

Exploring Asynchronous Online Discussion Forums as an Aid for Developing Language Teacher-Researcher Identities¹

Holden Kenneth Alcazaren², University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines

Abstract

With the internet becoming not just a social space, but also a learning space, schools and other educational institutions have started utilizing online learning platforms for students and teachers to create meaningful, social, and collaborative relationships. Recognized as educational contexts, these spaces have allowed students, particularly in higher education, to form and represent their identities. The current study aimed to investigate how language teacher-researcher (LTR) identity emerges through online posts and multimodal features in asynchronous online discussion forums. As online discussion forums are becoming a staple learning activity in many university classes, this study has identified the kinds of posts students use in these forums, the multimodal features of these forums that enable identity development, and the types of LTR identities that have emerged in these forums. The current study has utilized multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) that examined the use of these forums in two PhD graduate classes on language education, and online interviews of selected graduate students ($n=5$). Results have revealed that the majority of the posts were self-presentation of the individual's research expertise, application of learned concepts, and critical assessment of their peers. Responses from the interviews also uncovered the multimodal features that enable the presentation of LTR identities in these forums, and the emerging LTR identities in this particular context. As implications of the study, the effects and potential of asynchronous discussion forums in identity development were discussed.

Resumen

Con internet convertido no solo en un espacio social, sino también en un espacio de aprendizaje, las escuelas y otras instituciones educativas han comenzado a utilizar plataformas de aprendizaje en línea para que estudiantes y profesores creen relaciones significativas, sociales y colaborativas. Reconocidos como contextos educativos, estos espacios han permitido a los estudiantes, particularmente en la educación superior, formar y representar sus identidades. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar cómo emerge la identidad del profesor-investigador de lenguas (LTR, por sus siglas en inglés) a través de publicaciones en línea y características multimodales en foros de discusión en línea asíncronos. Dado que los foros de discusión en línea se están convirtiendo en una actividad de aprendizaje fundamental en muchas clases universitarias, este estudio ha identificado los tipos de publicaciones que los estudiantes utilizan en estos foros, las características multimodales de estos foros que permiten el desarrollo de la identidad y los tipos de identidades LTR que han surgido en ellos. El presente estudio utilizó el análisis del discurso multimodal (MDA, por sus siglas en inglés) para examinar el uso de estos foros en dos clases de doctorado en educación lingüística, y entrevistas en línea a estudiantes de posgrado seleccionados ($n=5$). Los resultados revelaron que la mayoría de las publicaciones consistían en la autopresentación de la experiencia investigadora del individuo, la aplicación de conceptos aprendidos y la evaluación crítica de sus compañeros. Las respuestas de las entrevistas también revelaron las características multimodales que permiten la presentación de identidades de relaciones a largo plazo en estos foros, así como las identidades emergentes en este contexto particular. Como implicaciones del estudio, se analizaron los efectos y el potencial de los foros de discusión asíncronos en el desarrollo de la identidad.

Introduction

Years before the pandemic, many universities around the world had already started utilizing the accessibility of online social spaces for student learning and interactions. Such online spaces for asynchronous discussion-based activities allow students to find resources, to interact with one another, and to build their own community (Markel, 2001; McInnerney & Roberts, 2004). These activities, which usually pertain to computer-mediated communication (CMC), involve any discussion or dialogue in any written or spoken form that may occur synchronously (e.g., chats and virtual meetings) or asynchronously (e.g., blogs, wikis, and discussion forums) (Ellis, 2018). Particularly, many educators utilize asynchronous forms of activities as these provide students ample thinking time to monitor and edit their work before posting or responding as classroom participation. As the CMC discussion forums are more linear than a traditional face-to-face interaction, these types of communicative sessions offer an increased democracy in allowing equal engagements for students (Ellis, 2018) that can result in apparent higher-order thinking processes

¹ This is a refereed article. Received: 23 September, 2022. Accepted, 18 October, 2023. Published: 6 May, 2026.

² 0000-0002-9684-6961, hqalcazaren@up.edu.ph

(Newman, 1995) and as a medium for discourse and discursive activities (Johnson, 2006; Singh & Richards, 2006; Varghese et al., 2005).

Fundamentally, CMC requires the use of the internet to lessen geographical and other environmental barriers. In effect, these cyberspaces become “flexible, lively, and practical adaptations to the real circumstances that confront persons seeking community... [which] are part of a range of innovative solutions to the drive for sociality—a drive that can be frequently thwarted by... geographical and cultural realities” (Stone, 1991, as cited in Williams & Copes, 2005, p. 68). The internet has become a social space where people, particularly the youth, seek meaningful social relations that address their needs of belongingness and togetherness. Furthermore, individuals try to identify and learn about themselves through meaningful interactions with others in the same social space that may share or differ on ideas and practices (Fine, 1983, as cited in Williams & Copes, 2005). In educational contexts, these spaces become places for students to live their identities, which can be subjective (views of ourselves), representative (descriptions of ourselves), or self-presentation (presentation of ourselves to others) (Marwick, 2013). These notions illustrate how the understanding of self-concept (Stets & Burke, 2000) can be described as reflexive and mediated among the networked connections of the individual to its culture and society.

Review of the Literature

In educational research, much of the literature has examined how online spaces facilitated identity development of teachers, prospective teachers, and learners. For example, Adams (2007) analyzed the posts of art graduates training to be teachers in selected socially oriented virtual forums. Results revealed various theoretical issues on the artistic expressions of these artists within a largely textual-based context which was enhanced by how they used forums as a means for social expressions. Similar issues were found in Irwin and Hramiak's (2010) analysis of discussion board posts of teacher trainees during their placement periods. The analysis of these online discourses showed how the participants identified with teaching in general through their shared experiences as teachers, but did not feel they had become teachers themselves. Problems with identity development from student to teacher, and from aspects of how to teach identifying with being a teacher were also addressed. In contrast, the study of Ellis (2018) revealed how asynchronous online forum discussions let prospective teachers manage and encourage exchanges of new ideas; therefore, enabling autonomy and agency among participants.

Aside from representation of teacher identities in online spaces, some literature also examined the presentation and development of student identities. In the context of CMC, there were inquiries about students' communicative and linguistic features in social media (Caparas & Gustilo, 2017; Dino & Gustilo, 2015), students' subcultural identities and boundaries in internet forums (Williams & Copes, 2005), and students' lived learning experiences (Alcazaren, 2021). For example, Raman et al., (2021) performed a linguistic analysis on the introductions of graduate students in an asynchronous discussion forum where they found students' efforts involved an attempt to legitimize and humanize oneself, and a statement of one's learning goals and community engagements. Similarly, the study of Delahunty (2012) investigated the role of asynchronous discussion forums with identity formation of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) post-graduate students through triangulation of posts, interviews, and online survey. Findings showed that in the absence of face-to-face interactions, identities emerged, were negotiated, positioned, and established from the different dialogues in these discussion forums through interpersonal maneuvering. Moreover, findings of Jahnke (2010) illustrated how online discussion forums improved students' research skills and lifelong learning skills through forum participation that emphasized social interaction and emotional awareness. Similarly, students positively perceived how online collaborative tools could improve their own learning outcomes.

One issue, however, is how identity formation may be affected by the lack of contextual factors in these online spaces where identities are solely constructed through written discourse of forums, chatrooms, and blogs (Delahunty, 2012). This argument against online spaces and contexts was appropriately explained by Ivanič (1998) in the discussion of 'discoursal identity,' where identities emerged through discoursal construction in the social practice of written language (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Cunliffe, 2003), and where meaning was communicated in written form through the author's voice, including the historical and sociocultural aspects it carried. Based on this assumption, it is possible to study identity formation through the communication of authors in online discussion forums. In her comprehensive review, Delahunty (2012) outlined similar constructs and consistent themes drawn from the literature that related identity construction

to asynchronous online discussions. Firstly, identity is a complex construct that is continuously being reconstructed and redefined over space and time, relating to the interpersonal processes between others and self (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This explains how an online discussion forum of a Ph.D. class in language education reinforced the presentation of multiple identities of graduate students, enacting their occupational, educational, and interest-driven attributes. Secondly, identity is a social construct formed through dialogic relationships, and shaped by perceptions of oneself, of others, and the power relations it upholds. Inherent in what students write were their own values and beliefs as graduate students in the program, coupled with their negotiations of their self-perceptions and perceptions of others in the shared space of these forums. This influenced the extent of their willingness to share experiences and to continue establishing rapport with the others. Lastly, identity is a linguistic construct that is formed, maintained, conveyed, and negotiated through language. With the lack of physical presence and other meaning-making strategies, posts in these discussion forums served as the means of expressing one's insights and feelings to provide an understanding of one's established identity.

With the extensive literature that links how online spaces mediate and construe identity formation, the current paper tried to discuss how asynchronous online discussion forums influenced the emergence of language teacher-researcher (LTR) identities (Banegas & Consoli, 2021; Edwards & Burns, 2016) among Filipino graduate students under the Ph.D. program of the College of Education at the University of the Philippines-Diliman (UPD). Furthermore, the analysis extended the understanding of LTR identity development with the use of computer-mediated technologies and platforms, particularly online discussion forums that specifically probe one's learning progress. Linking these constructs of identity and online spaces, the study had the purpose to determine potential implications on presenting a different perspective towards identity formation and identity development situated in a technology-driven contemporary society.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this paper is to present how graduate students' identity, specifically their LTR identity, emerged as part of the exchange of ideas that happened in asynchronous online discussion forums in Ph.D. graduate classes on language education. As sub-questions, the study aimed to answer the following: a) What kind of posts did graduate students use in asynchronous online discussion forums in presenting their language teacher-researcher identities? b) What multimodal features of online discussion forums were used by students to illustrate their language teacher-researcher identities? and c) What types of language teacher-researcher identities emerged in these discussion forums?

Methodology

Context of the study

As learning modalities shifted towards online remote learning during the pandemic, the University of the Philippines-Diliman (UPD) created and utilized their own learning management system (LMS) aptly named as University Virtual Learning Environment (UVLê) where UPD teachers could design their online learning spaces and UPD students could access these spaces for their online classroom learning and interaction. The study analyzed the online contributions and interactions in this platform of Ph.D. students enrolled in two graduate courses: EDL 341 (Oral and Written Discourse in Language Education), and EDL 371 (Research Colloquium in Language Education), across the two semesters of Academic Year 2021-2022. As course content, EDL 341 covered underlying theories of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), models of classroom interaction analysis, analysis of written discourse, and multimodal discourse analysis. EDL 371 covered introduction to research, nature and purpose of research, writing of introduction, reviewing literature, building a theory, and research approaches and methods. Both courses were conducted remotely in a fully online modality. Also, both courses had online discussion forums where students were encouraged to participate and interact with each other through UVLê, the university learning system.

Participants

Excerpts from the asynchronous discussion forums were collected from the two graduate courses where all students were under the program of Ph.D. in Education major in Language Education. Of these students, three were enrolled in EDL 371 in the first semester, and eight were enrolled in EDL 341 in the following semester. Moreover, five graduate students agreed to participate in an online interview to provide a deeper

understanding of their experiences using such platforms. The criteria for selecting the participants were: 1) they had to be enrolled in either one or both of the chosen classes; 2) they had to be majoring in language education, 3) they had to have experience in research writing, and 4) they had to be willing to be part of the study. For the profile of these students, see Table 1.

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Program	Course Attended
Ally	26	Female		EDL 341
Applehead	30	Female		EDL 341
JC	50	Female	PhD. Education (Language Education)	EDL 371
Rocket	37	Female		EDL 341 & EDL 371
Mike	27	Male		EDL 341

Table 1: Graduate students' demographic profile

Research Design

For the research method, a multimodal discourse analysis (Norris, 2011; O'Halloran, 2009; Song et al., 2017) was used to examine identity development through online discussion forums. As an emerging digital methodology, multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) deals with the analysis of multiple active communication modes present in contemporary learning contexts (Jewitt, 2006; Kress et al., 2001). Drawing from Halliday's (1985; 1998) systemic functional linguistics, MDA tries to construct and deconstruct meanings from different communication contexts into three types: 1) Interpersonal (pertaining to the related meaning between the interactions of the author and the addressee/s); 2) Ideational (pertaining to the construed meaning of the world outside and inside that of the author); and 3) Textual (pertaining to the created meaning through text) (Bower & Hedberg, 2009). These three types of meaning can all be represented in various kinds of modalities (Jewitt, 2006) that enact meaning-making from texts through discursive flow (Halliday, 1998). However, it should be noted that MDA is still a developing discipline in education in which this current study adapted its constructs to conduct this qualitative analysis of identity development in an online multimodal environment. In this current paper, MDA was demonstrated by examining the construction and development of LTR identities in an online learning environment.

Data collection

Prior to the study, informed consent forms were emailed and secured from the professor of the course and the selected graduate students. The consent form included the rationale of the study, the responsibilities of the researcher and the participants, and the agreement and conditions of the study. Parallel to other studies (Delahunty, 2012; Ellis, 2018; Raman et al., 2021), multiple sources were collected to ensure the validity of the findings. These included posts from the asynchronous discussion forums, and online interviews with the Ph.D. students ($n=5$) in language education. The discussion forums were all part of the modified activities of the two graduate classes that shifted to online remote learning. These discussion forums were used during the two semesters of A.Y. 2021-2022 for graduate students to reflect on their learning experiences, particularly their research writing process. Moreover, online interviews were conducted with the selected graduate students who took part in either or both of these two courses. These online interviews enabled the the data analysis (see Appendix 1). To ensure the participants' anonymity, they were allowed to choose the pseudonyms they wanted to be associated with in the results.

Data analysis

The analysis was based on of the learning design of the educational online platform (UVLê) where graduate students could post and respond to asynchronous discussion forums. Describing learning design as the "space where [students] act with tools and devices to collect and interpret information through a process of interaction with others" (Oliver et al., 2007, p. 65), the study utilized the three components of a learning design developed by Bower and Hedberg (2010). These components were drawn from Engeström's (1987) Activity Theory framework and Halliday's (1985) systemic functional linguistics. In analyzing the multimodality of online forums, the components were operationalized as:

- a) Technology: any discourse regarding the tools of the educational online platform that allowed asynchronous discussion forums.
- b) (Inter)Activity: Any discourse associated with the coordinating interactions between students and peers, or students and professor (the degree of interaction and presentation between subjects).

c) Task/Content: Any discourse about the curriculum-based subject matter where learning occurred.

With the three components focusing on particular areas, the discourse found in this online environment relating to its textual nature (i.e., structuring and writing of texts), its interpersonal nature (how text interacts with its reader), and its ideational intention zeroing on the learning domains addressed in each post was described.

Results

Themes from the discussion forum posts

Each course had utilized asynchronous discussion forums to help graduate students to develop their LTR identities by allowing them to articulate their research experiences and expertise in the form of written online posts. As each participant had unique characteristics and contextual backgrounds, the findings explored how they were able to structure and construct their forum posts and interactions that could be reflective of their identity development. Based on the data analysis, three key themes of graduate students' forum posts that enabled them to present their LTR identities were uncovered: a) Self-presentation of one's research expertise; b) Application of learned concepts; and c) Critical assessment of peers' works. Actual excerpts from the students' posts were presented to give a further description of these themes.

Self-presentation of one's research expertise

In each course, there were different forums that elicited students' research interests and research processes. For example, there was a forum that encouraged students to post a few relevant topics that they were interested in researching. In this forum, students were required to describe their topics, explain their intended data gathering process and approach, and respond to the posts of their peers. In another forum, students were asked to explain their strategies in gathering relevant sources and drafting their review of related literature sections. To participate in these forums, students could choose to create posts that self-presented their own research expertise and knowledge. Many students tried to integrate their own personal experiences to relate or respond to the prompts of the forums, as shown in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2. These two excerpts presented students' research expertise through articulating their research interests and research processes juxtaposed with their own personal narratives. Research expertise can also be expressed by explaining their positions on a particular topic. In the case of Excerpt 3, the student explained the changes he had made related to his potential dissertation topic.

After every synchronous online learning session, I often ask my learners to prepare reflection papers based on the previous session. This is a topic I find interesting because it helps me gauge what significant learnings my learners get from the learning session and how they find it significant to their daily lives. It is also a good practice as they make more sense out of the topic beyond the classroom discussion and [it] fosters higher-order thinking skills among the learners. [Excerpt 1: P1]

As for the reading of the articles selected, I first read abstracts. Then, I had to identify the RQs, then jump to the results and discussion. This made my task of writing the abstracts much faster. However, this activity and the completion of the task is not enough for me to discuss my research. I know I have to go back to the literature I've collected, and also refer to the literature that they [authors] have cited so I can establish the literature that could help me in developing my study. [Excerpt 2: P2]

As of now, I am still finalizing my dissertation proposal. As I go along with my proposal, I have realized that I can produce an output or develop a training material out of it. So, instead of settling on the identification of the competency levels of teachers and administrators in the implementation of a reading program and its impact on pupils' academic achievement, I am planning to redirect it [the proposal] to developing a training program for teachers and administrators that will equip them with competencies for efficient and effective implementation of a total school reading program. [Excerpt 3: P3]

Application of learned concepts

Another theme that exemplifies students' representation of their LTR identities is how they were able to apply concepts they have learned in the course in their posts. One strategy that students used in showing that they have understood the lessons and concepts was to support their arguments and explanations with references. Students were able to apply their knowledge and justify their opinions by mentioning references or in-text citations so that their arguments could be considered as academically acceptable and accessible not just for their peers, but also their professor. Furthermore, students' use of references helped validate their research choices from their objectives to their study's framework. Excerpts 4, 5, and 6 present how

these references support students' rationale of the study, theoretical framework, and research method respectively.

Before the pandemic, teachers would be in schools, leaving our homes and creating an illusion that our identity and obligation for the day is to be an educator. These multiple identities and social roles are more pronounced than ever and harder to separate with the remote setup. Since we use language that differs according to a particular identity or role (Gee, 2011), I would like to look at how student teachers mediate their student and teacher identities in the pandemic setup by looking at their language use. [Excerpt 4: P4]

Having the unique parent/teacher dual roles, this topic can inform, explore, and understand how their identities are established, co-constructed, and evidenced through their classroom discourse. For this topic, I intend to apply Sinclair and Coulthard's Model of Spoken Discourse (IRF/E cycle (Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation), turn-taking and repair (Nicholson, 2014; Castaneda, 2013), using transcriptions of videotaped real-classroom talks. [Excerpt 5: P5]

Drawn from the study of Gharbavi and Iravani (2014) about examining the teacher's discourse pattern and its effect on students' participation, I plan to gather at least 3 online synchronous math sessions (preferably in junior high school), transcribe the sessions, and identify the discourse patterns of the teacher in the class such as during turn-taking, the introduction of the topic, overcoming misunderstanding, etc. (Rymes, 2008). In analyzing the discourse, I intend to relate the contexts that affect the identified discourse patterns and eventually determine the implications in supporting the development of the language of mathematics among students. [Excerpt 6: P6]

Critical assessment of peers' works

To encourage interaction of students with each other, there were forums that required the students to provide critical assessments of their peers' work. This might have required students to comment on a video lecture presentation made by their peers or to provide feedback on a classmate's finished research paper. This kind of post provided peer evaluation that served as an outsider perspective other than their professor's feedback. This type of interaction among students enabled discourse of negotiation and co-construction of research knowledge and researcher identities among the students through their exchanges of written posts. Through this discourse, students were able to ask questions, clarify some misunderstandings, and suggest single or multiple solutions or improvements to their peers' work. Some examples are presented in excerpts 7, 8, and 9 that clearly express how students were able to provide their insights regarding their classmate's works, thereby, contributing to the development and construction of their LTR identity.

I like how the walkthrough was focused on the process. The focus is more on the content than the speaker. Though I would've appreciated seeing you speaking in the presentation, it's a good technique since the presentation is highly visual and text heavy. I also appreciate the explanation of the result interpretation. It would have been better if there is a sharing of sample data or research that has used the model. In terms of visuals, though the pastel colors are nice, however, it would've been better to consider a color coordination of visuals and fonts for better readability. Overall, it's a good walk-through that helps the audience understand the process of the model. [Excerpt 7: P7]

I was able to easily follow her discussion. She was able to meet all of the task's objectives. She provided detailed discussions of the model's proponents, its elements and how it could be applied. I also commend how she took the time to really clarify each parameter under each set and demonstrate its use from a transcription example, tabulating the observations and its analysis. However, I wish the presentation could have been a bit brief [sic] to meet the task's given time frame. [Excerpt 8: P1]

He provided sufficient information regarding the model's history, that is, how it developed from FIACS and what sets it apart from other interaction analysis frameworks. Each of the categories of the model was not only defined, but also explained thoroughly. I like that he used graphic aids to organize information. His discussion on the data collection methods and analysis in FLINT research would be of significant help to anyone in the class who plans to use the model. He emphasized the need to employ multiple research methods like interviews to confirm classroom observations. The demonstration of FLINT's application was presented clearly in the video. However, it could have been more helpful if a step-by-step guide had been offered. I appreciate that he pointed out the different contexts where FLINT can be best applied. [Excerpt 9: P8]

Multimodal features

Aside from the analysis of the forum posts of the students, an online interview was also conducted among the graduate students who were part of the courses. In the interview process, they were asked about the multimodal features that they used in participating in the discussion forums. Guided by the model of Bower and Hedberg (2010), findings revealed the features of multimodality that helped these graduate students enact their LTR identities. For the technological component of the asynchronous discussion forums, participants highlighted how the textual tools (i.e., font styles, emojis, links, and images) of the LMS allowed

them to enact their LTR identities. Moreover, the (inter)Activity of the online discussion forums allowed a more student-led interaction. Lastly, the content of these forums primarily involved the sharing of conceptual knowledge about research of students.

Textual tools of the forum

As a technological feature of the asynchronous discussion forums, the LMS interface enabled students to textually manipulate their posts depending on how they want to structure and present their insights and sharing. These textual tools provide a range of possible options that can be utilized in these online discussion forums where students are able to construct, emphasize, share, and even change the aesthetic of a post to present a more informal style of writing. These textual tools included font styles, emojis, shared links, and images. One of the respondents, Ally shared how she utilized these textual tools to highlight her key points, and sometimes, to provide an emotional representation of her written post. She discussed,

I have used the font (bold, underline, italicized) and emojis in my postings... I think I used them more like a tool to highlight the main points of what I want to say (for the fonts) so that the reader would get the main idea more easily. I also used emojis in some of my posts so that the reader would get a more visual feel of what I want to express. Since the forum is a form of written discourse, my classmates would inevitably have their own interpretation of my postings. I used emojis at times to try to keep their interpretations in line with mine. [Excerpt 10: Ally]

Another option that was used by the students was the ability of the interface to share links that can direct the readers to its primary source. Applehead explained how this feature could help readers to have a better understanding of her insights through supplementary aids and materials.

The features that I often use in posting my discussion forums are the links that will redirect the readers to the site where the material is originally uploaded. These are very much accessible and engaging because the links help you broaden your repertoire of knowledge through materials that are beyond the suggested readings [Excerpt 11: Applehead]

Student-led interactions

Clark (2005) identified three types of e-learning activities: a) Teacher-centered activities where there is a more transmissive approach to information delivery; b) Teacher-led where a deductive instructional approach is used, and c) Student-centered where learning is more inductive. As a multimodal feature of the online discussion forums, interactions among students and professors permitted a more student-led interaction in which most of the discussion and sharing were prompted by the responses and posts of the students. The majority of the exchanges of insights were among the student. These typically involved answering questions and responding to the comments and feedback of their classmates. When asked how he interacted in these forums, Mike responded that he, as much as possible, showed respect and appreciation to his classmates who provided feedback on his posts.

I always begin my discussions with pleasantries. To me, salutations make my posts sound inviting and cordial. As much as possible, I read all posts in the forum and respond to one or two discussions. I also try my best to respond to all the replies to my own posts. [Excerpt 12: Mike]

Through these interactions, feedback showed itself to be a beneficial result since it provided the students additional help for their research. Rocket shared how her classmates and professor helped her improve her research writing by recommending relevant materials and providing feedback in these forums.

My classmates and professor tend to suggest materials and views that were helpful in my research. I look at these comments in light of what I have to work on in my research and then I revise and improve my paper accordingly. [Excerpt 13: Rocket]

These student-led interactions in the asynchronous discussion forums had a significant impact on the development of LTR identities with these graduate students. The exchanges of insights and feedback among them and with their professor allowed them to get new perspectives of their research topics and research processes. JC expressed how the interactions helped her.

The feedback or comments coming from peers and the class professor not only give me new insights but also prompts me to investigate more on ideas that are worth noting. [Excerpt 14: JC]

Aside from the additional insights of their classmates, the forum interactions caused students to become more motivated and confident in their research skills. These interactions allowed students feel empowered as they received and gave constructive criticism.

I think that the forums have helped me feel more inspired as a teacher-researcher. It boosts my confidence and motivation whenever my classmates express their appreciation for my work. Moreover, I also feel empowered as a

teacher-researcher whenever I give feedback about my classmates' outputs. I view our forums as a platform for an online research community. [Excerpt 15: Mike]

Conceptual knowledge about research

In these online spaces of the educational discussion forums, there can be different types of tasks and activities that allow varying content to be presented. The content in these educational tasks can be easily classified through Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) 'knowledge' dimension where they distinguished content into declarative, procedural, and conceptual knowledge. In these asynchronous discussion forums, the majority of the content shared by the students and professor involved conceptual knowledge where they shared interrelated representations of complex knowledge acquired from their varied readings, which also included their schemas and personal experiences, explanations and positions, and constructive feedback about their peers' works.

I usually share information gained from readings as well as responses that are guided by the rubrics presented in a particular forum. [Excerpt 16: JC]

Mike also tried to include references and relevant literature to support his explanations and responses in the forums.

I also try my best to cite relevant literature to substantiate my explanations. In giving feedback on a classmate's work, I make sure that my discussion is a blend of positive and constructive comments. [Excerpt 17: Mike]

This was seconded by Applehead when she mentioned how the discussions in the forums revolved around their potential research topics and how they could further improve not just their own research work, but also their classmates'.

We are often prompted to provide our potential research topics that are related to the course as well as to our future dissertation. Also, we are asked to provide comments and suggestions for improvement regarding the outputs we have submitted, such as the walk-through videos and classroom interaction analysis paper. [Excerpt 18: Applehead]

Emerging LTR Identities

As Gee (2000) suggested, recognition from others is needed for an identity to exist. Recognition in these online discussion forums could be attributed to how students communicated their posts as a direct or indirect reference (Delahunty, 2012). From a sociocultural perspective, engaging through conversations in a common space like these forums can lead to a particular shared learning and self-knowledge (Bakhtin, 1981; Cunliffe, 2003). As a result, these in turn contribute to the process of constructing identities and social realities as graduate students of language education and as language teacher-researchers. Therefore, these online discussion forums provided insights into how the understanding of self is cumulatively and socially constructed through discourse (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). When asked what LTR identity these graduate students presented in the forums, words like "credible", "knowledgeable", "hardworking", and "intellectual" were used to describe their identities. From the participants' responses, the analysis divided these LTR identities into two broad categories: a) identity as presented through research expertise, and b) identity as co-constructed through interactivity.

Identity as presented through research expertise

One indication of identity becoming valuable and serving as the initial positioning ploy in these forums was the establishment of their credibility through talking about research credentials and expertise. In forums that require students to introduce their research interests, and to critique their peers' works, their LTR identity becomes highly positioned as they present themselves as credible by discussing their research experiences and expertise in their posts. As shown in the previous section, these graduate students' posts typically included presentations of their research knowledge, from their previous experiences to their application of the learned concepts. When asked what kind of identity they wanted to portray in their posts, Applehead mentioned that she wanted to present an identity that could be reflective of the community she wanted join.

The identity that I wanted to present is someone who contributes to the discourse of language education. Through it, I feel a sense of belongingness in that field. [Excerpt 19: Applehead]

This sentiment was also shared by Mike who felt the need to represent himself as an expert or as an equal collaborator among his peers.

As a Ph.D. student, I felt that it was expected of me to give high-level contributions. Personally, I felt motivated to engage in intellectual exchanges in the forums. The fact that I can give my honest feedback and suggestions on the works of my peers has helped position my identity as an expert or at least an equal partner or collaborator in the co-construction of knowledge. [Excerpt 20: Mike]

Identity as co-constructed through interactivity

With LTR identities presented through CMC, online discussion forums afford and enable interactivity where identities are co-constructed through forum interactions. Interactivity was defined as the “opportunity to access other opinions and information not residing within the classroom” (Jahnke, 2010, p. 31). but which lie within the world as argued in theories of distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995) which leads to the creation of interdependent and independent individuals. The affordance of asynchronous discussion forums connecting with others while accessing information sources allowed the creation of identity development as socially constructed through participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009). Jenkins et al. defined participatory culture as any form of expressions within a culture created by being involved in any participation; thus, shifting from individual expression to community involvement. As mentioned in the interview, Applehead explained how she emphasized her knowledge of research and experiences as an educator in her discussion forum posts to reflect the kind of LTR identity she wanted to present.

I think I am able to reflect that identity in the discussion forum posts. I manifest it by means of adding what I know about my peer's post through suggesting additional references, as well as citing my experiences as an educator related to the forum topics. [Excerpt 21: Applehead]

On the other hand, Rocket recognized the benefits of having forum interactions in developing her research works. She mentioned how these interactions could help prospective language teacher-researchers develop their skills through the feedback of other researchers.

I think they [forum interactions] can be supplementary tasks in forming research. Researchers tend to share their finished research in conferences or publications and rarely while working on them. I believe that forums could help the researcher receive feedback and think about how their research could better be improved. [Excerpt 22: Rocket]

For JC, these online forums replicated the purpose and significance of having face-to-face discussion in courses implemented remotely.

They are helpful and appropriate. The exchange of ideas or the written discourses that take place in the forum offer a different kind of learning which I might say is almost paramount to face-to-face discussion. [Excerpt 23: JC]

To clearly argue how LTR identities emerged from these forums as socially-constructed concepts of interactivity, Mike shared an explanation of how identity can change through the varying social interactions of individuals.

In my opinion, discussion forums can help students develop their researcher identities. Participating in intellectual discussions, learning new things from other people's works, and collaborating with peers can influence how an individual views themselves as a researcher. [Excerpt 24: Mike]

Results showed how these participants recognized the significant nature of identity being highly influenced by social interactions. The forum participation of these graduate students allowed them to reflect from their peers' divergent perspectives to their own views of the world to create their own new meanings (Geer, 2005), and emphasized the affordance of these online spaces for collective intelligence (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Discussion

It should be pointed out how the data discussed above came from a small number of online survey responses, and few asynchronous discussion forums from only two graduate courses of a university. For this reason, the study did not aim to be generalizable to a larger population. These limitations aside, the use of asynchronous discussion forums in this context appeared to have particular benefits as an aid in developing LTR identities among Ph.D. students, and to be perceived by the students as an advantageous learning experience. Similar to other studies that looked into asynchronous discussion forums (Ellis, 2018; Nandi et al., 2012a; Nandi et al., 2012b), the forums in the present context were mostly collaborative and peer-moderated where graduate students and prospective language teacher-researchers were allowed autonomy of their posts and the possibility for agency in the interactions they will choose. In the analysis of the discussion forums, there were three themes of students' posts that reflected their LTR identities namely the posts' ability to illustrate their research expertise, to apply their learned concepts, and to provide

constructive criticism for their peers. These findings showed how these students were able to highlight a wide range of cognitive skills while participating in online interactions. Parallel to Nandi et al.'s (2012a, b) findings, forum posts typically share students' knowledge and experiences to support participants' opinions or suggestions. In addition, students use social cues or emotions through emojis and font styles which ensure active and enjoyable interaction (Weaver, 2005). Delving into the context and content of these forum posts, students were able to utilize, probably unconsciously, perspective-sharing opportunities (Dennen, 2005) to make sense of their own learning process as each course proceeded from one lesson to another, and from one research task to another. Essentially, these opportunities were characteristic of the constructivist nature of online discussion that adheres to the constructs of intersubjectivity (Rogoff, 1990) or creation of mutual understanding (Crook, 1994) where personal experiences were shared, and connections were made.

In terms of the multimodal features that were discussed, it was revealed how these online interfaces can be effectively designed not only to develop individual's schema formation, but also to help the co-construction of knowledge among learners to which individual or collaborative meaning-making process were supported by the affordances of these learning technological resources (Bower & Hedberg, 2010). For instance, in the case of the asynchronous discussion forums, the forums can be used by the professor to enact a transmissive approach to instruction, while allowing students to interact with each other through exchanges by written posts that enable them to engage collaboratively with various activities. Relating these multimodal features to LTR identity development, students primarily utilized the textual tools found in the LMS to construct, negotiate, and enact the self-presentation of their identities through forum posts. They used font styles to emphasize their arguments, emojis to serve as social and emotional cues, and links to share additional materials and information. Furthermore, the discussion forums appeared to be peer-moderated where interactions were predominantly driven by the students as they took ownership of their own participation, emphasizing a critical feature of any learning task (Kirschner et al., 2004). In this manner, this context fosters a more inductive learning environment where collaborative approaches necessitate a student-to-student concept formation discourse, and a more facilitating role for teachers (Bower & Hedberg, 2010). Lastly, the majority of the forums elicit conceptual information about research from the students. The program and the level of the students might have greatly determined the tasks and content being discussed in these forums. Being part of two classes of a Ph.D. program for language education, students were required to articulate conceptual knowledge of their research process and research works, defined by interrelated representations of complex knowledge forms of their field, involving schemas, categorization hierarchies, and explanations (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

As a social construct, identity development heavily relies on the social reality of forum discussions as its context. As the findings have suggested, identity in this context is closely associated to cognitive and socio-environmental factors emanating from the discussions and the maneuvering strategies that occur over a period of time (Kreijns et al., 2004). As identity becomes reflective of one's research expertise and interactivity in the forums, identity is expressed in emotive, cognitive, and positive terms as students share their previous experiences and personal knowledge (Delahunty, 2012). Also, this has been indicative of how identity is shaped by the interpersonal bonds of individuals which heighten a greater amount of self-disclosure or investment in these discussions (Norton, 1997). This was seen during the discussions of students about their own research processes from their strategies in finding related literature to the intended methodologies of their potential research. Consequently, this established commonalities among the students' conversations and interests gradually developing their identities, particularly their LTR identity, into one that was "socially real" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Through the shared experiences and desires, LTR identities of these students became collective and mutually acknowledged. As represented in the forum posts, the visibility as language teacher-researchers indicates the influence of particular historical and cultural factors on graduate students' developing LTR identities. In this case, the cultural notion of *pakikipagkapwa* or fellowship (Enriquez, 1977) among these graduate students indicated a significant Filipino characteristic where one expresses their affinity and solidarity with others through a deep appreciation of one's dignity and existence. This can be seen on how the graduate students pattern their LTR identities to how they can participate in academic discussions and contribute to the improvement of the works of their peers. In addition, they were keen to present themselves as highly reliable and credible individuals that could be considered contributing members, not just by their peers, but by the academic community as a whole. The dynamic nature of defining and redefining identities has been primarily

influenced by these cultural and personal factors that lead to understanding how creation of different social contexts in online spaces may shape different identity associations divergent from the current and existing constructs.

Conclusion

With its expanding popularity as activities for remote learning, discussion forums have become powerful online tools for the development of many pedagogical skills such as critical thinking, reflective practice, and collaboration (Abawajy, 2012). Aside from the perceived advantages, findings of this study revealed its potential for identity development, particularly for researcher and LTR identities. Asynchronous online discussion forums offered many educational benefits in constructing and co-constructing identity development through their interface design that encouraged students to improve their collaborative skills and other social-constructivist characteristics of learning. In this current study, results showed how participation in these forums could help graduate students to fully realize their research potentials as they progressively created and participated in academic discourses that required sharing of their research expertise and personal experiences. The study also presented how online posts reflected research expertise, learned research concepts, and peer evaluations. Moreover, findings showed how various multimodal features (e.g., textual tools, interactivity to initiate conversations with peers) of these online discussion forums helped graduate students structure the presentation of their LTR identities with their peers and professor. Lastly, the affordances of this online educational space allowed the negotiation and redefinition of their LTR identity through forum interactions that emphasized how identities were socially and collaboratively created. Through its findings, this paper can provide educators and education policy-makers a glimpse of the potential of asynchronous discussion forums in not just developing student/researcher identities, but also in improving learning environments that can maximize collaboration, reflection, and higher order thinking skills.

References

- Abawajy, J. (2012). Analysis of asynchronous online discussion forums for collaborative learning. *International Journal of Education and Learning*, 1(2), 11-21. <http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30049653>
- Adams, J. (2007). Artists becoming teachers: Expressions of identity transformation in a virtual forum. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 26(3), 264-273. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2007.00537.x>
- Alcazaren, H. K. G. (2021). "Can everyone see me?": Exploring online distance learning and its challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PCS Review*, 19-44. https://www.philscomsoc.org/files/ugd/4e4547_27a2255eb16042cdae2fcc6bf15d9ec2.pdf
- Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. Longman.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (Ed.). (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Banegas, D. L., & Consoli, S. (2021). Initial English language teacher education: The effects of a module on teacher research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 51(4), 491-507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2021.1876840>
- Bower, M., & Hedberg, J. G. (2010). A quantitative multimodal discourse analysis of teaching and learning in a web-conferencing environment: The efficacy of student-centred learning designs. *Computers & Education*, 54(2), 462-478. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2009.08.030>
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 7(4-5), 585-614. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461445605054407>
- Burgess, A., & Ivanič, R. (2010). Writing and being written: Issues of identity across timescales. *Written Communication*, 27(2), 228-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0741088310363447>
- Caparas, P., & Gustilo, L. (2017). Communicative aspects of multilingual code switching in computer-mediated communication. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 349-359. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8137>
- Clark, R. C. (2005). Multimedia learning in e-courses. In R. E. Mayer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning* (pp. 589-616). Cambridge University Press.
- Crook, C. (1994). *Computers and the collaborative experience of learning*. Routledge.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2003). Intersubjective voices: The role of the 'theorist'. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 25(4), 481-498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2003.11029425>
- Delahunty, J. (2012). 'Who am I?': Exploring identity in online discussion forums. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 53, 407-420. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2012.05.005>
- Dennen, V. P. (2005). From message posting to learning dialogues: Factors affecting learner participation in asynchronous discussion. *Distance Education*, 26(1), 127-148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587910500081376>

- Dino, C. M., & Gustilo, L. E. (2015). Digitalk: An exploration of the linguistic features of CMC. *International Journal of Languages, Literature, and Linguistics*, 1(1), 51-55. <https://doi.org/10.7763/IJLL.2015.V1.11>
- Edwards, E., & Burns, A. (2016). Language teacher-researcher identity negotiation: An ecological perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 735-745. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44984710>
- Ellis, M. (2018). Asynchronous online forum discussion as an aide in helping teacher-learners perceive themselves as EFL teachers. *Konińskie Studia Językowe*, 6(3), 281-301.
- Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Orienta-Konsultit Oy.
- Enriquez, V. G. (1977). Filipino psychology in the Third World. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 10(1), 3-18.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Chapter 3: Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25(1), 99-125. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X025001099>
- Geer, R. (2005). Imprinting and its impact on online learning communities. In H. Goss (Ed.), *Balance, Fidelity, Mobility: Proceedings of the 22nd ASCILITE Conference, December 4-7, Brisbane, Australia* (pp. 231-240). Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1998). Things and relations – Regrammaticising experience as technical knowledge. In J. R. Martin & R. Veel (Eds.), *Reading science: Critical and functional perspectives on discourses of science* (pp. 185–235). Routledge.
- Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. MIT Press.
- Irwin, B., & Hramiak, A. (2010). A discourse analysis of trainee teacher identity in online discussion forums. *Technology, Pedagogy, and Education*, 19(3), 361-377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2010.513767>
- Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discursive construction of identity in academic writing*. John Benjamins.
- Jahnke, J. (2010). Student perceptions of the impact of online discussion forum participation on learning outcomes. *Journal of Learning Design*, 3(2), 27-34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5204/jld.v3i2.48>
- Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, Robison, A. J. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. The MIT Press.
- Jewitt, C. (2006). *Technology, literacy and learning: A multimodal approach*. Routledge.
- Johnson, K. E. (2006). The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 235-257. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264518>
- Kirschner, P., Strijbos, J.-W., & Kreijns, K. (2004). Designing integrated collaborative e-learning. In W. Jochems, J. Van Merriënboer, & R. Koper (Eds.), *Integrated e-Learning: Implications for pedagogy, technology, and organisation* (pp. 24–38). Routledge.
- Kreijns, K., Kirschner, P. A., Jochems, W., & Van Buuren, H. (2004). Determining sociability, social space, and social presence in (a)synchronous collaborative groups. *CyberPsychology Behavior, and Social Networking*, 7(2), 155-172. <https://doi.org/10.1089/109493104323024429>
- Kress, G., Jewitt, C., Ogborn, J., & Charalampos, T. (2001). *Multimodal teaching and learning: The rhetorics of the science classroom*. Continuum.
- Markel, S. L. (2001). Technology and education online discussion forums: It's in the response. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 4(2). <https://ojdla.com/archive/summer42/markel42.pdf>
- McInnerney, J. M., & Roberts, T. S. (2004). Online learning: Social interaction and the creation of a sense of community. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 7(3), 73-81.
- Marwick, A. E. (2013). Online identity. In J. Hartley, J. Burgess, & A. Bruns (Eds.) *A companion to new media dynamics* (pp. 355-364). Wiley.
- Nandi, D., Hamilton, M., Chang, S., & Balbo, S. (2012a). Evaluating quality in online asynchronous interactions between students and discussion facilitators. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 28(4), 684-702. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.835>
- Nandi, D., Hamilton, M., & Harland, J. (2012b). Evaluating the quality of interaction in asynchronous discussion forums in fully online courses. *Distance Education*, 33(1), 5-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2012.667957>
- Newman, D. R. (1995). A content analysis method to measure critical thinking in face-to-face and computer supported group learning. *Interpersonal Computing and Technology*, 3(2), 56-77. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/80700>
- Norris, S. (2011). *Identity in (inter)action: Introducing multimodal (inter)action analysis*. de Gruyter.
- Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity, and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 409-429. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587831>
- O'Halloran, K. L. (2009). Multimodal analysis and digital technology. In A. Baldry and E. Montagna (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary perspectives on multimodality: Theory and practice*. (pp. 1-26). Palladino.
- Oliver, R., Harper, B., Wills, S., Agostinho, S., & Hedberg, J. (2007). Describing ICT-based learning designs that promote quality learning outcomes. In H. Beetham & R. Sharpe (Eds.), *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing and delivering e-learning* (pp. 64–80). Routledge.

- Raman, P., Soliman, D., & Hewitt, J. (2021). Please introduce yourself: Exploring student identity in academic online spaces. In C. E. Hrnelo-Silver, B. De Wever, & J. Oshima (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning-CSCL 2021*. International Society of the Learning Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.22318/cscl2021.283>
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. Oxford University Press.
- Singh, G., & Richards, J. C. (2006). Teaching and learning in the language education course room: A critical sociocultural perspective. *RELC Journal*, 37(2), 149-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0033688206067426>
- Song, K., Williams, K., Pruitt, A. A., & Schallert, D. (2017). Students as pinners: A multimodal analysis of a course activity involving curation on a social networking site. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 33, 33-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2017.01.002>
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224-237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>
- Weaver, C. M. (2005). *What encourages student participation in online discussions?* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Southern Queensland.
- Williams, J. P., & Copes, H. (2005). "How edge are you?" Constructing authentic identities and subcultural boundaries in a straightedge internet forum. *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(1), 67-89. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2005.28.1.67>
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, & Education*, 4(1), 21-44. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2

Appendix 1

Interview Protocol

1. What is your process in responding to the guide questions in any of the discussion forums?
2. What do you usually share in the discussion forums of EDL 341/EDL 371?
3. What features of UVLê (e.g., fonts, images, links) did you use in posting on the discussion forums? Are these features accessible and engaging? Why/why not?
4. How did you interact with your peers and teacher in the discussion forums?
5. Did the forums in both or any of the said classes help you in your research work? If yes, how? If no, how could it have helped you?
6. Did forum interactions help you in your research work? Why or why not?
7. How did you find the interactions in the forums?
8. Did it make you realize anything about your identity as a language teacher researcher? How?
9. What kind of researcher identity did you wish to present when you participated in the forums?
10. Was your researcher identity reflected in your forum posts and replies? If yes, how were these identities manifested in the forums?
11. How do you find these forums as part of the activities to develop students' researcher identities? Are forums helpful and appropriate activities for this objective? Why/why not?