (T8, Narrative Frame)

Macro-sociocultural factors

The last dimension of the ecology of transnational language teachers' emotional vulnerability was related to sociocultural factors, a theme that entailed home-sickness, inequality, political climate, language barrier, stereotyping, economic factors, and legal and official codes.

One of the sociocultural factors affecting the teachers' psychological states was homesickness, getting deteriorated when teachers were influenced by other factors such as pedagogical and institutional challenges. T2 expressed that '... as an immigrant, people seem to come and go and leave you alone. You feel isolated. You feel homesick' (T2, Interview). Inequality, however, was the most common code in the interviews. Some teachers believed that domestic teachers received preferential treatment by gaining more respect and even salary compared to foreigners. Some thought that they were seen as brands for their workplaces because of their race which was degrading since their qualifications were overshadowed by their ethnicity. However, T4 viewed this issue from a different perspective, disclosing that she was blamed for discrimination:

One of my most remembered experiences when an issue extremely and negatively influenced my emotions was when two students accused me of discrimination, saying I treat them differently because of a headscarf. In reality, they failed the course and tried to get a passing grade by blaming me for discrimination. I mention this particular experience because I don't like injustice and deception. Also, for a long time after, I was very careful in how I treated my students, making sure I give everyone the same attention. The major factor underlying this experience was emotional. This experience influenced me by questioning myself and over-analyzing my behavior toward students. It also influenced my job/relationships/teaching, etc. by realizing that some students will do anything to pass. (T4, Narrative Frame)

The political climate was the next issue that impacted teachers' emotional vulnerability. T3 explained how the political climate of a country can affect how students and colleagues see transnational teachers. In his words, 'when conservatives came to power, I felt at ease because they had easier rules for immigrants' (T3, Interview). The language barrier was also a social issue that some teachers believed could make them emotionally vulnerable since they were considered aliens when they cannot speak the host country's native language fluently. T8 went further expressing that 'even if you can communicate fluently, they can find out you are not native from your accent and it influences how they behave' (T8, Interview). Stereotyping was another code that emerged from the data. T5 complained that he has been frowned upon in the first session of their classes by students when they knew his origin. He believed that it happened because of the stereotypes surrounding people from that specific nationality. The last two economic and legal factors made the teachers frustrated. T7 said 'I, at least, expect the same economic condition as my home country. Otherwise, what is the benefit of immigrating?' (T7, Interview). A similar point was clearly explained by T10:

One of my most remembered experiences ... that influenced my well-being was the lack of guidance I have received as an international tutor with regard to family residence procedure. ... I mention this particular example because it significantly affected the status of my husband who was asked to leave the country and I was not fully capable of managing all responsibilities by myself (considering that I was pregnant and he was the only support I had in the country ... I was grateful to the support of colleagues who shared what they know). However, because laws tend to constantly change, as a teacher I would like to be regularly informed about any updates and policy amendments that can influence my stay, housing, health care, access to facilities, and anything related to social life. (T10, Narrative Frame)

T10 went on to discuss how this experience restructured her identity: 'I dedicated a lot of time, effort, and money and you start questioning if you did the right things because you're not able to support your family' (T10, Interview). Such factors also demotivated the other teachers and made them avoid making friends.

Discussion

The above-presented data reveal that across the three classroom, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies, our focal transnational teachers experienced emotional conflicts and tensions that positioned them in a vulnerable state and influenced their professional identity construction. At the classroom level, the teachers faced challenges that not only imposed on them emotional vulnerability but also negatively influenced their identities to perform effectively. Previous research (e.g. Gao 2008; Song 2016) has discussed how classroom-level issues come to serve as a strong source of emotional vulnerability for teachers, especially the impacts of negative emotions on teachers' identity construction (Nazari and Karimpour 2023; Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). Nonetheless, our findings particularly resonate with those reported in Song (2022) regarding how being a teacher from a different culture comes to cause emotional vulnerability. Our findings, however, add to this discussion by showing (1) how being a transnational teacher comes to position teachers in a vulnerable situation that negatively influences their identities and classroom performances and (2) how linguistic differences and identities of teachers and students becomes a major dimension of such emotional vulnerability (see Kocabaş-Gedik and Ortaçtepe Hart 2021). These findings unpack novel dimensions of how transnationalism is dominant when teachers do not receive preparatory courses that facilitate their transition to the classroom context whose negative outcomes could inevitably extend to students' effective learning. The findings also show how when teachers' emotions become negatively influenced by in-class events, teachers are likely to experience conflicts in effectively constructing their identities (Yazan, Penton Herrera, and Rashed 2022), especially in constructive exchange of meaning with students.

Institutionally speaking, the teachers experienced a myriad of negative emotions due to inadaptability to the educational system of Turkey. Uştuk and Yazan (2023) also discuss how institutional dimensions could become a source of identity tensions, especially when teachers need time to become acclimatised to the educational system, a finding also reported in Yazan, Penton Herrera, and Rashed (2022) in the context of transnational teacher educators. Relatedly, our findings align with those reported in Nazari et al. (2023) who showed that managerial barriers become a major source of emotional tensions within the school ecology. Consistent with this line of research, our findings show that the emotional vulnerability of (transnational) teachers (see Alsup 2018; Kelchtermans 2009) is closely connected to their identities, which adds to Lasky's (2005) discussion of the interconnection between the two by showing how teachers need to deal with *differences* and become *adaptable* to the system. Thus, it seems that a key dimension of emotional vulnerability and identity construction is the power to become adaptable to the educational system so as to resolve the differences, a point that we discuss in the final paragraph of this section as well. Relatedly, this interconnection between institutional power and teacher identity has been extensively emphasised in the literature (e.g. Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Beijgaard et al. 2004; Song 2016; Yazan and Lindahl 2020), yet here it shows how institutional performances complicate transnational teachers' work in emotional terms, which seems to constitute a large share of these teachers' professional career.

At the sociocultural ecology, the teachers were faced with a host of emotional challenges that lay in the intersection between their personal sense-making and social-cultural peculiarities. A careful look at the themes presented in Figure 1 reveals that inasmuch as emotional vulnerability is a personal process, it is equally or more a sociopolitical phenomenon. The sociopolitical character of emotional vulnerability becomes more conspicuous when interpreted through the lens of transnationalism because it seems that there are many under-examined dimensions of emotional vulnerability that should emerge in future research. Recent research developments (e.g. Florida and Mbato 2020; Holappa et al. 2022; Song 2022, 2023) have been effective in broadening the landscape of emotional vulnerability, yet it seems that many social issues provide an effective venue to explore their contributions to emotional vulnerability of transnational teachers in greater depth. Although we have shown how issues like inequality, injustice, economic condition, and jurisdictional factors shape our teachers' emotional vulnerability, we believe that each of these and many other factors

need devoted research endeavours to unpack the levels of their impact and contribution, a point that adds value to this study in bringing this issue up in the context of transnational teacher professionalism. In this regard, our findings closely resonate with those shared in Yazan, Penton Herrera, and Rashed (2022) regarding the range of emotional challenges that transnational teachers experience, also negatively influencing their identities as effective professionals. Yet, our findings add to this discussion by showing how sociocultural challenges position transnational teachers in a vulnerable condition that comes to negatively influence their adaptation to the context of Turkey.

Although our findings showed how context negatively shapes transnational teachers' emotional vulnerability and identity construction, the present study is also among the first studies that show the positive side of emotional vulnerability. As discussed in the initial sections of the study, emotional vulnerability could have two positive and negative sides, yet most of the previous studies have remained theoretical in their diction of the positive contributions of emotional vulnerability. We showed that emotional vulnerability could in turn motivate the teachers to adopt context-sensitive coping strategies that lessen the negative bar of emotional vulnerability for their professional identity construction (also see Song 2022). That is, being vulnerable to the challenges of the Turkish context helped the teachers gradually adopt strategies that safeguarded them against the pernicious effects of those challenges over time. In this regard, the teachers drew on their identity learning (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Beijaard et al. 2004; Yazan and Lindahl 2020) to develop strategies that facilitated their engagement within the communities of educational practice in Turkey. In particular, emotional vulnerability could positively influence the teachers' professional adaptation through guiding their reflection, a point that merits focal attention in future research. Thus, the study offers fresh insights into how emotional vulnerability could serve as a proactive catalyzer for transnational teachers' professional identity construction either because they have no other alternatives to do or they find such an initiative effective or due to other reasons. Future research should unpack these reasons in greater depth.

Conclusion

This study explored transnational language teachers' emotional vulnerability and professional identity construction working in Turkey through an ecological perspective. The findings revealed that across the classroom, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies, the transnational teachers experienced various emotional challenges that positioned their identities in a vulnerable state. Most notably, we found that transnational teachers need to become contextually adaptable to the three ecologies in order to develop professional coping strategies that safeguard them against the chronicle stressors of their profession. From this perspective, we believe that if there is one lesson that we can communicate through this study, it is to suggest implications for educational decision-makers to hold preparatory teacher education courses that facilitate transnational teachers' adaptation to the new contexts. Of course, there have been calls for seeking such preparatory courses (e.g. Song 2022; Yazan, Penton Herrera, and Rashed 2022), yet it is important for such courses to entail preparatory modules relative to all the three ecologies, a point that is a novel contribution of this study to the literature of emotional vulnerability, LTI construction, and transnationalism.

Consistent with the findings of the study, teacher education courses could include the challenges that transnational teachers are likely to face at the in-class, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies. When such challenges are embedded in preparatory courses, transnational teachers can transition to the world of practice with more readiness, or at least with more awareness of the causes and scales of the challenges. This way, they become more embracing of the differences, a point that can help them deal with their vulnerabilities more effectively. Moreover, the study offers theoretical implications regarding the conceptualisation of (transnational) teachers' emotional vulnerability in that they seem to necessarily develop certain coping strategies over time. Thus, research should move beyond simply characterising teachers' emotional vulnerabilities toward the affordances that teachers draw on to address their vulnerabilities across the in-class, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies.

Our study suggests avenues for further research that could lead to a fuller understanding of emotional vulnerability, LTIs, and transnationalism. In particular, we could not observe the teachers' classes to see how in-class events could bear emotional fluctuations that shape students' and teachers' perceptions of/about transnationalism. This was a limitation of the study and could be an effective agenda for further research. Additionally, considering the layered and context-dependent nature of both teacher identity and emotional vulnerability, we were interested in but could not explore the cognition of institutional policymakers and decision-makers, which was another limitation of the study and could be pursued in future research. As we observed, there are many dimensions of each of the ecologies that could serve as fecund grounds for future research. Specifically, given the neoliberal and neo-national character of transnational teachers' work, examining the role of sociopolitical factors in teachers' emotion and identity construction would be a productive line of research. Overall, we hope that educational decision-makers could use the study findings to more effectively prepare transnational teachers in response to the classroom, institutional, and sociocultural ecologies of work within and beyond the Turkish context.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The open-ended questionnaire

Please list the pedagogical, institutional, and social-cultural factors that can put you, emotionally, in a condition that you become negatively influenced as a teacher educator.

Appendix B: Narrative frame

One of my most remembered experiences when an issue extremely and negatively influenced my emotions was ---
 ---. I mention this particular experience because ---
 ---. The major factor underlying this experience was ---
 ---. This experience influenced me by ---
 ---. It also influenced my job/relationships/teaching, etc. by ---

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview questions

- (1) How do you feel as a transnational teacher? What are the benefits and challenges?
- (2) What pedagogical factors in the teacher training courses or classes influence your emotions negatively? How do those factors put you in a condition that you feel easily affected? How do they influence your perceptions about yourself as a transnational teacher?
- (3) What institutional factors in the organisation influence your emotions negatively? How do those factors put you in a condition that you feel easily affected? How do they influence your perceptions about yourself as a transnational teacher?
- (4) What social and cultural factors influence your emotions negatively? How do those factors put you in a condition that you feel easily affected? How do they influence your perceptions about yourself as a transnational teacher?
- (5) In your opinion, what major challenges do transnational teachers experience in this context? How do such challenges influence their emotions and self-perceptions as teachers?