An Exploratory Study of a Korean EFL Teacher's Identity Shift during the Pandemic

Jinsil Jang[1]

[1] Ohio State University, United States

Correspondence: Jinsil Jang, Ohio State University, 1945 N High St, Columbus, OH 43210, United States.

Abstract

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, language teachers have been asked to rapidly react and adapt to constantly changing teaching environments in order to understand their students' needs in L2 learning and make judgments in conditions of uncertainty. The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the need to understand how teachers' identities evolve during such difficult times and situations. In response to this need, this study reports the findings from my qualitative case study on a Korean English teacher's identity shift. Drawing upon Foucault's (1983) notion of ethical self-formation, I examined how the Korean English teacher negotiated and developed her identity to adjust to drastically changing working environments as she weighted the benefits and challenges of online and offline education, particularly for novice Korean EFL learners. Data were collected through various sources from an experienced Korean English teacher, called Anna, at a regional foreign language center in South Korea over the course of two years. Due to the pandemic, she had to make the transition from offline to online teaching. Further, her center closed one year after the outbreak of the pandemic, and she was reassigned as a travelling teacher in a multi-school program for underachieving English students. The findings reveal that Anna became more agentive in searching for and utilizing multiple resources for teaching, showing her reflective and action-oriented practices to involve in ethical, practiced, and productive identity work (Miller, Morgan, & Medina, 2017). The findings contribute to expanding our understanding of the transformative potentials of language teachers' identity.

Keywords: teacher identity, COVID-19 pandemic, ethical self-formation

1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought many changes to English as a foreign language education. In many cases teachers had little or no prior guidance or were unprepared for teaching under the conditions dictated by the outbreak. In such uncertain circumstances, teachers had to quickly adapt to drastically shifting teaching environments, which most often demanded a shift to teaching methods suitable for remote instruction. Further, the unexpected transition to online teaching caused several challenges related to emotional, technical, and pedagogical issues for EFL teachers (e.g., Sundarwati & Pahlevi, 2021; Turnbull et al., 2021). EFL teachers also reported their inevitable difficulties and frustrations with the changeover (e.g., Farrell, 2021; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021).

Given the challenges that language teachers encountered, the existing literature illustrates various aspects of the impact of the pandemic crises such as EFL teachers' perceptions of online teaching (e.g., Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020; Todd, 2020), online assessment (e.g., Chung & Choi, 2021; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021), and the development of online programs (e.g., Yi & Jang, 2020). An important point commonly addressed in the existing studies is language teachers' agentive and voluntary actions taken to redevelop their teaching techniques and methods reflecting on drastically shifting teaching modes, the English language and literacy development of EFL learners, and effective communications with their students.

For example, Todd's (2020) study of 52 English teachers' perceptions of the sudden shift to online modes at a university in Thailand demonstrated that teachers progressively found solutions to their problems in spite of the enormous challenges of online teaching spaces. Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020) also showed Iranian teachers' willingness to employ online applications and the platforms effectively and efficiently despite the challenges. Further, online assessment research conducted during the pandemic of COVID-19 illustrated that the instructors built a professional learning community to create new forms of process-oriented projects and formative assessment practices (Chung & Choi, 2021). Another online assessment study, Zhang et al. (2021) also showed six EFL teachers'

online assessment practices in a Chinese university –their agentive negotiation of assessment methods reflecting on policy, context, and their previous and current teaching experiences and reflections.

As such, the existing research conducted after the pandemic outbreak has explored various aspects of challenges language teachers had encountered (e.g., online assessment). As part of these findings, researchers addressed language teachers' voluntary actions taken to overcome the challenges they faced during the sudden shift and their professional identity development in a virtual teaching environment. This indicates a need to understand how language teachers negotiate and (re)form their identity to appreciate their students' needs in online L2 learning and to make decisions in a climate of constant uncertainty. Yet very few studies have been conducted on EFL teachers' identity work in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to this gap and drawing upon Foucault's (1983) notion of ethical self-formation, this qualitative case study explores and examines a Korean English teacher's identity development in the process of her adjustment to drastically changing working environments. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will reinforce the importance of EFL teachers' reflection of their practiced identity and ethical aspects of teaching and learning in the process of becoming successful professionals (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Miller et al., 2017).

1.1 EFL Teachers' Shifting Challenges into Opportunities via Self-reflection

Due to the global health crisis, language teachers were initially confronted with significant administrative, technical, pedagogical, and even affective difficulties; however, they often adapted to these new circumstances –becoming more confident and flexible in teaching on online platforms– as they proceeded through their courses (e.g., Farrell, 2021; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021; Sari, 2021). For instance, Farrell's (2021) study demonstrated how four EFL novice teachers in Costa Rica overcame their emotional challenges through self-reflection and participatory classroom observations. Farrell argued that the teachers could better understand their own emotional and online adaptation challenges via self-reflection, which also enabled them to better manage such challenges in the future. It is important to note that teachers' classroom observations and their use of reflective tools of dialogue were utilized not merely for exploring their challenges, but for their professional development. This highlights self-reflective practice as an essential part of the development of the teacher-self. In other words, throughout the interviews as reflective practices, the teachers frequently expressed negative emotions (e.g., exhaustion, frustration, uncertainty) in connection with online teaching. Yet, their engagement in reflective practices supported them in becoming more resilient to stressful changes and enabled them to develop both professional skills and "emotional flexibility" (Mackenzie, 2002, p. 186).

Similarly, Sari's (2021) study on Indonesian EFL teachers (Nuranti and Intan) in rural higher secondary schools showed evidence of how the teachers responded to their negative emotions and exercised their agency to solve the problems through critical reflection. Rather than being dominated by negative feelings, both Nuranti and Intan reflected on their depressing emotions and recognized that their resistance to change would become a hindrance to their professional development. Thus, they worked hard to expand their knowledge of online language teaching methods and simultaneously looked for help from more experienced teachers. By doing so, they could transform their negative feelings into positive ones and showed "continuous professional learning efforts" (p. 10). This research suggests that the EFL teachers need to be provided with different types of professional development programs to further expand their reflective skills as well as their online teaching skills.

Sundarwati and Pahlevi (2021) also described four Indonesian high school EFL teachers' pedagogical and technical challenges and how the challenges became opportunities for their self-development as language teachers and enhancing their digital skills. Despite numerous pedagogical (e.g., online assessment) and technical (e.g., Internet access) difficulties in remote teaching, the EFL teachers became acquainted with integrating digital learning resources and innovations into their teaching. This was possible through the accumulation of their online teaching experiences from multiple teachers working on online program development, and the teachers' reflection on their online teaching, which fostered their sense of self and authority as teachers.

The sudden transition to remote teaching pushed language teachers to enact online teaching, something with which many were unfamiliar. Thus, most research conducted on EFL teachers amid the pandemic centers around the emotional, technical, and pedagogical challenges in virtual teaching environments which revealed teachers' capability to turn their challenges into opportunities. Such a change required teachers' agency, which enabled them to engage in reflective practices that could lead to the development of their professional identity. This aligns with the statement of De Costa and Norton (2017) that "identity work involves *practicing*, rather than mastering" which underlines the necessity of incorporating "reflective action projects into teacher education programs" (p. 10) (see also Miller et al. 2017). Namely, to prepare teachers to become more responsive to sudden changes in teaching and

learning conditions, it is critical to examine and understand teacher identity development by adopting the notion of ethical self-formation (Foucault, 1997) which will be addressed in detail in the following section.

1.2 The Ethical Analysis of Emerging Teacher Identity

Foucault conceptualizes 'ethics' as "the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself […] which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014, p. 238). In other words, his concept of ethics indicates *self-care* which implies "a series of technologies, of activities and reflections by which one gains knowledge of oneself and skill in the practice of relating to and improving oneself" (Infinito, 2003, p. 74). In his research of self-care, Foucault (1997) opens up the question, 'how self-transformation takes place,' introducing self-technologies as the practices and processes that specify "how an individual is to define, maintain and develop her/his identity with a view to self-control and self-awareness" (Anderson, 2003, p. 25). In these regards, self-technologies can be understood as technologies through which an individual (re)shapes oneself from "a state of having responsibilities (putting one's own development on the agenda) into taking on responsibilities (accepting responsibility for it)" (Anderson, 2003, p. 26).

This coincides with Clarke's (2008) view on the development of teacher identity in that he conceptualizes *learning to teach* as "an ongoing process of becoming" rather than acquiring "a set of skills and techniques" (p. 9). In his teacher identity work research, Clarke (2009) employed four ethical aspects of a relationship to oneself drawing upon Foucault's notion of ethical self-formation: the *substances*, the *authority-sources*, the *self-practices,* and the *telos* of teacher identity. The *substances* of teacher identity are pertinent to ethical judgment (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014). For example, it refers to the issues of what forms of subjectivity represent my teaching self and what aspects of myself and my identity pertain to teaching (Clarke, 2009). The second aspect, the *authority-sources* of teacher identity, concerns the mode of subjection – how and why "people are invited and incited to recognize their moral obligations" (p. 239) and develop certain behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014). The third aspect, the *self-practices* of teacher identity, involves the self-forming activity – what techniques and practices we utilize to (re)shape our teaching selves to become ethical subjects (Clarke, 2009; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014). The fourth aspect, the *telos* of teacher identity, concerns the issues of what kind of teachers we aspire to become when behaving in a moral way (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014).

Clarke's (2009) micro case study shows how Neil, a student teacher, viewed and developed his teaching self. From Neil's point of view, obtaining respect from his students was a critical part of his teacher identity. Despite his concerns about his relations with his students in the classroom, his efforts to engage in practices of self-formation (seeking and receiving advice from friends) and being aware of the necessity of continuous learning to teach encourage him to explore and (re)construct his teaching self. Similarly, the reflective identity practices of an elementary school teacher, JC, in Miller et al.'s (2017) 9-year case study revealed that teacher identity work involves ethical self-formation – enriching the language teacher's self-awareness as an ethical subject. The multiple case study of Guo, Chen, and Sun (2021) also investigated the identity construction of four native-speaking English teachers at a Chinese University. The findings of the study showed multiple and emerging teacher identities which were influenced by their teaching practices and beliefs.

As in the teacher identity research informed by the notion of ethical self-formation (Foucault, 1997) above, teacher identity self-practice and ethical self-awareness were found to be critical for supporting language teachers to explore the education system, their teaching experiences, and their linguistic and cultural knowledge, and to negotiate favorable identities which they would bring into their classrooms for effective teaching (De Costa & Norton, 2017). Such findings suggest that there is a growing need to apply identity as an analytic lens in teacher education research (Gee, 2000), particularly regarding Foucault's (1997) notion of ethical self-formation.

2. Method

2.1 Research Context and a Participant

This two-year longitudinal qualitative case study took place in a regional foreign language center shortly after the COVID-19 outbreak in South Korea in early 2020 till January 2022. The center was founded and funded by the An-young (pseudonym) County Office and operated by a provincial educational office in order to provide foreign language learning support to students from countryside schools. Before the pandemic, five to ten schools sent students to the center at least once a month during a semester, and students spent 3 hours (three 45-minute blocks with 15-minute intervals) doing various English learning activities with native English-speaking and non-native Korean English-speaking teachers. The mission of the center included working with the teachers to create various active, interactive, and communicative language activities as well as appropriate visual and audio materials. The

center was also equipped with studios where learners could participate in English conversations with native and non-native English teachers in simulations of real-life situations.

Prioritizing the development of communicative skills with hands-on activities, the center had mostly offered in-person instruction before the pandemic. Thus, the move to online instruction was a huge transition for the center staff and teachers. In February 2020, the Korean Ministry of Education announced that, due to COVID fears, schools and language centers were to push back the start of the new school year (in spring) and to prepare for online instruction. The center staff and teachers had to redesign and redevelop their entire curriculum and materials for online learning environments. During that process, the focal teacher participant of this research (Anna, a pseudonym) actively and voluntarily engaged in the development of online teaching lessons and materials.

The center closed one year after the pandemic outbreak because their online instruction was reported to be substandard, yet Anna was still employed by the County and was reassigned as the sole travelling teacher in an English phonics program operated across several schools in the district. During the 2021 academic year (from March to July and from September till December 2021), she travelled between 9 different schools, working full-time and single handedly running the program in each school. This program was a pilot funded by the An-young County Office with the aim of helping underachieving English students in the school district and reducing educational disparities between students, which were widening during the Coronavirus pandemic. The program aimed to assess the students' early English literacy skills (e.g., letter knowledge, phonological awareness) and to explore their specific English needs (e.g., vocabulary, phonetics). As an experienced Korean English teacher who worked at the center for more than seven years, Anna was well aware of students' overall English proficiency levels in the rural areas where she taught and that these levels were relatively lower than those of students in the surrounding urban areas. Further, she knew that EFL learners in the countryside were not interested in learning English as they had little chance to use English in their everyday lives. Thus, her primary concern was how to (re)design a program curriculum well suited for the EFL students' English literacy skill development as well as how to motivate underperforming students.

Anna and I first met in 2011 as graduate students of a master's program of TESOL at a regional university in South Korea. From that time forward, we kept in touch and discussed many different topics and issues related to English teaching in South Korean schools whenever we met or talked on the phone. Yet, a conversation we had in early February 2020 turned out to be quite different from our previous ones. In this conversation, Anna shared the news that the start of the new school year in Korea had been postponed due to COVID-19 and that she might have to prepare for online teaching. She was extremely worried about the situation and expressed uncertainty about the changes in teaching methods that would come after the start of the new semester. Upon receiving the news, I repositioned myself as a researcher, a negotiator, and a close friend. Over the course of data collection period, I listened carefully to her concerns and explored her agency and identity development as an English teacher amid the pandemic.

2.2 Data Collection

The data in this study were collected from various sources (e.g., interviews, observations, and fieldnotes) over the course of two years (2020-2022). The main sources of data were 50 semi-structured interviews, twelve non-participatory classroom observations, and artifacts (e.g., lesson plans for online teaching, students' written feedback on her YouTube video clips) shared by the participant, Anna. Interviews were conducted biweekly, but if a critical event occurred, such as the closing of the foreign language center where Anna worked, I immediately prepared a list of interview questions and interviewed her on the following day. Interview questions centered around her online and offline teaching practices, the transition of her teaching practices relative to the changes in teaching modes and contexts, and the reasons for the shift.

Due to the physical distance between Anna (in South Korea) and me (in the US during school semesters), I had 32 video interviews with her through Kakao Talk (the top messenger app in South Korea). The other 18 interviews were conducted face-to-face when I visited South Korea in between semesters. Each interview lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. At the request of Anna, Korean was predominantly used in all interviews and English was employed only when necessary. All interviews were audio- and video recorded, and then transcribed.

Seven non-participatory classroom observations took place in May and June 2020 when Anna was transitioning from offline to online teaching mode, whereas the other five observations were conducted in June and July 2021, three months after the English phonics program was implemented in An-young County. All the observations were digitally recorded. Fieldnotes were taken during the observations for contextual and other information regarding the observations and the interpretation of the meanings of the transcripts. In order to improve the reliability and

authenticity of the data, the interview transcripts and fieldnotes were shown to Anna.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved iterative qualitative processes using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and an individual-level logic model (Yin, 2018). Theoretical perspectives from ethical teacher identity research presented an interpretive framework with related guiding questions for analyzing the data. Upon collecting data, I transcribed and analyzed verbal data manually. The initial codes include the EFL teacher's perceptions of the benefits and challenges of online and offline education, the EFL teacher's self-reflection on her own teaching, and her attitudes towards teacher evaluation. The codes were reiterated and revised to identify certain themes and categories. The identified categories were triangulated across all available data sources (interviews, observation data, and the artifacts shared by Anna). From the data, the development of the EFL teacher's identity relative to shifting teaching modes and contexts was identified at multiple levels.

The overarching research questions of this study are:

1) What teacher identity does Anna develop with respect to EFL teaching amid the pandemic?

2) How is her identity negotiated and reshaped in the process of adapting to drastically changing working environments?

By answering these questions, this study aims to show the process of negotiating and (re)constructing an EFL teacher's identity in relation to radically transforming English teaching conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rigorous analysis of this longitudinal qualitative case study is anticipated to offer holistic insights into intricate contextual and pedagogical issues with respect to teacher education and teachers' identity work.

3. Findings

The analysis of data revealed Anna's flexible and fluid use of multiple resources for effective virtual teaching, self-initiated reflective practices, and growing beliefs about multilingualism. Throughout the course of two years, Anna showed agency and identity in order to successfully shift into online teaching, particularly in teaching English to lower-level learners in the countryside. In the following, each of the main themes is illustrated.

3.1 Transitioning from English-only to the Use of Multiple Resources in Online Instruction

Before the pandemic, it was rare to observe Anna using Korean while teaching in person. This was because her teaching at the center focused on providing her students with English immersion environments in which she employed various kinesthetic activities for EFL teaching, as noted in the interview below.

> "I did not expect myself to use *Korean* and *images* a lot for virtual English teaching… As you know, I tried *not to use Korean*… in face-to-face meetings… unless my students showed difficulties in understanding my English conversation with a native English teacher. And… To motivate EFL lower-level learners, I designed a number of kinesthetic activities so that they could be more exposed to English with interests." (Interview, 6.15.2020)

The sudden shift from offline to online teaching mode in early 2020 brought pedagogical challenges to Anna in supporting EFL lower-level students' understanding of English. Specifically, in the process of online program design, Anna came to recognize English-only practices and kinesthetic activities would not be effective for Korean lower-level EFL learners' language skill development, especially in virtual teaching mode.

Thus, in creating the videos, Anna utilized linguistic (English and Korean) as well as non-linguistic (images and body gestures) resources to help Korean EFL learners' understanding of English words/expressions as well as to enhance lower-level learners' motivation. As can be seen from Figure 1, the students watched one or two video clips on Anna's YouTube Channel on a weekly basis and communicated with Anna via the online forum on the center's website. Anna purposefully chose to upload her videos to YouTube to make them easily accessible for her students. Further, she voluntarily created the online forum so that her students could build their online community to negotiate the learned English knowledge. It is important to note that the drastic shift to virtual teaching mode enabled Anna to problematize her previous teaching methods and transformed them into those oriented to multimodal and multilingual.
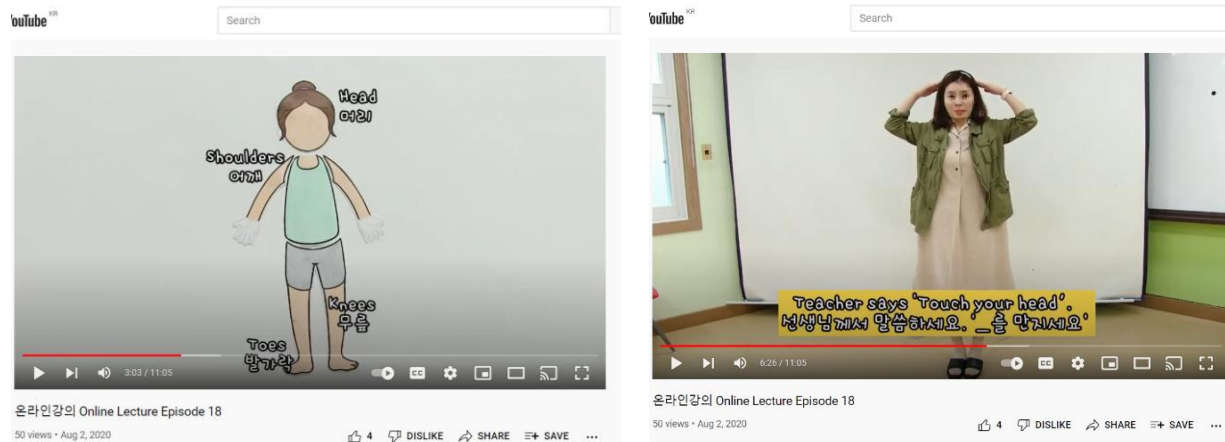
Figure 1. Anna's dynamic and flexible use of multiple resources in YouTube videos

Along with all Korean schools, the language center where Anna worked opened for in-person instruction in May 2020; however, Anna continued to upload her videos due to the fluctuations in COVID cases and administrative changes brought by COVID. As she produced more videos and received more comments regarding her online teaching, Anna noticed more limits in teaching English to Korean students with low phonological awareness skills. In other words, despite her attempts to create an effective English learning space online –utilizing both linguistic and non-linguistic resources, she sensed that online teaching might lead to growing educational gaps, particularly for novice EFL learners. Her recognition not merely resulted from her previous teaching experiences and knowledge of the regional EFL students' proficiency levels but from her reflective practices which included her voluntary student survey about her online teaching.

3.2 Reflection on Online English Teaching and Its Effects on Lower-level EFL Learners

To receive feedback on her prior online teaching, Anna voluntarily conducted student surveys when the center opened in May 2020. Her students mostly provided positive feedback. However, Anna could sense that her students wanted to participate in face-to-face meetings rather than online because in virtual learning mode, they could not receive direct support from Anna when they needed it. Anna seemed to agree with her students that offline learning was preferred. As shown in the interview below, she perceived watching videos as "a second-hand experience" for her students, not necessarily encouraging them to engage in the actual use/practice of learned English.

> "Regardless of students' level of English proficiency, they wanted to have face-to-face meetings. […] From their survey responses, I could sense…. If they could ask me directly in person like, "teacher, please do it this way," I would be more than happy to apply their requests into my teaching. […] Although I took some videos in my real life to show authentic English conversation, like getting a ferry ticket in English when I was on a business trip with my co-teacher… It's not a real experience for them, it's me who practiced the expression, not them. But I assume… that at least they can have a second-hand experience…" (Interview, 10.27.2020)

Further, Anna brought up another shortcoming of online teaching in respect to her students who were still learning the English alphabet and were not being able to identify or produce word sounds. Although her use of Korean and body gestures in YouTube videos enabled these students to understand the meaning of the expressions through the additions of contextual information, they failed to learn the target language (English) used in the expressions. She addressed this issue in the interview below.

> "Korean subtitles and body gestures help them understand the contextual information, what they are learning… For example, if they watch a YouTube clip about 'how to buy ice-creams,' they understand that they were going to learn related expressions such as 'how much is it?' … but the problem is… they barely know the alphabet, meaning that they can mimic the expression but do not know how to read and write it." (Interview, 5.27.2020)

Consequently, from the results of the student survey, Anna found some affordances of online teaching (see Table 1) such as the development of students' motivation. However, she believed that for the students' actual English language skill development, she needed to further develop her online teaching skills and techniques to overcome the perceived limitations (Table 1). This shows the development of her teacher identity. Specifically, she agentively

transformed the limitations into problems through reflective practices which resulted in "a work of thought" (Foucault, 1997, p. 119). Namely, Anna's problematization of online teaching established the conditions in which possible solutions could be provided (Foucault, 1997).

Table 1. Anna's perceived affordances and limitations of online EFL teaching for lower-level learners

	Affordances	Limitations
Lower-level Students	Enhancing students' motivation Promoting students' understanding of English expressions with the use of multimodal and translingual resources	The absence of direct support from teachers, especially for the students who lack phoneme awareness No or little opportunities for actual (writing and speaking) practice

One significant finding here is that the huge transition from offline to online teaching mode led Anna to voluntarily engage in reflective practices which offered her critical insights into what novice EFL learners actually need for their English skill development such as enhancing phonological awareness. Further, her use of student surveys demonstrated her professional way of self-care. Instead of being overwhelmed by the challenges she encountered in the online teaching mode, she critically explored the affordances and limitations so that she could focus on constructing diverse solutions to further develop both her teaching skills and her students' English knowledge.

3.3 Anna's Beliefs related to Teaching Lower-level EFL Learners in South Korean Schools

Anna's online teaching experiences and reflections had influenced her teaching of basic phonics in a specially designed pilot program, which she taught live in the classrooms of various schools from March 2021 after her center closed. For example, she attempted to teach English phonics in *Korean* in consideration of her learners' linguistic background and motivation. Moreover, she decided to run the program *in person,* having reflected on the limitations of her previous online teaching experiences. This indicates that the negotiation of Anna's teacher identity had an impact on her teaching beliefs and attitudes –showing her practiced identity.

In this new working environment, Anna also had to consider the aim of the program –bridging EFL learners' achievement gaps by teaching basic phonics to lower-level learners– in making decisions about book selections and the program design. As briefly mentioned above, Anna prioritized the students' understanding of English phonemes based on their Korean linguistic knowledge. Thus, the phonic book she chose was written in both *English* and *Korean*. Her decision to make use of the Korean English phonic book resulted from Anna's recognition, as addressed in the interview below, that *English cannot be learned through English-only practices*, particularly in the case of novice Korean EFL learners.

> "Upper elementary students can read the letters of the alphabet, but they can't read English words. So… on the very first page of the book [that I chose for the program] … it shows a table that how 'a' is pronounced in a word in *Korean* (/ㅐ/). No one had taught those children phonemes in Korean. […] So, learning phonics in Korean has opened up a new world for them, and I think it's the most efficient and effective way of enhancing their phonemic awareness. I had used several phonic books written in English only before, but it was not effective at all. English cannot be taught in English only… to lower-level Korean EFL learners." (Interview, 5.4.2021)

As she expected, learning English phonics through *Korean* enabled them to negotiate the linguistic difference between the two different languages, and many of her students started to read English words (see the interview on May 10, 2021, in Table 2). The table below shows the interviews that took place when she implemented the same program for the third time at a different regional school. Although this was her third time running this program, because she had new program participants, she still felt challenged, tense, and pressured, especially at the beginning of the program. However, a week later, she excitedly shared an outcome that she felt validated about the effectiveness of her teaching techniques. This outcome, a clear improvement in the students' phonological awareness, consolidated her teaching beliefs. Clearly, Anna's self-practice of teacher identity through her interviews with me invited her to reshape her teacher identity. It also enabled her to clearly envision her becoming a professional language teacher – successfully completing the pilot program so that the basic phonics could be taught through both *English* and *Korean* in regular English classes for novice Korean EFL learners (see the interview on May 13, 2021, in Table 2).

Table 2. Anna's reflections of the implementation of the phonics program

Date	Interview
5.4.2021	"It seems like I've got a lot on my shoulder… as I have taken on a new role, it *brings the tension and pressure that I have to fulfill expectations…*"
5.10.2021	"My growing responsibilities with the program push me to work harder... But as I run the program, I can see the development of the students' phonological awareness. And some of them even start to read English words! […] They are not deficient English language learners. *It's just regretful that basic phonics are not taught in the regular classes for English* in elementary school."
5.13.2021	"I want to show that the lower-level students have ability to become proficient in English so that *basic phonics can be taught in the regular classes*."

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the pandemic had an impact on language teachers' identity relative to different aspects such as teaching techniques, practices, and teaching beliefs. Considering the challenges Anna encountered, her agentive coping strategies to utilize placed resources are noteworthy in that her strategies led to the creation of effective language learning and teaching environments. Also, her reflective practices for self-care and the reformation of her teaching showed how she performed the dynamic and flexible roles of a language teacher and confirmed her emerging identity. Similar findings surfaced in the studies on EFL teachers' challenges amid the difficult times (e.g., Davies et al., 2020; Ghanbari & Nowroozi, 2021; Farrell, 2021).

Like the Iranian EFL teachers in Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2021), Anna's teaching had been considerably influenced by the modes of teaching. In other words, despite the unexpected and sudden technological, pedagogical, and emotional challenges, the Iranian EFL teachers evaluated their placed resources and came up with their own strategies to deal with the new situation. Likewise, Anna did not directly adopt her previous teaching techniques and resources but newly utilized linguistic (Korean and English) and non-linguistic (images) resources in order to cope with her online teaching mode. The transition from English-only to multilingual and multimodal practices is important to note as it was her own strategy to support novice Korean EFL learners' English comprehension in the online space. Clearly, the contextual change had little or no effect on the *substances* of her teacher identity –her passion towards English teaching for novice EFL learners– but impacted the *authority-sources* for teacher identity –(re)developing her teaching considering the students' needs in virtual learning (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014).

Another important finding of this study is language teachers' *self-forming activity* (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014). In order to further develop her online teaching techniques and skills, Anna voluntarily and agentively conducted a student survey which led her to engage in reflective practices. The reflective practices allowed her to recognize the affordances and limitations of online English teaching and learning, particularly for lower-level Korean EFL learners. Further, through the reflective practices, Anna problematized the limitations of online teaching on her own accord (Foucault, 1997), which enabled her to have a clearer sense of what teaching techniques and skills would be necessary to enhance the lower-level students' phonemic/phonological awareness. This is similar to the four Central American EFL teachers' reflective practices in Farrell (2021). Farrell's (2021) study focuses on teachers' emotions and reflections, but the findings of his study illustrate that all four teachers became more confident and flexible in coping with the challenges, including negative emotions, by engaging in reflective practices. Moreover, their reflective practices encouraged them to work through their demanding experiences in a productive manner. Namely, Farrell's (2021) study and Anna's example demonstrate the importance of teachers' self-care –reflective practices– in building a positive and constructive sense of their teaching self.

Lastly, constantly changing working environments propelled Anna to (re)shape her role as a Korean English teacher reflecting on the lower-level students' needs and institutional support. Her practices of self-formation in relation to online teaching and the implementation of a basic phonics program solidified her teaching beliefs and enabled her to clearly envision the kind of teacher she aspired to become. This shows that teacher identities are not fixed but provisional. In line with these results, other research carried out on teacher identities (e.g., Clarke, 2009; Gu, 2011; Guo et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2017) suggests that teacher identity work calls for ethical self-formation which enables language teachers to exercise their ethical agency for the reconstruction of teacher identity. Consequently, the result of this study supports the adoption of self-formation practices for pre-service teacher education and in-service teachers' professional development.

5. Conclusion

This study has some limitations, the first of which is the small sample size (one teacher). Given that generalization of qualitative case studies has always been difficult, I would like to suggest more teacher identity research in different contexts. Also, despite the relatively long data collection period (two years), because of the physical distances

between the author and the research participant, there were limits on the author's ability to observe the participant's reflective practices in person.

Despite these limitations, this study has implications for the professional development of language teachers. The current study emphasizes the role of teachers in the ever-changing classroom contexts as they are the ones who can immediately reflect on and accommodate the realities of language teaching in such challenging times. Namely, there is every reason to believe that, on the road to becoming successful professionals, language teachers will find value in considering the ethical aspects of teaching. In this regard, this study suggests that teacher education programs should address the ethical aspects of language teaching and learning so that teacher identities can be enacted in professional and meaningful ways to improve student learning outcomes (De Costa & Norton, 2017).

The findings of this study also provide new directions for future studies. Anna's example showed how she reflected on and made use of the teacher evaluation and the student survey for her future teaching. Given that there are very few studies exploring student evaluations of online teaching or how teachers respond to these evaluations and reflect on them in their future teaching, future studies on language teachers' reflective practices relative to student evaluations will provide much insight into language teacher identity development.

References

Andersen, N. Å. (2003). *Discursive analytical strategies: Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann.* Policy Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t898nd

Chung, S. J., & Choi, L. J. (2021). The development of sustainable assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of the English language program in South Korea. *Sustainability, 13*(8), 4499. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13084499

Clarke, M. (2008). *Language teacher identities: Co-constructing discourse and community.* Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847690838

Clarke, M. (2009). The ethico-politics of teacher identity. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 41*(2), 185-200. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00420.x

Davies, J. A., Davies, L. J., Conlon, B., Emerson, J., Hainsworth, H., & McDonough, H. G. (2020). Responding to COVID-19 in EAP contexts: A comparison of courses at four Sion-Foreign Universities. *International Journal of TESOL Studies, 2*(2), 32-51. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.04.

De Costa, P. I., & Norton, B. (2017). Introduction: Identity, transdisciplinarity, and the good language teacher. *The Modern Language Journal, 101*(S1), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12368

Dreyfus, H. L., & Rabinow, P. (2014). *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315835259

Farrell, T. S. (2021). "COVID-19 challenged me to re-create my teaching entirely": Adaptation challenges of four novice EFL teachers of moving from 'face-to-face' to 'face-to-screen' teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research, 9*(3), 117-130. https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2021.121079

Foucault, M. (1983). The subject and power: Afterword. In H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (pp. 208-264). The University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1997). *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth: Essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984,* Vol. 1. (P. Rabinow, Ed.). New Press.

Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education, 25,* 99-125. https://doi.org/10.2307/1167322

Ghanbari, N., & Nowroozi, S. (2021). The practice of online assessment in an EFL context amidst COVID-19 pandemic: Views from teachers. *Language Testing in Asia, 11*(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-021-00143-4

Gu, M. (2011). The ethical formation of teacher identity: Pre-service teachers in Hong Kong. In R. Jaidev, M. L. C. Sadorra, W. J. Onn, L. M. Cherk & B. P. Lorente (Eds.), *Global perspectives, local initiatives: Reflections and practices in ELT* (pp. 183-194). Centre for English Language Communication National University of Singapore.

Guo, X., Chen, G., & Sun, Y. (2021). An ethical analysis of native-speaking English teachers' identity construction in a mainland China university. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 42*(3), 247-261. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1684502

Infinito, J. (2003). Jane Elliot meets Foucault: The formation of ethical identities in the classroom. *Journal of Moral Education, 32*(1), 67-76. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724022000073347

Khatoony, S., & Nezhadmehr, M. (2020). EFL teachers' challenges in integration of technology for online classrooms during Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Iran. *AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy, 8,* 1-16. https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol8.sp.1.2020.

Mackenzie, C. (2002). Critical reflection, self-knowledge, and the emotions. *Philosophical Explorations, 5*(3), 186-206. https://doi.org/10.1080/10002002108538732

Miller, E. R., Morgan, B., & Medina, A. L. (2017). Exploring language teacher identity work as ethical self-formation. *The Modern Language Journal, 101*(Special 1ssue), 91-105. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12371

Sari, D. R. (2021). Rural EFL teachers' emotions and agency in online language teaching: I will survive. *Vision: Journal for Language and Foreign Language Learning, 10*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.21580/vjv10i17727

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Sage Publications.

Sundarwati, E., & Pahlevi, M. R. (2021). EFL teachers' challenges and opportunities of emergency remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic: Narrative inquiry. *Language and Education Journal Undiksha, 4*(2), 74-85.

Todd, W. R. (2020). Teachers' perceptions of the shift from the classroom to online teaching. *International Journal of TESOL Studies, 2*(2), 4-16. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.02.

Turnbull, D., Chugh, R., & Luck, J. (2021). Transitioning to e-Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: How have higher education institutions responded to the challenge? *Education and Information Technologies, 26,* 6401-6419. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10633-w

Yi, Y., & Jang, J. (2020). Envisioning possibilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications from English language teaching in South Korea. *TESOL Journal. 11*(3), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.543

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods.* Sage Publications.

Zhang, C., Yan, X., & Wang, J. (2021). EFL teachers' online assessment practices during the COVID-19 pandemic: Changes and mediating factors. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 30,* 499-507. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00589-3