Global Vietnam: Across Time, Space and Community

Tran Le Huu Nghia · Ly Thi Tran ·
Mai Tuyet Ngo *Editors*

English Language Education for Graduate Employability in Vietnam

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English Language Education for Graduate Employability in Vietnam

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Abbreviations

AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEFR	The Common European Framework of References for Languages
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EALTA	European Association for Language Testing and Assessment
ECAs	Extra-Curricular Activities
EF EPI	EF English Proficiency Index
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMI	English Medium of Instructions
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ETCF	English Teacher Competency Framework (Vietnam)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	The First Language/Mother Tongue
L2	The Second language
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan)
NFLP	The National Foreign Language Project 2020 (Vietnam)
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TLF	Three Language Formula (India)
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication

TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
UAE	The United Arab Emirates
UK	The United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	The United States
VSTEP	Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Chapter 9
The Role of English Language Learning Experiences in the Development of TESOL Preservice Teachers' Identity Capital

Minh Hue Nguyen and Xuan Minh Ngo

Abstract In our globalized world, English as a dominant language has become a means for enhancing employability, economic growth, transnational mobility, status, and prestige. In accordance with this, many education systems include English education at all schooling levels. As a result, English language learning has become a major part of many students' educational experiences. However, how this experience contributes to shaping their employability, especially employable identity, remains an open question. Aiming to address this gap, this chapter draws on (Tomlinson, M. Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability. Education+ Training, 59(4), pp. 338–352, 2017) model of graduate employability as a theoretical framework and uses a qualitative case study design. Based on data collected from narrative frames and individual interviews with two preservice teachers of English, the study identified the preservice teachers' levels of investment made toward English language learning, abilities to draw on English language learning experiences to articulate a narrative of employable identity, and self-concepts relating to future role as teachers of English. These findings show that the participants' English language learning experiences that spanned over many years contribute essentially to the development of their identity capital which they could use to develop and project themselves as employable graduate teachers. The chapter offers implications for English language teacher educators and future employers.

Keywords Employability · Identity capital · Narratives · English education · Teacher education

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9.1 English Education and English Language Teacher Education in Vietnam

Similar to many countries around the world, English is by far the most popular foreign language in Vietnam (Ngo, 2018a, 2018b; Nguyen et al., 2018) and recent estimates show that over 90% of Vietnamese students study it at all levels of education (Nguyen, 2016b; Tran et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the English proficiency of Vietnamese people as a whole remains rather modest (Le & Phan, 2013; Le, 2020; Ngo, 2018a, 2018b; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019) with a recent international survey (Education First, 2021) ranking the country 66th out of 112 participating nations and territories. The English language teaching (ELT) sector's disappointing performance has been attributed to a number of factors, including limited resources, large class sizes, the negative washback of grammar-based high-stakes tests, and students' low motivation; however, above all, a serious lack of qualified teachers has frequently been cited as the foremost reason (Le & Phan, 2013; Le, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019).

This shortage of competent teachers is, however, unsurprising given the Vietnamese scholars' critiques of the country's English teacher education system centrally managed by the Ministry of Education and Training (henceforth MOET) (Le, 2014; Ngo, 2021; Nguyen, 2015; Vu, 2017). Under the Ministry's mandatory guidelines, a typical four-year undergraduate curriculum in English teacher education is comprised of three domains, namely foundation (e.g., with courses in politics, Vietnamese language, and culture), specialization (e.g., linguistics), and pedagogy (e.g., teaching methods). As Le (2014) has observed, this model bears a striking similarity with "the applied science model" (p. 204) which places an inordinate emphasis on theories imparted by university lecturers—subject experts with little experience about students' target teaching contexts (i.e., secondary schools). Likewise, in a case study into Vietnamese and Australian teacher education programs, Nguyen (2013) found that both contextual knowledge and pedagogy were seriously neglected in the focal Vietnamese university's curriculum, accounting for less than 10% and 15% of the total credit.

To remedy this theory-laden curriculum, institutions often require their final-year student teachers to take an assessed school-based practicum which may last five weeks (Nguyen, 2015) or six weeks (Le, 2014). However, recent studies have revealed the ineffective partnerships between teacher training institutions and host schools (Nguyen, 2015) and the resultant disconnection between the university courses and the school-based practicum (Le, 2014). Because of this, student teachers, instead of adopting innovative methods introduced in their university courses, often resorted to uncritically following their school mentors' problematic teaching approaches to "survive classroom realities" (Le, 2014, p. 209). To compound matters further, when these under-prepared teachers enter service, their professional development opportunities are severely limited due to the heavy teaching schedule (Vu, 2017) and, if available, often exist in form of training workshops with university lecturers who understand little about English teaching in secondary schools (Le, 2015).

To overhaul English teaching and teacher education in Vietnam, the Vietnamese government launched Project 2020 (The Government of Vietnam, 2008), which was widely regarded as "the most significant and ambitious foreign language reform in modern Vietnam" (Ngo, 2018b, p. 48) and designated 85% of its nine-trillion-dong budget to upgrading teachers' language proficiency and teaching methods (Le, 2020). To facilitate this ambitious teacher training scheme, the MOET issued Vietnam's English Teacher Competency Framework in 2014 (henceforth ETCF), which was based on six different international frameworks and multiple sources of academic literature (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015; Le, 2020; Vu, 2019). The ETCF is comprised of five domains (knowledge of subject, knowledge of teaching, knowledge of learners, attitudes and values, and practice and context of language teaching), each of which is developed into numerous competencies, with each competency then being elaborated into performance indicators (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015; Vu, 2019). The idea behind the framework is to professionalize the English language teacher in Vietnam, turning them into "professional practitioners with adaptive expertise" instead of "teaching machines" (Vu, 2019, p. 269). While teachers' performance standards are used in many contexts to guide the preparation of teachers, it has also been argued that there needs to be a broader view on the quality of graduates which take into account the capitals that they accumulate both within and beyond the formal higher education course to become "employable" (Tomlinson, 2017). Despite Vietnam's ETCF's seemingly all-inclusive domains, competencies, and performance indicators, the question of "What capitals should an employable teacher of English have?" remains open.

As English language teacher educators, we recognize that teacher identity or teachers' self-image and self-awareness is central to the professionalization of language teachers (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Pennington & Richards, 2016), and it has been the focus of research in a number of Vietnamese studies (Dang, 2013; Le & Phan, 2013; Nguyen, 2016a, 2016b; Phan, 2007; Phan & Phan, 2006). However, among these studies, none has examined the link between English language learning experiences and English language teachers' identity capital, a concept proposed by Tomlinson (2017) to refer to a graduate's "abilities to draw on experiences and articulate a personal narrative" aligning to their future work (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 345), despite the acknowledged impact of schooling experiences on teacher identity in general education (Izadinia, 2013). There has been some interest in the influence of language learning experiences on Vietnamese English language teachers' practices and beliefs (Ngo, 2018a; Nguyen, 2017a). However, these studies did not examine the direct links between English language learning experiences and teacher identity, and they involved the participation of experienced rather than preservice teachers. Against this backdrop, we are particularly interested in knowing what forms of identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017) Vietnamese preservice teachers of English develop through their English language learning experiences, hence the focus of this chapter.

9.2 Language Teacher Identity and Language Learning Experiences

In the broader international field of TESOL, teacher identity has become an established sub-field in its own right. Commenting on the central role of identity, Norton and Toohey (2011) wrote, "over the past 15 years, there has been an explosion of interest in identity and language learning, and 'identity' now features in most encyclopedias and handbooks of language learning and teaching" (p. 413). Researchers tend to agree that understanding teacher identity is essential in understanding and supporting the development of language teachers (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Pennington & Richards, 2016). In the graduate employability literature, identity has been viewed as a form of capital that a person can draw on in acquiring employment and performing their work (Clarke, 2018; Pham et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2017).

As previously explained, teacher identity as a concept involves teachers' self-image and self-awareness as teachers in their community of practice (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Teacher identity is not a fixed entity but "a fluid, dynamic, multi-dimensional and ongoing developmental process which shapes and is shaped by the complexities of personal and contextual issues" (Nguyen, 2019, p. 128). In this process, contextual and personal factors have strong influence on language teachers' identity formation. Contextual factors such as mentoring relationships (Nguyen, 2017b, 2019; Trent, 2011, 2013), interaction with peer preservice teachers (Dang, 2013), and "'multimembership' in 'multicommunities'" (Nguyen, 2016a) have been documented as influential in language teachers' identity formation. Personal factors, including self-positioning through metaphors (Nguyen, 2016b) and sense of competence in terms of language proficiency and pedagogy (Le & Phan, 2013), have been identified as those shaping language teacher identity.

Especially, in preservice English language teacher education, preservice teachers' linguistic background has been documented as having a strong relationship with their identity. For example, a non-native English speaking background and associated English language learning experiences can strengthen preservice teachers' sense of confidence and competence in a number of areas such as knowledge of learning strategies and grammar as well as empathy with learners (Miller, 2007, 2009). On the other hand, non-native preservice teachers may feel a sense of inadequacies in fluency, pronunciation, and pedagogical skills in relation to English language teaching and the need to improve their proficiency and gain teaching experiences (Miller, 2007; Richards & Farrell, 2011). In the same vein, Pennington and Richards (2016) argued that, "A person's identity as a language teacher relates to the person's language background and language proficiency" (p. 11). This implies that the person's experiences in learning the language and the outcomes of that process have strong connection to how they represent his/herself as a teacher of the language.

The current literature on graduate employability predominantly discusses the development of identity capital, among other graduate capitals, in relation to graduates' participation in curricular and extracurricular activities around the higher education course (Tomlinson, 2017). However, identity formation may have strong connections with the experiences graduates had earlier in their life, such as their earlier schooling experiences and "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). In the age of neoliberalism and globalization, English is viewed as a means to enhance employability, transnational mobility, economic development, status, and prestige (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2014; Shin, 2016). Around the globe, English education has become an expanding industry both in public and private sectors (Kubanyiova, 2020; Murray, 2020). In Vietnam, as mentioned before, 90% of Vietnamese students study English at all levels of schooling (Nguyen, 2016b; Tran et al., 2016). Consequently, English language learning experiences, which span from formal experiences in the schooling system to informal experiences in private classes and independent learning, have become a significant part of many preservice teachers' personal histories. Although our literature review above shows that there have been periodical studies into preservice English language teachers' non-native backgrounds and identity (Miller, 2007, 2009; Richards & Farrell, 2011), where preservice teachers' self-concepts as non-native speaking teachers are focused upon, there is a dearth of research into how non-native preservice teachers of English develop professional identity in relation to their English learning experiences.

The present study aims to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature. The following research question guided the investigation: *What forms of identity capital do preservice English language teachers in Vietnam develop through English language learning experiences?*

9.3 Methods

The present study used a qualitative case study design because this approach is particularly suited for exploring complex issues where the boundary between the problem of interest and context is not clear-cut (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) such as the influence of distinct English language learning environments on teacher identity capital development. The study was conducted at Babel (pseudonym), a public university that trains foreign language teachers and interpreters in Northern Vietnam. The two focal participants were Ha and Thu (pseudonyms), both enrolling in the teacher education program at Babel's English Faculty. Their selection was initially due to their prompt and enthusiastic acceptance of the second author's invitation to participate in the project. This willingness to participate is an essential consideration since enthusiastic participants are more likely to provide in-depth accounts required in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, since this research focused on the influence of language learning experiences on preservice teachers' identity formation, Ha and Thu were chosen to represent two vastly different language learning

environments, namely the privileged urban setting and the underprivileged mountainous and suburban context (see below for further details). This sampling strategy, also known as maximum variation sampling, was intended to ensure the richness of data and facilitate cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ha was born and grew up in an inner suburb of Hanoi, Vietnam's capital city and received formal English instruction right from Grade 1 in her primary school. During her junior secondary school days, Ha attended a high-ranking private school. She later had the chance to develop her English further at a top-notch foreign language specializing senior high school and the selective fast-track English program at Babel. Ha aspired to become an IELTS trainer after graduating from Babel. Unlike Ha, Thu came from a sparsely populated, mountainous commune in the North East of Vietnam, where most people, including Thu, were members of ethnic minority groups. Hence, she was not exposed to English until Grade 6 when she attended a junior secondary boarding school for ethnic minority students located 15 km from her house. Afterward, to continue her education, Thu had to leave her hometown and go to a boarding school for exchange and ethnic minority students in an outer suburb of Hanoi. Nevertheless, the English lessons there were also delivered in the grammar-translation method similar to those at her junior secondary school. It was only when she attended Babel that Thu could experience the communicative language teaching approach and be given the chance to develop all four skills.

Our data collection and analysis were mainly guided by Tomlinson's (2017) graduate employability concept of identity capital, which is defined as "the level of personal investment a graduate makes towards the development of their future career and employability", "abilities to draw on experiences and articulate a personal narrative" aligning to their future work, and "self-concepts" relating to future employment (p. 345). Tomlinson (2017) particularly highlighted the role of experiences and personal narratives in constructing identity capital toward employability, arguing that these narratives allow graduates to present their employable self through compelling stories that convey their identity to impress employers. Furthermore, we also drew on Norton's (2016) concept of investment due to its prominence in the field of language education and its compatibility with Tomlinson's (2017) framework. While Tomlinson (2017) viewed *investment* as the efforts "a graduate makes towards the development of their future career and employability" (p. 345), Norton (2016) suggested that "learners invest in the target language if they anticipate acquiring a wider range of symbolic and material resources that will increase the value of their cultural capital and social power" (p. 445). Moreover, Norton (2016) argued that "a learner's imagined identity and hopes for the future will impact his or her investment in the language and literacy practices" (p. 447).

In line with Tomlinson's (2017) emphasis on personal narratives and Norton's (2016) argument on imagined identity, we collected data on each participant's English learning experiences and their formation of identity capital across past, present, and future from a set of narrative frames followed by an in-depth semi-structured narrative interview. Initially, participants were asked to complete a set of narrative frames which are a series of sentence starters provided to assist them in composing a story

detailing their language learning experiences, and the associated thoughts and feelings (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008) (see Appendix A). This instrument was utilized because its scaffolding makes the task of narrating experiences less daunting for participants, while its explicit structure ensures that key information could be efficiently obtained and analyzed (Barkhuizen, 2014; Wette & Furneaux, 2018). To triangulate and explore in greater depth the data collected from these frames, each participant was then invited to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview which was a sensible compromise between the reliability of the standardized interview and the freedom of the open interview (Prior, 2018). Following the advice of Creswell and Poth (2018), the research team prepared and piloted an interview schedule with a student teacher of the same cohort as the participants. During both interviews, the participants were allowed to communicate in their preferred language, which was Vietnamese in both cases, while an appropriate level of rapport was also maintained so that they would not hesitate to provide accurate and complete information. In accordance with Prior (2018), the interviews started with general questions to give interviewees more freedom to share information, followed by appropriate prompts and probes to explore the topics in further detail.

The interviews were first transcribed, and the transcripts, together with the completed narrative frames, were imported into NVivo12 for data management and thematic analysis. Similar to our data collection, our coding was informed by Tomlinson's (2017) conceptualization of identity capital, which involves "investment", "abilities to draw on experiences and articulate a personal narrative" aligning to their future work, and "self-concepts" relating to future employment (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 345). Interview excerpts that were used in this chapter were then translated into English by the first author and crosschecked by the second author for accuracy.

9.4 Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the data about Ha and Thu showed evidence of their identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017) in relation to future employment as English language teachers. Their identity capital as seen through the narratives was manifested through their investment in the language and literacy practices (Norton, 2016), abilities to draw on experiences in establishing their employable self, and self-concepts in relation to English language teaching. The data also showed the important role of the participants' English language learning experiences in shaping their identity capital. The findings are presented and discussed below.

9.4.1 Case Study 1: Ha

9.4.1.1 Investment in English Language Learning and Literacy Practices

Ha had actively invested in the English language since the beginning of her schooling. She recounted, "Actually, I started learning English in Grade 1 at school and concurrently going to extra English classes […] with foreign teachers". Ha's early investment in English language learning seemed to be consistent with the trend of the majority of Vietnamese students, especially those living in big cities (Nguyen, 2016b; Tran et al., 2016). After one semester, Ha stopped learning English at school due to the MOET's directive that students could only learn English from Grade 3, and she resumed her formal English learning in Grade 3.

Another example of Ha's investment in the English language was her attendance of extra English classes from Grade 8 to prepare for her selective senior secondary entrance examinations as, she said, "my goal was to go to an English specialised school". This shows that Ha not only invested in the language financially. She also invested a great amount of effort and time as she aspired to go to a selective school specialized in English language. In Grade 9, she showed further investment when taking part in the district's English talent contest and this led to a sense of achievement because, as Ha said, "My teacher came to know that I am good at English".

Ha eventually passed the entrance exam into an English specialized high school and had the opportunities to experience project-based learning in Grade 10 and 11. Ha and her classmates were encouraged to concentrate their efforts on projects that required them to develop and use a range of skills. However, this approach was discontinued in Ha's final high school year when a senior teacher took over the class and reset her class into the university entrance exam-coaching mode. Toward the end of her schooling, Ha had developed a high level of proficiency in English thanks to her investment in formal and informal English language learning over the years. At his point, Ha said, "there was no suitable extra classes for me because my proficiency level was higher than those classes, and classes that prepare for university entrance examinations were too easy, so I wouldn't learn anything new". She further explained that, "If I want to prepare for the English exam for university entrance, I have to study by myself" because "my school English teacher prepared for the exam but it was also too easy". No longer finding the formal and extra English classes useful in preparing herself for the university entrance examination, Ha invested in enhancing her English skills by independent studies. Evidently, Ha's "hopes for the future" (Norton, 2016, p. 447) in striving for university admission was the driving force behind her investment in English.

Upon high school completion, Ha, with her interest in English and teaching and family support, decided to enroll in Babel where she chose to sit competitive exams to enter the fast-track program reserved for the top ten percent of students instead of continuing in the mainstream program. In the first two years at university, Ha

completed four language skill-based courses each semester with numerous project-based assessment tasks. She considered learning in this course "happy and comfortable" because "my ability is constantly extended", as opposed to the less demanding mainstream program. Ha also liked the fast-track program because "everyone else is at my level; it helps to develop many areas" and "it's like, I get to know everything". Ha's preference for a learning environment where all her peers were at a compatibly high level and there were many learning activities to develop her skills showed her continuing investment in enhancing her language skills and developing her "cultural capital and social power" (Norton, 2016, p. 445). She invested in working hard and engaging with learning English in the fast-track program even when it was more challenging than in the mainstream program. While completing the teacher education program, Ha further invested in an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) course at a private language center to further enhance her English ability and work toward her future employment (Tomlinson, 2017) or imagined identity (Norton, 2016) as an IELTS trainer in future, which she revealed in the interview.

9.4.1.2 Abilities to Draw on English Language Learning Experiences and Articulate a Personal Narrative

Not only committed to long-term and lasting investment in the English language, Ha also demonstrated her ability to draw on her rich and diverse language learning experiences in developing her identity capital, which is an important aspect of identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017). When speaking about her future career as a teacher, Ha said:

> I hope that my English language learning journey…, the background knowledge and lived experiences I gained through this journey, will become a good source of inspiration for my students. Like, I've always been interested in English and that interest has brought me this far.

Here, Ha articulated a personal narrative linking her past learning experiences to her future identity as a teacher. She saw herself as an inspirational, resourceful example of successful English language learning and hoped that her future students would benefit from what she had to offer. In the same vein, she wrote in the narrative frames, "I want to be able to tell stories, to live what I share, what I teach and not just repeating the textbook". In addition, Ha also commented on the value of her "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) in developing her identity capital:

> For all of my teachers, I picked up some of the great qualities that I love about them; for my IELTS teacher, I am preparing myself for an international environment, which means teaching someone who don't speak my mother tongue.

In this extract, Ha seemed to indicate that her learning to become an English language teacher began as she started learning the language and observed different teaching methods. She placed great importance on the role of her teachers and her exposure to their teaching in the development of her identity, as she said, "I am able to draw

on their effective teaching strategies and form my own teacher identity". This is in line with Lortie's (1975) contention that teachers' prior learning experiences have strong influence on the development of teachers. In particular, Ha was particularly interested in developing her teaching identity by drawing on the experiences she had in the private IELTS course taught by the Filipino teacher:

> When I learned IELTS with my Filipino teacher, she offered very effective tips for practice and development of my language competences rather than telling me how to speak. I mean she didn't expect a fixed way to respond to the speaking section, and I like to follow that teaching approach.

It seemed that the Filipino teacher's teaching style had strong impact on Ha both in terms of English language proficiency and teaching identity. Ha indicated that she would like to adopt many of the strategies she experienced under the Filipino teacher's teaching and apply them in her future practice. In the narratives, Ha kept her future identity as an IELTS trainer in perspective, which shows a strong connection between her imagined identity, her investment in the language, and how she capitalized on her experiences in learning the language.

9.4.1.3 Self-Concepts

The data also revealed Ha's self-concepts in relation to her future job as a teacher of English. When responding to the question, "Which parts of your long English language learning journey contributed the most to your English proficiency?", Ha said:

> Perhaps the senior secondary years when I got to do meaningful and practical learning activities. Of course, I've always loved learning English since I was little, so my progress has been steady. However, in senior secondary years, my English ability was consolidated and shaped into its best form. I don't remember having any difficulty communicating with foreigners from the first time, so I just engaged in such communication naturally. Some of my university peers seem to be nervous and uncomfortable when communicating in English, but naturally, I've never had that feeling.

She perceived herself as having high English language proficiency and an ability to communicate comfortably and effectively in English. Ha attributed this to her many years of English language learning experiences, especially her senior secondary years at the language specialized school. Language proficiency has been reported as an essential domain of language teacher knowledge (Nguyen, 2013; Richards, 1998). This finding not only supports past research on the role of self-perceived language knowledge and skills in language teacher identity (Miller, 2007, 2009; Nguyen, 2017b). It also confirms the role of prior learning experiences (Lortie, 1975), especially investment in language practices (Norton, 2015, 2016) in shaping these self-concepts and consequently teacher identity.

When projecting herself toward her future teaching, although Ha appeared to be confident in terms of her language proficiency, she had some concerns about her teaching skills, as she said in the following interview extract:

R: You said in the narrative frames that your strong point is language proficiency or language competence. Is there anything else?

H: Amongst everything, I think I'm best at that. I mean I have sufficient subject matter knowledge to teach. But when comparing myself with my peers, I find that my teaching skills are not as good as theirs. For example, in the microteaching session in class, […] I felt that I was subject to public criticism and judgement. It's the same when I sit in the class as a student and form thoughts about my teachers' instructions such as 'They could do this, they could do that'. Therefore, I'm still nervous teaching in front of a class.

This extract shows that Ha was well aware of the important role of her high English language proficiency in her future teaching. However, she was also conscious of her anxiety about delivering lessons in front of students. This anxiety resonates with findings of previous studies where non-native preservice teachers feel a lack of confidence in pedagogical skills (Miller, 2007; Richards & Farrell, 2011). Further, it also seemed to be rooted in her other identity as a student, who would form judgments about her teacher's instruction. This exemplifies how preservice teachers' learning experiences contribute to shaping their teacher identity.

9.4.2 Case Study 2: Thu

9.4.2.1 Investment in English Language Learning and Literacy Practices

While Ha actively invested in learning English since Grade 1, both within the formal curricula and in private classes, Thu's English learning experiences were mostly associated with formal schooling. She started learning English in Grade 6, and the school strictly followed the MOET's textbook. Similar to the situation of English education in many public schools in Vietnam (Le & Phan, 2013; Le, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019) in and other countries (Murray, 2020), English was taught using the grammar-translation method, focusing mainly on grammar and vocabulary. However, Thu said, "At that time, I didn't feel that English was important, so I didn't have strong impression with the subject and teaching". At senior secondary school, the curriculum and teaching that Thu engaged with were similar to her junior secondary school, except the teachers were better qualified. At this stage, Thu had started to realize the benefits of learning English and invested in the subject more. She said:

When I started senior secondary school, I felt that English would be important in the future, so I focused on learning English more and wanted to become a teacher of English.

Realizing the role of English in contemporary society, as she finished high school, Thu decided to apply to Babel, which she regarded as "one of the best institutions in English education" based on her Internet research. This reveals that Thu had started to agentively invest in searching for a good institution to continue learning English and to learn to teach the language. Such investment was evidently driven by her understanding of the benefits of learning English in enhancing her cultural capital and social status (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2017; Price, 2014; Shin, 2016).

Different from Ha, who attended the fast-track English program at Babel, Thu's mainstream program at the university included 10 courses in English, divided into three streams (general English, academic English, and exam preparation). Thu appeared to invest in learning English both in class and independently much more than when she was at school. She commented on the intensity of English language learning at university:

> All the subjects have deadlines. At first, I was not used to that and I had to focus on developing my language skills, so managing the deadlines was really challenging. Also, my classmates were much more capable, so I felt a lot of pressure when working in groups.

Despite the challenges mentioned in this quote, Thu expressed tremendous satisfaction with these courses, which offered ample opportunities to practice language skills:

> The deadlines are important [….] because there is not much time in class to practice English, so there needs to be homework, such as recording your speaking, which was then marked by the teacher. So, I find the homework useful because it provides opportunities for practicing the language by myself.

This showed Thu's high level of investment in literacy practices and commitment to developing her language skills to make up for the gaps in her ability due to the unproductive experiences learning English at school. Although not mentioned explicitly, Thu seemed to be investing in addressing the gaps between her current ability level resulted from her past English language learning experiences and her future identity as a teacher of the language, which is the kind of investment discussed by Norton (2015, 2016).

9.4.2.2 Abilities to Draw on English Language Learning Experiences and Articulate a Personal Narrative

Similar to Ha, Thu also considered her English learning experiences as a type of resource that she could use in her future teaching. This exemplified a form of identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017) that Thu developed. She wanted to "share with students the learning tips and experiences gained throughout my learning". Thu had only learned English at school, and the English education programs she attended were grammar focused. Although Thu was frustrated with the way English was taught at school, she also appreciated the good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary she was able to develop through these experiences. This finding is in line with the findings of past research in highlighting the resources that non-native preservice teachers have and the way they shape teacher identity (Miller, 2007, 2009; Nguyen, 2017b, 2019). In response to an interview question about how her English education experiences in schools contributed to her future teaching, Thu said, "It developed my content knowledge. […] because although language skills were neglected, much attention was paid to grammar structures and vocabulary". The following extract further demonstrated Thu's view on the essential role of grammar and vocabulary in English education at school levels:

T: Regarding grammar, at secondary level, grammar is definitely very important if students want to take university entrance exams. So it needs to be taught, not a little but in-depth.

R: But would you use a different teaching approach?

T: In terms of grammar, I find it dry and many students don't like it. [….] High school teachers often teach the grammar rules then let students do exercises. I think I would provide examples first then teach the grammar rules so it is easier for students to remember. [….] For example, with the present simple tense, students would already be using it in their conversations. I would use their own sentences as examples to teach the grammar rule. That way they will remember for longer.

R: Would you want to include more listening and speaking at high school levels?

T: Yes, listening, speaking and especially pronunciation. It needs to be correct right from the beginning; otherwise, it will be very difficult to correct later on.

Acknowledging the role of grammar in high school English education and university entrance examinations, Thu emphasized that it should be taught more effectively. Based on her experiences having "dry" grammar lessons, she projected her future teaching to be more engaging by involving students in giving authentic examples before discussing the grammar points. The last part of the extract also showed that Thu would focus on communication and pronunciation skills alongside grammar and vocabulary. Thu's commitment to teaching communication skills was because through her own experiences, she became well aware of the disadvantages of her lack of communication skills. In reflecting on her English learning experiences at university, Thu said, "My classmates were much more capable, so I felt a lot of pressure when working in groups", and "At first, I was frightened as I couldn't catch much in listening. Yeah, I was most scared of speaking because I couldn't speak".

Moreover, Thu also demonstrated her ability to draw on her experiences learning English at university in forming her future teaching identity.

There are a number of ideas I can learn from my university teachers of English, such as learning activities they organised and their feedback strategies. For example, in writing, they often provided feedback on idea logic as well as common and recurring mistakes, instead of minor mistakes.

The data extracts presented in this section showed that in developing her teaching identity, Thu was drawing on the less productive learning experiences at school as well as the perceived effective teaching methods used by teachers at university. Here, Thu seemed to draw a close link between her past English language learning experiences and her imagined identity as a teacher in future, which formed an important part of her identity capital in the graduate employability model (Tomlinson, 2017).

9.4.2.3 Self-Concepts

In projecting her future role as a teacher of English, Thu perceived herself as an approachable, motivating, and at the same time strict teacher. She discussed these in the interview:

R: What do you think are your strong points as a teacher?

T: I think I'm quite approachable to students to help them feel more relaxed in my class.

R: So you would be approachable, but you also mentioned that you are a strict person?

T: Yeah, strict in terms of setting class ground rules for students, but approachable in terms of sharing with students… […], guiding students.

R: How would you help students feel more relaxed?

T: I would do that by motivating them to learn.

Thu also wrote in the narrative frames, "I will also try to orientate them to learn English by themselves because I cannot teach them everything in a limited time in class. If students know how to learn English effectively, they can learn no matter where without teachers' instructions". In these self-concepts (Tomlinson, 2017), Thu seemed to be developing an identity that she considered as beneficial to students' learning. The way Thu positioned herself was purposeful, as she would like to be approachable and motivating in order to help her students feel relaxed and enjoy learning English while being strict would help her students stay engaged.

When situating herself as a teacher in the classroom, Thu expressed some negative self-concepts:

My teacher-fronted presentation skills and explanation skills are areas where I am currently not confident. [….] I speak too fast and I often tremble. If I'm not well prepared, I will tremble. I speak too fast so I'm worried that students will not understand what I say. (laugh)

This self-awareness is similar to Ha's self-perception discussed in the previous section. Both preservice teachers were nervous in delivering lessons. While Ha's anxiety seemed to be influenced by her identity as a student, Thu's anxiety was due to her speaking speed and inadequate preparedness. Being aware of the causes of her anxiety, Thu identified strategies for overcoming these, including "more practice in teaching through part-time teaching jobs and observation of my peers and my teachers' teaching". This is in line with the findings of past research that preservice teachers feel the need to gain teaching experiences (Miller, 2007; Richards & Farrell, 2011) to develop their desirable teacher identity.

9.5 Conclusion and Implications

The graduate employability model developed by Tomlinson (2017), especially the concept of identity capital, supported this investigation into the question "*What forms of identity capital do preservice English language teachers in Vietnam develop through English language learning experiences?*". The forms of identity capital found included: investment in English language learning and literacy practices, abilities to draw on English language learning experiences and articulate a personal narrative, and self-concepts. It was found that both preservice teachers invested remarkably in learning the target language at school and university. They were able to draw on these experiences and articulate a personal narrative in light of their

imagined identity as a teacher of English in future. They also formed a number of self-concepts in relation to their future work as English language teachers. The study offers a number of insights that could be useful for preservice English language teacher education in developing graduate teachers' employability based on identity capital and for employers in selecting teachers for their English education programs.

First, Ha and Thu's stories reflect the neoliberal trend that many preservice teachers of English have rich English language learning experiences which span over many years before they enter teacher education (Murray, 2020). The study found that such experiences played an important role in shaping the participants' identity capital, which in turn was considered an essential aspect of their employability. Such wealth of experience in learning the target language needs to be recognized and capitalized on in preservice teacher education programs in efforts to develop preservice teachers' capitals for employability. With increased international mobility and the resultant changing face of the field of TESOL (Nguyen, 2019), "the majority of the ELT teaching force globally comes from, and teaches in, settings well outside the 'inner circle' [i.e., Anglophone countries]" (Freeman, 2020, p. 10). Therefore, rather than focusing on native/non-native speakerism, which "cannot be fully defined linguistically" (Freeman, 2020, p. 12), preservice teachers should be empowered by engaging in discussion about what capitals they can develop and have accumulated over their years of education.

Second, it is important to also acknowledge the diverse levels of language experience and competence that preservice teachers have and how this may impact differently on the development of their identity capital. Preservice teachers like Ha, who had successful language learning experiences in elite schools and private centers and had developed a high level of language proficiency from their investment in the language, should be encouraged to create narratives drawing on the success of their learning in articulating their identity capital. It is also important to understand what areas they feel a lack of confidence in, such as pedagogical skills, and provide support contingent on this. However, Thu would belong with the majority of English language learners, whose language learning may be limited to the formal schooling system. Formal English education is often criticized for its exam-focused curriculum using grammar-translation method (Murray, 2020). In many contexts, including Vietnam, high-stake examinations also do not assess communication skills (Murray, 2020). Consequently, many preservice teachers' communication skills are not well developed when they enter teacher education. In order to support them in developing identity capital, they should have opportunities to articulate narratives based on the profound grammar and vocabulary knowledge they have gained through their education experiences. In addition, teacher education curriculum should provide ample opportunities for them to develop their communication skills to bridge the gaps between their current level and the demands of their projected role. Based on the participants' narratives, Babel, the teacher education institution where Ha and Thu studied, seemed to provide an exemplary curriculum in this sense since it recognized the lack of communicative competence preservice teachers have on entry and reserved a significant portion of the curriculum for developing their communication

skills, which supports the findings of Nguyen (2013) that English language proficiency development subjects make up the largest part of the English language teacher education curriculum.

Finally, the study not only confirms Tomlinson's (2017) conceptualization of identity capital but also expands the conceptualization to include narratives of activities preservice teachers engaged in long before they started the higher education course. Alongside the development of teacher knowledge and skills within the curriculum, English language teacher education needs to create spaces for preservice teachers to articulate a narrative connecting their future identity and past learning experiences. Employers should also set selection criteria that not only focus on teacher qualifications and teaching experiences, but also their learning experiences in the language they teach as this is in most cases the richest resources that preservice teachers bring to teacher education and subsequently to employment (Murray, 2020).

Appendix A: Example of Narrative Frames

Part 1: Primary school [Please skip this part if you started learning English in secondary school].

I started learning in (1) …….. [year] when I was (2) …….. years old. I had (3) …….. periods of English a week, and the course book was (4) …….. …….. Most of the class time was spent on (5) …….. …….. …….. [What skills? What elements?] What I loved most about these English classes was that (6) …….. …….. …….. …….. What I did not like was that (7) ……..……..……..

Appendix B: Example of Interview Questions

Interview 1

1. Tell me about your experiences learning English?
2. How did those experiences contribute to your future job as an English teacher?
3. Which part of your English learning journey contributed the most to your English language proficiency? What are the most important elements of that part?

Interview 2

1. What do you think makes a good English class?
2. What qualities and skills should a good English teacher have?
3. Tell me about a teacher of English that you regard as your role model. (Will you try to follow/ replicate his/ her style?)
4. How do you describe yourself as a teacher of English in future?
5. What is your current English teaching philosophy? Will it change in future? (How/why?)
6. What do you think are your strengths as a future teacher of English? How did you develop these?
7. What areas are you working on to improve your teaching ability? Why do you want to focus on these?
8. What ingredients in your English language learning experiences would you bring into your future teaching?
9. How will your teachers of English and classmates influence the ways you will teach?
10. What do you think are your responsibilities as a teacher of English in future? Why do you think so?

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