Professional identity and digital transformation: Cambodian higher education EFL teachers' experiences

Borey Be
University of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Digital transformation in higher education has fundamentally reshaped teaching practices and professional expectations, yet its implications for teachers' professional identities remain underexplored, particularly in low and middle-income country contexts. This qualitative study examines how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Cambodian higher education negotiate professional identity amid sustained digital transformation. Drawing on sociocultural and post-structural perspectives on teacher identity, my study adopts an interpretive research design and is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 EFL teachers from diverse institutional settings. Thematic analysis reveals three interrelated processes of identity negotiation: (1) a shift from knowledge transmission toward learning design, reflecting a reconfiguration of professional legitimacy and pedagogical authority; (2) intensified emotional labour associated with technology-mediated teaching, including experiences of anxiety, vulnerability, resilience, and ethical tension; and (3) institutionally mediated and constrained forms of agency, enacted through adaptation, informal collaboration, and self-directed professional learning. These findings show that digital transformation is not merely a technical or pedagogical change but a socio-emotional process of professional becoming. This study contributes conceptually by advancing adaptive professionalism under constraint as a lens for understanding how teachers actively reconstruct identity, agency, and meaning in digitally transforming higher education systems.

Introduction

Higher education systems worldwide are undergoing intensified digital transformation, reshaping pedagogical practices, professional expectations, and academic labour. For English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, these changes extend beyond instructional adaptation to involve deeper processes of professional identity negotiation, emotional labour, and agency. Recent studies increasingly recognise that technology integration is not a neutral or purely technical endeavour but a socially, culturally, and emotionally mediated process that reconfigures what it means to be a teacher (Bussesund, 2025; Lai & Jin, 2021; van der Klink & Alexandrou, 2022).

Research on digital transformation in higher education has expanded rapidly, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic (Aljanazrah et al., 2022; Day, 2021; Vlachopoulos et al., 2023). Much of this literature, however, remains focused on instructional effectiveness, digital readiness, or perceptions of online and blended learning (Atwa et al., 2022; Jackman, 2018; Sharma et al., 2022). While such studies provide valuable insights into pedagogical change, they often under-theorise teachers' lived experiences and overlook the identity work and emotional dimensions that accompany sustained technological reform (Howard, 2021; Ulla et al., 2024). The gap is particularly evident in developing and transitional higher education systems, where institutional capacity, professional development, and policy

coherence remain uneven. In these contexts, teachers frequently navigate digital innovation under conditions of constraint, making identity negotiation both more visible and more consequential.

Teacher identity as dynamic, relational, and emotionally embedded

Teacher identity has long been conceptualised as dynamic, relational, and socially constructed rather than fixed or individualistic (Beijaard et al., 2000; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Varghese et al., 2005). Sociocultural and narrative perspectives emphasise that teachers' identities are shaped through interaction with institutional discourses, pedagogical practices, and professional relationships over time (Barkhuizen, 2017; Kelchtermans, 1993). In language education, identity is closely tied to beliefs about language, pedagogy, legitimacy, and professional expertise (Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Richards, 2023).

Recent systematic and conceptual reviews confirm that teacher identity is increasingly examined in relation to change, uncertainty, and reform, particularly in higher education and ELT contexts (Rushton et al., 2023; Tran, T. T. et al., 2024). These studies highlight that identity development is rarely linear; instead, it involves tension, hybridity, and negotiation, especially when teachers are required to adopt new roles or pedagogical paradigms.

Crucially, identity is inseparable from emotion. Teaching is an emotionally intensive profession, and periods of reform often intensify emotional labour as teachers manage stress, vulnerability, and professional self-doubt (Hargreaves, 1998a, 1998b; Zembylas, 2003). Research in language education has increasingly documented how emotions such as anxiety, confidence, ambivalence, and care shape teachers' professional selves and pedagogical decisions (Gao et al., 2024; Goetze, 2023; Warner & Diao, 2022). Yet, emotional labour remains under-explored in studies of technology-mediated teaching, particularly in higher education.

Technology integration as identity mediation in ELT

Emerging scholarship conceptualises technology integration as a mediator of teacher identity, influencing how teachers perceive their competence, authority, and professional legitimacy (El-Soussi, 2025; Lai & Jin, 2021). The shift toward online, blended, and digitally enriched teaching has redefined teachers' roles from knowledge transmitters to learning designers, facilitators, and content curators (Davies & West, 2014; Väätäjä & Ruokamo, 2021).

Studies across diverse contexts show that such role reconfigurations generate identity tensions, particularly when institutional expectations outpace professional preparation (Golzar et al., 2025; Howard, 2021; Zhang & Hwang, 2023). Teachers' engagement with digital tools is shaped not only by technical competence but also by beliefs, emotions, and access to institutional support (Adler et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2023). In ELT specifically, digital platforms and social media have introduced new forms of visibility and vulnerability,

further complicating identity construction (Aslan, 2024; Lemana et al., 2024; Nejadghanbar & Shaahdadi, 2025).

While research from well-resourced contexts dominates this literature, fewer studies examine how technology-mediated identity negotiation unfolds in resource-constrained higher education systems, where digital transformation often coexists with limited infrastructure and fragmented professional development (Hennessy et al., 2022).

Institutional context, agency, and professional becoming

Teacher identity negotiation is deeply embedded within institutional and policy environments. Research on teacher agency emphasises that teachers' capacity to act purposefully depends on the interaction between individual beliefs and structural conditions (Biesta et al., 2015; Tran & Li, 2025). In higher education, institutional policies related to digitalisation are frequently enacted through managerial or top-down approaches, which can constrain professional autonomy and intensify identity tension (Bussesund, 2025; Lambert & O'Connor, 2018).

Conversely, supportive leadership, collegial communities, and meaningful professional development can enable teachers to reinterpret, reform and exercise agency (Gul et al., 2025; Leahy et al., 2025). Studies from Southeast Asia suggest that teachers often enact agency through small-scale adaptations and informal learning rather than overt resistance, particularly in hierarchical, institutional cultures (Pawan et al., 2025; Tran & Li, 2025).

Despite growing recognition of these dynamics, there remains limited qualitative research examining how institutional mediation, emotion, and agency intersect in shaping EFL teacher identity during sustained technological change.

The Cambodian higher education and ELT context

Cambodia provides a critical yet under-explored context for examining these issues. Over the past two decades, Cambodian higher education has expanded rapidly, accompanied by increased emphasis on English language education, employability, and digital transformation (Chea & Lo, 2022; Flores & Mean, 2025). English occupies a central role in academic mobility and internationalisation, positioning EFL teachers at the forefront of institutional reform (Lin & Lin, 2025; Moore & Bounchan, 2020).

At the same time, Cambodian universities face persistent challenges related to infrastructure, professional development, and policy coherence (Bou, 2025; Ourn & Chhorn, 2025; Sam, 2024). Recent studies document teachers' limited readiness for online teaching and uneven access to sustained professional learning opportunities (Be, 2025; Eam & Song, 2023). These conditions create complex professional landscapes in which teachers must negotiate identity, agency, and emotional well-being while responding to reform demands.

Although emerging research has examined Cambodian teachers' beliefs, pedagogical practices, and professional development (Chea, 2024; Doeur, 2022; Heng et al., 2024), teachers' identity negotiation in technology-mediated higher education remains under-theorised. Cambodian EFL teachers' voices are still largely absent from international discussions on teacher identity and digital transformation.

Purpose of this study

Addressing this gap, my qualitative study explores how EFL teachers in Cambodian higher education construct and negotiate their professional identities amid technology integration and pedagogical change. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of digital tools, this study foregrounds teachers' lived experiences, emotional trajectories, and sense of agency as they navigate evolving professional expectations.

By situating teacher identity at the intersection of individual beliefs and emotions, technology-mediated pedagogical practices, and institutional structures, my study contributes to a more holistic understanding of digital transformation in higher education. In doing so, it positions Cambodia not as a peripheral case but as a site of theoretical insight into identity negotiation under conditions of constraint and change.

Guided by sociocultural and post-structural perspectives on teacher identity, this study addresses the following research questions:

- How do Cambodian higher education EFL teachers describe the development and transformation of their professional identities over time?
- In what ways has technology integration, particularly online and blended teaching, influenced teachers' pedagogical roles, emotions, and self-perceptions?
- What challenges and opportunities do teachers experience when adopting digital tools, and how do these experiences shape identity negotiation?
- How do institutional policies, leadership practices, and professional relationships mediate teachers' sense of agency and empowerment?

Method

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research design to explore how EFL teachers in Cambodian higher education construct and negotiate their professional identities amid pedagogical and technological change. Given the study's focus on teachers' lived experiences, emotions, and meaning-making processes, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. Rather than seeking generalisable patterns, the study aimed to generate contextually grounded and theoretically informed insights into teacher identity negotiation in a resource-constrained higher education context. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to reflect on their professional trajectories, teaching practices, emotional experiences, and interactions with institutional structures. This approach aligns with sociocultural and narrative perspectives

on teacher identity, which emphasise voice, reflexivity, and the situated nature of professional becoming.

Participants

The participants consisted of 15 EFL teachers working in public and private higher education institutions in Cambodia. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in gender, educational background, and years of teaching experience, enabling the inclusion of teachers at different career stages and capturing a range of identity trajectories and professional perspectives. Participants had between 3 and over 20 years of teaching experience in higher education and held academic qualifications ranging from bachelor to masters and doctoral degrees in English language education or related fields. Both male and female teachers were represented. All participants had experience teaching in face-to-face settings and had engaged in online or blended teaching to varying degrees. To protect anonymity, all participants were assigned pseudonyms from T1 to T15 prior to data collection, and Table 1 summarises their profiles. Illustrative quotations in this article are drawn from all fifteen participants, selected because their accounts directly and richly illustrated the three analytical themes. The sample comprised 13 male and 2 female teachers (T3 and T8), with qualifications ranging from masters to doctoral level and teaching experience spanning 3 to 20 years, representing early, mid, and late-career perspectives. No systematic over-representation of any single gender, qualification level, or career stage was identified in the selected excerpts.

Table 1: Teacher's demographic profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Qualification	Years exp.
T1	Male	Masters	15
T2	Male	Masters	25
T3	Female	Masters	3
T4	Male	Masters	13
T5	Male	Masters	15
T6	Male	Masters	20
T7	Male	Masters	8
T8	Female	Masters	18
T9	Male	Masters	10
T10	Male	Masters	15
T11	Male	PhD	15
T12	Male	Masters	10
T13	Male	PhD	10
T14	Male	Masters	16
T15	Male	PhD	20

Data collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted between November and December 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in English, which all participants used as a professional language. Interviews

were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability and institutional conditions. The interview protocol was designed to elicit rich narratives of teachers' professional identities and experiences. Interview questions addressed four broad areas: (1) professional background and identity formation, including teachers' educational pathways and motivations for entering the profession; (2) identity development over time, focusing on changes in beliefs, roles, and self-perceptions; (3) technology integration and pedagogical change, including experiences with online or blended teaching, perceived challenges and opportunities, and emotional responses; and (4) institutional influences and professional agency, including leadership, policy expectations, collegial relationships, and professional development experiences. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to provide concrete examples of moments of empowerment, disempowerment, stress, and growth. Follow-up probes were used to clarify meanings and deepen reflection. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), which emphasises iterative engagement with the data, inductive code generation, and the active interpretive role of the researcher in theme construction. First, all transcripts were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively, capturing salient ideas related to identity, emotion, technology use, and institutional context. Coding was conducted manually to allow close engagement with the data and sensitivity to participants' language and meanings. Related codes were then grouped into broader categories, with attention to patterns across participants. During this phase, emerging themes were continuously compared against the data to ensure analytical coherence. The analysis moved between inductive insights and sensitising concepts drawn from the literature on teacher identity, agency, and emotional labour. Themes were refined and defined in relation to the study's conceptual framework, with particular attention paid to how identity negotiation unfolded across individual, pedagogical-technological, and institutional dimensions. This process resulted in three overarching themes that captured teachers' identity shifts, emotional experiences, and agency under institutional constraints. Member checking was not employed in this study. Consistent with a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019), the researcher's interpretive readings of the data are understood as one among multiple possible constructions rather than representations to be validated by participants. Analytical rigour was instead supported through sustained engagement with the full dataset, reflexive memo-writing throughout coding, and continuous comparison of themes against the breadth of participants' accounts and continuous comparison of themes against all fifteen participants' accounts.

Ethical considerations

Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured using pseudonyms and secure data storage.

Findings

The findings illuminate how Cambodian EFL teachers negotiated professional identity in the context of sustained digital transformation in higher education. Three interrelated themes capture these dynamics: teachers' identity shifts from knowledge transmitters to learning designers, the central role of emotional labour in navigating technology-mediated teaching, and the institutional mediation of agency and professional becoming. These themes foreground digital transformation as a socio-emotional and relational process of identity negotiation rather than a linear process of skill acquisition.

Identity shifts from knowledge transmitters to learning designers

Teachers' narratives consistently indicated that digital transformation precipitated a fundamental reconfiguration of professional identity, marked by a shift from viewing themselves as knowledge transmitters to understanding teaching as the design and facilitation of learning experiences. This transition was not simply a pedagogical adjustment, but an identity negotiation process in which teachers reassessed their professional legitimacy, authority, and sense of purpose within evolving educational landscapes.

Many teachers described their early professional identities as grounded in content mastery, classroom control, and the transmission of linguistic knowledge. Teaching was initially conceptualised as the effective delivery of predetermined curricula, with professional competence measured by clarity of explanation and student compliance. As T7 reflected, "When I first started teaching, my focus was mainly on delivering lessons and making sure students understood the material. I saw teaching as sharing knowledge." Such accounts align with traditional transmissive models of teaching, in which authority is anchored in subject expertise and pedagogical routines.

The introduction of digital technologies disrupted these established identity narratives. Teachers reported that online and blended teaching environments destabilised familiar classroom practices and challenged assumptions about instructional authority. Teachers increasingly positioned themselves as facilitators, curators, and designers of learning experiences. As T10 explained, "In the classroom, I no longer see myself as the sole transmitter of knowledge but as a designer of learning experiences who curates digital resources, facilitates discussions, and scaffolds exploration across multiple platforms." This reconceptualisation was echoed across multiple teachers. T12 captured it succinctly: "Technology pushed me to become a learning-design facilitator." T14 similarly reflected, "Technology has transformed my role from a traditional instructor to a digital learning designer." For T15, the shift extended beyond technology itself: "My identity has evolved through research and collaboration, making me more reflective and adaptive." This shift reflects a broader reconceptualisation of professionalism, in which competence is tied to adaptability, responsiveness, and pedagogical creativity rather than content delivery alone.

Importantly, this identity shift was experienced as an ongoing and often unsettled process. Teachers described moments of disorientation as they navigated unfamiliar technologies and redefined their pedagogical roles. Several participants characterised this period as

"learning to learn again," highlighting the recursive nature of identity development. T7 captured this sentiment by noting, "Technology has completely reshaped my teaching approach and professional identity." Such statements illustrate how digital transformation functioned as a catalyst for reflexive identity work, compelling teachers to renegotiate who they were as professionals in relation to new pedagogical demands.

Over time, many teachers articulated a more expansive understanding of their professional identities, integrating technological competence with broader educational values. Teaching came to be framed not only as language instruction, but as supporting students' confidence, autonomy, and critical engagement. T8 reflected this broader orientation: "I view myself as a facilitator of language development, critical thinking, and intercultural competence, balancing accuracy with meaningful, communicative use of English." Here, identity reconstruction extended beyond technology use itself to encompass evolving beliefs about learning, student agency, and the social purposes of education.

This shift toward a learning designer identity also entailed renegotiations of professional authority. Rather than diminishing teachers' sense of legitimacy, many participants described how embracing facilitation and design roles allowed them to reclaim authority in new forms through intentional task design, responsiveness to learners, and the orchestration of digital resources. Teachers' narratives thus complicate assumptions that technology necessarily erodes professional authority; instead, authority was reconstituted through adaptive practices aligned with digital pedagogies.

The theme demonstrates that identity shifts in technology-mediated teaching are best understood as processes of adaptive professionalism. Cambodian EFL teachers did not simply adopt new tools or methods; they redefined what it meant to be a competent, legitimate, and ethical teacher in digitally transforming higher education. This identity negotiation was shaped by experimentation, reflection, and the gradual alignment of pedagogical practices with emerging professional values. In this sense, digital transformation functioned not only as an external reform, but as an internal catalyst for professional becoming.

Emotional labour and identity tensions in technology-mediated teaching

Teachers' narratives revealed that the integration of digital technologies intensified the emotional dimensions of teaching, positioning emotional labour as a central mechanism through which professional identity was negotiated. Rather than functioning as a neutral pedagogical shift, technology-mediated teaching generated affective tensions that reshaped teachers' sense of competence, legitimacy, and professional self. Across interviews, teachers described emotional trajectories characterised by anxiety, vulnerability, frustration, and, over time, conditional confidence and resilience.

At the onset of digital transition, many teachers experienced heightened uncertainty and self-doubt as they confronted unfamiliar platforms, accelerated institutional expectations, and uneven student access. As T6 explained, "When I am required to adopt new pedagogical approaches or technologies, I often experience a mix of excitement and uncertainty…

especially when time is limited or the expectations feel high." This emotional ambivalence reflects what Zembylas (2003) conceptualised as identity vulnerability, the moments when teachers' established professional narratives are disrupted, requiring emotional regulation to maintain a coherent sense of self.

For several teachers, technical breakdowns and infrastructural limitations directly undermined feelings of professional authority. T6 described moments of disempowerment when "technical problems or unclear expectations made it difficult to deliver lessons smoothly," while T10 noted that "constant updates and unequal access among students can sometimes feel overwhelming." These accounts suggest that emotional labour was not only internal but relational, shaped by interactions with students, technologies, and institutional demands. Teachers were required to manage not only their own emotions but also students' frustrations, disengagement, and inequities, thereby expanding the affective scope of their professional roles. This emotional trajectory, from anxiety toward conditional confidence, was consistently described across teachers. T1 reflected those new pedagogical demands "lead to stress and uncertainty initially but also foster growth and confidence over time as skills improve, and benefits emerge." T13 echoed this arc: "Initially, adopting new tools can be stressful, but confidence grows through experimentation and feedback."

A particularly salient source of emotional strain emerged from teachers' moral commitment to students in contexts of digital inequality. T3's reflection, "not being able to help poor students improve their grades, even when I try different ways to support them", illustrates how emotion, equity, and identity intersected. Here, emotional labour was tied to teachers' ethical self-conceptions, as feelings of inadequacy and guilt arose not from pedagogical incompetence, but from structural constraints beyond their control. This finding extends existing research on teacher emotions by highlighting how digital divides in resource-constrained contexts intensify affective tensions and complicate professional self-evaluation.

Despite these challenges, emotional labour also functioned as a site of agency and professional growth. Over time, many teachers described developing emotional resilience through reflection, experimentation, and reframing challenges as learning opportunities. T8 articulated this shift clearly: "I see professional growth as a continuous journey, where challenges are opportunities to rethink my role and where empowerment comes from embracing change with curiosity and creativity." Rather than eliminating emotional strain, teachers learned to work through it, integrating uncertainty into a more adaptive professional identity.

For some participants, successfully navigating emotional and technological challenges became a source of empowerment and renewed professional confidence. T9 reflected, "I felt empowered when I challenged with technology, students, and subject matter… keep lifelong learning, seek new platforms for learning and teaching." This suggests that emotional labour was not merely a cost of digital transformation, but a mediating process through which teachers reconstructed their identities as resilient, reflective, and future-oriented professionals.

Teachers' professional identities were shaped through ongoing affective work, managing anxiety, sustaining care, and cultivating resilience within institutional and technological constraints. These findings underscore that digital transformation must be understood as a socio-emotional process, in which teachers' capacity to adapt depends as much on emotional resources as on technical competence.

Institutional mediation, agency, and professional becoming

Teachers' accounts revealed that professional identity negotiation during digital transformation was profoundly shaped by institutional conditions, including leadership practices, policy expectations, professional development structures, and collegial relationships. Agency did not emerge as an individual trait or disposition, but as a relational and context-dependent achievement, continuously negotiated within enabling and constraining institutional environments.

Teachers described markedly uneven institutional support for technology integration. In contexts where leadership provided clear expectations, pedagogical guidance, and opportunities for professional learning, teachers reported a stronger sense of confidence and professional alignment. As T6 noted, "Supportive leadership and clear academic standards encourage me to maintain high-quality instruction and continually reflect on my teaching methods." Such environments allowed teachers to interpret digital reform as an opportunity for growth rather than as an imposed burden, reinforcing a sense of professional legitimacy.

In contrast, many teachers described institutional contexts characterised by limited infrastructure, inconsistent policies, and fragmented professional development. T7 reflected that "institutional support has been minimal due to funding constraints and poor infrastructure," which restricted access to reliable technologies and constrained pedagogical experimentation. In these settings, teachers experienced a tension between institutional expectations to integrate technology and the practical realities of inadequate support. This misalignment intensified identity strain, as teachers were held accountable for reforms, they lacked the structural means to fully enact.

Importantly, agency under these conditions did not disappear; rather, it was reconfigured. Teachers enacted what may be described as constrained agency, a form of professional action exercised through adaptation, improvisation, and self-directed learning rather than formal institutional pathways. Many participants described relying on informal strategies such as peer collaboration, online communities, and trial-and-error experimentation to navigate digital demands. T11 emphasised the importance of collegial support, stating, "Sharing strategies, exchanging feedback, and supporting one another reinforces my identity as part of a learning community rather than an isolated practitioner." These relational practices functioned as alternative sites of professional validation and identity reinforcement.

Student feedback also played a critical role in mediating teachers' sense of agency. Several teachers described how positive student engagement and responsiveness affirmed their

evolving pedagogical identities, even in the absence of institutional recognition. As T8 noted, "Honest student feedback keeps me aligned with their needs," suggesting that professional legitimacy was increasingly derived from pedagogical impact rather than formal evaluation structures. This shift underscores how teachers recalibrated their sources of professional affirmation in digitally transforming environments.

Despite structural constraints, teachers articulated strong future-oriented professional aspirations. Many expressed a desire to deepen expertise in digital pedagogy, engage in research-informed teaching, and contribute more meaningfully to institutional development. T7 captured this forward-looking orientation: "I see myself as a more innovative and adaptable educator… I want to continue developing expertise in digital pedagogy and research-based teaching practices to better support diverse learners." Such statements reveal that agency was not limited to present action but extended into teachers' imagined professional futures.

Collectively, institutional mediation is central to understanding teacher identity negotiation in digital transition. Teachers' professional becoming was shaped not only by formal policies and resources, but by how these structures interacted with individual initiative, peer relationships, and pedagogical values. Agency emerged as a negotiated and situational process, enabled in some contexts and constrained in others, yet consistently enacted through adaptive practices. These findings challenge binary notions of empowerment versus disempowerment, revealing instead a dynamic continuum in which Cambodian EFL teachers navigated reform through resilience, relationality, and reflective professionalism.

Discussion

This study examined how Cambodian EFL teachers in higher education negotiate professional identity amid sustained digital transformation. By synthesising the three analytical themes, including the identity shifts toward learning design, emotional labour in technology-mediated teaching, and institutional mediation of agency, the findings demonstrate that digital transformation is not merely a pedagogical or technical reform, but a socio-emotional process of professional becoming. Teacher identity emerged as dynamic, relational, and continuously renegotiated through the interplay of pedagogy, emotion, and institutional structure.

Digital transformation and adaptive professionalism

Across the findings, teachers' professional identity negotiation can be understood as a form of adaptive professionalism under constraint. Rather than passively implementing externally imposed reforms, teachers actively reinterpreted what it meant to be competent, legitimate, and ethical professionals in digitally transforming environments. The shift from knowledge transmission to learning design illustrates a fundamental reorientation of professional authority, from control over content toward facilitation, responsiveness, and pedagogical intentionality. This finding aligns with sociocultural and post-structural theories that conceptualise identity as enacted through practice and shaped by context (Barkhuizen, 2017; Beijaard et al., 2000; Varghese et al., 2005).

Importantly, this adaptive professionalism did not emerge from ideal institutional conditions. Instead, teachers reconstructed professional meaning while navigating infrastructural limitations, uneven policy implementation, and ambiguous expectations. This extends existing literature on teacher identity and technology integration by demonstrating that professional growth in low and middle-income country (LMIC) contexts is not contingent on optimal support structures alone but often develops through reflective adaptation and improvisation (Hennessy et al., 2022; Lai & Jin, 2021). Cambodian EFL teachers thus appear not as deficient actors "catching up" with global standards, but as professionals actively shaping localised forms of digital pedagogy.

Emotional labour as a mediating mechanism of identity negotiation

A major contribution of this study lies in foregrounding emotional labour as a mediating mechanism through which identity negotiation occurs during digital transformation. Teachers' narratives revealed that technology integration intensified affective demands, exposing vulnerabilities related to competence, authority, and moral responsibility. Anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt were particularly salient during periods of rapid transition, technological instability, and digital inequity among students.

Consistent with the theorisation of emotion by Zembylas (2003) as embedded in power and identity, emotional experiences in this study were not incidental but constitutive of professional self-understanding. Teachers' struggles with digital tools, time pressure, and student access reshaped how they evaluated themselves as educators, often producing moments of identity tension. These findings challenge dominant technology-in-education discourses that privilege skills acquisition and efficiency, while marginalising the affective dimensions of pedagogical change (Howard, 2021; Ulla et al., 2024).

At the same time, emotional labour functioned as a source of agency and growth. Teachers' ability to regulate emotion, reframe challenges, and sustain commitment to students enabled them to reconstruct professional coherence amid uncertainty. This supports and extends research on teacher resilience (Gu & Day, 2007), suggesting that resilience in digitally transforming contexts is not merely an individual trait, but an outcome of sustained emotional work linked to professional values and ethical commitments. In resource-constrained environments, where structural solutions are limited, emotional labour becomes a critical professional resource.

Institutional mediation and constrained agency

The findings further demonstrate that teacher agency during digital transformation is relational, situational, and institutionally mediated, rather than individually possessed. Institutional leadership, policy coherence, access to professional development, and collegial cultures shaped the conditions under which teachers could enact agency. Where support structures were present, teachers experienced greater alignment between institutional expectations and professional identity. Where support was fragmented or absent, agency was constrained but not eliminated.

In line with the Biesta et al. (2015) ecological conception of agency, Cambodian EFL teachers enacted agency through informal and adaptive practices, such as peer collaboration, self-directed learning, and pedagogical experimentation, rather than through formal channels of empowerment. These practices enabled teachers to sustain professional purpose and envision future development, even in contexts marked by limited resources and top-down reform pressures. This finding resonates with research from Southeast Asia and other LMICs, where teachers often navigate reform through quiet adaptation rather than overt resistance (Pawan et al., 2025; Tran & Li, 2025).

Crucially, the study reveals that agency and constraint are not binary opposites but exist along a continuum. Teachers simultaneously experienced empowerment and limitation, innovation and frustration, autonomy and compliance. This nuanced understanding challenges simplistic narratives of teacher resistance or compliance in digital reform and highlights the importance of examining how agency is negotiated within specific institutional ecologies.

Reframing digital transformation in LMIC higher education

Taken together, these findings challenge deficit-oriented framings of digital transformation in LMIC higher education, which often emphasise lack of infrastructure, preparedness, or competence. While such constraints are undeniably present, this study demonstrates that teachers actively construct meaning, legitimacy, and agency within these limitations. Cambodian EFL teachers' narratives reveal digital transformation as a lived professional experience, the one that reshapes identities through emotional labour, relational agency, and adaptive professionalism.

By centring teachers' voices, the study contributes to a growing body of critical scholarship that reconceptualises technology integration as a socially and emotionally mediated process (Lai & Jin, 2021; van der Klink & Alexandrou, 2022). It positions Cambodia not as a peripheral case, but as a theoretically generative context that illuminates how teacher identity evolves under conditions of rapid reform and structural constraint. These insights have relevance beyond the Cambodian context, offering transferable understandings for other higher education systems undergoing uneven and accelerated digitalisation.

Implications

The findings of the study have several important implications for policy, practice, and research in higher education, particularly in contexts undergoing rapid digital transformation. First, there is a clear need to rethink professional development for digital pedagogy. Cambodian EFL teachers' experiences demonstrate that effective professional learning must go beyond technical training to address the complex identity, emotional, and agency work involved in technology integration. Professional development programs should integrate reflective and narrative practices that help teachers make sense of identity shifts and emotional labour (Barkhuizen, 2017; Yazan, 2025). They should also foster adaptive professionalism by encouraging experimentation, peer collaboration, and the co-construction of digital pedagogies (Lai & Jin, 2021; Leahy et al., 2025), and provide ongoing,

context-sensitive support rather than relying on one-off workshops, recognising that digital transformation is a sustained, iterative process (Gul et al., 2025; Hennessy et al., 2022).

Second, the study highlights that technology integration is as much an emotional and social process as a technical one. Policymakers and institutional leaders must acknowledge and support the emotional labour of teachers, including the stress, uncertainty, and identity vulnerability that often accompany digital change (Hargreaves, 1998a; Zembylas, 2003). Promoting resilience and emotional regulation through mentoring, peer support networks, and safe spaces for sharing challenges is essential (Gu & Day, 2007; Schutz & Lee, 2014). Reforms should be designed with sensitivity to teachers' lived realities, especially in resource-constrained settings where digital divides and institutional constraints intensify emotional demands (Bou, 2025; Ourn & Chhorn, 2025).

Third, the findings challenge deficit narratives about teachers in low and middle-income countries, showing that agency and innovation often flourish under constraint. To harness this potential, institutions and policymakers should create enabling environments that value teacher agency, autonomy, and innovation, rather than enforcing top-down mandates (Biesta et al., 2015; Tran & Li, 2025). Investment in infrastructure and equitable access to digital tools is crucial to ensure that both teachers and students can participate fully in technology-mediated learning (Be, 2025; Flores & Mean, 2025). Additionally, fostering communities of practice where teachers can share strategies, reflect on challenges, and co-create solutions will help sustain professional growth and innovation (Lamb & Velikova, 2025; Leahy et al., 2025).

Finally, there are important policy and research recommendations. Ministries and universities should develop coherent digitalisation strategies that align with teachers' professional identities and provide sustained, holistic support for digital transformation. Future research should explore longitudinal trajectories of teacher identity in digital reform, conduct comparative studies across LMICs, and investigate the impact of emerging technologies such as AI and chatbots on teacher emotions and agency (Christodoulou & Zembylas, 2025; Seufert et al., 2025). In summary, supporting teacher identity negotiation, emotional wellbeing, and agency is essential for meaningful digital transformation in higher education. By centring teachers' voices and experiences, policy and practice can move beyond technical fixes to foster adaptive, empowered, and resilient educators, crucial for the future of language education in Cambodia and similar contexts.

Limitations and future research

This study, while providing valuable insights into Cambodian EFL teachers' professional identity negotiation during digital transformation, is subject to several limitations. The qualitative design and purposive sample of 15 higher education teachers limit the generalisability of findings to the broader population of Cambodian EFL teachers or those in other educational sectors and may reflect self-selection bias among participants who were more engaged or reflective about digital change. Data collection relied on self-reported interviews, which are susceptible to recall bias and social desirability effects, and did not include classroom observations or student perspectives that could have offered a more

comprehensive view of teaching and learning impacts. The research was conducted within the specific national and cultural context of Cambodian higher education during a period of rapid post-pandemic change, which may restrict the transferability of results to other countries or disciplines. Additionally, the study did not systematically compare identity negotiation across demographic groups or track changes over time. Future research should address these gaps by employing longitudinal and mixed methods designs, larger and more diverse samples, and by exploring the experiences of teachers in other subject areas and educational settings.

Conclusion

The study has illuminated the complex and dynamic processes through which Cambodian EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities amid the digital transformation of higher education. The findings reveal that technology integration is not merely a technical shift, but a deeply social and emotional journey that reshapes teachers' roles, self-perceptions, and relationships with students, colleagues, and institutions. Teachers demonstrated adaptive professionalism, resilience, and agency as they transitioned from knowledge transmitters to learning designers, often under conditions of constraint and uncertainty. Emotional labour and identity tensions were central to this process, highlighting the need for reforms and professional development that address both the technical and affective dimensions of teaching. Institutional context, leadership, and peer communities played key roles in mediating empowerment and growth, underscoring the importance of supportive environments for meaningful change. Ultimately, by centring teachers' voices and experiences, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital transformation in LMIC higher education and offers practical insights for fostering empowered, reflective, and resilient educators in Cambodia and beyond.

References

Adler, I., Montal, Y. & Soffer-Vital, S. (2025). Bridging culture and technology: Supporting teachers in developing culturally responsive pedagogies for technology integration. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 20, article 100840. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2025.100840

Aljanazrah, A., Yerousis, G., Hamed, G. & Khlaif, Z. N. (2022). Digital transformation in times of crisis: Challenges, attitudes, opportunities and lessons learned from students' and faculty members' perspectives. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, article 1047035. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.1047035

Aslan, E. (2024). Bite-sized language teaching in the digital wild: Relational pedagogy and micro-celebrity English teachers on Instagram. *System*, 121, article 103238. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103238

Atwa, H., Shehata, M. H., Al-Ansari, A., Kumar, A., Jaradat, A., Ahmed, J. & Deifalla, A. (2022). Online, face-to-face, or blended learning? Faculty and medical students' perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic: A mixed-method study. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 9, article 791352. https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2022.791352

Barkhuizen, G. (2017). Investigating language tutor social inclusion identities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(S1), 61-75. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12369

Be, B. (2025). Assessing teacher readiness for online teaching in Cambodian higher education. *Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Language*, 5(1), 111-133. https://doi.org/10.71514/jssal/2025.193

Beijaard, D., Verloop, N. & Vermunt, J. D. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(7), 749-764. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00023-8

Biesta, G., Priestley, M. & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 624-640. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325

Bou, D. (2025). Challenges and suggestions for improving the quality of higher education in Cambodia. *Cambodian Journal of Educational Research*, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.62037/cjer.2025.05.01.03

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Bussesund, E. S. (2025). Navigating the contradictions of digital transformation: Policy enactments of professional digital competence. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 12(1), 60-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2025.2603033

Chea, C. (2024). Mentorship's role in shaping professional identity: Insights from Cambodian teaching practicums. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), article 2419710. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2419710

Chea, S. & Lo, W. Y. W. (2022). International connectivity and employability in Cambodian higher education: A case study of developing employability skills in English language education. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 27(3-4), 335-356. https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2022.2041875

Christodoulou, E. & Zembylas, M. (2025). Ambivalence and emotion in the age of AI: How students navigate ChatGPT in higher education. *Education Inquiry*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2025.2567092

Davies, R. S. & West, R. E. (2014). Technology integration in schools. *Handbook of research on educational communications and technology: Fourth Edition*, 841-853. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3185-5_68

Day, C. (2021). An empirical case study of young adult carers' engagement and success in higher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(14), 1597-1615. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1624843

Doeur, B. (2022). Implementation of communicative language teaching: Cambodian EFL teachers' attitudes toward communicative language teaching. *International Journal of Instruction*, 15(2), 155-170. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2022.1529a

Eam, P. & Song, S. (2023). *Technology integration of Cambodian higher education: Emerging changes since Covid-19 and notable challenges*. UNESCO: Global Education Monitoring Report. https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/09/SopheakandPhyrom.pdf

El-Soussi, A. (2025). Teacher identity continuum: A framework for teacher identity shifts online. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 8, article 100411. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100411

Flores, E. & Mean, U. (2025). Digital transformation in Cambodian higher education: Current trends and future directions. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(1), 867-878. https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v9i1.4267

Gao, Y., Liu, Y., Zeng, Y. & Wang, X. (2024). Studies on language teachers' beliefs and emotions: Current status and future directions. *Heliyon*, 10(19), article e38695. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38695

Goetze, J. (2023). An appraisal-based examination of language teacher emotions in anxiety-provoking classroom situations using vignette methodology. *Modern Language Journal*, 107(1), 328-352. https://doi.org/10.1111/MODL.12832

Golzar, J., Sarwarzada, T. & Miri, M. A. (2025). Coping with teacher professional identity tensions: Using TPACK during global crisis time. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 24(5), 1208-1226. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2281952

Gu, Q. & Day, C. (2007). Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(8), 1302-1316. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.006

Gul, T., Criswell, B. & Demir, K. (2025). Impacts of teacher-driven professional development on teacher leadership identity. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 28(4), 875-902. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2052754

Hargreaves, A. (1998a). The emotional politics of teaching and teacher development: with implications for educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1(4), 315-336. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360312980010401

Hargreaves, A. (1998b). The emotional practice of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14(8), 835-854. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(98)00025-0

Heng, K., Doeur, B. & Hamid, M. O. (2024). University English teachers' research conceptions and engagement: Insights from Cambodian higher education. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 127, article 102450. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102450

Hennessy, S., D'Angelo, S., McIntyre, N., Koomar, S., Kreimeia, A., Cao, L., Brugha, M. & Zubairi, A. (2022). Technology use for teacher professional development in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *Computers and Education Open*, 3. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2022.100080

Howard, N.-J. (2021). Navigating blended learning, negotiating professional identities. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(5), 654-671. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1806214

Jackman, W. M. (2018). Switching from traditional to blended learning at university level: Students‟ and lecturers‟ experiences. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 17(5), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.26803/IJLTER.17.5.1

Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Getting the story, understanding the lives: From career stories to teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(5-6), 443-456. https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(93)90029-G

Lai, C. & Jin, T. (2021). Teacher professional identity and the nature of technology integration. *Computers & Education*, 175, 104314. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.COMPEDU.2021.104314

Lamb, T. E. & Velikova, S. (2025). Language teacher associations as innovative and collectively autonomous spaces in changing times: A global study. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 20(1), 9-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2025.2571847

Lambert, K. & O'Connor, J. (2018). Breaking and making curriculum from inside 'policy storms' in an Australian pre-service teacher education course. *Curriculum Journal*, 29(2), 159-180. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2018.1447302

Leahy, K., Calderón, A., O'Meara, N., MacPhail, A. & O'Flaherty, J. (2025). Navigating times of change through communities of practice: A focus on teacher educators' realities and professional learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 156, article 104925. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.104925

Lemana, H. E., Ulla, M. B. & Kohnke, L. (2024). TikTok for language teachers: Affordances of TikTok on teachers' identity and emotional vulnerability. *Heliyon*, 10(14), article e34388. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e34388

Lin, B. & Lin, E. (2025). Cambodia, English in. *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of World Englishes*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119518297.EOWE00227

Moore, S. H. & Bounchan, S. (2020). English in Cambodia. In K. Bolton, W. Botha & A. Kirkpatrick (Eds.), *The handbook of Asian Englishes*, 649-666. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118791882.ch28

Morgan, B. & Clarke, M. (2011). Identity in second language teaching and learning. In *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 2, pp. 817-836). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203836507-56/identity-second-language-teaching-learning-brian-morgan-matthew-clarke

Nejadghanbar, H. & Shaahdadi, M. (2025). English language teacher identity construction on Instagram: A looking-glass self theory perspective. *System*, 132, article 103696. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103696

Ourn, V. & Chhorn, T. (2025). Teachers' challenges in transforming the digital teaching in Cambodian context. *Journal of Education Innovation and Language Teaching*, 1(1), 76-87. https://doi.org/10.63381/jeilt.v1i1.52

Pawan, F., Wasanasomsithi, P., Kuttig, K. D. & Hsieh, Y.-C. (2025). ASEAN English language teachers' and teacher educators' situated praxis during times of crises and change. *TESOL Journal*, 16(4), article e70073. https://doi.org/10.1002/TESJ.70073

Peng, R., Hu, Q. & Kouider, B. (2023). Teachers' acceptance of online teaching and emotional labor in the EFL context. *Sustainability*, 15(18), article 13893. https://doi.org/10.3390/SU151813893

Pennington, M. C. & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher identity in language teaching: Integrating personal, contextual, and professional factors. *RELC Journal*, 47(1), 5-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688216631219

Richards, J. C. (2023). Teacher, learner and student-teacher identity in TESOL. *RELC Journal*, 54(1), 252-266. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688221991308

Rushton, E. A. C., Rawlings Smith, E., Steadman, S. & Towers, E. (2023). Understanding teacher identity in teachers' professional lives: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Education*, 11(2), article e3417. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3417

Sam, R. (2024). *Challenges and opportunities of educational technology integration in Cambodian higher education institutions: A literature review*. SSRN. https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.4849873

Schutz, P. A. & Lee, M. (2014). Teacher emotion, emotional labor and teacher identity. In P. Van den Hoven & J. D. Ten Thije (Eds.), *Utrecht Studies in Language and Communication* (Vol. 27, pp. 169-184). Brill Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401210485_011

Seufert, S., Hartmann, P. & Spirgi, L. (2025). Fostering intelligent-TPACK through AI-assistance: A multi-method study in pre-service teacher education. *Computers and Education Open*, article 100314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2025.100314

Sharma, D., Sood, A. K., Darius, P. S. H., Gundabattini, E., Darius Gnanaraj, S. & Joseph Jeyapaul, A. (2022). A study on the online-offline and blended learning methods. *Journal of The Institution of Engineers (India): Series B*, 103(4), 1373-1382. https://doi.org/10.1007/S40031-022-00766-Y

Tran, H. & Li, M. (2025). Influential sociocultural factors on teacher agency in times of educational change: Reflection from a Southeast Asian context. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 35(1), 308-324. https://doi.org/10.1111/IJAL.12619

Tran, T. T., Nguyen, T. C. & Luong, D.-H. (2024). Global perspectives on teacher emotions and agency in higher education: A content and bibliometric analyses over the past five decades. *European Journal of Education*, 59(4), article e12768. https://doi.org/10.1111/EJED.12768

Ulla, M. B., Perales, W. F. & Tarrayo, V. N. (2024). 'Becoming and being online EFL teachers': Teachers' professional identity in online pedagogy. *Heliyon*, 10(17), article e37131. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e37131

Väätäjä, J. O. & Ruokamo, H. (2021). Conceptualizing dimensions and a model for digital pedagogy. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, 15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1834490921995395

Van der Klink, M. & Alexandrou, A. (2022). Editorial: The call for a digital pedagogy. *Professional Development in Education*, 48(4), 541-545. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2022.2088748

Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B. & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1), 21-44. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0401_2

Vlachopoulos, D., Thorkelsdóttir, R. B., Schina, D. & Jónsdóttir, J. G. (2023). Teachers' experience and perceptions of sustainable digitalization in school education: An existential phenomenological study of teachers in Romania, Greece, Cyprus, Iceland, and The Netherlands. *Sustainability*, 15(18), 13353. https://doi.org/10.3390/su151813353

Warner, C. & Diao, W. (2022). Caring is pedagogy: Foreign language teachers' emotion labor in crisis. *Linguistics and Education*, 71, article 101100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101100

Yazan, B. (2025). Pedagogizing identity in teacher education through critical autoethnographic narrative. *RELC Journal*, 56(1), 165-183. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882241293835

Zembylas, M. (2003). Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective. *Teachers and Teaching*, 9(3), 213-238. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600309378

Zhang, L. & Hwang, Y. (2023). "Should I change myself or not?": Examining (Re)constructed language teacher identity during the COVID-19 pandemic through text-mining. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 127, article 104092. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.TATE.2023.104092

Appendix: Semi-structured interview

1. Could you briefly describe your professional background and how you came to work as an English language teacher in higher education?
2. How would you describe your identity as an English teacher, and what does being a teacher mean to you personally and professionally?
3. How has your sense of being a teacher changed from when you first started teaching to now?
4. How has technology, especially the shift to online or blended teaching, changed the way you teach and how you see yourself as a teacher?
5. What challenges or opportunities have you experienced when integrating digital tools into your teaching, and how have these influenced your teaching identity?
6. How do your institution's policies, leadership, or professional development opportunities shape your teaching practices or sense of professional identity?
7. How do you feel when you are required to adopt new pedagogical approaches or technologies? Can you describe any moments of stress, uncertainty, or confidence?
8. How do your interactions with colleagues, students, or leaders affect how you see yourself as a teacher?
9. Can you share an example of a time when you felt empowered or disempowered as a teacher? How do you continue to learn and grow professionally?
10. How do you see yourself as a teacher in the future, and what support would help you grow in your career?

Mr Borey Be is an independent researcher and lecturer in the College of Education, University of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He holds a masters degree in educational leadership and policy from Beijing Normal University. His research centres on teaching and teacher education, special education, online teaching and learning, educational technology, and parental involvement. He has authored and co-authored several peer-reviewed publications and conference papers in these areas.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0719-7497
Email: boreybe@gmail.com

Please cite as: Be, B. (2026). Professional identity and digital transformation: Cambodian higher education EFL teachers' experiences. *Issues in Educational Research*, 36(3), 863-882. http://www.iier.org.au/iier36/be.pdf