"It Is Tough to Come Back. Who Am I Now as a Language Teacher?": The Re-Positioning of Three Vietnamese Teachers of English Language Returning from Overseas Programs

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Abstract: Theoretically grounded in positioning theory, this study aimed to unpack three stories of Vietnamese teachers of English' transformation of teaching theory and practice due to their international and intercultural overseas experiences. Our ethnography study was centered on those teachers' varying perceptions of what and how to teach. Our examination of the teacher candidates' written critical reflection and interview was conducted over one year after they returned to teach in Vietnam. Particularly, these teachers' perceived teaching and learning changes were a possible consequence of their experiences of intercultural engagement in many local settings in their host countries where they had previously stayed before returning. Using positioning and transformative learning as a theoretical lens, the researchers explored how teachers' transformation was revealed after their return, suggesting that there were themes of positioning, including their modified cognition, awareness, attitudes, and behavior. More specifically, the findings implied that educational nation-level and school-level policy should pay more attention to the local English teachers' privileges and threats that drive how they navigate their professional careers, considering academic qualifications and personal attributes. While the former was related to implications for teacher education programs (that help them identify teaching philosophy, methodology, and teaching environments), the latter involved teacher characteristics, aspirations, and accumulated capital.
Keywords: qualitative research, teacher returnees, teacher education, teacher positioning, study abroad, intercultural teaching.

With the development of internationalized higher education in Vietnam to create globally competent teachers and teacher educators for education in the twenty-first century (Duong & Chua, 2016; Olmedo & Harbon, 2010; Roberts, 2007; Tran & Nguyen, 2018), the importance of international experience, including study abroad opportunities, has been highly valued. Even though no more than 1% to 2% of students in developing countries experience international mobility and international education experiences and achieved international qualifications, these returnees are likely to intentionally integrate an intercultural and global dimension into their

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teaching purpose and instructional delivery in postsecondary education (Pham & Saito, 2020; Trinh & Conner, 2019). Indeed, in support of the movement of study abroad, the Vietnamese government also established a commitment to internalizing teacher education and regarding it as having a vital role in educating the next generations, which consist of highly skilled workers and leaders across a range of fields in a knowledge-based economy (Harman et al., 2009). As a result of these national efforts of transformation and the government policy framework aimed at the repatriation of international Vietnamese graduates, a greater number of pre-service and in-service Vietnamese teachers of English language who were trained and qualified through international education in foreign countries ultimately decided to return to Vietnam to serve the next generation of teacher candidates and English language learners after graduating.

Nevertheless, Vietnamese study abroad (SA) research increasingly focused on experiences, skills development, and second language (L2) development of teacher candidates who gained many benefits during their overseas study (Dressler et al., 2021; Kissau et al., 2021; Nghia, 2019; Nguyen, 2012), yet little was known about their professional endeavors, educational decisions, and instructional practices after the return. One of the questions that remained is whether or not the teachers' international experiences in foreign countries alone could contribute to their philosophies and ideologies that shaped multicultural or global educators. Another question was the extent to which these teachers critically relied on (i) what they had learned in the overseas teacher education programs and (ii) how they had understood the lived intercultural experiences so that they would (i) gain a meaningful understanding of other cultures and (ii) determine their role in a Vietnamese classroom from new perspectives. English language teacher returnees to their home countries, such as Vietnam, might exhibit different ways to cope with a wide range of locally culturally driving norms and educationally conflicting tensions that happen in the sociopolitical and sociocultural schooling contexts.

To better understand the difficulty of re-integrating into the home culture after living abroad, it is necessary to refer to the research of Tran and Bui (2021), who discovered that re-integration is a dynamic interaction in which international returnees must decide which aspects of their overseas cultures to retain and which to abandon. Clearly, based on the findings of this study, it is justifiable to assert that such internal reflection, or perceptions of the effects of contextual factors on the returnees' homecoming decision and their home labor market navigation, played a crucial role in enhancing their employability and facilitating, or re-establishing, their access to the resources of their home labor market. However, little was known about how English language teachers specifically ruminate on who they were versus who they are now, as well as how they acknowledge or deny the support of their home universities and employers.

Addressing these significant gaps in the literature given Vietnamese education, this article investigated how Vietnamese returnee teachers of the English language at higher education level could perceive their learning transformations, professional beliefs in their teaching career, and interaction abilities with their home Vietnamese learners. Specifically, the purpose of this article was to present a study of these classroom teachers' sense-making processes and perspectives of their teaching approaches that may have changed between the time before their overseas educational experiences (in the United States and Australia) and when they returned to work in Vietnam's diverse educational contexts. As a theoretical lens, the positioning theory framework developed by Harré and van Langenhove (1999) was utilized to achieve this research objective. In addition, the researchers argued that it is more important to retain the complexities underlying a person's position than to classify it using dichotomous or Manichean perspectives. Therefore, the knowledge, awareness, beliefs, and conceptions of duties of these returnee instructors in a

particular context could be better comprehended from three primary dimensions of positioning: psychologically, cognitively, and behaviorally. Particularly from a psychological standpoint, such beliefs and ideas may be investigated and demonstrated through their critical reflections and explicit articulations of structures of assumptions and expectations (Taylor, 2017). The researchers would focus on the dynamics of these teachers' sense-making process in conjunction with their critical reflections on the impacts of the overseas program on their teaching philosophy and beliefs, with a particular emphasis on how they would conduct a lesson and provide opportunities for the students' engagement in classroom activities upon their return. These critical reflections also included their attempts to make meaning of experiences, such as expanding their frames of reference for reasoning and justification, advocating new methods of thinking/believing, and discarding old ideas/habits. Eventually, this culminated in a change in a person's worldview and assumptions (Berg et al., 2012; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011).

The following questions guided this collective case study focusing on teachers' positioning:

a) How did regular classroom Vietnamese teachers of English describe their roles concerning teaching English to local Vietnamese students?
b) To what extent were such teacher roles' conceptualizations affected by their overseas experience?
c) How did the teachers' actualized pedagogical instruction relate to such English language teaching change (or sustain) before and after the study abroad experience?

Accordingly, this article did not focus on teaching English from a linguistic perspective. Rather, it emphasized the underlying rationale for their pedagogical choices, how they formulated such beliefs in their teaching, supposedly from their study abroad, and what kind of impacts they believed their teaching could make on their students' learning and workplace.

Research on The Impact Of Study Abroad Cultural Immersion and Learning

Transformation on Returnee Teachers

Research that examined the influences of study abroad on teachers has been limited. It was built on the premise that pre- and in-service teachers studying or training abroad capitalize on a cultural exchange when encountering a new culture that is far different from their homogenous home culture. In fact, teachers' perceptions of the differences between the two cultures indeed vary greatly depending on diverse factors, including their philosophies in teaching and learning and contextual factors in their home country's schooling contexts (e.g., Aamaas et al., 2019; Lyons, 2016; Onosu, 2020; Shin et al., 2014; Tarc et al., 2012; Tran et al., 2022). Among those, most of them primarily emphasized the lived experiences of the returnees in a narrower context, including their negotiations regarding what they have gained and lost from experience, their relationship between teachers and supervisors, colleagues, or institutional and governmental organizations, and employability to prospective employers.

On the one hand, several experiences of teacher returnees were centered upon their positive attitudes towards the international teaching training and practicums, which included their enhanced language competence and confidence (Christiansen et al., 2018), professional growth, and a sense of self in an intercultural world (Gray & Savicki, 2015). Teacher returnees demonstrated their ability to see the similarities and differences across cultures and have both an outsider and insider's

perspectives into how one might feel in an uncertain and unfamiliar environment, which laid a strong foundation for contextualizing learning, and cultivating empathy and humanistic teaching practices (Kinginger & Wu, 2018; Tang & Choi, 2004). For instance, Kasun and Saavedra (2016) reported that Mexican teacher candidates worked in tensions with identities they had already created before going abroad, such as being excellent, authoritative classroom managers. Yet, upon returning to their country following the study, they posed a challenge to themselves by evaluating their identities as second language teachers within local contexts, considering the global contexts in which they had learned that communicative and student-centered approaches should be implemented to enhance their students' learning experiences. These returned teachers also established an innovative educational space in Cambodia where they pioneered the field of applied educational research (Moore, 2021). Similarly, Alhuwaydi (2020) emphasized that the returnees from other native English-speaking countries were encouraged to implement the knowledge and skills they had acquired abroad in their English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) classroom settings through the many forms of professional development provided by their Saudi government.

On the other hand, the returnees who had to ratify and reconstrue their encounters with a foreign culture of learning could signify loss or disorientation, discomfort, resistance, and confusion when they returned to their home country's societal, institutional, or individual norms, in other words, considered as 'others' (Cushner, 2007; Merryfield, 2000; Song, 2016). According to Gaw (2000)[2] overseas-experienced teachers, just like other adults, could experience "reverse culture shock" in which they were precipitated by the anxiety that results from "losing all their familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse'" (p. 177). Amongst a few studies on teacher returnees, a study of fourteen English teachers in secondary schools in South Korea (Song, 2016) found that the returnees struggled to comply with local curriculum requirements and assessment standards. In addition, their proficient English skills were dispelled in the mainstream's exam-oriented approach in their home country, along with peer discrimination and put-downs which can also be found in another study (Choi, 2005). Urbanized cities could offer more English language educational models than rural areas, which might have discriminatory attitudes towards teachers' perceptions of their homecoming opportunities or proposals to apply the instructional methods they have obtained overseas (Li & Edwards, 2013). Similarly, in Chinese education, the current generation of teacher sojourners faced a different and more complex set of opportunities and challenges that required them to unlearn and relearn the knowledge to maintain their competitiveness in the teaching labor market despite their innovative teaching approaches (Gill, 2010).

To date, research has shown very limited insights into how Vietnamese returnee teachers viewed themselves in terms of their (re)constructed professional roles and pedagogical practices inside their local classroom after their overseas education (Almutairi, 2018). Specifically, further research is needed to reveal the returnees' internal changes and how their gained professional resources and capital from overseas study or training are likely perceived and utilized in their home country's contexts (Goldoni, 2021). Therefore, understanding this sustained and reciprocal process is increasingly important in terms of how returnees tend to be aware of their roles and teaching (philosophy and) practices to be developed or challenged after overseas experience. In this sense, positioning theory provides a theoretical perspective for this central work when it drives these returnees' students regarding classroom participation.

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[2] See "W-curve" hypothesis (Gaw, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Positioning Theory

Positioning theory (a.o., Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Vanassche& Kelchtermans, 2014) studies how individuals can continuously generate a *relatively* [emphasis added] stable or fixed local sense in a context full of ever-shifting patterns of contestable and mutual rights and obligations. Positioning is to introduce a process through which a person analyzes his interpersonal encounters in a discourse of the social world from the vantage point. That is, in such discursive practices, which are relatively determined as social acts, s/he seems to define his/her place in the social acts and describe himself/herself in particular ways or so-called roles. S/he rationalizes what makes his/her actions as intelligible as possible while simultaneously positioning others in relation to himself/herself (Adams & Harré, 2001). Specifically, the two positioning modes that follow are employed to examine the phenomenon in this study.

The first mode, called reflexive positioning self-positioning, is s/he positioned himself/herself (Davies & Harré, 1990). In this mode, s/he holds a certain viewpoint with a conglomerate of underlying constitutive forces such as beliefs, judgments, assumptions, intentions, and task perceptions. Because "one's statements with the point of view one (could be indexed) on its relevant world" (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 62), those individualized constructionist points of view guide the way s/he acts, thinks, and takes responsibility for his/her duties, assignments, and "roles." For instance, a teacher's proclaimed worldview may explain how they position themselves in the teacher-student relationship. Before responding to individual ideas and guiding students to an answer to their inquiry, some teachers can position themselves as instructors "for all students" to create a dialogic space for their students' voices to be heard. Others may position themselves as knowledgeable, authoritative instructors who have received adequate training to determine what is most beneficial for their students to observe and assimilate. Regardless of their positions, teachers' instructional planning and interactional patterns with students are influenced by their positions. However, teachers may position students with or without awareness, thereby maximizing or minimizing their opportunities to develop a sense of themselves as learners.

Therefore, theoretically, it seems evident that teachers' positioning of their teacher roles in interactions with students is equally important. Another important mode of positioning is *interactive positioning*, in which s/he emerges through the processes of social interaction by an individual toward another or as a collective and jointly constructed action by a group of individuals (Kotsopoulos, 2014). Interactive positioning is of necessity to constituting a storyline about himself since "[he] is not as a relatively fixed end product but as [he] who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which [he] participate[s]" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 47). In this vein, looking at teachers, they could be subject to interactive positioning by students and expect the same thing, for instance. To reveal their interactive positioning, teachers are called for "scanning their experience for a concrete occasion on which to build an interpretation of the position they [have employed] (whether they accept or reject it) until they encounter the record of a typified occasion" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 48), such as teacher/student. Such relation between teacher/student is contextualized by a cultural stereotype (like one of many in Vietnam) where teachers conduct the class sequences, and students imitate or follow what is instructed, similar to the metaphor of conductor/orchestra.

Teachers and students may not be cognizant of their assumptions or their influence over one another. Teachers could position students as knowledge receivers, for instance. When students interrupt teachers, pose queries, or contest an answer key, they may receive negative feedback and be deemed "disobedient." However, students also employ reflexive positioning when speaking up without permission. They may not assume the subordinate power position that the teacher-student interaction assigns them. In contrast, teachers position themselves and students throughout their discourse. Thus, Kotsopoulos (2014) explains that positioning may be perpetuated or continued in future narratives, regardless of whether the positioning is initially intentional, reflexive, interactive, valid, or invalid. During the interaction, there can also be instances of misalignment between interactive and reflexive positioning. In any event, through interactive positioning, an individual can become recognizable through social factors or individual interactional processes over time.

Transformative Learning Theory

Along with positioning theory, this study builds on some of the work on transformative learning theory in which lived experiences provide a context for making meaning of the world by not applying their old understanding to new situations. Instead, those experiences can cause directional changes and create new meanings in ways entirely surprising to the participants, to such an extent that a pre-structured conception begins to lose plausibility and even become obsolete or replaced (Christie et al., 2015; Chwialkowska, 2020; Mezirow, 2002; Yang & Kim, 2011). Such new (i.e., sociocultural) contrasts and differences in the teachers' belief systems can lead to disorientation or dissonance (Kaur et al., 2021). Nevertheless, according to Trilokekar and Kukar (2011), study-abroad programs for teachers and teacher candidates help overcome disorienting periods and acquire international/intercultural knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work in diverse learning contexts and stimulate them self-examination of their beliefs and understanding via critical reflections. Eventually, such notions of intercultural competencies, cultural consciousness, global perspectives' (Byram & Wagner, 2018; Poole & Russell, 2015) in study abroad studies may cause the teachers' *conscientization*—the mindfulness that enables them to question their perspectives within a larger view involving contextual factors, lead to conceptual transformation, and eventually change their perspective (Kitchenham, 2008). With the lens of transformative learning theory, the international/intercultural learning process and its impacts on reflexive and interactive positioning stabilized after overseas learning could be identified.

Methodology

This study adopted ethnography to examine the experiences of three English instructors who returned from overseas teacher education programs. According to the viewpoints of Lichtman (2011), ethnography is typically more focused and rigorous than narrative research methodology since it involves a deeper dive into the context and practices of the characters in the narrative, recognizing that different people who come from a specific cultural or social group may have different truths or perspectives on a given issue. In this study, they are Vietnamese returnees who reflected cultural norms, practices, and social dynamics of Vietnamese educational contexts and who were being studied within their natural environment. Ethnography is recognized as a valuable approach for gaining insights into the realities experienced by specific participants. Its objective is not to ascertain a singular truth or validate the accuracy of accounts pertaining to the subject matter under investigation but rather to reveal a range of unique experiences and views. Nevertheless, this

pursuit holds significant and worth-pursuing value as it has the potential to uncover the authenticity and veracity of truth to a certain degree by encompassing a broader range of diverse and nuanced insights into the experiences and perspectives within the community under study, in contrast to alternative qualitative methodologies (Hammersley, 2006; Lavina & Lawson, 2019). Ethnography entails researchers engaging in immersive fieldwork when they actively observe, participate in, and interact with the community or group under investigation. During this study, the researchers additionally engaged in participant observation, wherein they actively visited and integrated themselves into the lives of the individuals under investigation, subject to the consent of the participating teachers.

As stories were constructed, reconstructed, read, revisited, evaluated, and reevaluated, this study will emphasize cultural aspects that exist in the storytelling of participants in a limited aspect of the culture involved. The stories were inspired and gathered based on the theoretical structures, the chronological order, and the research questions themselves, even though they were not written by nature and inclination. Concerning the researchers' guidance and adherence to ethical standards, the participants were provided with complete authority and freedom to choose what they would like to share after being informed of the purposes of the stories presented in this research. Particularly, the researchers were interested in the veracity of the returnees' accounts when presenting data.

Data Sources

The data for this study came from the written reflections, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and classroom observations of three Vietnamese returnee instructors who taught English at a Vietnamese university at the time of the study. The data were collected over one year at a university in Vietnam. The call for participation was released via the closed groups of social networks that the researchers knew were returnees from the accredited master's degree programs in the USA and Australia. Such a purposeful sampling method stems logically from the conceptual framework, allowing researchers to ensure and exhibit teacher returnees' situations for varied teaching purposes (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants were from three regions of Vietnam, namely the North, the Central, and the South of Vietnam. They were asked to be involved in semi-structured focus group interviews, subsequent individual interviews, class observations, and written reflections. Following qualitative research ethics, confidentiality was assured, and approval from their university to conduct their study was obtained (Goodwin et al., 2003). The university where the teachers studied and taught remained anonymous, and pseudonyms were used for quotations. Below are brief profiles of the two participants who were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity:

> ***Lan Ngoc*** *– female, born in the Central region of Vietnam. She was from an ethnic minority and received a partial scholarship offer from a university in Australia to study TESOL for two years after seven years of teaching English at a college. Then, she decided to go back to Vietnam after her graduation. She teaches English mostly to students whose majors are not English-related but need to meet English language requirements to graduate.*

Huy Nguyen – male, originally from the South of Vietnam, studying abroad for two years in a university on the West coast of the USA with a master's degree in TESOL, receiving a scholarship from the Vietnamese government for that learning experience with a precondition of agreeing to be back and teach in Vietnam after graduation, current university lecturer in English Language Teaching Methodologies class and teaching mostly English-majored student.

Hoang Anh – male, recently graduated from an MA program in a Southern state of the USA. Born in North Vietnam and studied abroad in Australia for a bachelor's degree in education. He taught in Australia for one year and then decided to apply for a master's degree program in the USA. After graduation, he decided to go back to Vietnam and teach in an internationalized program partnering with New Zealand. His students in this program will go to New Zealand for one final year to complete their degree requirements. Other courses he taught include Translation and Business English.

The questions for the focused group interview centered on the engagement practices, benefits, or associated challenges the teachers gained from their study abroad experience, as well as the influences of study abroad on teaching philosophy, teaching-related skills, and pedagogical decisions during instruction. Individual interview questions, on the other hand, delved more deeply into each participant's reflective personal articulations of support provided by the overseas university, obstacles of moving across contexts of learning and teaching, motivations for engagement in their current workplaces and classrooms, lived experiences during the study, and suggestions for navigating between what they learned abroad and current situations of teaching. Participants were encouraged to devote at least two hours per month (one semester total) to responding in depth to the guiding questions. We avoided emotive explanations and placed greater emphasis on evidence-based statements to elicit specific associations or responses from instructors (Kvale, 1994).

The class observations were conducted weekly for a semester and digitally recorded to triangulate with all the focus groups and interviews to compare what the teachers "said" and what they did in class, namely, their interactive positioning. Because positioning can be detected through people's speech and acts (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991), we closely listened to the students' dialogue and observed their engagement levels. We also observed the students' numerous interactions and behaviors in each classroom that could be interpreted as evidence of their teachers' positioning. To confirm the trustworthiness of my observation, I asked the students several questions using a stimulated recall method in informal interviews (DeWitt & Osborne, 2010), such as "How did you feel when your teacher did that?" or "Tell me about what happened at that time when your teacher did that" to identify their perceived positioning.

Data Analysis

The researchers read and reread the interview transcriptions separately and independently marked and thoroughly grounded the data analysis. After that, they conducted debriefs and consultations to agree upon our next steps in the coding process. Then, the interview transcriptions

were cross-checked and triangulated with written reflections and classroom observation field notes to contextualize teachers' statements and verify their narratives with concrete examples. After that, the researchers tried to discover general conceptual categories across the two cases. We first followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open-coding strategies. They used the axial and selective coding process of breaking down, examining, and conceptualizing the collected data while bracketing our preconceived assumptions along the scripts' margins. They then utilized Merriam's (1998) two stages of analysis: the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. For within-case analysis, the researchers examined the cases of the teachers individually, emphasizing their views of their roles and their instructional approaches with ELLs. For each case, the researchers were also well-advised to search for inherent contradictions that people have learned to live with and used field notes to conceptualize them, including underlying cultural contradictory assertions, beliefs, and ideas (Menard–Warwick, 2009). The researchers compared their coding efforts and compiled a thick description of the experiences using verbatim (direct quotations) to identify the characteristics of positioning in each participating teacher. From that description, we also used a method of coding called taxonomic analysis (Spradley, 2016) to define an organization of categories and describe their relationships. For example, more inclusive cover terms (i.e., "reflective teachers" or "teachers as explorers") that would link with and demonstrate the semantic relationship with sub-terms and subcategories were determined. Notably, the semantic relationships amongst categories were also guided by transformative learning theory (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011) that went beyond simply acquiring knowledge. The theory dives more into how teachers find meaning in their lives and illuminates their adjustments based on new knowledge after coming home.

The researchers moved to the second phase, called cross-case analysis, to build a general pattern accounting for the two returnee teachers' cases. The researchers identified a set of recurrent and central conceptual themes shared by all two cases: experiencing cross-linguistics and cross-cultural dynamics; experiencing "outsider" when encountering a new culture and coming back to re-assimilate into the home culture; engaging in the desire to initiate sociocultural transformation in educational contexts, experiencing new identities, and recognizing privilege and power relations across student populations. However, the intensity of each theme greatly varied in each case, so we still engaged in the use of the multiple theory perspectives and related our findings to diverse patterns, relevant theories, and past studies to help interpret the data. In reporting our findings, we provided a detailed, holistic, and distinctive profile theorized from each teacher's case, including a kindly but critically analytical English language teacher, an intercultural and meta-linguistically aware English language teacher, and an inclusive self-reliant English language teacher, respectively.

Findings

The findings for each teacher's case are presented in three sections. The teachers' stated beliefs, teaching philosophies, and teacher-student interactional dynamics were reported for answering the question (a). To answer questions (b) and (c), the teachers' in-class teaching practices and their students' participatory behaviors before and after the overseas training were explained using positioning theory as a lens.

Positioning 1: A More Critically Analytical yet Struggling Teacher

Lan Ngoc's beliefs centered on how she could overcome the perplexing obstacles:

I started to ask my students the 'Why' and 'How' questions since I appreciate inquiry-based learning style. Language is not just a tool for communication. It is a weapon to help them stimulate their sense of thinking and a means for structuring thought. But it is so challenging for my English learners and colleagues to get my sincere intentions to innovate. Then, it is my turn to ask myself why they do not welcome my innovation.

When Ngoc returned to her native country as an instructor, she felt estranged from the culture of her homeland. She preferred instructing in her host country for its convenience. She described her conflicting emotions regarding this bittersweet experience: she was excited to return to Vietnam because she knew most students were eager to learn English, particularly those from minority ethnicities, but she was saddened by the students' lack of motivation, commitment, and proactive attitudes in college learning. When obtaining their evaluations, Ngoc's students commented that her instructional activities were rigorous. Due to her "challenging" assignments, most students dropped her course. From Ngoc's perspective, the difficulty level of these activities was comparable to what she applied to her international students, and the students relished them immensely. When trained abroad, Ngoc discovered that classroom discussions, problem-solving tasks, and societal and creative initiatives could significantly improve English language skills. Thus, she did not initially comprehend the anguish of her Vietnamese students. As a result, Ngoc attributed her predicament to her students' fully ingrained and unyielding expectations of being spoon-fed with knowledge, particularly in their K-12 years. Her students desired to review the material that would be on the final exams, which were still grammar and language exercises. In addition, her students did not consider English mandatory because it was a graduation requirement but not a requirement for their disciplines. To overcome the difficulty of localizing her curriculum and finding common ground with her students regarding the purpose of English learning, Ngoc recalled how her motivation is diminished:

I spent quite a lot of time complaining about the slow changes of educational leaders, the colossal top-down authority, or social norms of education to make our students become more involved in the learning process and take initiatives. When I discuss this issue with my colleagues, they seem confused about adding more critical thinking activities in a language classroom. In the end, the students are assessed via vocab-building tasks and language-skill testing, so what I learn regarding students' engagement in using the English language to develop social and intellectual abilities seems to be irrelevant.

To overcome this reverse culture shock, Ngoc decided not to overwhelm her students with foreign ideas but rather to research harmonious methods to help them understand her past unique cultural milieu, which was a composite of her host and guest cultures. Ngoc prioritized her efforts on the few students who chose to keep participating in her class and who were receptive to her

teaching methods, guiding them through the preparatory, action, and metacognitive phases of assignment completion. For instance, she divided the large assignment into smaller, more manageable portions, explained the rationale behind each assignment, and described how this task may differ from previous traditional assignments. Then, she provided clear instructions and demonstrated step-by-step strategies for students to access the new information and relate it to their interests and prior knowledge. By making these steps explicit for the students, Ngoc gave them confidence that they could effectively exercise the thinking and work she desired. In addition, faltering and learning from mistakes are necessary for enhancing their language skills. Instead of condemning the students' errors, Ngoc provided them with constructive feedback and allowed them to revise their work for a final grade, a technique she had learned abroad. In accordance with Vietnamese exam-based orientations, Ngoc maintained the format of the practice exams but modified the question content to reflect the materials she brought to class. As a result, students were still adequately prepared for examinations while completing designated tasks that helped them transfer their skills to solving language tasks on summative exams.

Inferiority feelings of a returnee teacher were transformed into teaching aspirations. Ngoc was shocked about how significantly different her expected and actual experiences were upon return. She knew that she was excited about the different sets of innovations that she wanted to incorporate into her classrooms towards her self-reflection of overseas acquired practices and her students' measurable language competence. Ngoc reflected that she wanted to do something differently. Instead of framing herself as an outcast and being misunderstood by her students and colleagues, she was determined to accept the conflicts in her teaching context. After that, Ngoc invited students to embrace the idea of noisier and messier learning spaces. Because she valued students' learning process in addition to learning products, Ngoc gave constructive and positive feedback on students' ability to use language to rationalize *why* they did what they did and *how* they did it during their meaning-making process. She embraced debates and attentive listening, resulting in students' becoming open with her and getting accustomed to raising their voices in class. For instance, she praised students' ideas and creativity in a presentation developed from several drafts before mentioning how they could improve their language accuracy.

Nevertheless, Ngoc also realized the complexity underlying her return to Vietnam. She was overwhelmed by her school in terms of the making of her school, her school policy and culture, her faculty, and her classrooms.

> *I felt like if I did innovations alone, it was a lonely journey. I did not have*
> *a real chance to make it real. I had no sense of somebody interested in my*
> *ideas. Such irritating feelings just poured into me as a returnee.*

She knew that the university where she worked now was financially independent of the government, so she needed to actively open a wide range of degree programs supporting the school's financial interests and operational sustainability. For instance, as a returner, she was not willing to teach so many classes but needed to have more time to be prepared for her classes and provide more coaching to her students. Those expectations seemed to fit with her host country's educational settings. In Vietnam, her rigorous schedule to attain financial stability imposed excessive time constraints on her. It left her with little time to contemplate harmonizing instructional performance quality and quantity.

I needed to have made many sacrifices to see what was more important at some times of the year after I had returned. I was assigned to take care of too many students at the time. I lost hope of putting a little more effort into thinking innovatively about engaging my students in a language classroom. I was aware that my interest in innovative teaching persisted, but I regretted that those innovations couldn't be replaced after that because of very little time spent on research that I should have had.

Also, Ngoc was concerned about the policies and ethos of her school. She realized that her desire to prioritize academic services would not be met because financial considerations played a greater role. She discovered that there were not enough professional development programs to help her connect with her colleagues and the school's academic staff to motivate her psychologically, such as her desire to see the value of a teaching career and her colleagues' willingness to listen to her stories of overseas teaching experiences without assuming her privileges.

The school decided to give up many benefits for their key people who were teachers and could even help them make more money as they wished. I wondered why they could invest thousands of dollars in collaborating with the media to publicly advertise their school and programs without any pennies to grow us as their key educational programs. I questioned myself what such things are the interests of entrepreneurs. That was unfair to us, the teachers, and me.

Importantly, looking into how hierarchically her school was structured, it is apparent that her attention to her faculty was not as desirable as she had expected. As she maintained her relationship with her dean's office members and direct supervisors, she attempted to negotiate her interests in what she wanted to do in her role and how interested she felt in making her classrooms more culturally responsive. She meant that she cared about the diversity of her students' backgrounds, which she defined as including not only their linguistic competence but also their life experiences, personal traits, and academic interests. However, she received nothing but profound despondency. In contrast to what she was inspired to do during her overseas learning experience during her practicum course in her master's program, her attempts at change were ineffectual. Her instructor encouraged her to be as creative as possible, but she was unaware that the optimal class was unattainable.

I seemed to feel like the direct decision-makers did not feel confident about their roles if they allowed their people to change their traditions. I could be wrong, but there were tons of experiences coming to me and saying that "I couldn't do this ... that ... here ... there". Why was a change needed? What's wrong with the current situation? What if I didn't think you should change?" I promptly discontinued eagerness as a consequence.

Lastly, Ngoc seemed to deny her privileges of staying personally committed to her teaching career even though she tried to make the best of herself. She found that she was surrounded by many of the social, political, cultural, and local constraints, thus limiting her voice

and her contribution to making a better academic community that she seeks to obtain. That was a critical stage of thinking about moving on to a new level of her professional career, especially given that she needed to challenge her knowledge of education and her need to know what education drove and what drove education.

> *I knew that if my school could not do a good business, they could not give me a well-paid job that I couldn't deny say. I wondered if an education provider should be more business-oriented to make more money. Education used to be defined and called a privilege for teachers and students who also play important roles in shaping that business. It's a hard question, but it remains to be unanswered. Education is a business, isn't it?*

Positioning 2: An Intercultural and Meta-Linguistically Aware Teacher

Huy's beliefs focused not on positioning a non-native-speaking teacher educator but on a teacher who has bilingual abilities. The influences of the first language (L1) into his second language (L2) production was not a product of his under-represented cultural groups or monolingual population but a privilege that bilinguals could take credit for to maintain positioning and present voices of privilege. When living overseas, he embraced bilingualism. Upon returning to his first language and home country, he found bilingualism a social phenomenon that he was intrigued to explore and learn from. First, considering his academic engagement in the US, he became more engaged cognitively about the cultural characteristics of native speakers. As a bilingual, it was unsurprising that he made rare word choices and roundabout expressions like other Asian students, but suggestions made by the professors and colleagues allowed him to stay focused on his productive language skills and divergent thinking. However, it did not mean that he changed his ways by Americanizing his identity.

Instead, he completed himself in terms of synergizing different aspects of his identity: he respected the target language produced by native speakers and his mother tongue that formulated his ways of thinking and argumentative stances. Learning from this example, he found himself not failing to ignore his home identities as reflections of his new sets of identities, which necessarily emerged to help him succeed communicatively, not considering his background as a deficit compared to native English-speaking colleagues.

> *I found that Americans myself as an English language user was a silly job that I should resist as a consequence. I should be me, in a way that I was born in certain ways, and I was grown up in a way that my family and Vietnamese communities have shaped me. I greatly appreciate that people in my circle of education in the US succeeded in helping me gain this privilege, which I don't need anything further. I can be an effective user of the English language but unnecessarily be a native-like user of this language because it does not say anything about me in terms of race and culture.*

Multiculturalism reflected in language use should be embraced, and "I am an advocate for individual and intercultural students' voices." Following a tradition of L2 language and cultural expression fueled his passion and the positive emotions that a bilingual and intercultural individual

can produce. Huy self-reported that, despite being aware of phonological differences between L1 and L2 and between English-speaking regions (he earned his two master's degrees in Australia and the United States), he managed his L2 pronunciation, which was significantly influenced by his L1 identity. He was unable to alter his accent to feel like a native speaker, but maintaining his L1 dialect with precise diction was still advantageous. "He has a strong accent in [this] language" was a common remark with specific targets made to bilinguals: "he has a strong accent in [this] language." His English-major students who received a similar remark wanted him to know that they were not responsible. In this regard, bilinguals experienced ups and downs, including optimistic and pessimistic perspectives. On the one hand, he was ecstatic to have the prerequisite knowledge and personal motivation to share perspectives, and he cared little about his inferiority. It was a progression of the advantages that being bilingual offered him, suggesting that he reflected on his remarkable recovery in his childhood memories and numerous learning opportunities. He would have left his comfort zone, spoken with his accents and tones, and promoted his understanding of various L1 phonological properties. If he was able to convey messages that were precisely comprehended, the moment was enjoyable. On the other hand, misinterpretations in word pronunciation and emphasis prevented a speaker from enhancing his sense of belonging. For instance, if linking words were likely to improve the flow of his natural speech, he was occasionally unable to implement them. In his case, this was a case of solidifying authentic meaning: "I am sure to make my students confident to speak English to respond well to who they are culturally and linguistically. They can use languages that can be understood by any other speakers and accepted by them."

Huy's pedagogical engagement focuses on students' voices. Acquisition of L2 has challenged him to deal with common grounds of L1 in support of his research work. In terms of behavioral engagement in classroom teaching and student interactions, clarity and conciseness are contributing factors behind his writing skills and informed perspectives. Unlike how he sought to balance target native speakers' ways of thinking and expressions compared to those who are bilinguals, including him, he was particularly interested in adjusting his point-centered ideas. In speaking, he realized the importance of "thank-you" based on a common practice in America, for example. This allowed him to form this habitual expression in all situations, which does not necessarily seek to express gratitude to those who assisted but demonstrates civility in all other interactions. His overseas experience also helped his students comprehend the writing style and argumentation in a language, such as maintaining one main point per paragraph, without forgetting to mention how cultural contexts influence broad writing rhetorics and genres. What resonated with him in this regard was a matter of understanding, which meant for him as a bilingual writer to ensure readers' smooth reading and quick grasp of subject knowledge based on clarity of what stories he was likely to read. He reflected that this was part of the L1-L2 process and transition. Self-regulated learning played a role in his active participation in the composition of texts in many forms of presentation.

In addition, his ability to engage in profound thought was essential for presenting arguments that emphasize the interconnectedness of ideas in his writing topics. To effectively facilitate this process and transition, he viewed receptive language as a source of comparative and critiqued texts that enabled his robust imagination and the actualization of productive language. Due to regular L2 exposure, he was able to tolerate the unsuitability of L1 culture in L2 contexts, whereas local Vietnamese students may have had limited exposure to this situation. Accepting differences was a lesson learned, which provided a new perspective on analyzing and acquiring new language-learning knowledge. Nonetheless, Huy's students aspired to become language instructors in

Vietnam; consequently, they wished to learn about "traditions" and "apprenticeship of observations" rather than critiquing their own experiences and presumptions or being receptive to new ideas and intercultural shifts. They continued to insist on English-only as the medium of instruction and rekindled their desire for the imagined West more than a multicultural homeland.

> *Providing students with opportunities to understand the World Englishes and the relationship between language and culture would be an excellent job for every English teacher in their language classroom. As an English teacher, I am deeply aware that my students also struggle to use English authentically because they also misinterpret how an effective user of English looks, between acting as if they were native speakers and acting as an intercultural speaker. If they were a native speaker, they would accept neglecting their true cultural identities. If they acted as an intercultural speaker, they would seem to have more eye-opening experiences in terms of agreeing on cultural differences, following cultural rules that vary from one to another, and respecting those differences can make their learning more meaningful.*

Positioning 3: A Self-Reliant Persistent Language Teacher who Advocates Inclusivity

Anh's beliefs focused on considering classroom teaching and student-teacher interactions as a platform for cultivating a more equitable society. Before the journey overseas, Anh was very content existing in the education matrix in his home country (otherwise, he said he would not have embarked on this path). He was so ingrained in his "it is what it is" view of education that he quite literally became part of it. No questions were raised. No concerns were detected. Also, he found that his life force (i.e., lack of sleep due to a busy schedule, skipped meals, isolation from family for preparing students to pass the university English assessment tests) was a critical path to success in life for students seeking a degree. Little did he know that there *could be* an alternative way to the usual social rhetoric: "go to school, go to college, get a job."

When studying abroad in Australia and the USA for a total of six years, he described the experience as "taking red pills," meaning he was immersed in contrastive ideas about educational philosophies between the East and West. He started to see by approaching "the big picture," how little he knew, as a teacher, about the present organizational structure of education and the historical contexts that moved these immovable boulders into place. For instance, he realized that the idea of "differentiation in instruction" was imperative because it enabled a teacher to ensure that every student, no matter their proficiency level, should be supported in line with what allows them to achieve their objectives. Students from low to advanced levels got to learn the same content in a way that reached them:

After reaching a certain level, based on what he observed to develop his way of thinking, he indicated that how knowledge matters and makes meaning to each pupil varies significantly from case to case. Thus, he referred to assessments that must emphasize how much students have improved academically over time, as opposed to using statistics to compare themselves to their peers. Anh had some doubts about the effectiveness of mass education in which "chalk and talk" and exams are the primary means of assessing student performance without regard to the fact that each student is unique in terms of learning style, speed, and personal abilities. For instance, he argued that it was neither the student's nor the instructor's responsibility if his English test score

was subpar despite hours of practice, regular practice, simulated tests, and test-taking strategies. Thus, he continued to criticize the impact of the loss of culture on learning and exhorted himself to reexamine the learning environments that govern communication between instructors and students. By inviting their students to collaborate with them towards a common objective, teachers could be relieved of the pedagogical strain they were experiencing. Increasingly, teachers' feelings of tension and students' commitment/autonomy may have positive outcomes.

Anh expressed that he used to observe in his country educational policymakers as mythical wizards who pull strings, "I do not need to blame the system and wait for years of changes to come. Rather, I create changes in my classes." In this regard, he thought of teachers who would make minimal changes and blame the policymakers and even politicians for the lack of reform needed to support teaching and learning. Paradoxically, he admitted that teachers in his context were rarely capable of the analytical skills and prerequisite knowledge needed to help themselves with decisions to make proper class-level changes or school-level transformations. From Anh's perspective, this shortage was attributed to their endless circles of blaming, which means that they positioned themselves as collective punching bags or scapegoats for the implementation of the top-down policies. In other words, he insisted that teachers were more likely to regard their job of *teaching* as *a job that pays* instead of their job being "a social activist platform" in encouraging initiation and transformation of transformative movements to build a better "future" society.

Keeping this in mind, Anh saw a critical change in his attitude due to his exposure to overseas teaching education programs. He thought there was not much room for those without much of his educational experience. He used to feel that education should have been aimed at preparing students to move on to their *next step*, including academic journeys in general and language proficiency growth in particular. Necessarily, such an attitude towards mass education, "ultimate" goal that equates to so-called "learning success," and negligence of students' unique sets of skills have ultimately put enormous stress on teachers. Consequently, he believed that teachers placed students in no more than a position of digesting a wealth of hard knowledge needed to help their students to get into the college/university-level instead of helping them know what is effective in fundamentally transforming their English language capabilities between classroom and life events. Thus, attempting to avoid depressing the common culture that dominates Vietnamese classrooms, Anh chose to reposition himself and reexamine his attitude.

> *As an English teacher, I will find happiness in my teaching, not standard for all students. I care more about the career readiness of each student and the diverse applications of English in each student's life. Suppose a student scores low in an exam and cannot graduate as a requirement from the university. In that case, I find ways to protect him from being mentally bullied by the pressure to excel generated from me or any kinds of institutional or social expectations. While at the same time, I respect and help the students' purpose to excel in whatever they believe in, improving their abilities and better the world in which they live.*

Although Anh's psychological and philosophical perspectives on teaching, including his interactions with his students, contrasted, he was reluctant to evaluate his daily instructional practices. Anh realized that not every student was satisfied because the assessment that followed was not necessarily fair, even though he had intended to let his students take charge of their learning initiatives, such as choosing English writing topics that were interesting and comfortable for them

to write and be evaluated. Meanwhile, it also happened within his teaching context, where the class size was big, and Anh struggled to look after his individual students' needs.

> *I do not need to blame the system and wait for years of changes to come. Rather, I create changes in my classes. I also felt the actual purpose of schooling might be closer to babysitting and keeping students as placid as possible, at least from the administrative perspective of those insistent on keeping the organizational structures of schools in my country as the status quo. But I appreciate the idea of individualized learning. When I could not apply student-centered learning and improve all students in my class, I can no longer remember what I used to believe about the elements of instruction, let alone articulate what I think of these cornerstones to my profession.*

Anh viewed himself as a solitary actor in his belief of what should be beneficial for this voyage of generating and inspiring change. Within the context of creating an impact, he exerted considerable effort to implement his student-centered teaching models. Despite his dismal expectations, he reflected on his intransigence: his students disliked being placed in the center of learning because they had not been adequately prepared in previous grades regarding academic skills to be proactive and self-reliant in learning discovery. He identified the causes of this undesirable outcome and acknowledged the need for incremental adjustments to familiarize his students with this action first. He discovered that his academic experiences abroad contributed to the implementation of changes, so his students in Vietnam needed even more time, pace, and flexibility to get adjusted to his pedagogical ideas. Nonetheless, his attitude should play a role in adapting to the current reality and involving his students in the creation of more student-centered pedagogical changes. This collaborative work not only helped him better comprehend the sociocultural context in which his students appeared to exercise high levels of agency and autonomy in determining their own learning, but it also enhanced his understanding of his students' circumstances.

In other words, teaching and learning is a two-way process in which no single classroom participant is solely responsible. Anh viewed himself as persistent as he moved through this process of change. To address his self-talk as a teacher, he painstakingly spent time comprehending himself as a change agent. Instead of allowing the non-responsiveness of his students to undermine his sense of confidence in his teaching classrooms and to cause him to continually question his philosophy of teaching techniques, he proposed a variety of pedagogical practices that were likely to accommodate the diverse learning styles of his Vietnamese students. For instance, when his students remained mute during a class discussion, Anh tried to initiate the conversation with several prompters. He demonstrated to the class that false beginnings, dead ends, roundabout routes, and even returning to the drafting board were acceptable. With the opportune intervention of the teacher and sporadic interactions with peers, his students could come to an understanding of their investigation of knowledge without distinguishing "a right or wrong answer." Such intellectual tenacity persisted even after they left school to engage in decision-making inquiry and live independently. He wanted his students to know that they could let go of the burden of "needing to be right" to witness and appreciate their "eureka" moments. Therefore, it was not the work of change that required time but rather the fashion in which these duties were performed. To make his students feel empowered, he challenged himself to provide them with suggestions, elicitation,

and encouragement to persevere in overcoming intellectual challenges. By re-conceptualizing the underlying principles of what school is for, altering teaching contexts, and modulating teachers' duties, he seemed to see a clearer path to the genuine education reforms he expressed interest in.

Discussion and Conclusions

This ethnographic research examined three Vietnamese teachers as returners from the Anglophone countries' teacher education programs. With the immersion to a wide range of data sources, the researchers have found many layers that have emerged from these teachers' voices in response to what they have found themselves actively engaged in their change-making processes in the classroom-level settings and potentially school- and community-level counterparts. Specially to fill the missing literature on the extent to which teacher education programs in overseas sociocultural contexts rather than their home countries (Vietnam) have provided them with informed perspectives on teaching and learning (Dressler et al., 2021; Kissau et al., 2021; Nghia, 2019; Tran & Bui, 2021), with regards to English language education in higher education. Due to a lack of space, this research concludes by sharing profoundly the three distinct layers of resistance and the spectrum of transformation, which will likely facilitate future research on recognizing the interconnected and overlapping layers of these groups of English teachers who participated in the study.

Employing Harré and van Langenhove (1999) as a theoretical framework, this ethnographic research was grounded the teacher participants' voices that particularly attended to their observed, recorded, and written records of transformation in their teaching trajectories personally, academically, and professionally (Berg et al., 2012; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Firstly, with a view to classroom-level transformation, the findings suggested that all teachers acknowledged the need for student-centered pedagogy. They all shared that students' voices were openly recognized and fully respected regardless of right or wrong answers they might have for any type of question. They were fully encouraged to share their lived experiences, ranging from their home to integrative learning culture. The former means that they had the privilege to share cultural information about their family, hometown, and country. The latter means that their new "third" culture was probably a product of the mixed cultures of home and host countries, which activated their sense of knowing, communicating, and doing certain things accepted in their host countries. This line of fresher findings was seemingly reaped as impacts of the returnee teachers (Kinginger & Wu, 2018; Tang & Choi, 2004), such as these returnees who made a lot of efforts to establish strong relationships with their local students and express empathy rather than putting them into a certain school of culturally stereotyped concepts of norms and rules to level down the roles of their learners in the classroom (Kasun & Saavedra, 2016). The researchers found that these returners made a slight but valuable difference based on these correlated findings. Such experience was, from the researchers' perspectives, likely to emerge, evolve, and develop their increasing levels of adaptability, integration, internationalization, and interculturalization. Having brought these valuable and meaningful experiences back home, they were more prone to applying them in their classrooms. Nonetheless, there was a gradual process that they needed to take into closer consideration. Also, their linguistic competence was a valuable benefit, as seen in past research (Christiansen et al., 2018), especially given their fostered ways of authenticity. This suggests that they navigate their linguistic repertoires and produce language genres appropriate to their interlocutors' culture (Gray & Savicki, 2015).

Considering the lens of positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991), we found that these teachers were increasingly more aware that their change-making processes should not be that urgent and, importantly, consistent with patience and gradual, and perhaps directional, change over time (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Our findings explicitly pointed out that these changes were unnecessarily benefiting all of them, regardless of which regions they are teaching, because their students had been enormously exposed to traditionally deep-rooted teaching and learning strategies before the change. Thus, these teachers' transformation remained slow but very slow. Despite numerous obstacles encountered, this element has produced a robust innovation platform for how teaching and learning should appear. Curriculum development and evaluation were unquestionably predicated on students' local origins. This indicates that their students appeared more autonomous in terms of articulating individual voices and making choices. In contrast, these educators grew enthused about inviting and involving their students in co-creating impacts for themselves and others (Ladson-Billings, 2014). However, in this regard, it does not necessitate the complete replacement of native-like goals of English language learning, as they tended to generate a crucial surplus of meaningful content to facilitate experiential learning, with a balance of native and non-native' voices informing their culturally responsive teaching. This situation has also become clearer through previous works (Christie et al., 2015; Chwialkowska, 2020).

Thus, because of classroom-level changes, it appeared to be more optimistic that these teachers yielded many positive changes, cognitively, attitudinally, and behaviorally. In short, they became more enthusiastic about exploring many forms of culture, which reached beyond the knowledge presented in the textbook (Byram & Wagner, 2018). It was motivating that these male teachers might enhance their sense of intercultural sensitivity, considering that all forms of culture should be equally respected, inclusive of their students' knowledge background brought into their classrooms. Similarly, these teachers used to have many chances of generating new knowledge based on their possession of existing knowledge. In addition to their development of intercultural sensitivity and competence (Byram & Wagner, 2018), they gained and regained their positive thinking in such a way that they could not force their students to enact changes right after they wanted. Still, they took better care of a consistent process needed to revitalize their sense of knowledge and understanding. By looking into their reflective writing, knowledge should be centered on building, challenging – gaining – confirming – applying, with any missing piece of them leading to an incomplete process of learning. When they sufficiently grasped all knowledge, skills, and attitudes, they started to make and persist critical changes in structure and restructure teaching and learning frequently (Kitchenham, 2008). The researchers would like to borrow Tintiangco-Cubale (2010) about pedagogy as what has resonated with the findings:

> *Pedagogy is a philosophy of education informed by positionalities, ideologies, and standpoints (both teacher and learner). It considers the critical relationships between the PURPOSE of education, the CONTEXT of education, the CONTENT of what is being taught, and the METHODs of how it is taught. It also includes (the IDENTITY of) who is being taught, who is teaching, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to structure and power* (p. viii).

Aligned with sustained efforts to promote culturally responsive pedagogy within classroom-level contexts considering global efforts (UNESCO, n.d.), it was noted that there was limited evidence of how teachers' changes manifested at the school level. In line with research by

Kotsopoulos (2014), the limited findings suggested that teachers were able to mediate their identities more effectively to contribute positively to the educational quality of their school. As a teacher, they were observed to demonstrate a high level of responsibility, as evidenced by their completion of teaching responsibilities, their commitment to making changes, and their willingness to address numerous issues regarding achievement disparities and the loss of student voices. Positively, these prospective decisions were determinant factors of their intentions to increase school-level equity and inclusion. Nonetheless, these concepts continue to be unfamiliar in Vietnamese higher education (UNESCO, n.d.). While equity and inclusion have been identified as key determinants of all 21st-century citizens in terms of education, health, and other aspects of life, the top-down policy has had a significant impact on Vietnamese higher education in terms of standardization but lack of consistency (Engle & Faux, 2006). As a result, school leaders and administrators are required to ensure educational and academic quality that reflects the voices and perspectives of teachers and students as little as possible (Boaler & Greeno, 2000). This was consistent with the narratives of the teachers who participated in this investigation. Notably, teachers could not be viewed as passive recipients of directives, thereby reducing their decision-making opportunities in their classrooms due to time and resource constraints. At the time of the research, the institution offered no support. They made progress through this crucial event, and as a result, they did not resist their intended changes, in which their institutions may have little interest. Rather, they would discover numerous opportunities to identify potential changes that would benefit their institutions and the communities of the future workforce. Teachers have effectively managed their motivation, attitudes, and enthusiasm for change considering this. For instance, they would be empowered to observe a culture of collaboration among instructors and students, in collaboration with school leaders and administrators, to expand knowledge across grade levels, which can all contribute to mutually beneficial and sustainable development. In addition, they were intrigued by their strong convictions of change to improve the accessibility of education for students and their thought-provoking ideas for societies that require students as future generations and future workers. When it comes to the mutual effects of these categories of people, this research can open a new way of thinking about the need for more dialogue between those in education and society, whose voices must be heard and praised before a compromise can be reached. This ethnography study would distinguish itself from other previous works based on the returnee instructors' critical reflection on their replaceable energy sources. Examining the experiences of three returnee English teachers in a variety of educational contexts, the authors were able to determine that despite the teachers' ability to pursue their teaching professions over the years upon their return, they did not do so consistently. They had to navigate their individual choices to invest differentially in themselves and others. Depending on the effects of their school's structure, policy, culture, and concentration, we see there were a great number of these significant changes. Surprisingly, the findings suggested that teachers were entirely enthusiastic, devoted, and accountable for educational innovations, pedagogical modifications, and actual decisions. In the early years of their careers following their time abroad, these aspects of teachers' professional investments were beneficial in every way. Specifically, they tended to consecrate themselves to their students' development in academic works and career-related preparations, regardless of their perception of knowing and comprehending how their educational settings were structured. However, as the years progressed, they discovered that they had less time to invest in the sociocultural development of students because they were responsible for the sociocultural dimensions of others. As a result, their time for professional development, which supports teaching

innovations, and student service, which supports student coaching and mentoring, had to be sacrificed to fulfill their increased teaching hours and responsibilities.

Also, it happened similarly when the teachers' professional investment should account for other kinds of workload, including school-level business-related *(macro-level)*, faculty-level administrative *(meso-level)*, and classroom-level student-led *(micro-level)* commitments. With limited time in their full-time job, they could not fully participate in their so-called teaching position, which they had been employed to work on. From this account, the findings have proposed a very new aspect of understanding energy redistribution, which can be quantitatively measured as follows: "$I = A$ *(macro-level)* $+ B$ *(micro-level)* $= A$ *(macro-level)* $+ B'$ *(micro-level)* $+ C$ *(meso-level)* $= A' + B' + C' + D = A' + B' + C' + D' + E \ldots$". This new account has opened a newer package of scholarly contributions, suggesting that the Vietnamese returnee teachers seem to reduce their professional investment into their literal teaching jobs to make room for other irrelevant and redundant responsibilities under the premise of cost-saving efforts of the school to maximize their "business-making." When education has become a prospective form of business-making under the administration of private businesses and enterprises, rather than the highly qualified and well-trained educators and practitioners, this is not a new issue to be widely discussed in educational research. To remain competitive in the educational market, profits continue to be a key factor, as businesses are more likely to prioritize sustainability by ensuring the high quality of educational services and maximizing their return on investment. In the hands of competent educational entrepreneurs, achieving a balance between quantitative and qualitative measurements appears to be a manageable task despite the complexity of the situation.

This study does not stand without any limitations considering the increasing lines of research on returnee teachers whose Western perspectives may significantly drive their ways of organizing and structuring teaching and learning. To continue this important research, this research's findings have paved the path to many more considerations. First, considering this impactful topic, more work should be done to address the larger scope of Asians, especially from the lens of ethnography, including Vietnamese higher education, whose participants, especially English language teachers, are under-researched. Also, as the research participants are male teachers, it is interesting to uncover many interesting insights into the differences between male and female teachers, as very much literature has focused on the latter group. Thus, less attention has been paid to the former group regarding what types of support and how support can be implemented to ensure their privileges in the teaching profession. Most importantly, as teacher returnees from Western countries have played an important role in local education, this research has remained a challenge in terms of educational strategies and practices supporting their implementation of innovative but culturally responsive pedagogy in their local schools and classrooms. Even though there is a dearth of evidence that returnee teachers can implement what has been learned overseas in their classroom and offer better outcomes, more research can be a great addition to facilitate this package of unknown and undiscovered insights in becoming more clearly uncovered and strategically regarded in English language education in higher education of the developing countries, including Asia.

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