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v rámci publikační skupiny Publishing Group "Vědecká perspektiva"

MODERNÍ ASPEKTY VĚDY

Svazek LIX mezinárodní kolektivní monografie

Česká republika 2025 International Economic Institute s.r.o. (Czech Republic)
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University of New Technologies (Kyiv, Ukraine) International Consulting company "Sidcon" (Kyiv, Ukraine) European Lyceum "Scientific Perspectives" (Kyiv, Ukraine)

within the Publishing Group "Scientific Perspectives"

MODERN ASPECTS OF SCIENCE

59-th volume of the international collective monograph

Czech Republic 2025

ISBN 978-617-8614-15-7 https://doi.org/10.52058/59-2025 UDC 001.32: 1/3] (477) (02) C91

Vydavatel:

Mezinárodní Ekonomický Institut s.r.o. se sídlem V Lázních 688, Jesenice 252 42 IČO 03562671 Česká republika Zveřejněno rozhodnutím akademické rady

Mezinárodní Ekonomický Institut s.r.o. (Zápis č. 197/2025 ze dne 08. srpna 2025)



Monografie jsou indexovány v mezinárodním vyhledávači Google Scholar

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C91 Moderní aspekty vědy: LIX. Díl mezinárodní kolektivní monografie / Mezinárodní Ekonomický Institut s.r.o., Česká republika: Mezinárodní Ekonomický Institut s.r.o., 2025. str. 467

Svazek LIX mezinárodní kolektivní monografie obsahuje publikace o: utváření a rozvoji teorie a historie veřejné správy; formování regionální správy a místní samosprávy; provádění ústavního a mezinárodního práva; finance, bankovnictví a pojišťovnictví; duševní rozvoj osobnosti; rysy lexikálních výrazových prostředků imperativní sémantiky atd.

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§3.2 NAVIGATING MULTIDIMENSIONAL AGENCY: COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE, AND RELATIONAL DYNAMICS IN PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHER LEARNING (Gladushyna R.M., Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University)

Introduction. The contemporary landscape of education is characterized by a paradigm shift towards learner-centered pedagogies, where agency is recognized as a foundation of effective and empowering education [1]. Though this issue has gained increasing attention in recent years, there is still a gap in understanding how this concept manifests and develops within the specific context of pre-service teacher education, particularly for future EFL teachers.

Multiple internal and external factors influence the complex process through which pre-service EFL teachers develop their professional agency. The understanding of teacher agency has shifted from traditional intellectual or behavioral views to recognize it as a multidimensional concept that includes cognitive, affective, and relational aspects. Therefore, agency cannot be seen as a one-dimensional notion; it is inherently multidimensional. Understanding how preservice teachers navigate and develop their agency within the dynamic contexts of education programs requires a comprehensive and detailed perspective.

Drawing on theoretical frameworks of learner agency [2], relational agency that enhances professional agency [3], and teacher identity development [4], this research argues that pre-service EFL teachers' agency is best understood as an emergent and contextually based phenomenon resulting from a complex interaction of their cognitive processes, emotional responses, and relational engagements.

This study further investigates how pre-service teachers engage with knowledge, emotions, and professional relationships, and how academic contexts influence the real-time development of their professional agency.



The study uses a qualitative case study approach to examine these dynamics within the context of the Practical English and Translation Course. By focusing on the lived experiences of pre-service EFL teachers (graduate students), this research aims to shed light on the complex realities of guiding agency during their formative teaching development process. It also provides insight into how they understand their roles, handle emotional challenges, and interact socially within the possibilities and limitations of their learning environments.

Moreover, this study seeks to highlight the pedagogical and structural implications for supporting holistic agency development in teacher education programs. Ultimately, it calls for a reimagining of pre-service teacher training as a space that actively nurtures cognitive autonomy, emotional resilience, and relational engagement.

The Main Body. The concept of teacher agency has gained increasing importance in research on teacher education, particularly within the context of preservice learning. Key strands of scholarship on **cognitive**, **affective**, and **relational** dimensions of teacher agency emphasize how these dynamics are enacted and mediated within university-based teacher education programs.

Teacher agency has evolved from being perceived as an individual's capacity for autonomous action to being understood as an emergent, contextually embedded, and temporally situated phenomenon. The framework [5], which conceptualizes agency as a temporally embedded process of iteration, practical evaluation, and projectivity, has been widely adopted in teacher education research [6], [7]. Within EFL contexts, agency is often tied to the ability of teachers to make pedagogical decisions, respond to learner needs, and navigate institutional and sociocultural constraints [8], [9].

Agency characterizes the individual's capacity to self-govern, make decisions, and take initiative in directing their learning process, as well as readiness to deal



with a variety of tasks. It is not just about having options but also about the power and opportunity to act on them in a meaningful way [10]. Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson [11] further complicate the concept by framing agency as relational, contextual, and emergent, arising from the interplay between the individual, the social environment, and the structural conditions of learning. This perspective is crucial, as it accepts that agency is not an individual trait but is exercised and constrained by the context, including institutional structures, power dynamics, and available resources. This understanding sets the stage for examining agency not as a rigid concept but as a complex phenomenon with multiple, interacting facets.

Cognitive agency. This dimension relates to the mental processes underlying learning and decision-making that inform teaching practice. It includes metacognition (planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's knowledge), critical thinking, problem-solving, and the development of personal theories of action [12], [13]. Cognitive agency involves learners making informed choices about what to learn, how to understand it, and why it is important, thus exercising intellectual autonomy within their learning environment. Research shows how pre-service EFL teachers draw on prior experiences, course content, and reflective practices to develop a sense of ownership over their pedagogical choices [14]. Studies in university settings demonstrate that structured opportunities for critical reflection, such as microteaching, lesson planning, and case analysis, enhance pre-service teachers' ability to engage actively in their instructional decision-making [15].

Affective agency. This dimension emphasizes the influence of emotions, motivations, and beliefs on shaping learning behaviors and choices. It includes concepts such as self-efficacy, motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic), emotional regulation, and the development of a professional identity [16], [17]. A growing body of research acknowledges the emotional effort involved in teacher training. Pre-service EFL teachers often experience anxiety, vulnerability, and identity



tensions as they shift from student to teacher roles [18]. University-based programs can either support or hinder affective agency, depending on how safe and inclusive the learning environment feels. Mentorship, peer collaboration, and feedback mechanisms are crucial in building emotional resilience and confidence [19]. Affective agency is the ability to manage one's emotional responses to challenges, keep going despite difficulties, and rely on internal motivations to advance learning. For pre-service teachers, affective factors like anxiety about performance or passion for teaching significantly influence their agency.

Relational agency. Grounded in sociocultural theory, relational agency emphasizes that learning and action are fundamentally social processes [20]. This includes skills such as collaboration, dialogue, seeking and providing feedback, and navigating interpersonal dynamics within a learning community. Relational agency involves interacting with peers, mentors, and the wider professional community. The sociocultural turn in teacher education research has underscored the importance of social context in shaping agency. In university case studies, cohort dynamics, mentorship models, and institutional norms significantly influence how pre-service teachers perceive and enact their roles. Collaborative learning communities and dialogic spaces have been shown to enhance relational engagement and support the co-construction of professional identity [21].

Nevertheless, these dimensions are not isolated; they exist in a state of constant, dynamic interplay. A pre-service teacher's cognitive decision to implement a new communicative activity (cognitive agency) may be fueled by confidence in their skills (affective agency) and enacted through collaboration with a peer during a micro-teaching session (relational agency). Understanding agency, therefore, entails examining all three dimensions simultaneously.

The university itself acts as a powerful site of agency negotiation, offering possibilities and constraints. Course structures, assessment practices, and the



ideological orientations of teacher educators shape what kinds of agency are possible or recognized as legitimate [22]. In the case studies of university EFL teacher education programs, tensions often arise between theory and practice, institutional expectations, and individual aspirations. These tensions offer a favorable environment for examining how agency emerges through navigation rather than compliance. Furthermore, while the importance of emotions and relationships in teacher learning is recognized, they are rarely integrated into a unified framework of "agency" for pre-service EFL teachers.

Hence, a significant gap exists in the literature concerning the holistic nature of agency as experienced by pre-service EFL teachers. While cognitive, affective, and relational aspects of learning are discussed in parallel, there is a limited body of research that examines their interplay in this specific population. To sum up, researchers frame the university not only as a context for knowledge acquisition but as a dynamic social space where future teachers negotiate who they are and how they wish to act (see Table 1).

Table 1

Dimensions of Teacher Agency in University-Based ESL Education

Dimension	Definition	Key Features in	Influencing Factors
		EFL Context	in University Programs
Cognitive	Mental processes involved in decision- making, reflection, and knowledge use	Lesson planning, reflective practice, and pedagogical choices	Curriculum design, assessment, and coursework
Affective	Emotions, identity, and self-perception	Confidence, vulnerability, and teacher identity tensions	Feedback mechanisms, peer support, and safe learning spaces
Relational	Interpersonal and sociocultural dynamics of learning and teaching	Collaboration, negotiation, and mentorship relationships	Cohort dynamics, teacher educator relationships, and practicum structures



This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine how preservice ESL teachers negotiate cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions of agency within a university-based teacher education program. The case study design enables a deep, contextually grounded examination of agency as a dynamic and situated phenomenon, shaped by participants' interactions with institutional structures, social relationships, and personal histories.

The study was conducted at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, a medium-sized university with a well-established teacher education program. The university's diverse student body and its strong emphasis on reflective practice made it an ideal site for investigating the complex interplay of factors influencing teacher agency.

The study involved 47 pre-service EFL teachers who were undergraduate students. The diversity of their linguistic backgrounds provided a rich basis for examining how different individuals construct and enact agency across multiple dimensions. The primary context for data collection was the participants' experiences within their teacher training program, the Practical English and Translation course, and their supervised practicum placements in ESL classrooms.

To capture the intricate nature of agency, data were collected over one academic year using multiple qualitative methods, including Reflective Journals. Participants wrote weekly reflections on their learning experiences, classroom encounters, and emotional responses. Semi-Structured Interviews. Interviews were conducted with each participant, focusing on their evolving sense of agency as an individual experience, how they perceive themselves, and the world around them. Classroom Observations. Participants were observed during practicum sessions. Observations focused on evidence of decision-making, emotional engagement, and relational dynamics. Program Artifacts. Course syllabi, assignments, and feedback from mentors were reviewed to contextualize participants' learning environments and institutional expectations.



Data were analyzed thematically using a constructivist grounded theory approach [23]. Attention was paid to how agency was constructed over time and across different social contexts. The results clarified how pre-service EFL teachers enacted and developed their sense of agency across three interrelated cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions, within the opportunities and constraints of a university teacher education program.

Participants constantly demonstrated the development of cognitive agency through their engagement with theory, reflective practice, and pedagogical decision-making. However, the participants revealed varying levels of intellectual engagement. Some participants approached coursework as conventional. This difference highlights the role of prior experience, disciplinary background, and instructor modeling in shaping cognitive agency. Therefore, cognitive agency is promoted when teacher education programs create opportunities for integrating theory with practice, engaging a dialogic reflection, and metacognitive scaffolding in the context of collaborative learning.

Affective agency emerged as both a vulnerable and formative dimension of pre-service teacher learning. Some participants described feelings of insecurity and anxiety. These emotional responses were tied to perceived discrepancies between their evolving teacher identities and the demands of institutional norms. Yet over time, participants who received affirmative feedback and built emotionally supportive relationships were able to develop emotional resilience and a confident sense of teacher identity. Thus, affective agency is enhanced when emotional job is granted and supported, and when identity negotiation is seen as central to professional development.

Participants' ability to behave actively was influenced by the dynamics of their social and professional relationships. Those who engaged in peer collaboration, co-planning, and mentorship dialogues reported greater confidence



and flexibility. By contrast, participants who experienced unlinked partnerships experienced difficulties in exercising agency. These cases emphasize that agency is not subjective, but it is co-constructed in interaction with others. Consequently, relational agency flourishes in programs that encourage trust, collaboration, and dialogue for problem-solving.

To sum up, drawing on interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations, and program artifacts, the findings highlight the interwoven and evolving nature of agency across individual and institutional contexts. The results of this case study point to several key implications for teacher education. Programs should align coursework, practicum experiences, and mentorship structures to support the integrated development of agency across cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions. Emotional resilience and teacher identity formation must be recognized as core components of learning to teach.

The findings of this study provide empirical support for a holistic, multidimensional conceptualization of agency. The data demonstrate that preservice EFL teachers' agentic actions are not only driven by cognition. Furthermore, the study highlights that these dimensions (cognitive, affective, and relational) are intertwined. The data suggest that effective teacher education must therefore address these dimensions in an integrated manner, rather than treating them as separate components of professional development.

Conclusion. The study has explored how pre-service ESL teachers enact agency through cognitive engagement, affective negotiation, and relational interaction within a university teacher education program. Through the case study approach, it has been found that agency is not a static trait possessed by individuals, but rather a dynamic and emergent process co-constructed across contexts and relationships.

Navigating multidimensional agency is a pedagogical and ethical imperative for teacher educators. Considering the complex and multifaceted nature of agency,



a holistic approach is essential. Acknowledging and supporting the thinking, feeling, and relating aspects of teaching as interconnected rather than separate, preservice teachers will be prepared for the challenges of EFL classrooms. Teacher educators can create more empowering learning environments to equip pre-service EFL teachers with the resilience and adaptability needed for the complex realities of the modern classroom. Future research and practice must continue to prioritize this integrated view, ensuring that the pre-service teachers are prepared and empowered to navigate their educational experiences with confidence and purpose.

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