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Language Teacher Wellbeing, Mindfulness, and the Development of a Researcher Identity

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Abstract

Language teacher identity (LTI) has been a significant and growing field of research in English language teaching (ELT) circles for some time, and the increasing pressure on English language teachers working in higher education to develop researcher identities is well acknowledged (Yuan, 2017). However, the importance of language teachers' wellbeing and psychological responses to environmental tensions shaping their professional identities has only recently gained traction in the field and remains an underdeveloped area of investigation. Therefore, this paper reports a longitudinal narrative case study of the researcher identity development of Angelica, an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher working in the context of higher education in Japan. Using the dual lenses of language teacher identity and Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) – we traced Angelica's EFL researcher identity development focussing on her growth from a wellbeing perspective. The study revealed that Angelica's researcher identity development was shaped by her *perezhivanie* – a key component of SCT, defined as “a unity of emotion and intellect” (Zhang et al., 2022, p.1) – which in turn was shaped by her mindfulness practices that contributed to her wellbeing. This paper concludes with implications for facilitating the researcher identity development of teachers working in the field of EFL.

Keywords: *Identity, Mindfulness, Perezhivanie, Sociocultural Theory, Wellbeing*

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¹Introduction

¹ This paper is part of a special issue (2024, 46) entitled: In Honour of James P. Lantolf's Contributions to Sociocultural Theory, Second Language Development and Language Pedagogy (edited by Mirosław Pawlak, Zhisheng (Edward) Wen, and Hassan Mohebbi).

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One common challenge faced by English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers and faculty members is the difficulty of developing a researcher identity (Yuan, 2017). For teachers working in higher education the initial period of development is characterized by multiple demands placed on them for: personal academic excellence, doctoral completion, achievement of teaching excellence and demonstrable research productivity, among others (Kearns et al, 2008; Lim et al 2019; van de Schoot et al, 2013). These demands have been shown to be a very real threat to wellbeing (Pentón Herrera et al., 2023). This article reports a longitudinal case study of an EFL assistant professor's development from undergraduate student to EFL teacher, and ultimately, to tenure track professor. Using a key concept taken from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), *perezhivanie* (Lantolf & Swain 2020; Veresov & Mok, 2018) as a unit of analysis, this study traces the development of her professional identity as an education researcher and her emotional management of various environmental tensions, including PhD program demands, the COVID-19 pandemic and requirements for research productivity required to secure work as an academic.

Wellbeing, a positive state encompassing both physical and psychological health, and positive emotions have been identified as playing an important role in success for both faculty members and for students more generally (Cárdenas et al., 2022; Schreiner, 2018). The promotion of wellbeing has been shown to positively impact both academic and non-academic outcomes for students (Hennessey, et al., 2023). Furthermore, it has been shown to significantly impact teacher performance, effectiveness, and quality of life (Babic et al., 2022; Sulis et al., 2023). Moreover, there has been a growing recognition that wellbeing specifically is a valid goal within TESOL (Mercer et al., 2016; Oxford, 2016).

Throughout her tertiary education and as an early career researcher, the participant in the present study, Angelica (pseudonym), encountered and overcame many of the emotionally trying challenges outlined above connected with the acquisition of academic credentials, writing for publication and furtherance of her research agenda. She also overcame anxiety and associated negative emotions as she developed as a researcher. A particularly significant element in the successful progress of her journey was the use of mindfulness practices such as yoga and meditation to enhance both physical and mental wellbeing. Here we use the term mindfulness to indicate a state of awareness of the present moment and non-judgemental acceptance of it (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Although such practices, in particular mindfulness meditation, have been researched extensively, there has been minimal qualitative research on English language teachers' use of mindfulness practices and their professional identity development. This leaves a significant gap in the field. Therefore, this study seeks to provide an in-depth study of one case, in contrast to numerous extant quantitative studies of mediation's efficacy.

In the light of the challenges faced by early career researchers outlined above, this paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does an individual employ mindfulness to develop and maintain their wellbeing while expanding their role from undergraduate to professional scholar?

RQ2: How does an individual's EFL researcher identity develop as they negotiate the tensions present in their environment and grow their professional role from undergraduate to professional scholar?

This study utilizes Vygotsky's (Lantolf & Swain 2020; Veresov & Mok, 2018) concept of *perezhivanie* in an analysis that focuses on the participant's researcher identity development. The term refers to a combination of intellect and emotion, through which an individual experiences the social world. Every individual's *perezhivanie* is unique. It refracts the social world, and as individuals take actions in response to the refraction, it leads to their psychological development. This paper starts with an overview of relevant literature on wellbeing and mindfulness as psychological constructs. This is followed by an outline of relevant aspects of SCT and how they relate to identity theoretical approaches. The details of the research method and findings are then presented and discussed. The paper concludes with implications for researcher identity development for language teachers and their professional development.

Literature Review

Wellbeing and Mindfulness

Wellbeing as a psychological construct is multifaceted and has been through multiple iterations over the previous four decades (Mercer et al., 2016). We use the definition provided by the American Psychological Association as a starting point for the conceptualization of wellbeing used in the present paper: "a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health outlook, or good quality of life" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020, para. 1). This definition emphasizes subjectively felt positive emotions such as happiness and contentment. It also acknowledges the physical aspect of wellbeing and the interrelated nature of psychological and physical wellbeing. However, due to its emphasis on the subjective experience of the individual, we extend upon this definition by arguing that wellbeing is at the same time socially constructed and deeply interconnected with the individual's social situation. This point is made by Mercer (2021) who argues that wellbeing cannot exist solely within the individual subject by is also dependent on contextual variables. She notes that while it may be subjectively defined, it is influenced by cultural concepts of wellbeing, as well as by concrete realities of daily life, for example, working conditions, teachers' relationships with school networks, social status, job precarity and financial status. With this in mind, and to clarify our position on wellbeing it is important to note that, in line with Pentón Herrera et al. (2023), we do not conceive of wellbeing as an "individual duty, but the responsibility of society" (introduction, para. 4), and we therefore take a holistic view of the concept of wellbeing in this paper.

Mindfulness as a psychological construct has two core components (Renshaw et al., 2022, p. 136). First, awareness of the present moment by deliberately focusing on present experience rather than pondering on past experiences or thoughts about the future. Second, acceptance of the present moment, in terms of both feelings and thoughts. This second aspect highlights the non-judgemental nature of mindfulness. For example, if a person notices they are feeling a particular emotion in the present moment they are not to judge whether it is a "good" or "bad" emotion. Mindfulness based interventions have been used since the 1970s (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) to promote wellbeing. They are "an evidence-based practice for reducing suffering and promoting wellbeing with diverse individuals across a variety of service settings" (Renshaw et al., 2022, p. 135). Although mindful meditation is a well-known technique for promoting mindfulness, mindful movements such as walking, running or yoga are also possible.

One widely used practice that develops mindfulness is mindfulness meditation. This type of meditation is not faith based. It has been defined as “moment-to-moment nonjudgmental awareness and is most commonly applied to the breath” (Zajonc, 2013). Meditation may once have been considered a fringe pastime; however, it has entered the mainstream. It has been the subject of extensive scientific inquiry this century and has been found to be effective in stress reduction (Michie, 2002; Rosenzweig, 2003; Sharma, 2015). Of pertinence to students is that research has shown meditation to significantly enhance readiness for self-directed learning (Ho, 2011). According to Ho (2011, p. 115) self-directed learning is “a process in which learners take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in identifying their learning needs, formulating learning goals, choosing learning resources, employing suitable learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes.” She concludes that meditation can positively affect both learning outcomes and professional development for adults.

The connection between wellbeing and mindfulness in the field of TESOL has received some attention (Pentón Herrera, et al., 2022). Nonetheless, mindfulness practices, for example meditation and yoga, have yet to be fully explored in the context of TESOL (Wang, et al., 2021; Zhu, 2022). We argue the influence of mindfulness practices on educators’ wellbeing and professional identity development should be explored and the present paper seeks to address that gap in the literature.

Theoretical Approach: Identity and Perezhivanie

Identity has been a key construct in language teacher education research for decades because identity is believed to affect teacher cognition and behaviour (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Language teacher identity (LTI) theory indicates that LTI development occurs as teachers negotiate tensions existing in their environments and that such tensions arise from conflict between external pressures and personally held ideals (Varghese et al., 2016). Researcher identity as an aspect of LTI, is becoming a more prominent area of research in the field. This is in line with the growing emphasis placed on the value of conducting research for language teachers generally as a form of professional development (Banegas, et al., 2022; Edwards & Burns, 2020) and with the global increase in pressure on faculty members in higher education to be research productive (Barkhuizen, 2021; Mason et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, language teachers in higher education are increasingly expected to conduct research, despite historically not being required to do so (Allison & Carey, 2007; Reyes-Cruz & Perales-Escudero, 2016) thus requiring a significant shift in their professional identity. In short, language teachers in all sectors of education are encouraged to conduct research in various forms.

This paper engages with the concept of LTI from a SCT perspective. We utilize the definition of LTI put forward by Edwards and Burns (2020) in a paper that explores the LTI development of teachers undertaking action research from a SCT perspective. They write that LTI “can be conceptualized as a sense of ‘self’, which refers to how people perceive themselves, their roles and status, and how they think others perceive them” (p. 71). Nonetheless, they argue that a sociocultural perspective of identity formation highlights the ongoing negotiation of professional identity within micro and meso environmental contexts, and the dual influences of an individual’s emotions and intellect in this process of determining their sense of self. LTI is firmly based in practice. For example, Golombek (2016), also writing

from a Vygotskian SCT perspective, notes that “teacher identity is a sustained process of learning to teach with real students in actual teaching” (p. 155), thus highlighting its rootedness in the day-to-day activities of teachers.

The *researcher* aspect of LTI professional identity is similarly rooted in the actual practices of research. The conduct of research itself has various components (for example, acquisition of funding for research, research design, collection of and interpretation of data, communication of research findings either through presentations or publications). Researcher identity in this context is understood holistically to refer to a flexible understanding of oneself as a researcher, that is constantly negotiated and realigned to fit changing circumstances of the social and professional situation that the teacher inhabits.

The term *perezhivanie* refers to Vygotsky’s conceptualization of an emotion – intellect dialectic, a key concept in SCT (Vygotsky, 1994). Early in his writings Vygotsky used the term *perezhivanie* to refer to all emotional lived experiences. However, he subsequently developed the concept of *perezhivanie* as an analytical tool, specifically as a lens through which to view the process of psychological development and its interconnectedness with environment (Veresov, 2017). It is in this second sense that the term is used in this paper. The term *perezhivanie* is difficult to translate into English because there is no adequate equivalent, although it is sometimes loosely translated as lived experience. In defining the concept *perezhivanie* it must be understood in terms of both its meaning content and its theoretical context. The term is a unification of intellect (cognition) and emotion (affect), through which an individual experiences social relations. The social world is refracted through the individual’s unique *perezhivanie* leading to their psychological development. Various tensions exist in the individual’s environment. The individual responds to these tensions through their *perezhivanie* and thus they develop.

The concept of *perezhivanie* can only be fully understood in the context of another SCT concept, the *social situation of development* (henceforth SSD). The social environment may contain ideal forms that an individual interacts with to guide their development. Ideal forms are as diverse as documents, speech, or the behaviour of role models. For example, in the domestic sphere, the form of language spoken by a parent may represent the ‘ideal form’, while in academe, ideal forms may be found in journal articles or publishing activities undertaken by a thesis supervisor. In this approach the social environment is a *source* of development, rather than a mere context in which development takes place. In SCT this conceptualization of the social environment as a source of development is termed the *social situation of development*. It is deeply connected to the concept of *perezhivanie* because, as Veresov (2017) writes, “An individual’s *perezhivanie* makes the social situation into the social situation of development” (p. 58) as their interior psychological development is triggered by external factors existing in their environment as they are refracted through the individual’s *perezhivanie*. The unique *perezhivanie* of individuals leads them to understand, interpret and respond to ideal forms in unique ways.

Although Vygotsky himself did not specifically address identity as a construct, the sociocultural theory he formulated is aligned with identity approaches because of its focus on psychological development (Veresov, 2020). Later theoretical developments of SCT have unified it with identity approaches (Golombek, 2016; Holland & Lachiotte, 2007; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). SCT was originally developed by Vygotsky in the context of child

psychological development (Vygotsky, 1998). In a paper using SCT to understand TESOL teacher professional development, Zhang, Lantolf and Meng (2022) applied the ideal forms concept to an analysis of adult professional identity development. Moreover, they expanded the identity approach by adding *perezhivanie* as the critical lens. In order to reveal the researcher identity development of their participant (“Wang”), Zhang and colleagues utilized a narrative analytical approach. Among other factors, they found that Wang’s *perezhivanie* was deeply influenced by his parents who had been very supportive throughout his childhood and his academic studies. They argued that the presence of Wang’s parents in the various SSDs “penetrated his identity development trajectory and enabled him to deal with and overcome his negative emotions at turning points when conflicts interfered with his research identity development trajectory” (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 10). Given that not all novice researchers have access to this type of parenting, it raises the issue of alternative modes of development of optimistic and positive *perezhivanie*.

In sum, recent work on SCT posits that the social world is refracted through the individual’s unique *perezhivanie* and that leads to their psychological development and correspondingly to their identity development. The social environment may contain ideal forms that an individual interacts with to guide their development. In this paper, the concept of *perezhivanie* is applied to Angelica’s professional history narrative to reveal her researcher identity formation. As noted above, wellbeing and mindfulness practices are increasingly issues to be addressed in the realm of LTI research. *Perezhivanie*, as a theoretical lens, with encompasses both dialectical interaction between an individual’s emotion and intellect, and dialectical interaction between the individual and their environment is ideally situated to reveal links between language teacher wellbeing and professional identity development. This paper extends recent work in the field of identity development viewed from an SCT perspective (Edwards & Burns, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022) by exploring mindfulness practice as a potential source of wellbeing that contributes to one aspect of a language teacher’s professional identity construction, specifically their researcher identity.

Method

Research Context

The study took place over three years in Japan, coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic and the Japanese government’s associated management of the health crisis. This necessitated remote teaching and researching for many academics working at this time, for roughly the first two years of the pandemic. Publishing in academic journals and the possession of doctorates has grown in importance in the last two decades and is now a pre-requisite to secure tenured employment at many post-secondary institutions in Japan (McCrostie, 2010).

Research Design

This study is a qualitative, longitudinal, narrative case study. The participant was interviewed, and various other data, outlined below, was collected. The data were used to construct a narrative of the participant’s professional life, starting with her time as an undergraduate. The longitudinal design allowed the researchers to uncover the process of the participant’s professional (researcher) identity development over time. The value of qualitative research lies in its ability to explicate a particular case in detail; to report particularities of one case rather

than generalities (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). This paper focuses on one participant to provide an in-depth exploration of her experiences. There are many ground-breaking precedents for such focussed in-depth explorations pertaining to one focal participant in qualitative TESOL research literature (see for example, Tsui, 2007; Wolff, & De Costa, 2017; Zhang, et al., 2022).

Research Participant

Angelica (pseudonym) identifies as a female Japanese national. At the time the interviews started, Angelica had six years teaching experience in both the secondary and tertiary sectors. She had a high school teaching certification, a master's degree in English language education, and was studying toward a doctorate in the same field. She was in her 20s and lived and studied in a large metropolitan centre.

Data Collection

Angelica responded to an advertisement for the study that was circulated by a mutual professional acquaintance. The study was explained verbally and in writing to the participant prior to participation, and written consent was obtained. The study received approval from the ethics committee of Macquarie University prior to commencement.

The data were collected as part of a larger research study looking at researcher identity development. Data collection started in March 2020 and continued until March 2023. Three interviews were conducted, at roughly yearly intervals. These interviews followed Angelica at a critical time in her career, covering the final stage of her doctoral studies and the first year of her work as a professional researcher. The first interview questions reviewed Angelica's reasons for studying English language, and her professional and research history to that point. The second and third interviews focussed on events that had occurred in the preceding year as they pertained to her researcher identity development. The first interview took place in person at a café near her workplace and the subsequent interviews were all conducted on Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to 191 minutes of recorded interviews.

The interviews were all conducted in English and transcribed by the first author. They were then forwarded to the participant for verification. All interviews that provided data for the present paper were conducted in English by the first author, a middle-aged Australian female, who had been working at Japanese universities as an EFL lecturer for five years at the start of the study. The interviews were enjoyable and light-hearted in nature and the respondent offered to answer further questions or be interviewed again whenever necessary.

The respondent also wrote a one-page reflection about her history as a researcher and provided the authors with copies of her PhD dissertation and recent publications. The first author also accessed online information about the respondent such as her ResearchGate profile, profiles published online by the universities she was employed at and finally, the first author attended two presentations given by the respondent concerning her research.

Data Analysis

The first stage of analysis took place after all three interviews were conducted. The interviews were read to get a holistic grasp of the data and salient themes and events were noted in pencil

in the margins. Second, the interviews were read repeatedly, and a timeline was constructed using a MS Word file. The timeline recorded dates, Angelica's age at the time, mindfulness practices, her wellbeing, professional activities related to teaching and research and notes. During the third stage of analysis the data were uploaded to NVivo, a software program commonly used in qualitative analysis. Incidents that played a role in Angelica's researcher identity development were identified through intensive reading of the data. The incidents were identified as relevant based on Angelica's report of the emotional content of the incident and its connection to research. Based on our understanding of SCT and themes emerging from the analysis, four SSDs were identified, specifically undergraduate life, master's life, PhD and finally assistant professor. Undergraduate life was thematically characterized as a beginning, exploratory stage regarding research, "I really did not have any clear reasons." This was followed by a difficult negative stage characterized by struggle, "I couldn't see anything." A third expanding and positive stage was identified, exemplified by the phrase "I feel I can overcome anything". A fourth phase, in which her researcher identity focused and solidified, as expressed in the phrase, "I can concentrate on the present moment". Brief narratives were composed, one for each SSD. Finally, the concept of *perezhivanie* was used to analyse events occurring within these narratives, to understand her researcher identity formation in circumstances that may lead to experiences of either positive or negative emotions.

Findings

In line with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) this study adopts a narrative approach to present findings. Excerpts from the interviews are also used to illustrate the findings. Our analysis traces the process of researcher identity development as it moved through four SSDs (undergraduate, master's, PhD, and assistant professor). The central themes of these four SSDs are captured in the following key words: beginning, struggling, expanding, and focussing.

Beginning: "I really did not have any clear reasons."

After graduating from high school Angelica enrolled in a four-year undergraduate degree at a public university. She chose to study English language and culture as an undergraduate after developing an interest in languages while on family holidays abroad and after a brief student exchange in the United States that she enjoyed during high school.

Angelica spent the third year of her degree studying education abroad at a university in a European country. She could use the credits she earned there toward her Japanese university degree. This experience was so positive that she decided to have a career in educational research. It was also at this time that she met a person who was to become her mentor. Her mentor was a fellow Japanese who happened to be at the European university at the same time as Angelica invited her to join a research group they coordinated, which was focused on educational research.

There was no one single reason for choosing a career in academia, hence she commented that "I really did not have any clear reasons" for this choice to embrace a career in EFL research. She was interested in the topic, she had met various people abroad who stimulated her to think about her future, but she also noted in her reflection that, "The most attractive point was that researchers were able to work in their own office" (Reflection, March 2022). During her undergraduate days, she needed to develop a plan for what to do with her life and her SSD

provided her with glimpses of life as an academic and models such as her mentor. Her researcher identity was incipient at this stage but her *perezhivanie*'s refraction of the SSD had instigated its development.

Angelica's *perezhivanie* shaped intellectual, emotional, and action responses to the critical incidences occurring during this SSD. Emotionally she was excited and energized by meeting various people who had established careers and more life experience than her. Intellectually she appraised the experience and decided on a career in language education research. She then took various actions. She worked on a graduation thesis focusing on education. However, she also reported working hard because her self-evaluation, rooted in her intellect, was that she had very many weaknesses in research and writing that needed to be improved. This negative focus indicates a negative aspect to her *perezhivanie* that becomes more obvious in the next SSD, her master's program.

Struggling: "I couldn't see anything."

After completing her undergraduate degree, Angelica immediately began work on a master's degree at the same university and department as her undergraduate degree. She also continued to attend study group sessions organized by the mentor she had met in Europe, who had also returned to Japan. She obtained a teaching licence and started working part-time as an EFL teacher in two schools, a junior high school, and a high school. On campus she met and heard of other young researchers who had published articles in prestigious journals, received awards at conferences, and received research grants or research fellowships and she yearned for their accomplishments. Her SSD at this stage was rich in models of researcher practice. These models included not only other young researchers but also her mentor and study group participants who were seriously engaged in research.

An avid reader, Angelica continuously sought to inform herself about how to succeed in the tertiary milieu. She read many theses because she wanted to use previously published theses as models for her own. The primary tension present in her environment was the need to complete her master's degree and qualify for the PhD program. Unlike her contemporaries who had entered the full-time work force, Angelica was preoccupied with producing an ideal master's thesis, but her desires were almost thwarted toward the end of her first year.

At this time Angelica's emotions were turbulent. This is demonstrated when she describes her thoughts and feelings, "I was very negative. ... I felt quite a lot of pressure to finish or to do something great ... I couldn't see anything; I was basically very narrow" (Interview 1, March 1, 2020). Moreover, she had a great deal of difficulty agreeing on a topic with her dissertation supervisor but was eventually able to select a new topic after talking with another academic. Although she felt she had wasted a year due to her problems with topic selection she could submit a thesis. However, she still recalls the process of changing topics with pain, as the nadir of her research career. The comments she made about the difficulty of changing her dissertation topic demonstrate rigidity of her thinking at that time. Her wellbeing was clearly very low at this point.

Angelica's unique *perezhivanie* refracted the demand for master's degree topic change in various ways. Intellectually, her own evaluation of the topic was at odds with her supervisor's evaluation, and this led to extremely negative feelings about changing topics. Emotionally, she continued to be attached to her original idea for a topic, but discussions with another academic

in a chance encounter led her to re-evaluate her direction and take the necessary action of reconceptualizing, researching and writing her thesis.

After Angelica qualified with a master's degree, she was eligible to apply for a competitive research grant that would have supported her research, however she was not successful. Nonetheless, she could adapt her master's thesis into an article published in an in-house journal produced by her university. Angelica's researcher identity orientation was focussed on becoming a *great researcher* and she considered that there was a need to publish articles and books, to present at conferences, to win prizes for presentations at conferences, and to apply for and secure research grants.

Expanding: "So, I feel I can continue working on research, or I feel I can overcome anything." At the start of her PhD Angelica's work environment expanded to include tertiary level EFL teaching. Her mentor recommended her for a part time position teaching English at a university. Subsequently she obtained a full-time position as a lecturer at the university she was enrolled at for her doctoral studies, which she began in the third year of her PhD. She had some positive experiences attending and presenting at conferences "it gives me energy to move on" (Interview 1, March 1, 2020). However, the environment clearly included tensions: she had to complete a PhD and beyond that were her desires to get further scholarly accomplishments and secure a tenure track position in a highly competitive environment.

Angelica began a habit of meditation and yoga, which she credits with the successful negotiation of these tensions. In 2020 she decided to concentrate on developing her meditation practice, noting that she was (as with yoga) interested in the mental health aspect. Many activities that had been in person went online during the early stages of the pandemic in Japan. Through a celebrity's social media account, Angelica learned of an instructor teaching meditation online and started participating. Intellectual understanding was necessary before she could commit to the practice and she gained this through taking these classes, "As I understood, I still continue doing it" (Email, February 22, 2023). She began meditating several times a day for seven minutes at a time. During the pandemic, she could not attend meditation classes in person; instead, she enrolled in various courses and videos available online. She did this while maintaining a regular yoga habit every morning. Comparing her emotional response during the final stages of her PhD to her master's degree period she said, "Yes, I think I have changed quite a lot. I'm flexible and I'm optimistic" (Interview 3, March 16, 2022). Her transformation was further emphasized when she described her attitude to research one year into the pandemic, "so, I feel I can continue working on research, or I feel I can overcome anything" (Interview 2, February 10, 2021).

In stark contrast to the experience of writing her master's thesis, her PhD thesis writing went smoothly. She made a schedule for getting the work done that involved rising early and worked on the thesis between classes. Unlike the situation when writing up her master's thesis, she pushed through by deliberately *not* focusing on finding "something important" and doing something *great* through her research. Instead, she gave herself small achievable tasks that fit the time available. Her comments show her stepping back from the story of being a great researcher and demonstrate the influence of her mindfulness on her day-to-day activities as a researcher and her identity perception. Her mood was buoyant and calm, she said she was

“doing really great” (Interview 2, February 10, 2021) a comment that expresses her wellbeing in this SSD.

With respect to the various aspects of *perezhivanie*, Angelica’s intellectual response was to appraise the situation and to decide to focus on drafting her thesis. Her emotional response was positive. There was a noticeable change in Angelica’s *perezhivanie* over the course of her doctoral studies. Angelica’s *perezhivanie* continued to refract her SSD, but the *perezhivanie* itself appears to have qualitatively changed in nature due to the inclusion of mindfulness practice.

At this point, she had made significant steps towards establishing herself as a researcher. A doctorate is a necessary pre-requisite for a tenure track position in academe. Furthermore, during her doctorate she was finally successful in obtaining grant monies from the government, another signal of professionalism in research.

Focusing: “I can concentrate on the present moment without thinking about the past or the future.”

After submitting her PhD thesis, she continued working as a contract employee at the same university, with one year left on her contract. At the end of that year, it would be necessary to leave that university, and this was non-negotiable because of the rigid employment conditions for contract workers at Japanese universities. During this final year she continued to attend the study group organized by her mentor. She also continued with her mindfulness meditation, saying she did it “to control myself” (Interview 2, February 10, 2021). With that in mind she meditated every morning after yoga and attended meditation sessions four days a week online. The primary tensions in her life were that she was no longer a student and must plan and implement her own research studies.

After submitting her thesis Angelica began working in the English language department of a prestigious university as a tenure track professor. She presented at conferences and wrote and submitted some articles that were later accepted for publication.

At the end of her PhD Angelica’s ambition was to get a contract to adapt her PhD thesis for publication as a book. She said she was really interested in the process of publishing a book from start to finish. She had researched this and attended a seminar with a well-known publisher regarding the process. Her supervisor had done this, and other members of her PhD cohort had book contracts in hand. However, she was not successful in her pursuit of a book contract based on her doctorate dissertation. Despite some early initial telephone contact with an editor, she said, “But I haven’t heard from her for a while. ... I am interested in doing that, but I don’t need to do that right now. Probably in the future.” This comment illustrates Angelica’s flexible and optimistic viewpoint and is dramatically different from that demonstrated during her master’s degree (Interview 3, March 16, 2022). However, this setback did not discourage her, she said “Fortunately, I got a job which was most attractive for me, and I decided to continue researching for a while as I was given a chance to do so ... I just concentrate on what I need to do at this point” (Reflection, March 2023). Comments such as these indicated being in the present moment, a distinctive feature of mindfulness. As noted in the literature review (Renshaw et al., 2022), mindfulness involves deliberately focussing on present experience rather than mulling over the past or creating stories about the future. Angelica’s ability to focus

on the present is also highlighted when she says, “I can concentrate on the present moment without thinking of the past or the future” (Interview 3, March 16, 2022).

On the other hand, her mentor contacted her inviting her to become involved in a project he was spearheading to produce an edited book. She quickly accepted the offer. She had various tasks in this project and enjoyed working together with the team of scholars producing the book and also enjoyed learning about the process of producing an edited book.

Angelica’s *perezhivanie* refracted various elements in her environment in ways that were qualitatively different to that experienced during the early years as an undergraduate and master’s student. Intellectually, Angelica’s focus changed, “At first, when I was an undergraduate and master’s student, I really struggled. I thought I needed to overcome my difficulties or weaknesses, but gradually, I have felt I don’t need to do that” (Interview 3, March 16, 2022). Intellectually, there are still many things Angelica wants to learn about as can be seen in her sincere interest in seeing the process of producing an edited volume. Wellbeing is evident in Angelica’s emotional response to her failure to publish a book based on her PhD thesis: she was calm and hopeful. Her increased flexibility is shown when she commented, “or, if I am not good at something, maybe I can find something else” (Interview 3, March 16, 2022). In terms of action, she worked on articles, the edited book and grant application. At the time the COVID-19 pandemic came to an end Angelica’s meditation practice continued every day.

There are numerous external signs of researcher identity that indicate how others perceive Angelica’s professional identity in this final SSD period. As a tenure track professor at a respected university and with a list of publications and presentations and an edited book soon to be published it is not an exaggeration to say she would be perceived as a professional researcher. She has a pragmatic approach to motivation and is still focused on setting achievable tasks. A core component of mindfulness is acceptance of the present moment, both feelings and thoughts (Renshaw et al., 2022). When Angelica makes comments such as, “Now, I am probably not confident either, but I don’t focus on it. I don’t care if I am confident or not” (Interview 3, March 16, 2022) she is communicating this radical acceptance. This excerpt highlights that although Angelica took (and continues to take) many deliberate actions toward developing as a researcher, she did not fixate on success in that arena and is no longer attached to the identity of being a great researcher. However, she has become an optimistic and flexible researcher.

Discussion

The models that guided Angelica’s identity development were not confined to academic ideal forms. She accessed ideal forms regarding contemplative practice when she noticed yoga and meditation instructors on social media. She experienced an intellectual curiosity in this regard that motivated her to take part in mindfulness practices. The result was that she felt calm, positive and had a sense of wellbeing. If wellbeing is understood as “a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health outlook, or good quality of life” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020, para. 1), then it would appear that Angelica was in a state of wellbeing during the final stages of our study. Her wellbeing was not only a product of her hard work and mindfulness practices. Her researcher development was supported by aspects of her social situation, including access to successful models of

researcher behaviour and output. Her wellbeing was also supported by social and organisational structures, such as the tenure system at her final workplace.

The dialectical relationships inherent in *perezhivanie*, the interaction of intellect and emotion with each other and with the SSDs meant that Angelica's experience of PhD candidature and the Covid-19 pandemic were essentially positive. We argue that mindfulness practices were a critical mitigating strategy undertaken at this time that contributed to her wellbeing and her positive experience of developing a researcher identity.

The current research has been driven by two questions, which will be discussed in order. RQ1 concerns how an individual employs mindfulness to develop and maintain their wellbeing, while evolving their identity from undergraduate to professional scholar. Our findings have identified various strategies used by Angelica to navigate her identity development, that we list here: One, participate in and benefit from being a member of a social learning space, her mentor's study group (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Two, steady consistent effort. Three, gaining knowledge of the industry, for example, academic book publishing. Four, formulation of achievable goals and evaluation of learning. Five, knowledge of where to get resources. We assume that these strategies are used by many "good students". However, Angelica also employed a sixth strategy, development of wellbeing through mindfulness practices.

A significant turning point in Angelica's narrative is clearly starting to actively integrate mindfulness practices into her life. She indicated that these practices helped her to mitigate the difficulties and challenges posed by the expansion of her role from student to professional researcher under the especially trying circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. The post PhD period is a critical time in developing as a researcher and candidates can get derailed from an academic career at this point (Kearns et al, 2008; Lim et al 2019; van de Schoot et al, 2013). Moreover, a PhD alone is not enough to establish a career as a researcher and publications and research productivity are extremely difficult to achieve (Yuan, 2017). However, Angelica successfully navigated this period and did not succumb to burnout.

RQ2 required us to explore how an individual's EFL researcher identity develops as they negotiate the tensions present in their environment and grow their professional role from undergraduate to professional scholar. In short, this question asks us to examine the identity development experienced by the participant. Globally, there are increased demands on language teachers working in higher education to be researchers (Barkhuizen, 2021; Mason et al., 2023; Reyes-Cruz & Perales-Escudero, 2016; Yang, et al., 2022). Developing a strong researcher identity is an important aspect of achieving this goal. Over the course of this 3-year longitudinal study, Angelica was seen to develop an open, flexible and optimistic researcher identity that enabled her to comfortably continue to research despite various disappointments. Finishing her doctorate, under pandemic conditions, was an achievement that facilitated her employment and identity development. We conclude that this study supports the idea that language teachers with doctorates have a smoother journey developing as researchers.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the development of Angelica's researcher identity in the findings section. She began as an undergraduate uncertain of her future, then she developed an interest in language education research. She struggled at first to get the necessary credentials to be seen

as a researcher. Ultimately, she was able to obtain enough evidence of researcher competence to be seen as a novice researcher and to get a tenure track position at a public university. Angelica's *perezhivanie* can be seen profoundly shaping her response to environmental tensions. *Perezhivanie* is composed of intellect, emotion. During her undergraduate years and throughout her master's degree her emotions were dark and her perspective narrow, and the case can be made that she was far from experiencing wellbeing. This made it difficult for her to flexibly her change dissertation topic. Intellectually she understood the need for change and took various actions, such as talking with her supervisor and researchers in her vicinity. Through these actions she was introduced to a viable alternative topic. She then forced herself to take other necessary actions, such as revising her topic and conducting the research and writing the thesis. Nonetheless, it was a harrowing experience, fraught with negativity and with a desperate sense of fighting against time.

The ability to overcome difficulty and disappointment is an essential attribute of developing a researcher identity. The conduct of research includes many aspects other than writing, such as gathering data, interacting with participants, administrators, designing research activities, and campaigning for funding. It is both a complex and arduous undertaking. Researchers must constantly vie for funding, promotion, and publication. Our analysis, undertaken from a Vygotskian SCT perspective, leads us to conclude that mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, are an additional strategy that can be employed by aspiring researchers to help them overcome these hurdles. In the case presented here the practices appeared to facilitate the successful completion of Angelica's doctorate, avoidance of burnout, and a smooth journey to research success and strong researcher identity development.

This paper will be of use to aspiring academics and those whose role it is to support them. People who wish to have careers in the academy must manage their working lives so that they are not overwhelmed by inevitable stressors and furthermore so that they can reach required research productivity goals set by university administrators. This paper reports in-depth one example of how a person achieved this.

This study has the limitations associated with any in-depth case study research. It can provide a detailed picture of the case being reported, however, its findings may have limited transferability due to individual and contextual variability. There are other sources of stress that may be alleviated by mindfulness practices. One implication of the present study is that mindfulness could be a useful tool in a researcher's professional identity development. Additional studies in the field concerning mindfulness practices, wellbeing and LTI are called for, especially given the dearth of qualitative studies in this field. It would be interesting to see cases in which mindfulness practices were employed at other times of significant transition, for example as academics transition to part-time work or retirement or to administrative roles. Many universities have induction modules and commencement programs for graduate research students. We suggest one implication of the present study is that instruction in mindfulness practices may be a useful component of such a course of study. Identity transitions carry with them particular stressors that should be acknowledged at the start of research careers and novice researchers should be encouraged to reflect proactively on these transitions and plan for ways to respond appropriately.

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