

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Multilingual English Language Teachers' Identity (Trans)formation in War-torn Ukraine: A Collaborative Autoethnographic Account

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### Abstract

This collaborative autoethnography (CAE) explores the identity (trans)formation of multilingual English language teachers in war-torn Ukraine. Amidst the ongoing war, educators confront immense challenges that reshape their professional identities and pedagogical practices. Drawing on a conceptual framework to understand language teacher identities (Yazan, 2019, 2023), the study highlights how we adapt to the trauma experienced by our students while navigating our own emotion labor. Through reflective narratives and thematic analysis, the findings reveal significant shifts in teaching responsibilities, including the incorporation of trauma-sensitive practices, inclusive curriculum design, and social-emotional learning strategies. This research underscores the interconnectedness of teacher identity, emotional resilience, and the broader cultural context, providing insights into the profound impact of the crisis on educational practices. This CAE aims to contribute to the literature on language teacher identity and emotion labor, offering actionable recommendations for educators facing similar challenges in contexts of war, conflict, and displacement.

### Keywords

emotion labor; language teacher identity; second language teacher education; social-emotional learning; trauma-sensitive pedagogy

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, increased attention has been given to the theory and research on language teacher identity (LTI) in second language teacher education (SLTE) (Barkhuizen, 2021; Borg, 2003; Yazan, 2023; Yazan et al., 2023), emphasizing that identity is central to shaping language teachers' professional practice and sense of professionalism. Teacher knowledge is not an isolated set of cognitive abilities but is fundamentally linked to teacher identity and socio-cultural orientations, informing teacher development, agency, and practice (Johnston et al., 2005; Yazan, 2019, 2023). Contemporary scholarship emphasized that in today's digitalized world, teachers are not merely content providers. Instead, teachers construct identities that shape their thoughts, decision-making, performance, and sense of community membership (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Yazan, 2023), shedding light on how they view themselves as professionals in the context of changing work situations (Cohen, 2010). LTI also intersects with agency, self-efficacy, motivation, emotion,

values, and beliefs, demonstrating the intertwined nature of personal, professional, and socio-cultural dimensions of teaching (Benesch, 2017, 2019; Bukor, 2014; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Nazari & Karimpour, 2023; Pentón Herrera, Trinh, et al., 2022).

Although LTI has been examined in diverse contexts, including education in areas of warfare (Davies, 2004; Lopatina et al., 2023; O’Malley, 2010; Qaimari, 2016), multilingual language teachers’ identity transformation in war-torn Ukraine has received less focus. In the midst of war, Ukrainian English language teachers face immense challenges in sustaining professional commitment and identity, with significant implications for emotion labor, resilience, and pedagogical adaptation (Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Czopek, 2023; Lavrysh et al., 2022; Lopatina et al., 2023; Moroz, 2024; Senyshyn & Lypka, 2024). While these studies document teacher experience under conflict, they often rely on second-hand accounts (i.e., relaying participants’ accounts through researchers’ voices), providing limited insight into the intimate process of identity (trans)formation and the interplay of emotion labor, resilience, and professional adaptation in real time. In this collaborative autoethnography (CAE), we explore our identity (trans)formation as multilingual English language teachers in war-torn Ukraine, focusing on how the ongoing war has reshaped our professional identities and responsibilities. Our study addresses the following questions:

1. How is the war in Ukraine affecting our perceived responsibilities as multilingual English language teachers?
2. What factors drive our motivation to continue developing as professional English language educators amidst martial law?

This CAE serves not only as a testament of our lived realities as multilingual English language teachers during wartime but also examines how the intersection of trauma, emotion labor, and professional agency shapes identity (trans)formation in crisis. By situating our experiences within ongoing war, we seek to historicize the present moment of Ukrainian education and to capture the profound entanglement between linguistic diversity, emotional resilience, and pedagogical adaptation. In this context, our collaborative reflections contribute to broader understandings of language teacher identity and the ethics of care in contexts of war and displacement (Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Czopek, 2023; Pentón Herrera, Martínez-Alba, et al., 2022). Through this approach, we foreground teacher voices as both witnesses to and agents within sociopolitical disruption, advancing knowledge on how educators sustain motivation, empathy, and purpose despite instability and loss (Lavrysh et al., 2022; Moroz, 2024; Senyshyn & Lypka, 2024).

Teaching under crisis conditions requires an ethic of deep care grounded in attentiveness, trust, and responsiveness to students' academic and emotional needs (Gkonou & Miller, 2019; Simel Pranjić, 2021). Yet this same ethic often exposes teachers to emotional vulnerability, secondary trauma, and burnout (Tsybuliak et al., 2024). By reflecting on these tensions, this CAE illuminates how we, as multilingual English language teachers in Ukraine, navigate the dual demands of caring for students while protecting their own well-being. In doing so, it extends language teacher identity (LTI) scholarship by theorizing resilience, flexibility, and emotion labor as central to LTI (trans)formation under extreme sociopolitical pressure (Benesch, 2019; Yazan, 2023). Ultimately, our goal is to offer empirically grounded, human-centered insights that inform teacher education, policy, and support systems for educators working in and beyond conflict-affected contexts.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

In exploring LTI, we adopt Yazan's (2023) socio-cultural framework as a conceptual lens, which emphasizes the dynamic interplay between identity, professional practice, and contextual influences on teachers' experiences (Johnston et al., 2005; Yazan, 2023). This framework is particularly relevant in the context of wartime Ukraine, where socio-political upheaval not only disrupts teaching practices but also reshapes professional identities. By situating our reflections within this framework, we examine how external pressures redefine our professional identities, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in teaching during war. Our findings extend this framework by showing how crisis contexts accelerate identity (trans)formation, making emotional and ethical dimensions of teaching especially salient. In particular, our experiences highlight that LTI is not only socially constructed but also contingent on extreme contextual pressures, where teachers' professional selves must expand to meet emergent needs.

Identity, from this perspective, is relational and continually shaped by the social, cultural, and political contexts (Yazan, 2023). Teachers' identities evolve in response to their environments, and in this case, the context of wartime Ukraine significantly influences how educators perceive their roles and responsibilities. This framework acknowledges that identity is co-constructed through interactions with others (i.e., students, colleagues, and the broader educational community). In the context of war or crisis, these interactions are imbued with new layers of emotional, ethical, and logistical challenges. Additionally, a conceptual framework for understanding LTI helps view individuals as active agents who negotiate their identities

within the constraints and possibilities of their social environments. Teachers, therefore, have to navigate institutional expectations, the needs of their students, and the broader societal disruptions caused by the war. Moreover, teacher identity is closely linked to teaching practice, meaning that the professional roles teachers assume are not only defined by their qualifications or responsibilities but also by the ways they adapt to meet the demands of their students and contexts. This is particularly salient in wartime, where the roles of educators often extend beyond traditional teaching, encompassing emotional support and advocacy for students.

Within Yazan's (2023) socio-cultural framework, identity is not a static construct but a process that emerges through ongoing negotiation of agency, emotion, and context. In wartime Ukraine, these negotiations are intensified by the constant confrontation with uncertainty and loss, making resilience and emotion labor essential dimensions of teacher identity work. Prior scholarship positions resilience as an adaptive capacity that allows teachers to cope with challenges and sustain professional efficacy (Nazari & Karimpour, 2023). Our CAE extends this view by revealing the mechanisms through which resilience is cultivated in wartime classrooms. Trauma-sensitive practices, social-emotional learning (SEL) integration, and reflective collaboration foster both student and teacher resilience, demonstrating that resilience is relational and co-constructed rather than solely an individual trait. Similarly, our CAE contributes to the ongoing discussion of emotion labor by showing that, in crisis contexts, it operates as both a source of empowerment and vulnerability. Collaborative professional development, supportive peer networks, and reflexive practice enhanced our agency, enabling pedagogical adaptation and sustained care for students. Yet, these same emotional demands exposed us to stress and exhaustion, underscoring the dual nature of emotion labor as both sustaining and depleting. Together, resilience and emotion labor illuminate the affective core of LTI (trans)formation under crisis conditions.

The socio-political upheaval caused by the war has profoundly reshaped our roles, requiring us to shift from being merely knowledge providers to being counselors, mentors, and emotional anchors for our students. The conceptual framework helps us understand this shift by highlighting the relational and contextual nature of identity. As the war disrupts students' lives, we, their teachers, find ourselves addressing their psychological and emotional needs in ways that extend beyond the conventional scope of teaching. In response to the crisis, we have adapted our teaching practices, adjusting lesson plans to account for trauma, offering more flexible timelines, a hybrid mode of classes, and creating a learning environment that is

sensitive to ongoing challenges. These adaptations demonstrate the framework's central insight that professional practices and identity are deeply interconnected (Yazan, 2023).

This socio-cultural approach is particularly apt for understanding the fluid and responsive nature of teacher identity, especially in a setting marked by extreme external pressures, such as war. Building on scholarship that views identity as relational, dynamic, and socially situated (Yazan, 2023), this framework enables a nuanced exploration of how external socio-political forces shape internal processes of identity (trans)formation. It foregrounds the interplay between teacher agency and structural constraint (Barkhuizen, 2021), offering a powerful lens for examining how professional practice and teacher identity are continually renegotiated in response to the evolving demands of crisis.

Furthermore, this framework supports the ethnographic approach we adopt in this study. Autoethnography, which blends personal reflection with broader cultural critique, is an ideal method for situating our individual experiences within the wider socio-political context of the war in Ukraine. Through the socio-cultural framework, we reflect on our internal (trans)formations as educators, connecting these insights to broader structural forces. This approach enriches both the personal significance and the theoretical depth of our narrative. Our study highlights that teacher identity in crisis contexts is dynamic, ethnically grounded, and relational, shaped by socio-cultural pressures, emotion labor, and the imperative to support student resilience. By clarifying these mechanisms, our CAE advances theoretical understanding of LTI and provides actionable insights for teacher education and policy in high-stress, trauma-affected, or emergency settings.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Background

This study employs CAE (Chang et al., 2013) as both a methodological and reflective framework to explore our complex experiences as multilingual English language teachers in wartime Ukraine. CAE involves a systematic process of collective self-inquiry, critical dialogue, and introspection that situates researchers as both participants and analysts of their lived experiences. As Chang et al. (2013) explain, this design allows for deep self-examination of emotions, values, and social interactions while maintaining analytical rigor through collaboration. For us, CAE provided a platform to examine how our professional identities have been (trans)formed by trauma, emotion labor, and shifting pedagogical responsibilities. In alignment with prior research on teachers' emotion labor and professional resilience

(Kađonek-Crnjaković & Czopek, 2023; Pentón Herrera, Trinh, & Gómez Portillo, 2022; Yazan, 2023), we view CAE as an opportunity to re-engage with our practice as both self-study and a form of collective sense-making, especially during this time of war and crisis in Ukraine.

This research takes place within the socio-cultural and educational context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has profoundly affected all dimensions of life and learning. Since the Russian invasion began on February 24, 2022, the nation's educational institutions have faced severe disruptions, ranging from infrastructure damage to mass displacement. At Rivne State University of Humanities, where the three of us teach, these challenges have been deeply felt as the university community has struggled—and continues to struggle—to sustain academic life amid constant air raid threats and instability. The war has transformed the educational landscape, forcing teachers and students alike to renegotiate their roles and expectations within a climate of uncertainty. Within this environment, our CAE becomes both a scholarly and moral act—an attempt to document and historicize how teacher identity, emotion, and agency evolve when professional and personal worlds collide under extreme conditions.

During the first two years of the war, traditional face-to-face learning was rendered nearly impossible due to air raids, insufficient bomb shelters, and frequent missile attacks. To sustain instruction, the university shifted to online learning, which soon evolved into a hybrid model that blended in-person and virtual engagement depending on the security situation. This flexible approach enabled academic continuity while prioritizing safety, reflecting the adaptability of Ukraine's educational system in crisis. However, these pedagogical shifts also introduced new challenges related to digital access, engagement, and emotional well-being. Teachers were compelled to balance instructional duties with the psychological care of students enduring trauma and uncertainty. Hybrid learning thus became more than a logistical solution, emerging as a pedagogical and emotional strategy that revealed the resilience, creativity, and empathy defining Ukrainian educators during wartime.

## Participants

We, the participants in this study, are three female faculty members from Rivne State University of Humanities, Ukraine. All of us have extensive experience in education and language acquisition, with approximately 24 to 30 years of professional experience in academia. Our long-standing careers in academia enable us to contribute valuable insights into the teaching and learning processes involved in SLTE and English as a foreign language (EFL) education. Two of us hold PhDs—one in the theory of education (i.e., Alla) and another in

psychology (i.e., Olena) —while the third is a senior lecturer (i.e., Nataliia). We graduated from the same university but from different faculties: two from the Faculty of Foreign Philology (i.e., Alla and Nataliia) and one from the Faculty of Psychology and Nature Studies (i.e., Olena).

As multilingual educators, we have diverse academic and linguistic backgrounds. Alla and Nataliia are qualified teachers of both English and Russian, while Olena is an expert in teaching English and psychology. We are all Ukrainian by nationality and were raised bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian, as we were educated in Russian, with Alla and Nataliia specializing in teaching Russian. Additionally, Alla has expertise in German. We have all completed a course in the methodology of teaching foreign languages, further strengthening our knowledge of second language acquisition (SLA) and the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Despite our different academic specializations, we share a common research interest in SLA, particularly in TEFL. Our interdisciplinary approach allows us to analyze language learning from linguistic, cognitive, and educational perspectives. We are especially interested in how socio-cultural factors shape language acquisition and identity formation, as well as in developing effective teaching methodologies tailored to bilingual and multilingual learners.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Our research into our evolving identities as multilingual English language teachers spanned from April 2022 to November 2024. To gain profound insights, we employed several qualitative methods, including narrative inquiry, collaborative reflections, and self-observations. We also established a group in Viber, a messaging app widely used in Ukraine, that allows for group chatting and video calls, making it easy for us to stay connected and exchange ideas in real time and discuss our reflections collectively. In addition, independent journaling was used for continuous reflection, allowing us to document daily experiences and emotional responses. Narrative frames were employed to structure our storytelling, enabling us to articulate our evolving identities systematically and thematically. Barkhuizen et al. (2013) and Barkhuizen (2014) define a narrative frame as a structured template for storytelling that comprises a series of incomplete sentences varying in length. This narrative frame facilitated our reflections by providing a structured outline to shape the content of our reflective thinking.

Influenced by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work on narrative inquiry, we began the collection of data by constructing 'autobiographical timelines' by individually chronicling our experiences in language learning, teaching, and teacher education. Clandinin and Connelly's

(2000) work involves exploring and interpreting personal stories to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences. They emphasize the importance of stories in education and research, particularly how individuals' experiences shape their identities and understanding of the world. In our case, their approach inspired us to use autobiographical timelines as a way to reflect on and analyze our personal experiences in teaching and language learning. This process involved self-reflection and retrospective analysis, spanning multiple revisions over the course of the research period. We fostered a collaborative environment by sharing our narratives and engaging in critical dialogue and meetings held at regular intervals, as we have been working together in the same department. These discussions challenged our individual perspectives and facilitated the collective construction of meaning from our experiences.

Drawing on Rodriguez and Ryave's (2002) concept of interactive introspection, we practiced self-observation throughout the research period. This involved documenting our thoughts and behaviors during critical incidents (e.g., when a student started to cry in the classroom during particularly challenging moments for them), further enriching our understanding of identity formation. We also employed a range of tools to supplement our narrative data. These included visual aids, chronological mapping, and reflective journaling (Chang, 2008). The specific tools used were chosen based on their suitability for capturing particular aspects of our experiences. By combining these diverse methods, we aimed to create a comprehensive picture of our evolving identities as EFL practitioners. The data collection process was iterative, with insights gained from one technique informing the application of others throughout the research timeframe.

To address our research questions, we conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of the collected data. This process began with a comprehensive review of the data, involving repeated readings of our narratives and reflections, complemented by critical discussions of our observations. After generating initial codes, we identified and categorized key themes within the data. These codes were then organized into broader themes that captured the core elements of the data. We refined and revised these themes iteratively, ensuring clear definitions and accurate thematic labels through ongoing analysis and interpretation. This approach provided us with a more profound understanding of how the war has influenced the perceived responsibilities and motivations of multilingual English language teachers in Ukraine, particularly in relation to their engagement in professional development.

Following Corbin and Strauss (2008), we conducted open coding to identify emerging themes and axial coding to establish connections between these themes. Data were coded and subsequently organized into hierarchical themes, a process known as axial coding. MAXQDA was used for coding data and performing content analysis. To minimize bias and ensure the accuracy of our interpretations, we implemented regular checks, which involved sharing our findings, interpretations, and codes to confirm that the views of all participants were accurately represented. Having a research team, collaborating with peers, and conducting frequent reviews also provided diverse perspectives, ensuring a more balanced analysis. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1. To enhance clarity and coherence, certain themes were merged or recategorized. For instance, the themes “recognizing trauma” and “trauma-sensitive approach” were combined into the broader category of “trauma-sensitive pedagogy” (Table 1, Theme 1).

**Table 1.** Thematic Analysis of (Trans)formed English Teachers’ Responsibilities

theme	coding
Empowering Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	professional networking, intercultural (virtual) projects, collaboration
Trauma-Sensitive Pedagogy	recognizing trauma, trauma-sensitive approach, supportive environment, creating inclusive curriculum, incorporating SEL, an instructor of mindfulness technique
Fostering Resilience	motivation, promoting a positive learning environment, flexibility, adaptability of multilingual English language teachers
Challenges and Costs	excessive responsibilities, emotion labor, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout

To ensure reliability and validity, we implemented member checking, where we shared our interpretations with peers for feedback, and peer review, allowing for external perspectives on our narratives. By using these methods, we aligned our CAE with the recommendations of Pennington and Richards (2016), who advocate for reflective practices in teacher development, which includes teacher self-research. Pennington and Richards (2016) suggest that continuous dialogue and self-inquiry can strengthen teachers’ professional identities.

## Researcher Positionalities

### *Professional Experience and Reflection: A Glimpse into Our World A Surfer on a Wave: The Journey of Alla*

Waves are inevitable, but they can be navigated with skill and patience. Wave after wave. (Alla's reflective journal)

Life, like the ocean, can be unpredictable. And in the midst of crashing waves, we have two choices: to sink or to learn how to surf. I like to think of myself as a 'surfer'—a term I have come to embrace throughout my pedagogical journey. It represents an individual who not only rides the waves of life's challenges but also finds balance and resilience in the process.

I have spent over two decades teaching English. However, in the past few years, I have found myself navigating far more than grammar and language. The outbreak of war in Ukraine forced me and my 12-year-old daughter to flee to Poland, where we settled temporarily before I was invited to continue my academic journey in Denmark as a fellow at Roskilde University.

Living in Warsaw (Poland) and Roskilde (Denmark), I found myself at a crossroads, both personally and professionally. My deep love for teaching, combined with the need for stability, pushed me to explore new opportunities. This journey of resilience, adaptation, and growth has shaped my outlook on education, making me even more committed to learning, teaching, and supporting others in times of uncertainty. Like a surfer, I have adapted to new environments and situations, riding the waves of uncertainty, finding strength in each challenge, and emerging with new perspectives. This nickname, while playful, speaks to my belief in perseverance—through every wave, there is an opportunity to find our balance and keep moving forward.

### *Rooted in Resilience: The Journey of Nataliia*

Growth doesn't always require movement; sometimes, it's about staying still and standing strong. (Nataliia's reflective journal)

While the world around me trembled with uncertainty, I tried to stay firm. To me, staying in Ukraine meant something more than just holding my ground—it was about planting deeper roots in the soil of my hometown, Rivne.

I have been teaching English at a local university in the town of Rivne in Western Ukraine for over 25 years. When the war broke out, many of my colleagues and friends had to leave for safety and stability. I chose a different path. I wanted to contribute to my community, be a source of strength for my family and my students and find ways to grow amidst the chaos.

Despite the challenges of air raid sirens, power outages, and the emotional toll of living through conflict, I continued to inspire my students and colleagues. My vision was simple: to nurture a resilient community of educators who could guide their students through uncertain times.

My professional journey changed as I immersed myself in collaborative projects with Ukrainian and American colleagues. I worked tirelessly through virtual partnerships and initiatives to bring innovative methodologies to my classes. From organizing teacher training workshops to co-authoring research on cross-cultural communication, I found ways to bridge the gap between local needs and global expertise. The war made me realize how interconnected we all are. Even from Rivne, I could engage with educators worldwide, share ideas, and create something meaningful.

### *Unbroken Wings: The Journey of Olena*

A person's spirit is like a bird resisting the worst storm. Though the winds push hard and the rains pour, they keep moving forward; each beat of their hearts is a quiet act of boldness. Even when the whole world is against them, forcing them to pause, they find quiet strength within, waiting for the skies to clear. And when the first rays of light break through, they rise again, carrying hope in their heart and courage in their soul. (Olena's reflective journal)

For over twenty years, I have dedicated myself to teaching English at a university in my hometown of Rivne. When the war broke out in Ukraine, I was emotionally devastated, but I found purpose in volunteering and continuing my teaching. As the situation worsened, I had to leave Ukraine to ensure the safety of my teenage son. Even in Germany, I remained committed to teaching, transitioning to online classes. Education became a lifeline for both my students in Ukraine and those abroad, providing a sense of routine and connection, just like many of my compatriots, who became an example of a resilient community for their students, did.

The war compelled me to reassess my role as an educator and the profound impact I could have on my students. Initially, I left my home due to the war, but a sense of responsibility drew me back. I realized that my role extended beyond my family and that my students needed my guidance and support, especially during such challenging times. To better equip myself for this task, I actively engaged in professional development and collaborated with colleagues from around the world. Through this process of continuous learning and self-improvement, I gained an in-depth understanding of the crucial role educators play in fostering resilience and guiding students toward a brighter future, even in the face of adversity.

## FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of our data revealed a strong link between trauma-sensitive pedagogy (Table 1, Theme 2) and the promotion of resilience (Table 1, Theme 3), highlighting their interconnectedness. This intersection highlights the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that not only acknowledges and addresses past trauma but also empowers learners to develop coping strategies and foster resilience. While the previous themes highlight positive aspects of our role as English teachers, the final theme, Challenges and Costs (Table 1, Theme 4), presents a stark contrast. It sheds light on the significant personal and professional challenges faced by us as English teachers working in war-torn Ukraine. These challenges cause excessive (perceived) responsibilities and emotion labor (Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Czopek, 2023), secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue (Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024). Since the onset of the war, our pedagogical responsibilities have undergone significant transformations, reflecting the unique challenges and needs of our students. In the sub-sections ahead, we shed light on our findings and realities.

### Empowering CPD

Engaging in continuous professional development has been vital in equipping us with the tools and strategies necessary for the (trans)formation of our professional responsibilities in emergency settings, both in terms of practical strategies and identity (trans)formation. Collaborating with colleagues and participating in seminars and workshops focused on trauma-sensitive practices and mindfulness techniques have enhanced our ability to support our students while managing our own emotional well-being. CPD thus functioned not only as skill acquisition but also as a mechanism for negotiating agency, positioning, and professional identity within broader transnational communities of practice (Barkhuizen, 2021; Yazan, 2023).

Nataliia's reflections made on April 15, 2023, illustrate how collegial exchanges fostered both practical problem-solving and affective support:

Had a great chat with my U.S. colleagues today during our virtual exchange—we talked about ways to keep students engaged, even in tough times, and they shared some cool ideas for online activities. It felt so good to hear their encouragement and know they genuinely care about what we're going through here.

Analytically, this excerpt demonstrates an expansion of agency through access to new pedagogical strategies and validation from peers. Nataliia's positioning shifted: she moved from feeling isolated within the constraints of a wartime classroom to being a participant in a

collaborative, problem-solving network. This engagement illustrates how CPD acts as a mediating mechanism that reshapes professional identity by integrating external knowledge, fostering self-efficacy, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to a wider educational community. Olena's reflection expanded this analysis to the relational and transitional dimensions of CPD. Reflecting on a session of The Online Professional English Network (OPEN) course "Teaching English in Emergencies" (Eastern Washington University, U.S.), Olena found it both empowering and informative.

There's a real sense of solidarity and shared purpose in these discussions. ...By sharing our experiences and perspectives, we're not just exchanging knowledge; we're also representing our countries and building trust with our colleagues. ...The connections we form with other educators boost our confidence and motivate us to strive for new heights in our teaching. (Olena's reflection on August 16, 2023)

Here, identity (trans)formation emerges through positioning within a transnational professional community. Olena navigates dual roles: representing her local context while integrating global pedagogical practices. Tensions are implicit: adapting foreign strategies to Ukrainian wartime classrooms requires negotiation and selective adoption, highlighting power dynamics in whose practices are foregrounded and whose knowledge is adapted. Observable changes in practice include the introduction of trauma-sensitive and engagement-focused online activities, illustrating the concrete translation of CPD into classroom behavior. Both passages emphasize the transformative capacity of collaboration and its positive impact on teachers.

Finally, Alla's reflection on the "Holistic Language Pedagogies Project" (November 20, 2024) emphasizes collaborative and affective dimensions:

Every late night, every early morning, every moment of doubt was worth it. What truly made this collaboration unforgettable was the sense of camaraderie and support we shared. We weren't just colleagues; we were a team. We encouraged each other, pushed each other to be better, and celebrated each other's successes. It was a beautiful reminder that we are all better when we lift each other up. (Alla's reflection on November 20, 2024)

All the experiences underscore the personal and professional growth that can emerge from challenging projects. Teachers' dedication to CPD mirrors their commitment to continuous improvement, enabling them to better support their students and navigate the complexities of teachers' roles during wartime. The reflections provide examples of the personal and professional benefits of collaboration. Analytically, this vignette highlights identity negotiation within a peer network: teachers are positioned as co-creators rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This reconfiguration supports professional growth and reinforces collective agency, illustrating that CPD can simultaneously empower individual educators and foster

community resilience. However, critical reflection also surfaces equity considerations: participation in such networks requires stable internet access, language proficiency, and institutional support—conditions that may exclude some educators, particularly in conflict-affected areas. By connecting personal reflection with observable shifts in practice and positioning, this theme illustrates how targeted CPD initiatives empower educators while also revealing structural constraints and inequities that shape access and impact.

### **Trauma-Sensitive Pedagogy**

Recognizing the impact of trauma on learning has shifted our approach to teaching. We have learned to tailor a safe and supportive environment where students feel valued and understood. This involves not only being aware of their emotional needs but also implementing strategies that help them process and cope with their traumatic experiences. By integrating trauma-sensitive practices, we can better facilitate their engagement, academic resilience, and classroom well-being in general. Trauma-sensitive teaching has never been more critical. Understanding the emotional turmoil that trauma inflicts on students is essential to providing effective support. Olena's reflection about participating in a workshop on storyboarding during the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Ukraine summer school provides an example of how seemingly innocuous classroom materials can inadvertently trigger traumatic memories for students. Olena's reflection illustrates how seemingly neutral classroom materials can trigger trauma:

Today's workshop on storyboarding turned out to be quite ambiguous: while the goal was to clarify how to use storyboarding strategies to enhance the learning process, we were presented with a video about a mother who lost her son in an accident ... When we questioned whether such a video was an appropriate example; it became clear that in many peaceful countries, people often cannot comprehend how triggering such content can be.... For us, every story has the potential to evoke negative associations, and in our current context, even the slightest misstep could reopen wounds we are still trying to mend. (Olena's reflection on July 17, 2024).

Analyzing this episode reveals the decision rules we adopted to mitigate retraumatization: screening content for sensitive or potentially triggering material, flagging “red-flag” themes (loss, displacement, native place, home, hobbies, family traditions, etc.), establishing opt-out protocols or alternative tasks for students, prioritizing emotional regulation and reflective discussion. Implementing these rules altered our classroom practice. For instance, we replaced narrative videos with impersonal or abstract storytelling materials and designed alternative activities such as group resilience storytelling or emotion check-ins. These observable changes

demonstrate the alignment of trauma-sensitive pedagogy with identity (trans)formation: we assumed responsibility not only for learning outcomes but also for students' psychological safety, illustrating the entwined nature of professional and emotion labor.

Alla's experience as a refugee trainer in the 'Warsaw University for Ukraine' program (a component of the Third Mission project at Warsaw University, aimed at supporting refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after February 24, 2022—Program of the EU "Knowledge, Education, and Development," Dec 2022—Dec 2023) corroborates these patterns: "Familiar topics and texts are not suitable for Ukrainian refugee students. The topics and materials for reading and discussion should be impersonal, not to trigger students." (Alla's reflections on May 23, 2023). Similarly, Nataliia's observation highlights subtle behavioral cues of trauma:

It hit me today when a student froze mid-presentation, eyes darting to the window as if bracing for something unseen... Our classroom feels like a fragile bubble in a storm. (Nataliia's reflection on October 14, 2023)

These vignettes collectively show how trauma-sensitive teaching requires ongoing professional judgment, reflective practice, and heightened emotion labor. The trade-offs were evident: we had to balance literacy and learning objectives with harm minimization, often substituting engaging content with safer alternatives or modifying tasks to reduce potential triggers (for instance, the topic "My Hobby" was substituted by "Strange Hobbies" in the EFL classroom).

The passages underscore both the impact of trauma on teachers' and students' emotional well-being and academic performance. Olena's and Alla's reflections emphasize the potential for classroom materials to retraumatize students, while Nataliia's observation highlights the subtle signs of trauma that may be exhibited in the classroom. These passages collectively demonstrate the importance of creating a trauma-sensitive classroom where students and teachers feel safe and supported.

Thus, integrating trauma-sensitive practices and SEL into our teaching has become a priority. We actively promote emotional regulation and interpersonal skills, which are essential for building a supportive classroom community. This not only aids language acquisition but also helps students develop their academic resilience and confidence to express themselves. By fostering a positive and empathetic learning environment, we can empower students to overcome challenges and embrace opportunities for growth. By incorporating activities such as mood-meter check-ins and group storytelling focused on resilience, we observed increased student engagement and emotional expression:

Trying to incorporate some SEL activities we discussed yesterday into my class today, and it felt like a small but meaningful step. We started with a “mood meter” check-in, where students described how they were feeling using new vocabulary—words like “anxious,” “hopeful,” and “calm.” Later, we worked on a group storytelling activity, focusing on themes of resilience and teamwork.... creating this space for emotional expression really made a difference. With everything they’re going through, blending SEL with language learning feels more important than ever. (Nataliia’s reflection on April 18, 2023)

Crucially, these practices also underscored the importance of teacher well-being. As Alla notes:

If I’m not grounded emotionally, it’s impossible to provide a supportive learning environment for my students... Taking small moments to breathe, reflect, and connect with colleagues made a big difference today. (Alla’s reflection on June 28, 2023)

Through this lens, trauma-sensitive teaching and SEL are not only tools for student support but also mechanisms for redefining professional identity and managing the emotion labor inherent in crisis education. Our reflections reveal that professional development, collaborative reflection, and deliberate content curation enable teachers to navigate the ethical and emotional complexities of wartime teaching while fostering both resilience and agency for themselves and their students.

## Fostering Resilience

Fostering resilience among our students has become a key goal. This transformation has not only enriched our teaching practice but has also profoundly impacted our students’ learning experience, enabling them to thrive in an inclusive and supportive educational environment. Resilience, in this context, is understood not as an innate trait but as a developable skill cultivated through shared experiences, adaptive strategies, and reflective practice. This ability to adapt and persevere is crucial in today’s ever-changing world. Nataliia’s reflection provides a personal example, highlighting the importance of staying grounded. This focus has prompted a shift in our roles: from traditional content deliverers toward facilitators of emotional processing and adaptive learning, reflecting both identity (trans)formation and increased emotion labor:

For me, resilience isn’t about being unshakable—it’s more about finding ways to get through tough times. ... I’ve learned to deal with things by staying grounded and adapting as I go. (Nataliia’s reflection on September 28, 2022)

Here, resilience is enacted through reflective self-regulation, highlighting how teachers’ own adaptive strategies directly influence their ability to support students. Classroom-level adaptations provide examples of observable changes in practice in response to both student

needs and situational uncertainty. Alla's reflection (October 26, 2022) illustrates the shift from rigid lesson plans to flexible, collaborative activities:

The air raid sirens blared through the night, leaving a lingering sense of unease in the classroom. It was clear that my students were struggling to focus... I pivoted to a more engaging activity—a collaborative storytelling exercise. We shared personal experiences, talked about our hopes and fears, and found comfort in each other's company. (Alla's reflection on October 26, 2022)

This decision reflects a deliberate trade-off: prioritizing student emotional well-being and engagement over strict grammar instruction, demonstrating both professional judgment and ethical positioning. These adaptations exemplify how resilience is co-constructed between teachers and students, transforming the classroom into a safe and responsive community of practice.

Moments like these remind us about the necessity of being flexible in the classroom. As teachers, we should be adaptable and ready to adjust our plans to meet the ever-changing needs of our students. Sometimes, a simple shift in focus, a kind word, or a shared moment of laughter can make all the difference. Both reflections emphasize the importance of adapting to changing circumstances and finding solutions to challenges. Nataliia's reflection focuses on personal resilience, while Alla's highlights the importance of flexibility in teaching. Subsequent reflections underscore how fostering resilience requires ongoing flexibility, creativity, and attention to relational dynamics. Nataliia (April 15, 2023) notes: "Teaching now is tough, but I've realized how adaptable teachers can be... my students and colleagues keep finding ways to stay focused and connected through all the chaos." (Nataliia's reflection on April 15, 2023).

Olena (November 18, 2024) extends this analysis by demonstrating structured mechanisms for emotional processing and skill development:

... we discussed social issues and the responsibility of every citizen to voice their stance at elections. ... Sharing their thoughts freely, without relying on speech patterns, grammar, and vocabulary correctness, allowed them to process these heavy emotions and experience the healing power of storytelling. ... We also agreed to share thoughts in our group chat afterward. (Olena's reflection on November 18, 2024)

This vignette illustrates multiple mechanisms of resilience-building: creating non-judgmental spaces, integrating civic and social content, and facilitating peer-supported reflection. It also highlights how teachers' professional identity evolves: educators assume roles as emotional guides, facilitators of reflection, and co-learners, increasing the intensity and complexity of emotion labor.

Alla's subsequent reflection (November 19, 2024) emphasizes teacher resilience and self-care as inseparable from student support:

I'm focusing on what I can control: my lessons, my attitude, and my support for my colleagues and students.... And I need to remember to take care of myself, too. I'll try to meditate tonight, I promise.  
(Alla's reflection on November 19, 2024)

The reflections examine the transformative effects of the war on English language teaching practices more generally and on our English language teaching practices more specifically. Educators have had to adjust to the distinct challenges their students face, emphasizing the importance of trauma-sensitive pedagogy. By fostering resilience among both students and teachers, creating supportive classroom environments, and adapting to evolving circumstances, we have demonstrated our ability to navigate adversity.

Taken together, these reflections demonstrate observable shifts in teaching practice: adapting lesson plans, integrating storytelling, prioritizing SEL, and fostering participatory discussions that exemplify the mechanisms through which resilience is cultivated. We also highlight how professional identities are reconfigured in response to crisis, as teachers balance educational goals with emotional support, navigating ethical and practical trade-offs. Ultimately, fostering resilience emerges as both a pedagogical strategy and an identity-(trans)forming process, illustrating the interplay between teacher agency, student adaptation, and emotional labor in high-stakes educational contexts.

### **Challenges and Costs**

The weight of these additional responsibilities of providing social-emotional support and fostering resilience among students, coupled with the emotional toll of this work, highlights our dedication as teachers in present-day Ukraine. It is essential to acknowledge the immense effort and sacrifice required to maintain a sense of normalcy in the classroom, especially when faced with such overwhelming circumstances. These pressures illustrate that professional identity in crisis contexts extends beyond content delivery, encompassing roles as emotional guides and advocates. Nataliia's reflection (November 20, 2022) illustrates the compounding effect of multiple responsibilities:

Today felt like a marathon—teaching classes, covering for colleagues who have had to leave, and organizing supplies for families hit by the war. It's hard to keep up with it all, especially when everyone's carrying so much unseen pain. (Nataliia's reflection on November 20, 2022)

Nataliia's later reflection (May 5, 2023) highlights the emotional cost of witnessing student trauma:

[...] a student shared how she hid in a basement, her voice trembling with suppressed tears, and I couldn't hold back my own. I carried her story home, unable to focus on anything but the overwhelming guilt of a helpless adult who couldn't do anything to prevent children from suffering relentless fear. (Nataliia's reflection on May 5, 2023)

Here, the tension between professional responsibility and personal well-being becomes explicit. Teachers confront trade-offs: maintaining emotional presence and providing support versus preserving personal mental health. This demonstrates how wartime teaching amplifies both the intensity and complexity of emotion labor, producing feelings of helplessness, guilt, and moral responsibility.

This vignette demonstrates how LTI (trans)formation occurs under duress: teachers are required to expand their roles, integrating administrative, emotional, and pedagogical functions simultaneously. The observable impact includes extended working hours, prioritization of immediate student needs over curricular planning, and increased engagement in non-teaching duties, reflecting the practical consequences of emotion labor.

The demands of wartime teaching can lead to significant personal sacrifices. Balancing work and family life becomes increasingly difficult when educators are burdened with additional responsibilities and emotional stress. The ongoing requirement to balance instructional, emotional, and social demands takes a toll on their overall well-being. Alla's reflection (April 27, 2022) further emphasizes the cumulative strain of balancing professional and personal obligations:

It feels like my life is a constant whirlwind. Juggling the demands of work, family, and the ongoing war has left me feeling stretched thin... Work seems to always take precedence, leaving little time for family and self-care. I can't pull myself together. (Alla's reflection on April 27, 2022)

Collectively, these reflections illustrate that fostering resilience and providing trauma-sensitive education in wartime is not without significant costs. Teachers bear the weight of students' suffering, often internalizing their distress while simultaneously negotiating expanded professional roles. This highlights a critical dimension of teacher identity (trans)formation: the integration of care and ethical responsibility into everyday practice, alongside the emotion labor necessary to maintain both student support and personal functionality. By making these mechanisms explicit, we see how wartime teaching reshapes identity, practice, and classroom well-being in profound and enduring ways.

## DISCUSSION

The ongoing war in Ukraine has profoundly influenced the socio-cultural environment in which Ukrainian multilingual English language teachers work, prompting a significant reassessment of professional roles and identities. This situation highlights the interconnection between personal experiences and cultural contexts as teachers navigate their own challenges while addressing the shifting needs of their students. Our CAE demonstrates that LTI (trans)formation is a dynamic, contextually mediated process, continuously shaped by external circumstances, especially the current war. These findings extend existing scholarship (Benesch, 2019; Yazan, 2023) by illustrating how crisis contexts accelerate identity (trans)formation, expand professional responsibilities, and amplify emotion labor in ways not captured in typical teaching environments. The findings also emphasize the importance of resilience among educators as they respond to the evolving demands of their profession amid war-related adversities. In line with existing scholarship on LTI, our study confirms that educators' identities are deeply shaped by their socio-cultural contexts (Benesch, 2019; Yazan, 2023). It also demonstrates that LTI formation is dynamic, adjusting to external pressures, while emphasizing the crucial role of resilience in maintaining professional identity.

Our reflections reveal how wartime teaching entails navigating complex and often competing professional and emotional demands. Beyond traditional instructional roles, educators are increasingly expected to provide social-emotional support and trauma-sensitive instruction. This expansion foregrounds emotion labor as a core aspect of professional identity, encompassing ethical decision-making, relational care, and self-regulation (Benesch, 2017; Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Czopek, 2023; Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024). By making explicit decisions about content and SEL integration, we observed tangible changes in classroom practice and self-concept: we shifted from being primarily content deliverers to facilitators of resilience, highlighting the intersection of professional identity and emotion labor. Trauma-sensitive pedagogy requires heightened attunement to students' emotional states, flexible curricula adaptation, and continuous reflection on the potential for retraumatization. By screening content, establishing opt-out protocols, and creating opportunities for emotional expression, we redefine our roles, demonstrating how emotion labor and professional decisions are enacted in everyday classroom practice. This evolution underscores the dynamic intersection of LTI and emotion labor, revealing how the affective dimensions of teaching become sites of adaptation, agency, and care.

Moreover, our experiences illustrate that the challenges of teaching in a war-torn setting necessitate a significant shift in perceived responsibilities and practices. This transformation highlights the need to view educators not merely as content deliverers but as emotional and social support systems for their students. Despite the challenges posed by the war, English language teachers in Ukraine, such as ourselves, continue to strive for professional development. Factors driving this motivation include engaging in continuous learning, particularly in areas such as trauma-sensitive teaching, inclusive curriculum design, and students' motivation, which empower us to better support our students' needs. Collaborating with colleagues in communities of practice centered on teaching in emergency settings provided us with strategies to support students while also managing our own emotional well-being, thereby reinforcing the link between teacher identity and continuous professional development (Douwes et al., 2023). CPD emerged as a key mechanism for supporting these identity shifts. Engagement with trauma-sensitive teaching workshops, transnational collaborative networks, and reflective practice provided both practical strategies and emotional support, reinforcing teacher agency and fostering resilience.

Additionally, fostering resilience was mutually constitutive: teachers' identities, practices, and classroom well-being were interlinked with students' capacity to adapt and thrive. Observations from our classrooms showed that creating safe, responsive learning environments, integrating SEL, and prioritizing relational care empowered students while simultaneously sustaining teacher agency and mitigating burnout. These findings highlight how trauma-sensitive pedagogy, SEL, and teacher self-care operate synergistically to support both educators and learners in crisis contexts.

This study contributes to the literature on LTI, trauma-sensitive pedagogy, and emotion labor in three ways: extending Yazan's (2023) socio-cultural framework to a crisis context, revealing how extreme socio-political pressures accelerate identity (trans)formation, and expanding the ethical and emotional dimensions of teaching. This study also identifies underexplored aspects of emotion labor, including relational and self-regulatory components to navigate trauma-sensitive teaching in high-stress conditions. Additionally, it provides transferable practice insights for educators in emergency or high-stakes environments, including content curation strategies, SEL integration, and reflective collaboration. By linking personal experiences with broader socio-cultural and crisis-driven pressures, this CAE moves beyond descriptive narrative to offer both theoretical and practical contributions, demonstrating that teacher identity, resilience, and emotion labor are deeply intertwined under

sustained adversity, and highlights mechanisms through which educators can navigate these challenges: reflective practice, collaborative CPD, and trauma-sensitive strategies.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Our exploration of LTI (trans)formation highlights the evolution of educators' roles in war-torn Ukraine. As the war launched, multilingual English language teachers have expanded responsibilities beyond content delivery to include emotional support, trauma-sensitive pedagogy, and facilitation of social-emotional learning. This (trans)formation demands adaptive expertise, reflective practice, and ethical decision-making. Teaching under crisis conditions requires holistic approaches addressing both cognitive and emotional needs: creating safe learning environments, conducting emotional check-ins, and fostering resilience through SEL. Mindfulness, trauma-sensitive strategies, and reflective collaboration help us balance student support with self-care, mitigating burnout while sustaining professional agency. Technological adaptation adds a layer of complexity, as hybrid and online learning, along with emerging tools such as AI, demand flexibility, refined pedagogical strategies, and guidance, highlighting the ethical and practical dimensions of LTI (trans)formation.

Ongoing professional development is essential for sustaining teacher identity and well-being in crisis contexts. Programs that integrate trauma-sensitive teaching, SEL, and collaborative reflection enable us to address student needs and socio-cultural pressures. Communities of practice strengthen collective resilience and facilitate continuous refinement of teaching strategies. This approach is relevant not only in war-affected regions but also in other crisis settings and within the wider context of today's rapidly advancing digital and AI-driven learning spaces. This CAE emphasizes the necessity of tailoring educational practices to fulfill the needs of learners and posits that similar methodologies could prove advantageous in other scenarios where education is intertwined with crisis.

While our narratives reflect personal experiences and do not capture the full diversity of Ukrainian educators, they provide nuanced, context-sensitive insights into LTI (trans)formation in wartime teaching. The findings demonstrate that LTI in crisis is dynamic and adaptive, shaped by emotion labor, socio-cultural context, and the dual imperative to support both students and ourselves. The findings offer actionable guidance for SLTE programs, policymakers, and other crisis-affected educational settings, including digitally mediated and AI-enhanced.

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