

Emotionally Mediated Professional Identity Transformation in Intercultural Mooc-based Learning

The study investigates the process of professional identity transformation within the affective framework of intercultural MOOC-based learning for pre-service English language teachers. The aim of this study is to bridge a gap in existing research literature by investigating the intersection of three separate domains that have been studied individually: professional identity, emotion, and intercultural engagement in online learning. Instead of considering identity formation to be a stable process or emotion to play a subordinate role in intercultural learning experiences, this study considers emotion to be the interpretative tool with which intercultural experience acquires a professional meaning. The exploratory qualitative approach informed by interpretivism was employed in this research. The results reveal the occurrence of emotionally intense events influenced by factors such as global visibility, comparison, feedback, validation, and linguistic vulnerability associated with participation in the MOOC. Based on the data analysis, there were four interrelated themes identified such as emotional stimulation as a result of global visibility; intercultural de-centering and perspective broadening; emotional reflection and identity work; and re-positioning as an emotionally responsive teacher. In each of these themes, emotion did not simply accompany learning as a secondary activity but rather served as the medium of interpretation for intercultural shock and personal re-positioning as future teachers. The theoretical significance of the research stems from the development of an account of professional identity transformation that is process-oriented, whereby intercultural interactions become transformative only to the extent that emotionally significant experiences are reflexively processed and incorporated into emerging professional selfhood. Although the results may be context-dependent and derived from retrospective accounts, the research provides an explicit conceptual model of professional identity transformation that is dialogic, affective, and contextualized in intercultural online learning environments.

Keywords: *professional identity transformation, emotional mediation, intercultural MOOCs, pre-service English language teachers, dialogical identity, reflexive thematic analysis*

Introduction

Professional identity has become a central construct in contemporary educational research since it shapes how practitioners understand their roles, interpret institutional expectations, and sustain commitment in complex professional environments. Specifically in teacher education, professional identity is no longer understood as a fixed personal attribute, but as an evolving, socially situated, and relational process. Recent studies connect professional identity with reflective practice, self-concept, adaptability, well-being, and

professional development, showing that becoming a teacher involves continuous negotiation between personal meanings and professional expectations rather than the simple acquisition of technical competence (Hui et al., 2025; Pi et al., 2024; Rodrigues-Silva & Alsina, 2024; Ye et al., 2025). However, though there is a dynamic growing recognition of identity, many studies treat it as an outcome variable or measurable construct, paying less attention to how transformation is lived, interpreted, and narrated by teachers' experiences.

According to the aforementioned, the importance of this gap highlights when identity development takes place in intercultural and digitally mediated settings, where uncertainty, visibility, and comparison are intensified. In this regard, the paper claims that emotion should not be treated as a secondary by-product of professional learning, but as the mediating mechanism through which intercultural experience becomes professionally transformative. Emotions shape how individuals interpret feedback, experience vulnerability, respond to difference, and reposition themselves in relation to others and to their future professional roles. In addition, emotion does not simply accompany identity development, but it organizes the interpretive movement from encounter to reflection and from reflection to transformation. In this regard, Cheng's (2014) study on emotional affordance in MOOCs emphasizes that online environments generate forms of emotional participation that influence learning in ways not reducible to achievement alone. Similarly, research on professional identity and well-being suggests that emotional processes are deeply implicated in how professional self-understanding is stabilized, challenged, and reconfigured (Hui et al., 2025).

On the other hand, intercultural engagement adds a further layer of complexity because this environment exposes learners to unfamiliar communicative norms, competing perspectives, and alternative ways of understanding teaching and learning. MOOCs are particularly relevant in this regard because they can function as spaces of global interaction rather than mere platforms for content delivery. According to different scholars, such environments can foster intercultural competence, communication skills, and shifts in pedagogical orientation (Dell'Aquila et al., 2023; Rai et al., 2023; Rodrigues-Silva & Alsina, 2024). However, the present studies have been focused more on describing these outcomes in terms of competence development, behavioral adjustment, or reflective growth rather than in terms of the mechanism that links intercultural exposure to identity change. Furthermore, there is a lack of analysis on how emotional activation generated by intercultural contact, through anxiety, affirmation, uncertainty, comparison, or recognition, mediates the reinterpretation of self that makes possible the transformation of professional identity.

In this regard, this study brings together three issues that have continuously been separately analyzed like professional identity, emotional mediation, and intercultural engagement. Firstly, it starts from the premise that professional identity transformation is not produced by intercultural exposure alone. Rather, transformation occurs when emotionally charged encounters are interpreted, negotiated, and integrated into evolving understandings of teaching, selfhood,

and professional responsibility. So, by foregrounding emotion as the mechanism mediating, this study shifts the focus from whether intercultural learning influence's professional identity to how that influence becomes meaningful, reflexive, and transformative.

Theoretical Framework

This study aims to analyze professional identity as a dialogical, socially situated, and continuously evolving process rather than just a stable individual quality. There are several aspects that help in the formation of identity in teacher education, such as the interaction of biography, institutional expectations, professional communities, and personal experience. However, this study departs from approaches that treat identity primarily as a measurable construct associated with variables such as self-concept, adaptability, or professional development (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Instead, it conceptualizes identity as an ongoing process of repositioning through which pre-service teachers negotiate who they are, who they are becoming, and how they understand their future role. So, dialogical identity theory provides the central lens, since it explains professional identity as an evolving constellation of "I-positions" that may coexist, conflict, and be reconfigured through experience (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Consequently, emotion is not treated as a secondary response to professional learning but as the central mediating mechanism through which identity transformation occurs. The paper argues that intercultural experience does not reshape professional identity directly, but it firstly generates emotional disturbance, such as anxiety, uncertainty, comparison, affirmation, or vulnerability, and then these emotions become meaningful through reflexive interpretation. In this regard, emotion acts as the link connecting external events to internal change processes. Consequently, this research builds on existing experience that demonstrates the role of emotion in online learning and professional wellness but simultaneously rejects scholarly frameworks that view emotion as merely the backdrop or mediating factor in its analysis. Emotion is understood in this study as a process of interpretation that focuses attention and facilitates professional repositioning (Cheng, 2014; Hui et al., 2025).

On the other hand, intercultural engagement in this paper is understood not merely as exposure to cultural difference or as the acquisition of intercultural competence, instead, intercultural participation is viewed as a form of epistemological disturbance that unsettles familiar assumptions about language, teaching, communication, and selfhood (Rai et al., 2023). In MOOC-based environments, such disturbance is intensified by global visibility, cross-cultural interaction, asynchronous communication, and public comparison (Manor & Masry-Herzallah, 2025). These conditions do not simply create opportunities for skill development, but they generate moments of tension in which participants become more aware of difference, relativity, and the limits of their own prior assumptions. Therefore, intercultural learning is considered to be a process of

destabilization and de-centering that calls for reflection on the learner's professional identity and pedagogical values (Dell'Aquila et al., 2023).

The theoretical framework of this study lies in synthesizing these three dimensions into one, creating a single explanatory model. In addition, professional identity provides the developmental object of inquiry, intercultural engagement provides the disruptive context, and emotion provides the mediating process that links the two. From this perspective, transformation begins when intercultural MOOC participation activates emotional responses under conditions of visibility and difference. Moreover, it develops further when participants engage in reflexive emotional processing, reinterpreting discomfort, feedback, and uncertainty as professionally meaningful. In this regard, the outcome is not simply emotional adaptation, but a repositioned professional identity characterized by greater inclusivity, relational awareness, and pedagogical flexibility. So, identity transformation is understood as negotiated, reflexive, and emotionally mediated rather than linear, automatic, or purely cognitive.

Differently from other studies, this paper does not treat MOOCs as passive delivery systems but as socially and emotionally charged environments that shape how participants encounter others and themselves. Their digital affordances, including public participation, feedback, multimodal performance, and interaction with diverse peers (Cheng, 2014; Hui et al., 2025) create the conditions under which emotional activation and identity negotiation become possible. Though, these same affordances can function as both support and constraints. This is the reason why the framework assumes that professional identity transformation in intercultural digital contexts depends not only on exposure, but also on how emotionally charged experiences are interpreted, negotiated, and incorporated into an emerging sense of self as teacher. The framework therefore supports an interpretivist and qualitative approach (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022), since only such an approach can adequately capture how participants narrate emotional tension, intercultural decentering, and professional becoming as interconnected dimensions of the same process.

Research questions

To address the identified gap in the literature and to align the study with its interpretivist and exploratory qualitative design, the present research is guided by a set of questions that examine professional identity transformation as an emotionally mediated and interculturally situated process. More specifically, the study seeks to explore how pre-service English language teachers experience and interpret emotionally charged intercultural encounters in a MOOC-based learning environment, and how these experiences contribute to the negotiation, repositioning, and reconfiguration of their emerging professional identities. The following research questions therefore provide the conceptual and analytical focus for the inquiry.

1. *How do pre-service English language teachers experience intercultural MOOC participation emotionally?*
2. *How do these emotional experiences mediate the reinterpretation of professional self-understandings?*
3. *How do participants reflexively negotiate tensions between competing professional and personal identity positions?*
4. *How does intercultural MOOC engagement contribute to the repositioning of professional identity toward more inclusive teaching methods?*

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design, based on an interpretivist epistemological perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to interpretivism, reality is socially produced and culturally negotiated and knowledge emerges through interaction, meaning-making, and reflective involvement rather than objective measurement. A qualitative approach was considered to be the most suitable for recording participants' emotionally mediated intercultural experiences during a MOOC-based blended learning environment as professional identity developing is a complicated, dynamic, and relational process.

Research suggests that a teacher's professional identity is dialogical, diverse, and constantly negotiated under various circumstances (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004). This study viewed identity as an evolving constellation of "I-positions" that are engaged, questioned, and repositioned through experience rather than as a fixed characteristic. Therefore, intercultural digital engagement was conceptualized as a dialogical environment that may activate tensions between conflicting identity positions (e.g., competent future teacher vs. insecure language student) rather than similarly instructional exposure.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) was used to investigate these processes that are particularly suitable for identity-oriented research. RTA allows methodically identifying patterned meanings while recognizing the researcher's interpretive role in theme construction. Themes are seen as analytic outputs rather than passive discoveries, and analysis is conducted iteratively through reflexive engagement with the dataset.

Context and Participants

The study included 16 pre-service English language teachers participating in a university teacher education program. The course structure combined participation in an international MOOC with face-to-face classroom sessions. Participants in the MOOC created lesson presentation videos, received feedback,

participated in asynchronous discussions, and commented on international peers' work. Reflection and discussion took place in class to add to these experiences.

The MOOC environment introduced participants to learners from various cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, aiming of intercultural barrier bridging. The interaction was predominantly text-based, highlighting language performance and enhancing self-monitoring.

The sample size ($N = 16$) is limited in quantitative terms, and qualitative adequacy is judged by depth and richness rather than statistical representativeness (Guest et al., 2006; Malterud et al., 2016).

A conceptually rich dataset appropriate for exploratory thematic analysis was generated by the participants' extensive narrative responses to 20 open-ended questions. Informed consent was acquired, and participation was entirely voluntary. Before the analysis, the responses were made anonymous and the data was safely kept and used only for research.

Data Collection

Data was collected at the end of the course using an open-ended questionnaire created by the researcher. The instrument included 20 reflective questions intended to elicit thorough reports of emotional experiences, intercultural interactions, feedback interpretation, communication challenges, and evolving perceptions of teaching.

Questions were organized around five conceptual domains:

1. Emotional responses to global participation
2. Intercultural communication experiences
3. Feedback and comparison dynamics
4. Reflexive meaning-making processes
5. Professional identity transformation

The written approach allowed participants to engage in careful contemplation, allowing for a more in-depth expression of identity-related insights than would be possible with brief survey responses.

Data Analysis Procedure

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generation of initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the analytic narrative

Semantic and latent coding methodologies were used and initial codes included feelings (e.g., worry, excitement, validation, frustration), intercultural awareness markers (e.g., recognizing communication variance), reflective processes (e.g., cognitive reframing, viewpoint shift), and explicit professional identity statements.

Codes were iteratively clustered into higher-order themes that depict regular developmental pathways, and a cross-case analysis was used to detect similarities and differences in identity changes. The analytical focus was on conceptual coherence and theoretical importance rather than prioritizing frequency counts (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria were used to determine trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to guarantee transparency between data and interpretation, verbatim quotations were used extensively, which increased credibility. A thorough contextual description of the course environment promoted transferability. Explicit documentation of analytical processes and reflective acknowledgement of interpretative positions increased dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

Findings

Following the reflective thematic analysis, the intercultural exposure in the MOOC setting triggered emotional experiences that, when intuitively processed, assisted in intercultural decentering and professional identity repositioning. The MOOC functioned as a dialogical multicultural environment where vulnerability, comparison, affirmation, and identity negotiation interacted rather than simply a digital teaching tool.

Four interconnected themes were identified in this process:

1. Emotional Activation Under Conditions of Global Visibility
2. Intercultural Decentering and Perspective Expansion
3. Reflexive Emotional Processing as Identity Work
4. Repositioning Toward Inclusive and Emotionally Responsive Teaching

Across the themes, emotion functioned as a mediating mechanism linking intercultural exposure to identity transformation.

Emotional Activation Under Conditions of Global Visibility

Participation in the MOOC produced a context for increased visibility and the participants' linguistic performance and thoughts were publicly exhibited to worldwide peers, which increased emotional activation. Few of them described the experience as “exciting but also a bit stressful,” highlighting emotional

uncertainty. Another participant stated being “flabbergasted from the sheer amount of new information,” reflecting cognitive stimulation combined by emotional enthusiasm. However, vulnerability appeared prominently with the participants frequently described anxiety linked to English language expression:

“At first I was nervous because I thought I would embarrass myself with my English.”

“I was very nervous while writing my thoughts in the comments.”

Public comparison intensified insecurity:

“Comparing myself with my peers felt bad... I saw people who have extreme knowledge.”

These statements suggest the activation of competing identity positions — I as a skilled future teacher contrary to I as an anxious language learner in accordance with dialogical identity theory (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Importantly, validation reduced vulnerability and the participants discussed the emotional impact of feedback:

“I was so happy when someone liked my story.”

“It felt like real communication with the teacher.”

These micro-affirmations improved engagement and stabilized insecure professional self-concepts. The MOOC served as an intense identity-testing environment where both validation and insecurity were increased by global visibility.

Intercultural Decentering and Perspective Expansion

Participants revealed increased awareness of cultural differences in learning methods and communication styles.

“Some people are very direct, while others are more indirect or polite.”

“Every person’s learning style can be different.”

These findings point to a shift toward intercultural separation, or the understanding that one's own norms are relative. Crucially, recognition of our common humanity coexisted with understanding of difference.:

“I realized people are mostly the same everywhere.”

“Intercultural learning is not only about seeing differences but also about finding common ground.”

For some participants, intercultural interaction disrupted prior concepts about teaching:

“Before the MOOC I believed those who want learn will learn... now I realize teaching should be flexible and inclusive.”

1 This change is not indicative of superficial tolerance, rather instead of
2 epistemological repositioning and relational, context-sensitive, and diversity
3 responsive teaching was reinterpreted.

4 5 *Reflexive Emotional Processing as Identity Work*

6
7 Transformation was not ensured by emotional activation alone and
8 reflective interpretation and integration of emotions led to identity development.
9 Emotions were defined by participants as developmental cues:

10
11 *"My emotions acted like a compass."*

12 *"When I felt confused, I knew I needed to study harder."*

13
14 Others expressed distress constructively:

15
16 *"Instead of seeing feedback as negative, I saw it as an opportunity to improve
17 myself."*

18
19 This kind of cognitive reframing reveals emotional control associated with
20 professional development.

21 Participants started embracing imperfection with increasing frequency:

22
23 *"Now I'm confident... I know that even if I'm a teacher candidate, I'm still a
24 learner."*

25
26 The integration of competing I-positions is demonstrated by this transition
27 from perfectionism to developmental humility. The transformation was
28 mediated by reflective processing. Identity repositioning requires interpretive
29 involvement; exposure alone was not sufficient.

30 31 *Repositioning Toward Inclusive and Emotionally Responsive Teaching*

32
33 The participants' transforming thoughts about teaching revealed the most
34 major shifts. Teaching was reframed to expand beyond teaching grammar:

35
36 *"Teaching English is not just about grammar."*

37 *"Being a good teacher is not just about knowing English well, but about having
38 high emotional intelligence."*

39
40 Emotional safety emerged evolved into a fundamental pedagogical concept:

41
42 *"Students cannot learn if they feel judged or scared."*

43 *"Making mistakes are natural part of communication and education."*

44
45 Experiencing vulnerability appeared to increase pedagogical empathy.
46 Participants stated their commitment to decreasing student anxiety and
47 promoting inclusive environments.

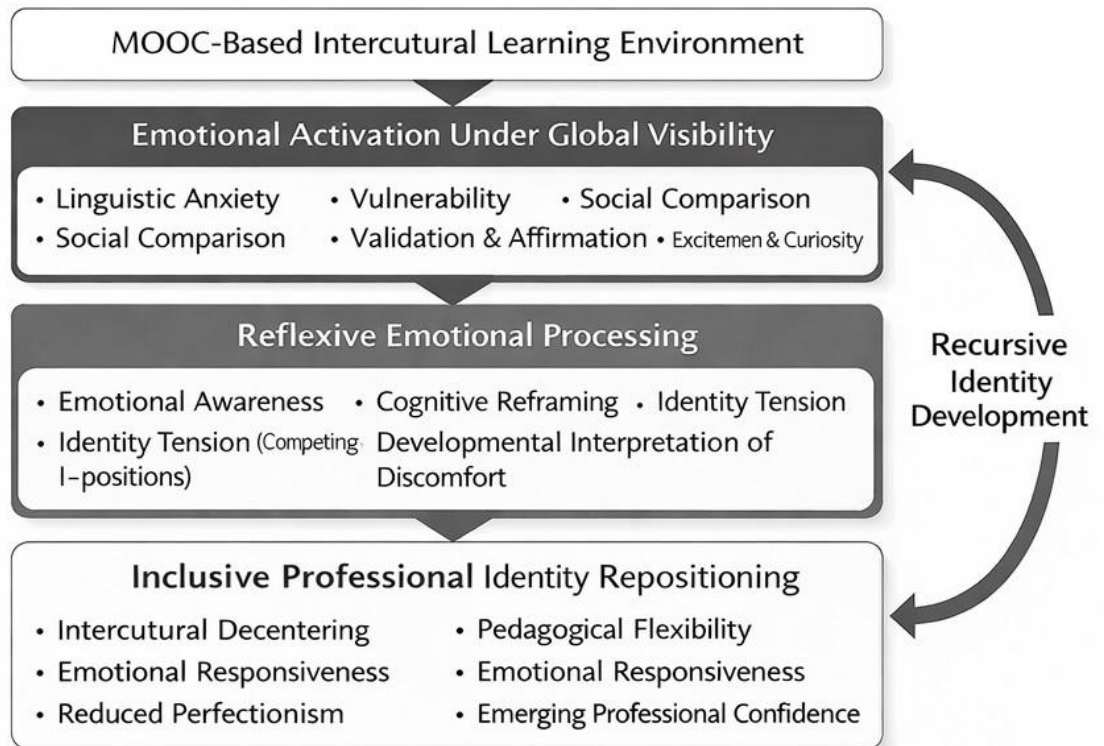
Lesson video production strengthened professional identity development:

“Seeing myself as a teacher helped me feel like a professional.”

“I recognized the huge difference between my first video and the last one.”

Video production served as an integrated rehearsal of the teacher identity, cultivating professional confidence and digital readiness.

Figure 1. Structural Thematic Model of Emotionally Mediated Professional Identity Development



Note. The model illustrates the structural relationship between emotional activation, reflexive mediation, and professional identity repositioning within a MOOC-based intercultural learning environment.

The findings from each of the themes identified above suggest that the professional identity transformation is not only a consequence of intercultural experience, but it is a consequence on how these experiences are interpreted and integrated within the evolving understanding of teaching held by the participants. The relationship between these elements is clearly illustrated in Figure 1 through its internal structure. More specifically, it illustrates how the MOOC-generated intercultural context provided conditions of global visibility that led to feelings like anxiety, comparison, vulnerability, and affirmation, all of which gained developmental significance through emotional reflexivity. The

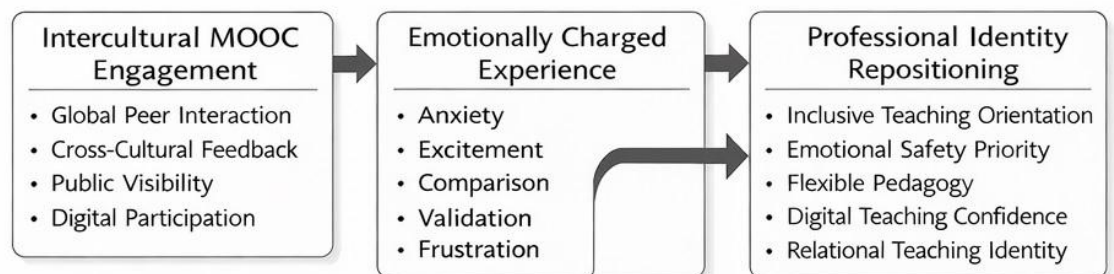
theoretical contribution of the figure is its visualization of the idea that identity transformation in this study was neither a simple nor sudden process but rather a self-referential one that involves interpretation through emotional activation, reflection, and professional positioning. Additionally, Figure 1 might be interpreted as a conceptual framework for the integration of results when emotion serves as a link between the intercultural encounter and the professional transformation. Therefore, it argues that meaning is not created automatically through the encounter with others but rather through the critical reflection of the participants on their discomforts, recognitions, and reactions to feedback. This significance establishes that professional identity formation takes place through interpretation of emotions and not through participation in the MOOC itself.

Integrative Model

Across themes, a recurrent development sequence emerged: **Intercultural Exposure → Emotional Activation → Reflexive Processing → Intercultural Decentering → Inclusive Professional Identity Repositioning**

The MOOC setting served as a dialogical identity lab and the emotional experiences facilitated intercultural learning and professional development. Transformation was negotiated, reflexive, and emotionally based.

Figure 2. Process Model of Emotionally Mediated Intercultural Professional Identity Development



Note. The model conceptualizes emotion as a mediating mechanism linking intercultural exposure within MOOC environments to inclusive professional identity repositioning.

While Figure 1 presents the intrinsic thematic structure of transformation, Figure 2 provides an additional layer of explanation through the representation of a clear process, illustrating that intercultural MOOC involvement leads to emotional experiences that facilitate the transition to professional identity transformation. The significance of figure 2 lies in the interpretation that emotion becomes the primary mediating step in the process and not a consequence of intercultural interaction. In other words, Figure 2 demonstrates the process entailed in all of these results like students were not changed merely by interacting with global peers, but rather by interacting with global peers in a way

that led to emotionally meaningful interpretations of those interactions. That said, both figures provide two complementary insights into the findings. While structural thematic model reveals the nature of the phenomenon, which is based on recursion and layers and implies the identity development process through the cycle of emotional activation and positioning, the process model explores the directional sense of the process through the sequential connection between intercultural engagement, affective mediation, and professional identity. Together, these models claim that the role played by the MOOC was not just that of a digital medium, but rather that of an intercultural affective space in which professional identity was contested and renegotiated.

Final remarks

The findings indicate that intercultural engagement in the MOOC had significant emotional effects that only led to professional repositioning after the latter was reflexively processed. MOOC did not serve as digital learning tool, but as an intercultural space where visibility, comparison, feedback, affirmation, and vulnerability linked in order to confuse and disrupt participants' identities as future teachers. Across the entire data set, emotion was not viewed as a secondary aspect of intercultural engagement, but rather as the mechanism mediating the translation of participants' experiences into their professional identity reconstructions. The four main interconnected categories discovered such as Emotional Activation in the Context of Global Visibility; Intercultural Decentring and Perspective Expansion; Reflexive Emotional Processing as Professional Identity Work; and Re-Positioning Towards Emotionally Responsive and Inclusive Teaching. Importantly, should not be seen as disconnected ones. They constitute a developmental continuum where intercultural experience resulted first in emotional activation, which in turn prompted reflexivity and enabled more inclusive ways of understanding. In this regard, the data highlight the fact that identity transformation was not an immediate process but one of recursion and interpretation. On the other hand, the process model transforms the same information into a more process-oriented representation, clearly indicating how intercultural engagement impacted professional identity through emotional involvement, as opposed to merely exposing individuals to different cultures. As a result, the data illustrate that emotion serves as a link between intercultural interaction and identity transformation.

Emotional Activation Under Conditions of Global Visibility

The first key result is that the MOOC generated an environment of increased global visibility. Performances, comments, and teaching-related activities in the language of the participants were exposed to their international peers, generating a high level of emotional arousal. "Exciting but also a bit stressful" and "flabbergasted from the sheer amount of new information" are some of the descriptions used by some participants to explain their experiences. This indicates that the MOOC offered more than just a platform for intercultural

exchanges. It was an intensified environment in which learning took place through exposure, uncertainty, and self-reflection. Vulnerability was another emotion that frequently emerged during the process. The anxiety regarding the use of the English language seems to be prevalent among the participants. “At first, I was nervous because I thought I would embarrass myself with my English” and “I was very nervous while writing my thoughts in the comments” are some phrases indicating their concern. Comparison, another critical factor affecting their emotions, intensified their vulnerability. “Comparing myself with my peers felt bad... I saw people who have extreme knowledge.” Considering the participants’ experience, global visibility seemed to prompt multiple identity positions, particularly positioning the self as a competent future teacher versus the self as an insecure language learner. Thus, the power of the MOOC experience did not simply reside in intercultural encounters, but in the potential for the self to be exposed to scrutiny, evaluation, and feelings of inadequacy. However, while visibility was certainly associated with discomfort, several participants also reported experiences of positive recognition and confirmation. Phrases such as “I was so happy when someone liked my story” and “It felt like real communication with the teacher” highlight the importance of feedback and micro-affirmation. Such findings imply that the activation of emotions was complex and not solely based on negative experiences. The same context that provoked anxiety and discomfort also fostered moments of recognition, connection, and encouragement.

Intercultural Decentring and Perspective Expansion

It is clearly stated from the responses that there was growing consciousness among the participants about the differences between cultures regarding communication methods, learning styles, and interaction methods. Comments like “Some people have a very straight-forward communication style whereas some prefer an indirect approach,” or “Every individual has his/her own learning style” indicate that participants were beginning to view their own ideas within the context of culture rather than assuming them to be universal. The above transformation was not solely responsible for the appreciation of the differences. Instead, there was also a simultaneous appreciation of the sameness, as illustrated by phrases like, “I realized that people are pretty much alike everywhere” and “Inter-cultural learning involves appreciating the similarities and differences between people.” The inclusion of sameness in addition to differences implies that the process of intercultural learning was not simply an exercise in diversity celebration or homogenization. Instead, it was more complicated, involving a reorientation where people appreciated plurality and unity simultaneously. For some participants, the process led straightly into their conception of teaching. One participant for example remarked: “Prior to MOOC, I felt those who wanted to learn would learn.... Now I know that teaching must be adaptive and open.” This statement represents something more profound than merely a change in attitude; it signifies an epistemological transformation in how teaching itself is perceived. A task that was once thought to be dependent on individual motivation was redefined as a relational, contextual, and responsive

activity. Lastly, the process model is located between emotionally loaded experience and identity relocation, thus emphasizing that intercultural decentering was not independent of emotional mediation but rather an important effect of it.

Reflexive Emotional Processing as Identity Work

On the other hand, transformation could not be achieved as an immediate result of the experience of emotions or intercultural communication. In fact, participants found themselves engaging in the process of reflective interpretation of their emotions, thus making them significant for the professional context. This is evident from the phrases such as “My emotions worked as a compass” and “If I were confused, it meant I had to work harder.” It becomes clear that people did not only go through the experience but also tried to interpret their feelings and make sense of them. Therefore, identity transformation seems to have been achieved through individuals' capability to interpret their emotionally disturbing experiences. Such interpretive activity could be especially observed in people's reactions to feedback and discomfort.

This kind of re-framing reveals how emotional reactions were actively negotiated rather than passively endured. In addition, feedback no longer remains an evaluation done outside oneself, but an element of an inner construction process of the self. Emotions thus mediated not in causing the change itself, but in prompting a critical re-examination of self and one's own actions. Another frequent subject matter was that of a shift from perfectionism to a more developmental notion of professionalism: “I think I've changed. Now I feel confident.... I know that even if I am a teacher candidate, I am also a learner.” According to the statements, competing identities are not reconciled by removing all tensions between them, but by incorporating those tensions into a more stable self-conception. Therefore, the value of structural thematic model lies precisely in the representation of reflexive emotions as the middle level of the theoretical framework. It is stated that emotional activation itself could not be sufficient for transformation; some interpretation was necessary. Consequently, it is argued that reflection on emotions played a mediating role in the current study.

Repositioning Toward Inclusive and Emotionally Responsive Teaching

The theme of repositioning toward inclusive and emotionally responsive teaching looked at the implications of the above shift for pedagogy. The shifting accounts of what teaching requires from participants show that the process of professional identity repositioning was manifest not only through their self-perception but also through their conception of teaching. For example, some participants shifted from technical perspectives of language teaching, as seen in the statement “Teaching English is more than just teaching grammar,” and another “To be a successful language teacher, one must not only have a high degree of knowledge of English language but must also be emotionally intelligent.”

What was visible in this transformation process related to the importance of emotional safety that was brought out by participants. This can be clearly shown from statements such as “Students cannot learn if they feel judged or scared” and “Making mistakes are natural part of communication and education.” The importance of emotional safety was highlighted because participants felt vulnerable and fearful during the course of the MOOC. Therefore, participants showed more empathy towards students due to their own experience in this context. Emotional exposure did not only occur on a personal basis, but it was also used to create a new professional ethic that involved inclusion, safety, and responsiveness. Video production was also another important factor that contributed to this transformation process. Statements like “Feeling like a teacher made me see myself as a professional” and “I noticed the big difference between my first and my last video” imply that digital performance contributed to the incorporated process of becoming a teacher. It was not just technical improvement, but also professional self-awareness and confidence gained through digital learning. Finally, according to process model, the consequences of digitally facilitated intercultural participation in terms of emotion management can be viewed in the final phase of professional identity repositioning where inclusive teaching orientation, emotional safety, flexible teaching, digital teaching confidence, and relational teaching are described as mediating results. Consequently, the model indicates that the mentioned pedagogical results were obtained by means of mediation and not direct exposure to experience.

Discussion

The current paper contributes to the field of research into teacher professional identity, suggesting that, in intercultural MOOC learning, emotion is not just a contextual factor, an accompanying emotion, or even a result of development, but a mediating interpretive device via which identity transformation can be achieved. According to the results of the study, participation in intercultural interactions does not automatically lead to the transformation of identity. Rather, emotional activation occurs first due to differences, visibility, feedback, and comparisons, and only after the interpretation of emotions, new professional meanings become apparent. From this point of view, the current study contributes to theorizing about teacher identity not as something measurable or developed but as a transformational process based on emotionality (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004).

The key theoretical contribution of this study, thus, lies in clarifying how intercultural experience turns out to be transformative. In existing literature, MOOCs have been seen to enable reflective practice, intercultural communication, and career development (Cheng, 2014; Dell’Aquila et al., 2023; Rai et al., 2023; Rodrigues-Silva & Alsina, 2024), while other researches have associated emotions with well-being, social support, and professional identity among pre-service teachers (Hui et al., 2025; Pi et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2025). But

these lines of inquiry have mostly operated independently. The unique contribution of this study comes from connecting these areas of research theoretically by showing that the emotional process mediates the connection between intercultural disruption and identity transformation. These emotions did not just happen incidentally around the experience of participating rather they became the lens through which the participants made sense of their position within the educational context, how they viewed others, and ultimately how they reconsidered the type of teachers they were becoming. In this regard, emotions mediated the transformation of participation into professional identity.

On the other hand, the study emphasized that emotions helped improve the understanding of dialogical theories of professional identity formation. Following dialogical identity theory, participants seemed to fluctuate between conflicting "I-positions" like that of the confident future teacher and the insecure language learner (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). However, the results from the current study indicate that the fluctuation between these I-positions was not solely an intellectual process. Instead, emotional events helped make sense of these conflicting positions. Embarrassment, vulnerability, encouragement, and validation brought focus to particular areas of oneself that needed reflection. By reflecting on them, the emotions were not just regulated or mastered but changed into professional knowledge. This implies that emotion should be seen not as something outside the process of identity construction, but rather as the very means whereby dialogic tensions come to mean something and whereby identity positions are rethought, revoiced, and reconstructed. In other words, the study expands our understanding of dialogic theories of teacher identity by demonstrating how identity shifts are affectively mediated.

Furthermore, the study contributes by theorizing the MOOC not as a simple medium through which educational content is delivered but rather as an intercultural affective space whose possibilities amplify the work of identity formation. Not only were the elements of global visibility, asynchronous communication, public feedback, and linguistic performance facilitating participant engagement, but they also constructed the affective environment that led to the increased awareness of self in relationship to others. The significance of this data lies in how MOOCs have been previously considered. On the other hand, the current study indicates that the possibility for transformation within these settings comes from their ability to produce emotionally significant experiences that challenge existing premises and open up space for reinterpretation. As a result, intercultural learning is considered transformative not by virtue of mere encounter with difference but by virtue of experiencing difference emotionally, reflecting on it, and integrating it into one's professional identity.

Moreover, the study sheds light on the transformation of the professional identity in terms of a process that occurs in the following manner such as Intercultural exposure leads to emotional arousal, followed by reflexive interpretation and de-centering/re-positioning in relation to the profession in order to become an emotionally intelligent teacher. However, it is not a linear and automatic process. There were instances when emotions alone did not lead

to transformation and, at other times, intercultural exposure alone did not create new understandings for teaching. The theoretical importance of this argument lies in the fact that it makes clear that the role of emotion in this case is not one of the broad effects of emotions on learning but the mediation process of identity transformation. In other words, the research does not address the question of how intercultural learning impacts professional identity but how intercultural experiences rich with emotions affect teaching pedagogies and self-concepts.

Thus, the shift towards being more inclusive and emotionally responsive in teaching, according to the participants, cannot simply be considered the consequence of exposure to diversity. The reason why the participants became more committed to creating conditions for emotional safety and inclusivity in their classes was that they were personally vulnerable, judged, affirmed and uncertain in the space of the MOOC. As such, emotion-mediated self-revision was at the heart of the participants' changing professional identity. Indeed, it is emphasized that professional identity transformation is dialogic and affectively mediated. While emotion was not merely a by-product of transformation, and it was not just hiding behind the processes of transforming one's professional identity, emotion played a key role in the process of sensemaking related to intercultural disruption.

Based on the aforementioned, in linking professional identity transformation, interculturality, and emotion to provide a unified theory of explanation, the study takes aim at overly straightforward accounts of competence development among teachers, which tends to overlook the role of emotion in shaping reflection and sense-making in relation to professional selfhood.

Limitations

First, the results are derived from written self-reflections that were obtained using a questionnaire administered at the end of the class. While this approach helped gain deep insights into the participants' experiences, it reflected their interpretations of past events rather than the ongoing process of identity transformation. Therefore, the research is capable of describing the process by which participants interpreted and transformed their emotions, but it does not allow following the dynamic interplay of identity, interpretation, and emotion on a moment-to-moment basis. Hence, the paper proposes a more detailed analysis interpreting emotions that underpin identity transformation. The second limitation of this study concerns the size and specificity of its sample, which includes only 16 future English language teachers involved in one instance of blended intercultural learning through MOOCs. The specificities of this context provided insights into the interaction of emotions, intercultural dialogue, and professional identity formation. At the same time, it constrains the generalization of the results to other contexts, such as different fields of study, educational institutions, MOOC platforms, or developmental stages. Hence, this study does not claim that intercultural MOOC learning always entails the same

transformation but reveals how this learning experience makes possible the mediation of emotion in professional self-positioning under certain conditions. Third, due to the interpretive and qualitative nature of the research design used in this study, its aim was to shed light on meaning-making processes rather than to assess the strength, frequency, or consistency of the process of emotional mediation. This research has revealed some interpretive patterns that emerged out of the experience of emotionally laden intercultural encounters among participants, however, it did not reveal whether or not the same patterns could occur in other settings and with different groups of individuals over a longer period of time. A further limitation relates to the character of the data itself. The present study is predominantly dependent on the reflections of the subjects involved. There was no other form of triangulation applied such as interviews, observation of the class environment, platform communication, or follow-ups in a longitudinal perspective. Such forms could have helped provide more depth into the process of expressing emotions, reflecting on them, and integrating the reflections into one's professional identity. Future research would be improved through the use of multimodal data to better understand the relationship between emotional disturbance, self-reflection, and professional identity formation. However, these weaknesses do not diminish the importance of research, but they serve to define the level on which its findings need to be considered. This research did not aim to provide a global model for developing teacher identity in a digital intercultural environment. What this research aimed at was an explicit description of how, in a particular MOOC setting, emotion played not a role in the background or as an outcome of the process, but rather an interpretive one.

Conclusion

To conclude, the research attempted to identify ways in which the transformation of professional identity would be mediated through emotions in the case of intercultural MOOC learning by pre-service teachers of the English language. It resulted that intercultural MOOC participation did not impact the transformation of the participants' professional identity due to their exposure to a global community of peers, different viewpoints, or engagement in digital dialogue alone. Instead, such transformation took place only when the emotional experiences of anxiety, vulnerability, comparisons, validation, and uncertainty were critically analyzed within the context of teaching and professional identity development.

Firstly, the MOOC generated global visibility that heightened emotional activation. Secondly, such emotionally charged interactions led to the experience of intercultural decentering and perspective broadening. Thirdly, identity transformations could occur because of reflexive interpretation of emotions, as emotional reactions were considered signs of personal development instead of isolated instances. Finally, such an interpretative approach allowed for the reframing of professional identities into more open and emotionally sensitive views of the practice of teaching. All of these insights suggest that professional

identity transformations in digital intercultural settings are not mechanical, nor are they simply cognitive processes, but they are dialogic and affective.

Consequently, the main theoretical contribution of the study consists in defining emotion as the process through which intercultural disruption translates into a transformation of professional identity. By combining existing knowledge about professional identity formation, emotions, and the role of intercultural MOOCs in the formation of teacher identity, the present research departs from an instrumental understanding of teachers' professional development focused on skills and outcomes. Instead, it reveals that it is not intercultural contact itself but the sense-making process of emotional intercultural experiences that leads to transformations in professional identity.

The study also carries educational implications. Since identity transformation requires emotional mediation rather than just exposure, intercultural digital learning should be facilitated not only for bringing learners together across borders, but also to facilitate reflective processes of thinking about vulnerability, comparison, feedback, and recognition. Professional teacher training programs could take advantage of emotions as legitimate sites of professional development and provide reflective opportunities for pre-service teachers where emotionally meaningful experiences can be interpreted within the context of developing into teachers.

In sum, the present article claims that intercultural MOOCs can be considered as spaces of affect and dialogue, where future teachers not only come across other people, but also new options for themselves. The professional identity transformation takes place through emotionally loaded experiences that get reflexively transformed into a new, more inclusive and flexible stance towards teaching. In this case, emotion is not something that exists around the transformation of identity; emotion allows such transformation.

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