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Once an Expert, Now a Newbie: An Autoethnography on Identity in Transition to Online Education

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Abstract: Situated in the unprecedented realities of life, the present autoethnographic account is an organic manifestation of how a language teacher (the first author) navigated diverse roles in transition to online education in a dialectic and dialogic manner with another teacher (the second author) in the pandemic period. The sudden and complete shift accompanied by health threats and a number of complexities in the new normal brought about uniquely stressful and demanding conditions in the lives of the teachers. Being in such a delicate position in educational activities, teachers' views, practices as well as identities were not immune to these changes. Considering that identity is being constantly moulded by lived experiences, deconstruction of the existing identity in order to grow into another seems to be an important niche to be addressed in current studies particularly in such turmoil. For this reason, the present autoethnographical study aimed to uncover how a language teacher at a higher education context grew into another self with emergency remote teaching and online education practices. The data relying on self-observational, reflective and external tools revealed three stages in the identity (de-co-re-)construction of the participant: where the researcher felt the shock, where she tried to find a way out and where she found the synergy among diverse selves. The implications regarding teacher identity, well-being and sociocultural foundations of (online) teaching are also discussed in the study.

Keywords: Emergency remote teaching, online education, teacher identity, teacher well-being, autoethnography

Highlights

What is already known about this topic:
- The challenges and tensions brought about by emergency remote teaching (ERT) and online education resulted in emotional overload and identity crises on the part of the teachers and learners.
- The personal and professional lives of teachers, their understandings of selves, collegiality and their relationship with learners seem to be taking new forms with the recent, rapid and forced change due to ERT and online education.

What this paper contributes:
- It presents an organic manifestation of a thorny transition from traditional teaching to online education.
- The particularities and the voice of an individual teacher with her lived experiences, identities, resources and contextual realities through the notion of perezhivanie in time of turmoil are addressed in the study.

Implications for theory, practice and/or policy:
- Social presence, well-being and inter/intra personal relationships are significant factors in online education practices.
- The sense of identity as a multiple, fluid and constantly transforming construct should be the key understanding in how teachers view themselves.
- It is of utmost importance for the institutions to establish a climate of care, collaboration and empathy in the (virtual) workplace.

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Introduction

"To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."

H. Bergson

> On a beautiful spring day, while we were covering a reading text with Pre-intermediate 6, we heard a loud knock at the door. It was our group leader looking at us with worried eyes. She called me for a second and told me that Covid19 was on the island, and there would be no school till next week. She also added that this was definitely no holiday, and the students had to follow the program closely till then. She wanted me to go back to class and announce this immediately. I really did not know what to feel, think and do at that very moment. What I felt was fear and worry about our health, but the emphasis was on the academic requirements. I walked into the classroom without really knowing what to say and tried to be honest with my feelings and ideas. I passed on the news to the students, told them how I really felt and saw the confusion in their faces as well. We had a quick chat about what we can do and then left the class without knowing that was our last face-to-face class.

Situated in the unprecedented realities of life, the present autoethnographic account is an organic manifestation of how a language teacher (the first author) navigated diverse roles in transition to online education in a dialectic and dialogic manner with another teacher (the second author) in the pandemic period.

As illustrated in the excerpt above, the requirement to pivoting to a completely different understanding with no preparation at all came as a shock to the teachers as well as the students (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Conceptualized as "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternative delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (Hodges et al., 2020, para. 14), emergency remote teaching (ERT) with its own peculiarities differs from distance (online) education. While the latter refers to planned, polished and well-supported online courses, the prior functions as a band-aid under complex and catastrophic conditions to ensure educational continuity (Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022). The dire circumstances in ERT in the case of the pandemic led the first author, Müge, to question her beliefs and abilities, cultivate ways of negotiation with this challenge and transform into another self dialectically. In this process of growing into another self during the Covid days, she as a language teacher and a PhD student had valuable opportunities to unpack and (de-co-re-)construct her diverse selves with her students, colleagues and institution.

As the instructor of a teacher education course Müge had been taking back then, Ulker functioned as a mentor and critical friend who "asks provocative questions" and "provides data to be examined through another lens and offers critique of a person's work as a friend" in this process (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50). These intersectional identities provided Müge with a timely space where she can unearth her changing selves in relation to others and erratic circumstances; therefore, this narrative has been an endeavour to make better sense of self in its situatedness, fluidity, criticality and co-occurrence.

Theoretical Framework
A Vygotskian Perspective on Teacher Identity

> *"The truth is that in community we are stronger, wiser, more open, more reflective, more adventurous and ultimately better learners and teachers." – R. Townsend*

Emphasizing the significant role of "social experience in human development" (Cole et al., 1978, p. 22), sociocultural theory acknowledges that learning and cognition is "co-knowledge" (Leontiev, 1981, p. 56–57). To actualize this process of thinking and growing together, it mainly dwells on such concepts as dialogic interaction, collective agency, lived experience and reflexivity in relation to the discourse and

context (Cole et al., 1978). By relating them to the process of being, becoming and transforming, this social paradigm argues that identity is (de-co-re-)constructed through the mediation of interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Marginson & Dang, 2017). In other words, the external interpersonal social activity turns into "internalized psychological tools for thinking (internalization)" through mediation, negotiation and transformation (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 4). As a consequence of this dialogic interaction with the social environment, human beings can actively construct a new set of beliefs as the basis of their new selves/ identities by relating them to their previous experiences, knowledge and beliefs.

Although the interpersonal relations have been of utmost significance to uncover teachers' journey in the literature, subjective interpretations, emotional experience and internal tensions when confronted with a dissonance seem to be missing from the previous enterprise to investigate teacher identity and learning (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Yazan, 2019a). This less charted territory which is in need of further empirical studies might be conceptualized in relation to perezhivanie, which is a Russian term used widely by Vygotsky in order to refer to "the subjective significance of lived experiences that contribute to the development of one's personality, especially the emotional and visceral impact of lived experiences on the prism through which all future experiences are refracted" (as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p. 42). In order to understand teachers' identity (de-co-re-)construction, perezhivanie offers a unique framework to find out the individual ebbs and flows as a result of diverse interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences, how those (are) influence(d) (by) the community, critical peers and other involved parties, and transform beliefs and practices (Yasnitsky & Van der Veer, 2016; Zavershneva & Van der Veer, 2017).

In a nutshell, bringing a postmodern approach to the issue of identity, reiterating the notion of particularity (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) and the situational condition of learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), this notion underlines diverse individual experiences, interpretations and emotions need to be explored in their own situatedness within their own peculiarities (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

Research into (Online) Teacher Identity

The Vygotskian theoretical framework of the study supports that teacher identity as a multi-dimensional, relative and context-bound term grows and transforms in its dynamic and contextual idiosyncrasies in connection with other parties and discourses. Considering the recent, rapid and forced change in the personal and professional lives of teachers due to ERT, their understandings of selves, the teaching profession, collegiality and learners seem to be taking new forms as well. As a consequence, the issue of teacher identity and lived experiences while switching to distance education seem to be a significant niche to be addressed in the upcoming studies.

Among the recently emerging studies in the abovementioned field, Kraft, Simon and Lyon (2020) investigated the lived experiences of teachers during ERT in the US context through pre-post retrospective surveys. In addition to the challenges in learning and balancing their personal and professional lives, the participants from any career phase reported a sudden and tremendous drop in their sense of achievement and agency in different ways to varying degrees. While mid-career teachers were dealing with work-life balance mostly, veteran teachers expressed their discomfort with using technological tools. The study argues that practitioners as "the first responders in tragedy" (O'Toole & Friesen, 2016, p. 1) have to endure a number of challenges and tensions not only about their own well-being but also "students' socioemotional and academic needs" (Kraft et al., 2020, p. 8). More importantly, the study revealed how the pandemic-driven changes made existing inequalities more visible and stronger in ERT and distance education. To illustrate, the supportive working conditions together with intimate collegial relations were reported to play a significant role in helping informants deal with those tensions by the ones working at schools at high-income places. The most recurrently suggested ways of coping with this change was stated as "strong communication, targeted training,

meaningful collaboration, fair expectations, and recognition of their efforts" (p. 1). Unlike those so-called privileged teachers, the ones at low-income areas mentioned receiving limited institutional support, which accounted for greater emotional labour and challenges.

Another study by Nazari and Seyri (2021) sheds light on the identity shift from the traditional teaching to the virtual one due to the pandemic in Iran. The data revealed several tensions related to the conceptual change in the profession, emotional labour, low agency and professional preparedness. Yet, through enhanced reflectivity triggered by the unprecedented change, the participants seemed to learn to handle it. Moreover, despite being emotionally overloaded, the informants argued that this catastrophe promoted a dialogic interaction between learners and teachers where they can have genuine interaction and closer relationships. This was argued to improve the participants' emotional adaptability both at a personal and professional level.

Similar to the abovementioned studies, challenges in terms of using technological tools, mental wellness, digital pedagogy and equity were reiterated by several studies. To illustrate, the lack of prior preparation for online teaching and the absence of any needs analysis before and after ERT were argued to be the underlying reason for the dissonance experienced by the participants in a mixed-method study conducted at the US context (Crompton et al., 2021). Likewise, through a multiple case study design in the Maldivian context, Shakeeb (2020) uncovered that participants had to deal with student disengagement and their own readiness to conduct online classes in ERT, which might be resolved through the support, mediation and careful planning of the administration. Additionally, a study (Khlaif et al., 2021) conducted in Palestine, Libya and Afghanistan revealed a lot of challenges on the side of the teachers, learners and administration in terms of limited online opportunities, which shows how the pandemic perpetuated the existing difficulties in such developing countries.

Taken together, what teachers have been through in the pandemic seems to be analysed through the lens of sociocultural theory (Cole et al., 1978) to a certain degree in diverse settings excluding the Turkish and Northern Cyprus context. In fact, the particularities and the voice of individual teachers with their own existing lived experiences, identities, resources and contextual realities through the notion of perezhivanie have been an emerging field of study during the pandemic. In order to contribute to the newly constructed literature and to be better informed about the (de-co-re-)construction process of a language teacher identity along with her situated lived experience in transition to online education, this study aims to answer the following question:

1. How did a language teacher at a higher education context grow into another self in transition to online education?

Methodology

"The universe is not made of atoms; it's made of stories." - M. Rukeyser

Research Design

The research design of the present study is autoethnography, which is in the realm of qualitative research. Focusing on the dynamic "interaction with the socio-cultural contexts by exploring one's learning experience, struggles, solutions, failures and successes" (as cited in Arıkan, 2015, p. 78) during the process of transforming and being, this sociocultural approach both looks "inward into our identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences" and "outward into our relationships, communities and cultures" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 46). Opening up space for introspective accounts of life experiences through critical reflection in a socioculturally situated setting, not only the obvious, but also the hidden beliefs and assumptions which would not be easily accessed otherwise might be interrogated and uncovered through this self-investigative tool (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Yazan, 2019b).

The strength of this methodological design derives from the fact that it relies on "action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and a sense of self-consciousness" (Raab, 2013, p. 2) as the main source of data. With the author's voice resonating from the writing, it allows both the researchers and readers to better understand the self, others and particularities, which might transform the lives of all parties involved. More importantly, it promotes agency, empowerment and "emancipatory discourse" (Richards, 2008, p. 1724) where the subjectivity of the researcher is valued since "the subject and object of research collapse into the body/thoughts/feelings of the (auto)ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time" (Gannon, 2006, p. 475).

Considering the theoretical framework and the purpose of the study, this model of decolonized sociocultural inquiry approach was adopted in order to (de-co-re-)construct the notion of self and others in a time period full of novelty, ambiguities and conflicts.

Setting

The study was conducted at the school of foreign language (SFL) of an English-medium university in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This high-tuition state university is attached to its main campus in Turkey in all administrative and academic issues and operates within the same educational standards and regulations applied in its main campus.

As for the organizational structure of the SFL, it is managed by a director, a program coordinator and group leaders in each level group. There are also two teacher trainers in the Professional Development Unit (PDU) who are responsible for organizing professional development activities for the faculty. It has thirty-nine full-time instructors in total, a majority of whom are Turkish/ Turkish Cypriot non-native speakers of English. They are either the graduates of ELT or related departments such as Linguistics, American Literature, English Literature, and Translation Studies. The majority of the instructors hold a Master's degree either in language teaching or related areas. There are few instructors with a doctorate in the relevant field. Their experience in the profession of teaching differs from veteran (+25 years) to novice (less than 5 years), and the majority of the instructors is assumed to have 7-12 years of teaching experience. The workload for teachers is up to 20 hours per week in addition to some other job-related duties such as substitution, materials development, testing and teacher development activities.

During the pandemic, the SFL took a two-week break in March, 2020, and then, kept following the very same curriculum through asynchronous sessions, teacher-created instructional videos and Google Classroom in 2019-2020 spring term. In the summer and the following fall term, additional tools and synchronous sessions commenced as elaborated in the findings section.

Data Collection Tools and Analysis

The present study dwelled on three kinds of resources: self-observational tools (thirty-seven recorded lessons and eighteen recorded office hours), reflective tools (reflection on classroom events and recall of critical incidents) and external tools (fifty-two email exchanges and informal talks with colleagues, administration and the PDU, three syllabi for the three semesters in question and Google Classroom posts) from March 2020 to February 2021 (Chang, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). While the tools for self-observation and self-reflection offer a glimpse of the past and present perezhivanie (Lindahl, 2019; Mirhosseini, 2018), the external data aim to add different layers to the first author's lived experience and interpretation (Chang, 2016).

Following Yazan's (2019b) model of autoethnographic data analysis, Müge reiteratively read all the relevant written sources (i.e., email exchanges, Google Classroom posts and relevant syllabi), watched

the video recordings (i.e., recorded lessons and office hours), remembered her lived experiences and took notes of the key points regarding her affected and changing selves on a professional and personal level in transition to online education. Since identity is a multi-layered complex term, she tried to look at the issue from a wider perspective to see any factors affecting her identity as well as her personal and professional life in this turmoil. With the help of this iterative reading, she was able to spot six areas (i.e., emotional well-being, communication with students, work-life balance, collaboration, institutional support and sense of efficacy and competency) which were affected by the pandemic-related changes. Upon recognizing and (re-)interpreting her experiences which might fall into a common group among these areas, she organized her notes in the form of a narrative account, which might be considered as reflection-on-action for the "preliminary analysis" (Yazan, 2019b, p. 41). In the meantime, when she was not very confident with remembering, she asked the relevant people for further elaboration and clarification. After coming up with a snapshot of preliminary results based on the six aforementioned areas, she intended to engage in a deeper level of reflection through the technique called the Wheel of Life. This tool, originally proposed by Paul J. Meyer in the 1960s, was further developed and implemented by Byrne (2005) particularly in psychology for reflection and goal-setting purposes. The Wheel of Life as a self-reflection tool helps one to identify factors which "influence overall wellbeing while identifying areas of life where support, guidance, and additional focus are needed" (Sutton, 2022, para. 8). By simply dividing a pie-style wheel into six slices, Müge wrote down the name of each category on these slices and rated them out of ten (ten being highly satisfied and one being highly dissatisfied) based on her level of satisfaction with these areas in three periods (2019-2020 spring semester, summer school and 2020-2021 fall semester). Upon this process of iterative reflection accompanied by online discussions with the second author in the form of co-thinking, she tried to locate her experiences in the theoretical framework of the study (i.e., Vygotskian perspective of teacher identity) to find out and interpret the connections between her lived experiences and theoretical constructs. Lastly, they went over her narrative accounts as well as the three Wheels of Life by paying close attention to their relations with each other and the theoretical framework. Finally, they chose the most striking and revealing incidences and excerpts to be included in the study.

Trustworthiness

The validity, reliability and trustworthiness in qualitative studies have always been an issue of concern, and this has been addressed with data triangulation and providing as much factual evidence from various sources as possible. This study, too, follows this very path. In other words, it aims to ensure trustworthiness by 1. triangulating data from self-observational, reflective and external tools, 2. providing quotes and instances from these tools and 3. establishing a dialogic relationship between the authors where they probed each other's views. However, these are not to "reduce uncertainty" or make findings validated and generalizable but to "contribute to the enhancement of meaning" (Barone, 2001, p. 153). The researcher's voice, subjectivity, and agency is foregrounded in such studies, and it is a legitimate position to show the dynamic, subjective and incomplete nature of self and perezhivanie (Canagarajah, 2012). Although it may not be "a transparent access to truth" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 261) for the structuralists, this poststructuralist approach values the data presented after the first author made herself vulnerable to her lived experiences in her own particularity, confronted with challenges and tried to deal with them by benefiting from her own resources, agency and critical peers. With this exposed vulnerability, the researchers aim to reach a level of sophistication where the situated lived experiences along with "the nexus of self and culture" are accessible to the readers so that they experience a certain level of resonance and "me too moments" (as cited in de Souza Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 418). Moreover, although this is a self-investigation and reflection tool, the researcher preferred to use the third-person pronoun in order to bring an outsider look at her own perezhivanie and evaluate it through a certain theoretical framework. In this way, she aimed to be both an insider and outsider in the relevant process, which might also contribute to the depth and multiplicity of the meaning.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented in three sections, which refer to the spring semester in 2019-2020, summer school in 2019-2020 and the fall semester in 2020-2021 respectively. While the first period might be considered as part of ERT, the others refer to online education due to their pre-planned situation.

Here comes the big shock: The sense of a newbie

"Life is like a wheel. Sooner or later, it always comes around to where you started again."- S. King

After the suspension of the face-to-face classes on March 11, 2020 for a week as illustrated in the excerpt at the beginning of the paper, all the educational activities were announced to be carried out online. That is, the students were told that they would be sent the materials for that week, and they were supposed to work on them on their own. Although this was considered to be a temporary case, the officials announced that it would last till March 27. This inevitably led to chaos and ambiguity on the side of the school administration, teachers, students and families. Although there were a lot of unanswered questions and unprecedented changes, Müge calls this 'the honeymoon stage'. Despite the initial shock, she realized that how tired and busy she was and could not really find the time to slow down in her happy place, spare time for mediation, appreciate what she has and read for fun. This made her feel relatively comfortable despite the lockdown measures and worsening case of the pandemic. She recommended her students turn this catastrophe into a productive process where they can involve in deep thoughts, reflection and discovery.

This did not last long because the school administration notified the teachers on March 20 about the fact that they would start online classes on March 23. The researcher felt the shock again after the honeymoon stage and thought that they were being dragged into the unknown. The following email, however, sounded supportive and said that:

> We are definitely in an uncharted territory here. Many of you might be worried and anxious (also because of the Covid-19) This is absolutely natural. We are working in cooperation with our campus administration to overcome these difficult times as problem free as possible and to make the most of available facilities and technology at hand under the current circumstances. Undoubtedly, we will be experiencing many problems throughout this unprecedented journey, but we are sure that with your continuous support and cooperation, we'll be able to overcome these problems. These times are very challenging. We are in this together – and we will get through this, together. I 'm looking forward to getting back to normal and seeing you all.
>
> Stay safe & healthy (an email sent by the school administration to the instructors)

In an email traffic emphasizing the need for collaboration more than ever and ending with newly constructed closings such as 'stay home/ safe/ healthy', Müge felt safer but could not overwhelm the sense of a newbie. Those three days before the online classes commenced seemed they were the only chances where she could grow into an online teacher. Although it sounded impossible, apparently it seemed plausible to the higher administration. In order to use even this little time effectively, she got herself familiar with the suggested tools such as Screencastify, Google Classroom and Zoom. She first considered this process as nothing more than accumulating capital and information about new tools simply in order to maintain educational activities. However, as she became familiar with them, she started to question her abilities and changing role(s) in lessons where she would make use of them. This short preparation time, therefore, functioned as the process of acquiring both pedagogical tools (i.e., in the form of platforms, applications and websites) and psychological tools (i.e., critical reflection through deconstructing identity).

Prior to the online classes, the group leaders immediately set up Whatsapp groups, and partners teaching the same classes had their own groups. The ones who are already familiar with these tools shared what they know about these platforms and held mini trainings despite the late hours and the weekend. While the PDU is responsible for such activities, the nature of expertise seemed to have

changed due to the immediate needs, and collegial relations seemed to take another dimension. In this very process of (de-co-re-)construction of identity, she involved in both intrapersonal activities by questioning her abilities and interpersonal activities through deep conversations with her colleagues and Ulker.

Before creating videos for the asynchronous classes in this 'forced experiment', Müge started to question her teacher self, efficacy and competency as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> Our group leader called and asked me to create a screencast for a writing handout. Emphasizing the need for guiding our students in this uncharted territory, she provided me with both emotional and professional support. She sent me two tutorials and the objectives of the handout. I was quite stressed and lost despite this support. However, I tried to motivate myself by considering the first days of my teaching. It was the very same feeling, so what I have been going through now is not that unknown actually. Yes, I am a new online teacher, but I AM a teacher. I survived this once, and I can do it again (based on the first author's recall of this critical incident).

Upon trying to record videos for countless times, Müge was able to screencast with the help of her teaching partners. Especially the tech savvy ones were the life-saviours back then and contributed a lot to the growth of the team. While recording videos and preparing materials such as handouts and presentations, she realized that she was benefiting a lot from thinking and exploring together with her colleagues and her existing pedagogical content knowledge, which in a way helped her to gain her confidence back. This might be regarded as the embodiment of how interpersonal social activities argued by Johnson and Golombek (2016) fostered learning, resilience and adaptability. Moreover, these interpersonal relations seemed to trigger and enhance intrapersonal activities as Müge's reflexivity and critical reflection seemed to gain a new dimension through constant questioning of her changing self and role(s) in relation to the new situation and her colleagues.

With the beginning of the asynchronous classes and uploading materials on Google Classroom, Müge had several problems with being able to reach students. Some of them left the island even without their computers because they were thinking about coming back after some time. Some did not have (a regular) connection in their hometown, and some simply believed that these would not help them learn things. What's worse, a good number of students had already been infected while going back to their countries or some had infected family members, which hindered their participation in classes. She tried her best to contact those, help them solve their problems if possible and convince them as in the following excerpt, which turned into a tremendous emotional labour for her.

> Arkadaşlar merhaba, [a friendly greeting in Turkish, meaning 'Hi guys']
> First of all, I want to know how you are. How have you been? Do you need anything, is everything okay? I know these sentences lose all their sincerity and power on the screen, but I mean it. I have been very concerned about you all, especially after some travelled to their countries and some could not because of the travel restrictions. I am away from my family too, so I believe I can empathize. We are living through extraordinary, unpredictable and tough times. Last days have been a rush of emotions with the unpredictability of the situation and because of the changing decisions of the government. It seems like we found our new normal, at least for now. You all received the e-mail about academic continuity, so you know that we will continue our lessons. Probably you are not a big fan of the idea, at least for now. You may have a point since keeping track of the classes while being worried and anxious may not be the easiest. But still, not allowing the virus to steal a good academic term of ours should be a motivating goal. I believe we can and will do this together!

Stay home and healthy! (an email sent by the first author to her students)

After surviving the first week of ERT with trying to motivate herself, colleagues and students for online classes, recording videos for the asynchronous sessions and uploading materials on Google Classroom, Müge and her teaching partners decided to prepare a reflection form to be sent to the students to be informed of their ideas, feelings and preferences. The school administration together with the PDU did the same for the teachers. It is apparent that while she was de-constructing her existing identity in order to make sense of who she is in relation to the new modality, she also engaged in this co-construction process with her colleagues, students and administration. The reflection form in question particularly might be argued to provide all the stakeholders a venue to unearth, question and reflect on their existing and changing beliefs under the present uniquely complex conditions.

The results of the survey for the students revealed that the mental, emotional and physical suffering were the underlying causes of their unwillingness in following the online activities. Also, the lack of social presence and clarity demotivated them to continue their academic studies. In order to ameliorate some of the challenges the students were going through, she decided to turn her traditional care and share sessions into a video to explain how she was surviving this catastrophic period as a newbie just like them. The school administration both in North Cyprus and Turkey was impressed by the idea and shared this informal video on their Youtube channel as in Figure 1 to guide their students. Müge was really happy with the reaction to the video by the students and quite surprised to see that although she felt a lot incompetent and stressed to do this, it went to the heart and mind of a lot of people and fostered a lot of 'me too moments'. One more time, she remembered this famous saying: 'in teaching I am learning, and in learning I am teaching.' Additionally, by looking at the results, she decided to hold more office hours on Zoom even at night because of the students' changing habits. Also, she and her teaching partners planned to hold some synchronous classes as well to foster the feeling of social presence. Although it seemed to be additional emotional burden to the researcher, these sessions helped her a lot to get used to the new normal and discourse.

Figure 1: A video to help students in their remote education practices [Turkish title in the figure translates 'Suggestions for remote education practices']

After surviving April and May 2020 with the collaboration of colleagues and students, the school was informed of the fact that an online proficiency exam was going to be held at a date to be announced later. Although it meant to provide some clarity, it led to further worries on the part of the teachers and students because of the lack of necessary preparation and infrastructure. This added further stress to Müge and started to worry about her online testing competency.

The Wheel of Life in Figure 2 intends to show how imbalanced, chaotic and irregular Müge's life was in ERT. Considering the fact that a wheel can only proceed with balance and regularity, her journey might be viewed far from smooth, which requires immediate need for balance, synergy and adaptation.
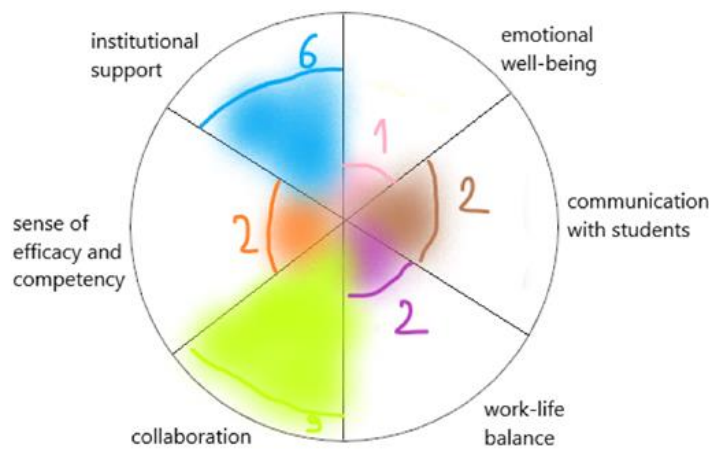

Figure 2: The Wheel of Life during the first period (10 being highly satisfied and 1 being highly dissatisfied)

Work in progress: I am getting there

> *"Transformation is a journey without a final destination."* - M. Ferguson

The educational activities for ERT ended in June, and then, the school started to implement an intensive teaching program for the upcoming proficiency exam. Since it was a relatively more structured period in the form of a summer school, it might be characterized as the first instances of online education. In the meantime, Müge attended the training sessions provided by the PDU regarding the online proctoring upon the identification of the instructors' background and needs. She reports her feelings at the beginning of this period in the following way:

> It was a time of ambiguity and chaos. I still cannot believe the spring term is over, but more difficult days are waiting for us. The students got stressed because of the unknown dates and procedures. Since they are the lowest achievers at school, they believe that they cannot be successful in the exam. They were already demotivated by the lack of social interaction and at the same time reluctant to participate in the lessons actively by turning their cameras and microphones on. Although this was not much of a problem at the beginning and they were relatively in the process of getting to know the new normal, they seemed to lose their already low confidence and motivation. While I start to feel more confident with the new tools and discourse, I am getting more scared of the students' reactions and demotivation (based on the recall of the first author's informal talk with one of her colleagues).

The classes started and as Müge assumed, the students were quite unwilling, hopeless and lost. They reported that due to the guilt and sense of failure, they were also not willing to ask for help. She again felt the need to do a care and share session with her students and remind them

> This process has been such a challenge for everyone, but it is up to us to make it more productive. A great number of universities throughout the world have already been having an online component in their curriculum or shifting to remote education

completely. It is not hard to guess that we would have this sooner or later. Yes, it is quite worrisome to have this shift in such a traumatic way, but under the present circumstances, as long as we and our loved ones are safe and healthy, we can add to our 21 century selves and enhance our tech skills. We may even like this more than traditional classes because of the flexibility and vast opportunities it has. Give it a chance, guys! Be with me! Life is already difficult. Let's help each other to make it bearable (based on one of the recorded office hours carried out by the first author).

Making the idea in the excerpt the rationale of the lessons, she tried to focus on the possible growth thanks to the opportunities in online education. For instance, she introduced several tools to her students she got to know thanks to her colleagues, online conferences and webinars she attended. Emphasizing that these tools are quite personalized since they provide them with the activities matching with their levels and needs, she tried to promote the idea of flexibility in distance learning as suggested by pedagogy of care (Bali, 2021; Burke et al., 2022; Xiao, 2021). The students' reaction and participation got better in the course of time, and they reported benefiting from these tools, studying at the time and place of their choice and getting feedback through various tools. Also, several students made the necessary arrangements in terms of their computers and internet connection, which increased their availability and attendance. All in all, this positive change on the part of the students helped Müge get rid of the emotional burden created by the lack of motivation and opportunities, which contributed to the endeavours of her growth into a new teacher self.

Having finished the classes and implementing the first proficiency exam, the preparations for the next term started immediately. The school administration asked instructors to come together in groups of four virtually, brainstorm and come to a conclusion about their suggestions and preferences for the next term. Although it was the middle of August, each and every instructor did not take any time off, participated in the decision making process and shared their ideas freely. Although it was unclear how this would lead the upcoming term because of the changing conditions and officials' own agenda, Müge appreciated this inclusive initiative.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the Wheel of Life seemed to be more balanced, which apparently led to a smoother journey. With the increased communication among the administration, students and colleagues, Müge's well-being and her sense of efficacy seemed to improve to a great extent.
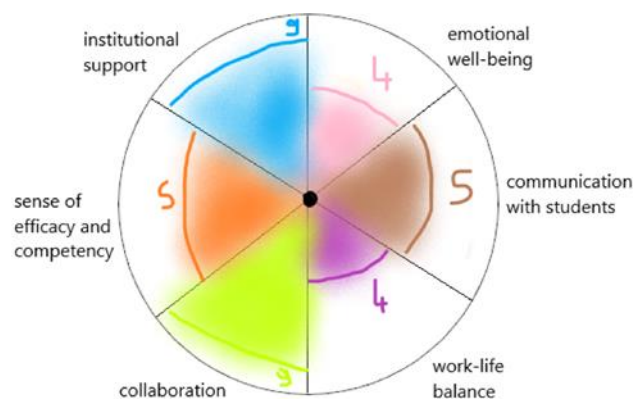

Figure 3: The Wheel of Life during the second period (10 being highly satisfied and 1 being highly dissatisfied)

Almost there: The synergy between the expert and the newbie

> "Change always involves a dark night when everything falls apart. Yet if this period of dissolution is used to create new meaning, then chaos ends and new order emerges." - M. J. Wheatley

After spending the summer with brainstorming and familiarizing herself with the new tools and applications, Müge felt more empowered and ready to tackle the challenges. More importantly, caring and feeling cared in these extraordinary times facilitated her transition to a smoother, safer and more peaceful condition. As highlighted by Maha Bali (2021) in her inspiring blog, pedagogy of care is multidimensional, and it is not only about teachers' efforts for care-oriented practices. Teachers, too, need "care from fellow teachers, care from their own students, and equitable caring policies from their institutions" (Bali, 2021, para. 1). This reciprocal and intersectional nature of care-informed pedagogy influenced Müge's identity (de-co-re-)construction process in (un)predictably diverse ways. Although she knew that the upcoming semester would be filled with the new unknown as in the following excerpt, she preferred to believe in the power of her transforming self, collective agency and open communication as supported by the aforementioned parties.

> Thanks God, now I feel much more relieved. I still do not know what is waiting for me. This is a new semester, and I do not know my students this time. I will meet them online. Are we able to really get to know each other? How am I going to establish rapport in class with those I have never met? Things seem even more challenging now, but I am stronger because I know that I dealt with challenges on the first day of school when I was thrown into a class full of students at my age, and I survived this. We switched to online education faster than the speed of light, and I survived this. My (traditional) teacher self is not gone. It is only taking new forms with the tensions and dissonance. I am in the being. I am transforming. And I am happy that "we are in this together" did not stay as a slogan word in these extraordinary times. This school showed the real community spirit, and I am thankful for those making it possible (based on the first author's recall of the critical incidents).

The synchronous online classes started with complete strangers, and it did not go as problematic as she feared. Probably because the students already had some experience with the process, and they were curious about the university life, their new friends and Cyprus, they showed enormous enthusiasm and participation. With the changing classroom discourse, Müge held online ice-breaker activities, virtual care and share sessions, movie nights with some students and tea and talk sessions. Caring much more about soft skills such as empathy, patience and enhanced well-being, she felt that her traumatized identity had been growing into a more caring and empathic teacher who did not ignore the significance of social presence in remote teaching. More importantly, she felt that she had been learning from her millennial students a lot particularly in terms of tools and swift adaptation to change. According to her observation, the nature of expertise seemed to have changed not only among the teachers but also in the relationship between the student and teachers. Remembering the words of Freire (2005), she now came to the realization what he meant by this: "through dialogue the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teacher" (p. 264).

The PDU sessions regarding useful tools and best practices among the teachers continued this semester as well. Not only academic support such as ways of giving feedback and motivating students to turn their cameras on but also well-being was addressed in these sessions. On top of it, Müge remembers being impressed by a session about the epic fails in online education. With the underlying

message saying that we all have been there and done that, the instructors shared embarrassing, shocking and fun moments they had in online teaching. This seemed to work much more than the best practices since it showed the lessons learned, ways of coping with challenges and the relationship between reflection and action.

Another big difference in Müge's life was that she started her PhD journey in this semester. She was quite curious and happy about the fact that she was going to be more informed about the theories and realities encompassing the English Language Teaching (ELT) world. More importantly, with enhanced reflection and identity (re-)construction due to the recent changes, she believed that she would add another layer to her diverse selves thanks to this new experience. Furthermore, with the new research areas emerging with the distance learning and ERT, she thought that ELT would be more vibrant than ever, and she would have the chance to delve into the depth of this new normal. Her experiences met her expectations, and she realized that she benefited not only from the classroom discussions and coursework but also from the mode of instruction. Since she was being an online student there, she had the chance to observe and experience this at first hand. She believed that this also helped to shape her new identity particularly in terms of being more understanding with the screen fatigue issue, catching up with deadlines and respecting preferences such as the camera matter.

In brief, the synergy between the traditional teacher self and the new self started to appear in this period as shown in Figure 4. Clearly, it led to a smoother and less bumpy experience for Müge in this journey thanks to the increased well-being as a result of the collegial, institutional and student-driven support and heightened self-efficacy and competency.
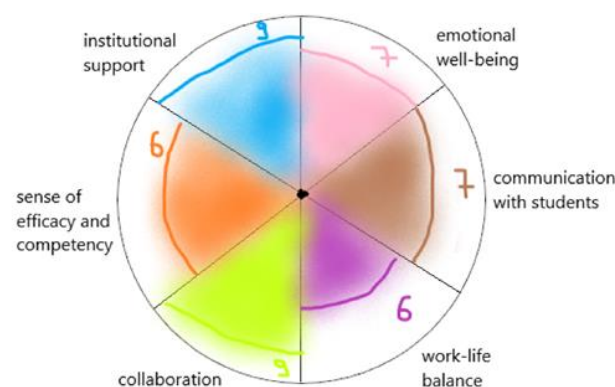

Figure 4: The Wheel of Life during the third period (10 being highly satisfied and 1 being highly dissatisfied)

Discussion

"The circle has no beginning and no ending. It is unbiased, solid and unwavering in its geometric simplicity, denoting unity and eternity, totality and infinity. It eludes mathematical exactness, thereby reminding us that nothing is exact, even in mathematics. In this manner, it is the essence of all that is natural, primordial, and inescapably human." - J. Helfand

The present study aimed to see a language teacher's journey in uniquely challenging times due to the pandemic-related changes. As revealed by the three periods in the findings, Müge went through emotional turmoil worrying about not only her health but also her sense of efficacy and competency as a teacher at the beginning of these extraordinary times. Having no prior training and experience in online education, she felt being dragged into the absolute unknown. With the support of the administration and

her colleagues as in the case of pedagogy of care (Bali, 2021; Xiao, 2021), she felt the sense of togetherness and thinking together. Shared agency, collaboration and withitness gave rise to a community of practice (CoP), and she benefited from this coknowledge in her identity (de-co-re-)construction.

In addition to her interpersonal relations as in the case of sociocultural theory (Cole et al., 1978) and CoP (Wenger, 1998), she enhanced the frequency and depth of her reflective practices. This intrapersonal journey as highlighted by perezhivanie also provided her with a heightened awareness of self, change and transformation. On top of it, not bottling her feelings, being vulnerable to the emotional fluctuations and facing them in the presence of others' ideas, tools and feelings helped her a lot in the process of growth. Consequently, the overall findings particularly in terms of reduced wellbeing and chaos caused by the lack of preparation seem to be in line with those of Nazari and Seyri (2021) and Crompton and her colleagues (2021). It also shared the similar understanding with Eşici and her colleagues (2021) in terms of the opportunities this unprecedented change has provided. However, there were some different results yielded in the present autoethnography with regards to the institutional support and digital equity. The participants in low-income areas in the study of Kraft, Simon and Lyon (2020) thought that they did not receive much institutional support, and this led to increased ambiguities and enhanced emotional labour on the side of the teachers. The presence of such support in this study, therefore, might account for the relatively smooth transition in the later periods of the process. To be more specific, the reciprocal relationship at the intersection of well-being, care and empowerment among the school, students, teachers as well as between the authors seems to help the first researcher overcome the pandemic-related challenges to a great extent. As put forward by Freire (1985), "to transform the world is to humanize it" (p. 70), and the human-centred understanding at the institution in question as well as Müge's dialectical relationship with Ulker helped Müge progress in her journey of transformation by taking relatively firmer steps unlike those in Kraft, Simon and Lyon (2020). The other difference is that the issue of digital (in)equity was not a very visible factor in the research setting as in the study of Crompton and her colleagues (2021) as well as the one conducted by Kraft, Simon and Lyon (2020) probably because the present context is a high-tuition state university. Although it was not among the challenges Müge had to deal with in her context, she still had a thorny period in this transition. Since the pandemic situation was reported to exacerbate the existing inequalities as in the aforementioned studies, CoP, pedagogy of care and collaboration gain more and more importance in order to address the pandemic-related obstacles. This finding also addresses the significance of Kumaravadivelu's (1994) principle of particularity for the sake of evaluating each case in its own peculiarities and situatedness.

Another striking point in the study might be related to the so-called dichotomy between the traditional and online teacher identity. While the researcher assumed that she suddenly turned into a newbie who does not have the necessary tools, agency and a coping mechanism, she seemed to disregard her accumulated expertise in the field of teaching and learning as well as the fluid nature of identity. It is undeniable that the semantic and practical borders of teacher expertise have had to be redefined with this sudden shift; however, experienced and veteran teachers still have a certain level of pedagogical content knowledge and psychological tools to be utilized in different forms in diverse ways in such times. To this end, upon realizing that this is a process of growing into another self rather than turning into tabula rasa suddenly, she tried to change her perspective towards this process from changing to transforming. This eureuka effect together with thinking and acting together in the form of collegial power helped her to find the synergy between her diverse selves. Consequently, this process which might be characterized by enhanced resilience and adaptability for the sustainability of educational activities even in the case of a catastrophe turned into the case of Phoenix as argued by Bozkurt (2022). In order for her (Müge in this case) to "rise from the ashes" (p. 12), she first needed to "face the flames" (p. 12), and with collective thinking and action, she tried to recalibrate herself in line with the changing situations.

To conclude, this intellectually and emotionally stimulating and empowering process of self-discovery indicates that individuals have to reinvent the wheel in order to find its other forms in different contexts under diverse circumstances. This seems to be the only way of progress, transformation and growth.

Implications

"Women and men are capable of being educated only to the extent that they are capable of seeing themselves as unfinished. Education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable. And the same awareness in which we are inserted makes us eternal seekers."- P. Freire

The present study seems to bear several implications for practitioners, institutions and teacher education programs. To begin with, the sense of identity as a multiple, fluid and constantly transforming construct should be the key understanding in how teachers view themselves. In order to realize this growth, they should not ignore the significance of their interpersonal relations, intrapersonal realities, psychological tools and resources. Next, it is of utmost importance for the institutions to establish a climate of care, collaboration and empathy in the workplace. Paying attention to both professional needs and emotional wellbeing, the administration and PDU need to work in collaboration to respond to such needs. Lastly, the teacher education programs had better emphasize the fluidity of identity much more in coursework by underlining the changing realities and conditions. By equipping teacher candidates with essential tools such as critical reflection and action, agency and collegial harmony, these programs may lay the groundwork for future teachers' transition from "pedagogic discomfort" to "pedagogic agility" (Kidd & Murray, 2020, p. 552) in such turmoil. As a final note, we can add that this autoethnographic analysis of a language teacher's experiences through the notion of perezhivanie will contribute to the conceptualization of the complex processes of teacher identity transformations back and forth and resonate with other teachers who have to wrestle with similar turmoil in other contexts.

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