

Career Identity Formation of Filipino Teaching Interns through Internationalization: Consensual Qualitative Research

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Abstract. This study explored how teaching internship experiences influence the formation of career identity among pre-service teachers who participated in an international internship program at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam, under the Student Internship Abroad Program (SIAP) of Southern Leyte State University. Guided by Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), the study gathered data from selected teaching interns through semi-structured interviews and analyzed recurring patterns of their lived experiences. Findings revealed five interrelated themes: (1) adaptation to linguistic and cultural differences as a foundation of professional growth, (2) confidence and career commitment through experiential validation, (3) navigating threats and opportunities for personal safety and responsibility, (4) cross-cultural understanding and emotional resilience in professional identity formation, and (5) personal, social, and systemic factors influencing transformative learning. The results highlighted that international teaching internships serve as a transformative space for the development of career identity, fostering adaptability, self-efficacy, and intercultural competence aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). The study underscores the significance of internationalization as a catalyst for shaping globally responsive and reflective Filipino educators.

Introduction

In modern society individuals are becoming responsible for their own work allocation. In order to overcome an increasing social and work-related insecurity, they not only have to acquire specific career skills but also a so-called "career identity". A career identity is a structure of meanings in which the individual links his own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles (Meijers, 1998).

In the Philippines, teaching internship is a vital phase in every teacher education program to prepare for becoming a full-fledged educator. In this stage, prospective teachers are trained with the rudiments of learning-centered instruction and immersed in the actual classroom experience to become equipped and qualified teachers in the country.

Teaching Internship has been used interchangeably with the phrase "practice teaching". It is also known as "clinical student teaching," "clinical teaching practice," "field studies," "infield studies," "student teaching," "practice teaching," "teaching apprenticeship," "pre-service training program," "student teaching internship," "pre-service teaching program," and "student teaching practicum." It is described as an in- and out-of-school program that aims to provide hands-on experiences in the real classroom setting while being supervised by an experienced practitioner.

A career means nowadays is helping employees change their focus from what they want to be to what they want to do (Giulioni, 2022). In contrast, an internship is a professional learning experience that delivers meaningful, practical work relevant to a student's subject of study or career goal (UMBC Career Center, n.d). A student's opportunity for skill improvement and learning new things is provided and even establishing career identity via an internship. It gives the company the chance to cultivate talent, infuse the office with fresh ideas and vigor, and possibly create a pipeline for future full-time workers. A career identity is a structure of meanings in which the individual links his own motivation, interests

and competencies with acceptable career roles. Thus, Building individual career identity—and refining it as the individual gain more experience—will help the person develop their career goals and identify the personal values that are most important to them in the workplace.

Meijers suggested that individual cognitive exercises when encounters in the working world create new meanings that strengthen career identity and encourage experience reflection in order to produce useful outcomes. Pursuing in the modern workplace, a career is valued and career identity is essential to self-directed career management based on personal beliefs. Development of one's career identity is important in the teacher education, teacher identity is essential to the teaching profession as it provides a framework for teachers to construct their ideas of “how to be,” “how to act,” and “how to understand” their work and their place in society (Sach, 2005).

Numerous studies on teaching internships have been conducted all around the world. Some facets of practice teaching and improving teacher-teaching have been covered in prior works. These studies have specifically focused on the actual teaching internship, from the practicum through the evaluation, and its flaws and strong points. However, in the Philippines, studies on teacher education have mostly focused on metaphorical lens (Galdo & Palanca, 2023; Rogayan & Reusia, 2021); teaching and learning process during pandemic (Valdez et al, 2022); pair teaching & mentoring practices (Baylan, 2019); online internship experiences (Ugalingan, 2021); lived experiences (Iradel, Codales & Perez, 2021); evaluation and assessment of internship (Tindowen et al, 2019 & Lobo, 2022); pedagogical development (Dos Santos, 2021); designing materials (Huertas et al, 2021); and teaching models (Lozano et al., 2021).

Research Questions

Thus, this study splits career identity formation into the personal cognitive and social interaction categories based on current research. The study explores professional identity from each angle and suggests more investigation that can enhance interns' career identities. The research questions are as follows: (1.) What factors influence formation of interns' career identity? and (2.) How does the internship process affect formation of interns' career identity?

Methodology

This study aims to give an in-depth account of teaching interns' experiences during the internship phase. Researchers in the field of teacher education and training have advocated qualitative research as the most suitable approach toward the aim of the study. Such researchers have emphasized a consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach as appropriate. CQR is a qualitative analysis method that combines Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory with Elliott's comprehensive process analysis and is a systematic method of reaching consensus through core concept extraction, subtraction, and cross analysis to overcome previous limitations to qualitative research. Understanding and analysing the data through repeated consensus among multiple researchers helps the prevention of bias and meaningful omissions in the interpretation of data (Lee & Ahn, 2021).

The participants of the study were teaching interns who completed their international internship at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam through the Student Internship Abroad Program (SIAP) of Southern Leyte State University. Selection was conducted by an intern representative who explained the purpose of the research to fellow interns and facilitated recruitment using snowball sampling. To ensure representativeness, the gender ratio was evenly distributed across programs at Southern Leyte State University Tomas Oppus Campus as our research locale. Inclusion criteria (a) a bonafide SLSU students; (b) student interns with regular load units; & (c) with good moral character. Exclusion criteria: (a) student interns who shifted from other courses; and (b) students with irregular load units.

Following extensive discussion, the following final questions were adapted from Lee & Anh (2021) and contextualized considering the study's chosen respondents:

1. Tell me about your internship experience, including your experience as a teacher intern.
2. How did you feel about your future career when you were in the education department and the internship program?
3. Which experience made you prefer or avoid with? Threat or Opportunity?
4. What is the biggest mistake you have committed or the biggest challenge you faced during the internship program?

If there were changes, which factors do you think would influence the changes (Personal, social, and system domains)?.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interview data revealed five interrelated themes that illustrate how teaching internship experiences influence the formation of career identity among pre-service teachers who participated in an international internship program at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. Specifically, the themes include: (1) adaptation to linguistic and cultural differences as a foundation of professional growth, (2) confidence and career commitment through experiential validation, (3) navigating threats and opportunities for personal safety and responsibility, (4) cross-cultural understanding and emotional resilience in professional identity formation, and (5) personal, social, and systemic factors influencing transformative learning. Together, these themes provide a nuanced picture of how international internship experiences in a public higher education institutions like Southern Leyte State University shape the evolving career identities of teacher interns within the broader framework of globalized education.

To consolidate the findings, the table below presents a summary of the five emergent themes derived from the participants' narratives, together with the corresponding codes that illustrate their lived experiences during the international teaching internship.

Theme	Codes (with Descriptions)
Adaptation to Linguistic and Cultural Differences as a Foundation of Professional Growth	C1. Language barrier C2. Cultural adjustment C3. Instructional adaptation C4. Interpersonal initiative
Confidence and Career Commitment through Experiential Validation	C5. Professional assurance C6. Role validation C7. Self-efficacy
Navigating Threats and Opportunities for Personal Safety and Responsibility	C8. Environmental risk C9. Situational awareness C10. Self-regulation

Table No. 1. Emergent Themes and Corresponding Codes on Teaching Interns' Career Identity Formation through International Internship Experiences

Theme 1: Adaptation to Linguistic and Cultural Differences as a Foundation of Professional Growth

Participants repeatedly described how they encountered language barriers and cultural differences in their internship at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. These barriers prompted adaptive instructional strategies and personal initiative, which in turn fostered growth in their sense of professional identity.

"I had difficulty explaining lessons at first because of the language, but I used more visuals and gestures." (P3)
"I reached out to students individually to check if they understood my lesson." (P1)

Initially, the teaching interns felt challenged by the Vietnamese-language classroom environment and the cultural context. The inability to explain fully in the local language (code C1: Language barrier) meant they had to slow their pacing (C3), differentiate instruction (C3), and provide one-to-one support (C4: Interpersonal initiative). Over time, this process enabled them to gain confidence in their teaching competence and develop intercultural sensitivity—which are key components of forming a career identity as a teacher.

This theme reflects interns' ability to adjust teaching strategies amid linguistic and cultural barriers. Such adaptability aligns with PPST Domain 1: Content Knowledge and Pedagogy (Strand 1.4 – Strategies for Promoting Literacy and Numeracy) and Domain 3: Diversity of Learners, which emphasize responsiveness to learners varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The interns' efforts to use differentiated instruction and visual strategies embody the PPST call for culturally sensitive and inclusive pedagogy.

In the literature, studies show that teaching internships promote transformation of professional identity partly through increased self-efficacy and engagement. For example, Cai, Zhu & Tian (2022) found a positive link between internship experience and professional identity, mediated by self-efficacy and engagement. Moreover, literature on teacher identity emphasizes the impact of cultural and contextual challenges in international settings (Rushton, 2023). In our study, the interns' adaptation to a foreign environment enhanced their sense of 'how to be' a teacher in diverse settings, aligning with the conceptualization of teacher identity as a dynamic self-understanding (Sach, 2005).

Thus, adaptation to linguistic and cultural differences emerges as a foundation for professional growth, enabling interns to reflect on their role, refine their teaching practices, and integrate professional self-concepts. The internationalization context acted as a catalyst for identity development.

Theme 2: Confidence and Career Commitment through Experiential Validation

A second strong theme centers on how the internship experience validated the interns' readiness and commitment towards the teaching profession, thereby strengthening their career identity.

"Teaching Vietnamese students made me realize that I am ready for real classroom challenges." (P5)

"The internship boosted my confidence to teach anywhere." (P7)

Through hands-on teaching, the interns moved from preparatory coursework to authentic practice. This experiential validation (code C6: Role validation) reinforced their self-belief (C7: Self-efficacy) and sense of professional assurance (C5: Professional assurance). The result: a clearer, stronger teaching career identity, where interns felt not just "I could teach" but "I am a teacher".

Through direct classroom exposure, interns developed self-efficacy and professional assurance, validating their readiness to teach. This aligns with PPST Domain 7: Personal Growth and Professional Development, particularly Strand 7.4 – Professional Reflection and Learning to Improve Practice, as interns reflected on their teaching experiences to enhance professional competence. The internship experience served as a platform for interns to embody reflective, lifelong learning teachers envisioned by the PPST.

The literature supports these links: Cai et al. (2022) highlight that internship experiences are positively correlated with professional identity through self-efficacy and learning engagement. In addition, recent findings show that beginning teachers' identity motives (such as career commitment, professional belonging) are salient during transition into the field. Our findings extend this by showing that the international context may amplify that experiential validation: teaching abroad made interns feel globally ready.

Hence, this theme underscores that experiential validation strengthens career commitment and identity: interns not only practiced teaching but internalized "teacher-as-profession" and "teacher-as-role" in their self-concept.

Theme 3: Navigating Threats and Opportunities for Personal Safety and Responsibility

While much of the focus is pedagogical, interns also reported experiences relating to personal safety, environmental risk, and responsibility—factors that influenced their professional identity indirectly but significantly.

"I avoided reckless driving when using a bicycle; it was risky outside the university." (P2)

This participant (P2) reported that non-academic aspects of the internship—the local traffic and transport conditions—felt like personal threats (C8: Environmental risk). Their avoidance of risk and increased situational awareness (C9) and self-regulation (C10) contributed to a sense of maturity and professional responsibility. Although this seems tangential to teaching, it connects to career identity because being a teacher often involves responsibility, decision-making, self-regulation, and awareness of safety and welfare.

Interns learned to manage personal and environmental challenges, demonstrating discipline, situational awareness, and self-regulation. This corresponds with PPST Domain 6: Community Linkages and Professional Engagement, especially Strand 6.3 – Professional Ethics, where teachers uphold personal responsibility and safety awareness in diverse communities. Such experiences helped interns develop ethical and professional judgment consistent with PPST expectations for globally competent teachers.

In the literature, there is less explicit focus on such personal safety/environmental threat factors in teacher identity research, but studies on career adaptability (Wang et al., 2025) stress that transition experiences—especially unfamiliar contexts—affect career concern, control, and confidence. Our finding suggests that navigating threats can contribute to professional maturation and career identity building.

Thus, this theme highlights an often-overlooked dimension: the non-pedagogical, personal responsibility and environmental adaptability developed through internship abroad contributes to the interns' evolving career identity.

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Theme 4: Cross-Cultural Understanding and Emotional Resilience in Professional Identity Formation

A fourth theme emphasizes how interns dealt with cultural misunderstandings, food and lifestyle adjustments, communication breakdowns—and how their responses fostered emotional resilience and cross-cultural understanding.

"There was a misunderstanding because of cultural differences, but we resolved it by talking openly." (P4)
"Adjusting to food was hard, but I learned to adapt." (P6)

Interns encountered cultural issues (C11: Cultural misunderstanding) and had to engage in open communication (C12: Open communication) and active flexibility (C13: Flexibility). They reported that this experience enhanced their interpersonal empathy and adaptability. The emotional challenge (C14: Emotional regulation) of adjusting to new cultural norms, food, communication styles, and social interactions contributed to their professional identity: becoming a teacher with global and cross-cultural awareness rather than a teacher only in a homogeneous local context.

Interns' ability to resolve cultural misunderstandings and regulate emotions strengthened their resilience and empathy. This theme connects with PPST Domain 2: Learning Environment, specifically Strand 2.3 – Safe and Secure Learning Environments, and Domain 7: Personal Growth, as it highlights emotional maturity and socio-emotional competence. Through intercultural encounters, interns cultivated the social and emotional intelligence needed to create inclusive and respectful learning spaces.

The literature bears this out in international teaching practicum studies. For example, Anindya & Triyoga (2025) found that international teaching practicums significantly advanced teacher identity development through emotional reactions, teaching methods, and symbolic representation in cross-cultural contexts. Rushton's review (2023) also emphasizes teacher identity as negotiated in international mobility and cultural contexts. Our interns' account mirrors this: by adapting to cultural difference, they re-shaped how they see themselves as teachers who can operate in diverse contexts.

Thus, this theme indicates that cross-cultural understanding and emotional resilience are important in forming a more robust and globally oriented career identity for teacher interns.

Theme 5: Personal, Social, and Systemic Factors Influencing Transformative Learning

Finally, interns pointed to a complex interplay of personal (mindset, mental health), social (peer support, intercultural interaction), and systemic (language preparation, budgeting, programme structure) factors that influenced their growth and identity development.

"Daily preparation, mindset, and strong mental health helped me survive." (P1)
"I realized the importance of budgeting and learning another language." (P2)

Interns reflected that beyond instructional tasks, their mindset (C15), emotional well-being (C16), life skills like budgeting (C17), and language learning (C18) shaped their ability to benefit from the internship. These reflect personal domain factors. Social domains (not explicitly quoted here but implied) include peer interaction and support. Systemic domains relate to institutional preparation, program structure and intercultural readiness (C19: Self-regulation). According to interns, these factors influenced how effectively they processed their internship experiences and translated them into career identity formation.

Interns recognized the role of mindset, mental health, financial literacy, and institutional support in their professional growth. This aligns with PPST Domain 7: Personal Growth and Professional Development (Strands 7.2 & 7.3 – Dignity of Teaching and Career-long Learning), which emphasize teacher well-being and continuous self-improvement. The holistic integration of personal, social, and systemic factors reflects the PPST vision of teachers as lifelong learners who are adaptable, reflective, and resilient professionals.

In the literature, career adaptability research (Wang et al., 2025) shows that internship plus emotion regulation predicted dimensions of career adaptability (career concern, control, curiosity) in pre-service teachers. Additionally, literature on teacher attrition and identity (2024) highlights the need for teacher education programs to support professional identity through personal/social/systemic interventions. Therefore, our interns' reflections align with these findings: their identity growth was influenced by the inter-relation of personal mindset, social environment and systemic support.

Thus, this theme confirms that personal, social, and systemic enablers are crucial in shaping teaching interns' career identity development through the internship process..

Conclusion and Recommendations

The international teaching internship served as a transformative journey where interns discovered and strengthened their career identity through adaptation, reflection, and intercultural engagement. Immersion in a global teaching context empowered them to connect personal growth with professional purpose, reinforcing confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging in the teaching profession. Ultimately, internationalization has become not just an avenue for practice, but a catalyst for shaping globally minded educators with a deepened commitment to their vocation. The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the development of teaching interns' career identity through international internship experiences: (1.) Integrate intercultural competence and language training as core components of internship preparation, (2.) Establish structured mentorship and reflective supervision systems to guide interns in identity development, and (3.) Provide holistic support mechanisms—including mental wellness, financial literacy, and cultural adaptation programs—to sustain interns' professional growth in international contexts.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.