

## Research Article

**USING CREATIVE METHODOLOGY  
TO EXPLORE FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER EDUCATOR IDENTITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study is to find out factors influencing the development of teacher educators' identities and to suggest appropriate policies for Ho Chi Minh City University of Education (HCMUE) to identify their teacher educators' identities. Creative methodology was applied in the study through lantern-making and reflection process of six teacher educators in the HCMUE on their practice of being an academic and factors impacted on their formation of teacher identity. Private dialogues between each pair of the teacher educators were recorded and analyzed based on themes including external and internal factors that affect the teacher educator identity. Findings indicated that external factors are pressure in arranging time for teacher educators' professional learning, works, and families. Internal ones include a meaning of being a teacher educator, their motivation and self-studying. These were crucial factors impacting their teacher educators' identities. Based on the study, it is recommended that high-quality policies should be developed to enhance the development of teacher educators' identities at the HCMUE.*

**Keywords:** creative methodology; development of teacher educators' identities; teacher educator identity

**1. Introduction**

Teacher educators play an important role in preservice teacher education by providing training, guidance, and supervision to student teachers. Therefore, they have enormous influences on the quality of school teachers (Loughran, 2006). Also, teacher educators' identities have an impact on shaping prospective teachers' identities (Dinkelman, 2011) throughout the training at university and practicum at school.

The journey to become university teacher educators often starts at the positions as preschool, primary, and secondary teachers at school (Dinkelman, Margolis & Sikkenga,

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2006). Thus, teacher educator identity is redefined and reconstructed over time. Even as school teachers, they might have been identified themselves as experienced teachers, when shifted to be teacher educators, the process of forming new identities to adapt to new roles and positions can be taken place with fully challenges (Pinnegar, 2005). Most Vietnamese teacher educators used to be trained as preschool, primary or secondary teachers in preservice teacher education. After that, based on their excellent performance during the preservice training at university, most of them are recruited to be teacher educators. Therefore, in fact, the process of developing their identity as teacher educators has been mostly undertaking during their working time at universities of education.

There has been an increasing number of studies on teacher educator identity during over 10 years focusing on issues such as challenges and tensions experienced by teacher educators; factors influencing teacher educators' identity development; and high-quality induction programmes of teacher educators (Izadinia, 2014). Yet there has not been any comprehensive research on the formation of Vietnamese teacher educators' identity.

While a number of studies have applied various research methodology such as exploring teacher identity, there is still a lack of studies that “come to possess the constructs and ideas that inform their professional identity” (Clark, Hyde & Drennan, 2013, p.7). In this study, creative methodology was applied through lantern-making of six teacher educators in the HCMUE. During this process, these teacher educators could reflect and develop their ideas of their professional identity through hand-made lanterns by themselves, and then they also shared their perspectives with another colleague. In other words, the study adopted creative methods and interviews to find the answers of the following research questions:

(1) What are the internal and external factors that influence Vietnamese teacher educator identity?

(2) Which factors should be more concerned in producing better policies in developing Vietnamese teacher educator identity?

## **2. Literature review and methodology**

### **2.1. Literature**

There has been a common notion in literature on teaching and teacher education that teacher identity is dynamic, and this changes over time under impacts of numerous internal and external to the individual (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) revealed that emotion can be one of the internal factors that affected teacher individual while job and life experiences can be factors that influence them. McKeon and Harrison (2010, p.27) also argued that identity has been identified as “a socially and culturally constructed self-formed through a life's experiences and communication about these experiences”. Furthermore, teacher identity could be viewed “as both product (a result of influences on the teacher) and process (a form of ongoing interaction within teacher development)”

(Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p.177). Teacher identity was also recognized in the relation to aspects of teachers' professional lives such as their conception of a teacher role, motivation for teaching, willingness to change (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

Thus, the examination of teacher identity required us to understand which factors shape teacher identity or have influences on the teacher and how these factors shape teacher identity within their professional learning. It also should be emphasized that the ways of exploring identity are depended on sociocultural perspectives (Sfard, & Prusak, 2005).

In this study, teacher identity has been conceptualized in contexts and has been shaped by external and internal factors. Internal factors included teachers values of being an academic, motivation that keep them staying with being of teachers and willingness to change or their self-studying experiences, while external ones comprised issues related to their family and work (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Thus, in order to create such high-quality policies at institutional and national levels to develop teacher educator identity, policymakers need to understand which internal and external factors affect to teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

## **2.2. Methodology**

Gauntlett (2007) confirms that 'creative, artistic and other 'making activities', combined with time for reflection, can help us to understand people's identities and social experiences' (p.2). Moreover, creative methodology can support research participants in developing their thinking about personal experience and identity (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). With a new creative method, participants can have a reflective process in which they have time to make creative crafts and then reflect upon what they made (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). Creative methods are often followed up by other qualitative research methods such as interviews due to the fact that interviews are beneficial in revealing people's insights including ideas, opinions, perspectives, values (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In order to answer the research questions of this study, creative methods combine with reflection and interviews were considered to be the most appropriate.

Six teacher educators in HCMCUE participated in the making lanterns process as a chance to reflect their professional journey. Data has been collected through interviews which have been conducted in three pairs of participants right after lantern making to engage and discuss their deep reflection of being a teacher educator.

Particularly, in the first phase of the study, six participants were asked to make lanterns by their own creative ways for about an hour in order to show their identities as well as thoughts of their experiences and professional learning. By participating in lantern making, these teachers could express themselves in meaningful ways (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006).

In the second phase of the study, six participants were required to continuously take times by interviewing each other in pair, discussing and sharing what they had done in the

lantern making in three different rooms. Each interview lasted around over twenty minutes and were all been recorded. Recordings of the interviews were then analysed by a reasoning model of induction in which analyses have been driven by data (Brinkmann, 2014).

After the collecting data process, teacher educators’ identities and their professional learning through analysing the interviewing data that they had done during their journey of becoming a teacher. With the induction model, hot spots, and glows (Maclure, 2013) radiated from the data and related to their telling stories, motivation and self-studying experiences of becoming teacher educators which had been explored to answer the research questions. Relevant theories to these themes had been chosen to discuss the findings of the study.

Participants in the interviews were anonymous and named as A, B, C, D, E, and F. The below table presents some descriptive information about six participants.

*Table. Demographic Characteristic of Participants*

Gender		Years of teaching experiences		
Male	Female	2- 5 years	6 – 10 years	Over 10 years
2	4	2	2	2

### 3. Results and discussion

In this research, the records of interviews were listened carefully and then glowing moments were chosen, this helped to shape the analysis of interviews’ data with six participants into two main themes as: (1) an external factor that had influence on teacher educator identity such as pressure or difficulty in arranging time for professional development, work and family; (2) internal factors that had influence on teacher educator identity as: teachers’ values of being an academic; motivation (to help teachers staying with being an academic); and teachers’ willingness to change. Furthermore, discussion about suggested policies for the development of teacher educator identity was also included in the below analyses.

#### *3.1. An external factor that had influence on teacher educator identity: pressure in arranging time for professional development, work and family*

Job and life experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) in which pressure teacher educators in arranging time for professional learning, work and family had also been considered as an external influence on teacher identity. Pressure in career has been always an issue for teacher educators, especially for married female teachers in arranging time for professional learning, work and family effectively. Since taking care of the family was the most crucial thing for her, sometimes she found it stressful to arrange time for her family, work, and studying.

Another pressure is that I am a woman. If I was single, I would dedicate myself to work and study. For example, I can stay up late to work or study. I really believe that I the ability to work and study well. However, currently, when I'm married and especially, I always value taking care of my family as my most important thing, I feel it's a bit contradictory, I I feel very stressful... (Lecturer A)

This glow indicated that it might be a very common struggle of academics in general and married female academics in particular. However, rapid changes in teaching led to new requirements of reforming instructional techniques and contents of subjects as well as increasing more interactive teaching rather than traditional lecturing which also would take more preparation time for the teacher educators (Miller et al., 2000; Pundak & Rozner, 2008). The institution has to recognise this fact and respond to it by modifying policies related to faculty schedules as well as supporting policies of time for teachers who are studying postgraduate programmes. In fact, the regulations on teaching standard hours for teacher educators at the HCMUE have been still following the national policies issued by the Circular 47/2014/BGD ĐT of regulation on a working regime for university lecturers in which a standard requirement for lecturers in a school year is 270 standard hours. However, each university can revise this in order to adapt to its own contexts and changes. Besides this, HCMUE also has a policy of supporting a 50% reduction of teaching hours for teacher educator taking postgraduate programs. Further research is necessary to determine the exact amount of working time that would satisfy all teachers within the institutions and minimises their burdens on arranging times for multiple roles both at work and home. Similarly, the organisation of discussion or workshop for female academics within the institution also should also be considered to help them balance work, family, and their professional development more effectively. The hot spot in the story of this female lecturer should be considered fully because half of lecturers in our institution are female. Therefore, it is necessary to raise this issue and find ways to propose solutions for the policymakers at the institutional level to help them with better supports and policies for their professional and their teacher identity development.

### **3.2. Internal factors that have influence on teacher educator identity**

#### **3.2.1. Teachers' values of being an academic and their motivation**

Two of the internal factors that impacted the teacher educator identity and their motivation were teachers' values of being an academic and their motivation. It has been argued that these two factors are interrelated because what they value of being an academic would also be their motivation to help them stay in the career. A teacher educator shared that learners had been the most significant factor that influenced his professional development. Also, this was also the motivation for his being a teacher educator.

In fact, the thing that mostly influences the working environment of H, H still sees that's the learners until now. Because there are many times, most of the semesters that H has been teaching till now, H still sees: sessions that I've taught, I feel the learners interact, they are happy, they are active. [...] it is the motivation and a factor that affect my development. (Lecturer B)

For another teacher educator who is a female academic and has been working for the institution under three years, she expressed that the motivation for her becoming of a teacher is her lecturers who had taught her when she was a teacher student at the institution.

In fact, experienced lecturers have impacted on me. I want to be a lecturer who can inspire students. Yes, so when I went to university, I felt that my lecturers treated me well. For example, they always encouraged me [...]. Because I am the type of person that if others believe in me, I won't let them down and I will have faith in myself that I can do it. So, I became a lecturer and I believe that I can become a good one. (Lecturer C).

The reflection of the motivation of being an academic of this lecture seemed to correspond with the pre-professional age in four ages of the teaching professionalism in the study of Hargreaves (2000). In this case, the teacher educator (Lecturer C) learned teaching and inspiring students from her university teachers when she was student teacher at the institution. Although role modelling together with inspiring young lecturers of experienced lecturers might have an impact on some young teacher educators, it has been also questioned that whether such extrinsic motivation would last long if someday these young ones realised that their teachers might not be good as they expected.

You (Lecturer D) said the reason when you presented your lantern: the reason you want to be a lecturer is that your lecturers at the institution make you admire, so it is not because of fame, but because they are motivated you for being a teacher, right?

Do you think that motivation will last long if some day you find out that your teachers really aren't what you think? (Lecturer C)

Because of the differences in working experiences, each teacher possibly had different view-points in deciding whether a motivation from their experienced teachers that lasted long or not. A young teacher educator might think this kind of motivation lasts long because they had not got enough experiences in exploring which factors really affected them and kept them staying long with being of teacher educators. However, a more experienced teacher educator might find that intrinsic motivation could help them sustain of being an academic. Therefore, if they wanted to develop in the teaching career at higher education, they not only had to teach and inspire students as the way their teachers had ever done, but also had to do research from which they could have more influences on their students.

I also understand you mean that you want to pursue the field of education, you want to develop your career path with inspiring teaching. But you (Lecturer C) also have to determine this: in order to obtain those desires, you must not only look at your teachers or students, but you also have to do research. (Lecturer D)

Lecture D mentioned the conception of having to do research to develop the professional of a teacher educator, which has been reported by Davey and Ham (2010). They believed that research has been a very crucial tool in the development of better teacher educators and their professional learning.

Through sharing ideas of meanings of the lanterns that one lecturer made, the exploration of the lecturer's motivation was found out and further suggestions for the younger lecturer in the interview were identified in order to help her with her professional development of being a good teacher.

Each teacher educator in different age of professionalism might have different motivation of being a teacher, so the role of the institution is always listening and investigating teachers' motivation by discussing and communicating with faculty and support them to go with that.

### 3.2.2. *Self-studying of lecturers*

Exchanging of self-studying experiences between two teacher educators whom both moved from the field of basic sciences to teaching methods which really attracted us because their thoughts of this have a lot of in common. Each teacher educator had their own way to self-study during their changes of teaching field, both of them feel very happy about experiencing new thing through self-studying, using the trial and error techniques (Izadinia, 2014) and taking risks from that.

The way that we train ourselves to help us to create a new mind for ourselves, another field of teaching which is a problem really? (Lecturer F)

You and I are the ones to learn by ourselves and then think, then learn by ourselves, by taking risks - that's all. (Lecturer E)

However, self-studying through applying the trial and error technique had been just one of many types of self-support activities of teacher educators in order to develop their teacher identity which had been known as doing self-study research, critical reflection, self-evaluations, personal reading, doing daily work of supervising and teaching student teachers (Izadinia, 2014). Therefore, it was suggested that creating learning communities should be considered as the best method for the development of teacher educators' professional knowledge and identity (Ben-Peretz et al. 2010). Institutional policymakers can create programs or policies that can provide teacher educators with opportunities for observing experienced colleagues teaching, participating in team teaching and team planning, joint assessment, and supervision of students (Murray, 2008) or having online discussions to explore ideas, discussing, reflecting on and evaluating practice and having sessions about curriculum and pedagogy development (McKeon & Harrison 2010).

These two lecturers in this interview with very excited voices which were very optimistic and comfortable to share about what they had done in the self-studying process with each other. Any changes for lecturers were not always easy, but their attitudes to face to those were very impressive. For example, a lecturer asserted her willingness to experience new things in teaching as well as to change.

Because I only consider the matter of time and will often SAY YES with new experiences. (Lecturer F).

#### 4. Conclusion

This study was designed by using a creative methodology to investigate the reflection on the teacher identity through discussing external and internal factors influencing the teacher identity development of teacher educators at HCMUE. By applying abductive analysis model, several hot spots were chosen and analysed. The study showed that by using a creative methodology, teacher educators were more open and comfortable to share their pressures, motivation, and self-studying experiences during the journey of becoming an academic with other colleagues. Glowing moments in the interviews were captured which reflects impressively the identity of teacher educators. As such, it has some distinct limitations of scale and methodology. Nonetheless, with these limitations acknowledged, the results explored some factors affecting the development of teacher educator identity as teachers' values of being an academic, motivation, self-studying, and pressure of married female academics in arranging time for work, family, and professional development. The outcome of this study would enable future researchers to better understand the variety of teacher educators' identity formation at universities of education in particular and at other universities in general and suggest some considerations for designing and improving more appropriate policies to help teacher educators to develop their identity.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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## SỬ DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP NGHIÊN CỨU SÁNG TẠO ĐỂ TÌM HIỂU VỀ CÁC YẾU TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG BẢN SẮC CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN SƯ PHẠM

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### TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu các nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến việc phát triển bản sắc của giảng viên sư phạm, gợi ý các chính sách và giải pháp phù hợp cho Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh nhằm xác định bản sắc của giảng viên sư phạm. Phương pháp nghiên cứu sáng tạo được sử dụng trong nghiên cứu này với sự tham gia của 6 giảng viên tại Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh qua hoạt động làm đèn lồng và phân tư thực tiễn công việc và các nhân tố ảnh hưởng lên việc hình thành bản sắc giảng viên sư phạm của họ. Các đối thoại giữa từng cặp giảng viên sư phạm được ghi âm và phân tích theo các chủ đề: các nhân tố bên trong và các nhân tố bên ngoài ảnh hưởng đến bản sắc của giảng viên sư phạm. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng nhân tố bên ngoài như áp lực trong việc sắp xếp thời gian cho việc học tập chuyên môn, công việc và gia đình. Các nhân tố bên trong như ý nghĩa của việc trở thành giảng viên, động lực và việc tự học. Đây là các nhân tố quan trọng, ảnh hưởng đến bản sắc của các giảng viên sư phạm. Dựa vào kết quả nghiên cứu, các chính sách chất lượng cao có thể được phát triển nhằm nâng cao bản sắc của giảng viên sư phạm tại Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh.

**Từ khóa:** phương pháp nghiên cứu sáng tạo; phát triển bản sắc của giảng viên sư phạm; bản sắc của giảng viên sư phạm