

Article

What Sustains Academic Buoyancy of Vietnamese English-as-a-Foreign-Language Teachers Navigating Graduate Education?

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Abstract: Academic buoyancy enables teachers to manage academic challenges associated with professional life. Despite increasing interest, little is known about what sustains academic buoyancy among English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers pursuing further education. Drawing upon Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory, this qualitative multiple-case study traces how Vietnamese teachers manage their unique resources to remain academically buoyant in graduate education. Five teachers enrolled in Master's programs in Teaching English as a Foreign Language participated in two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings indicated that academic buoyancy is sustained by four resource domains. Personal resources (future-oriented aspirations, self-regulation, and personal teaching experiences) provide a foundation for enduring academic pressures. Psychological resources (optimism, perseverance, and self-efficacy) enable participants to embrace their day-to-day challenges as opportunities for personal growth. Institutional resources (administrative flexibility and alignment between graduate coursework and teaching responsibilities) reduce workload-based strain. Socio-cultural resources (Confucian values, professional prestige, and familial support) further reinforce participants' persistence and intrinsic motivation. The study extends the theory by shedding light on how various resource domains sustain academic buoyancy among language teachers partaking in their continuing professional learning. Pedagogical implications are offered for various stakeholders seeking to aid teachers' development as lifelong learners.

Keywords: Language Teachers; Academic Buoyancy; Graduate Education; Conservation of Resources Theory

1. Introduction

In the Global South, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is a rewarding, demanding experience for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Such experiences are enriched further as English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers embrace a dual position, combining classroom instruction with the advanced goals of professional learning [1]. In this knowledge-building journey, they proactively engage with high-level academic standards, including research learning, action research, publication expectations, and working as teacher-researchers. Positive psychology directs its attention toward setback-handling competencies. Within this focus, academic buoyancy is regarded as an adaptive competence [2,3] enabling teachers to maintain professional equilibrium amidst such universal fluctuations of academic settings. While academic resilience refers to one's management of critical career crises and trauma-based events, academic buoyancy is a set of psychological strategies teachers utilize to navigate daily routines and typical pressures inherent in academic learning. Notably, this dispo-

sition aligns with the conceptualization of buoyancy [4] as the capability to cope with the difficult situations they face, serving as an inner asset that transforms minor challenges into much-needed resources for teachers' career stability. In professional learning, academic buoyancy establishes itself as teachers' capacity to respond to academic variations, ensuring progress despite unpredictable hurdles [5].

An analysis of the literature establishes the vital roles of buoyancy in supporting teacher CPD. Specifically, buoyancy is deemed an indispensable buffer protecting language teachers from professional hopelessness [6, 7]. Furthermore, Ding and He [8] revealed a negative correlation between high buoyancy and teacher burnout. Subsequently, Li et al. [9] and Mohammad-Hosseini et al. [10] expanded this scope, demonstrating that buoyancy can act as an external variable that drives learners' academic achievement. In another line of research, Liu et al. [11] connected this fortitude to long-term commitment, and Zhi et al. [12] proved that buoyancy and self-efficacy predict work engagement. In classroom settings, Fu [13] confirmed that buoyancy plays a moderating role against learning burnout, noting that its protective impact increases in lower-proficiency classrooms. Most recently, Zhang and Derakhshan [14] used statistical modeling to confirm that academic buoyancy, combined with emotion regulation strategies, determines a significant portion of teachers' well-being. These advancements open up an opportunity to explore how these principles apply to unique, specialized subgroups. While existing studies successfully examine general education teachers in standard workplace environments [12] or undergraduate students [13], the academic community stands to gain valuable insights by tracing the resources sustaining academic buoyancy of teachers concurrently enrolled in graduate education. Additionally, the existing wealth of quantitative methodologies invites researchers to add complementary depth by exploring the localized dynamics teachers utilize to maintain their psychological strength.

The education system in Vietnam provides a highly structured context for exploring teacher buoyancy in graduate education. Circular No. 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT [15] and Circular No. 02/2020/TT-BGDĐT [16] establish professional standards for school teachers and criteria for teacher training, dictating values and competencies required for CPD. Simultaneously, teachers must satisfy the academic mandates governing graduate progression, which are enforced under Circular No. 23/2021/TT-BGDĐT [17] concerning Master's program training. When teachers enter graduate education programs to fulfill these mandates, they encounter an expansion of their professional duties that strains their finite supply of personal assets [18]. The demanding socio-cultural environment in Vietnam places a premium on academic excellence, encouraging EFL teachers to (re)construct a sense of self, evolving from teacher-practitioners into teacher-researchers who accumulate valuable intellectual capital. In this regional setting, academic buoyancy is regarded as an essential engine for emotional shielding and adaptation, allowing teachers to convert academic setbacks into opportunities that greatly support professional longevity.

To bridge the above-mentioned gap, this study adopts the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory [19]. The primacy of resource loss corollary states that resource loss is inherently more powerful than resource gain, meaning individuals experience the psychological strain of losing an asset far more intensely than they feel satisfaction from gaining an equivalent asset itself [20]. To counteract this vulnerability, individuals rely on the resource investment corollary, which states that they must actively deploy their existing assets to protect against depletion, recover from previous losses, and build new resource pools [21, 22]. In this study, the challenges of graduate education represent threats to teachers' resource pools, which encompass their physical and emotional stamina. Adopting COR theory allows this study to utilize theoretical corollaries regarding resource dynamics to explain how buoyancy is sustained. Thus, a depletion of assets compels teachers to enact preservation strategies to protect remaining capital. By mapping these principles onto the lived experiences of Vietnamese teachers, this study traces how teachers strategically invest their personal and communal resources to transform academic setbacks into sustainable gain caravans. Grounded in this theory, this study addresses a question: What sustains the academic buoyancy of Vietnamese EFL teachers navigating graduate education?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study is designated as a qualitative multiple-case study under interpretivism [23]. This choice allows for the exploration of academic buoyancy in its real-life settings, honoring lived experiences of each teacher. A multiple-case approach can further strengthen the analytical lens of the study, enabling cross-case analysis that reveals how

different teachers deal with the demands of graduate education. Notably, each teacher is selected as a bounded case, allowing the study to examine contextual influences on their academic buoyancy.

2.2. Research Setting and Participant Selection

The current study is conducted in a major city in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta, an area currently undergoing economic development and educational reforms. To identify information-rich cases in this setting, participant recruitment relies on a snowball sampling approach.

The process starts with a primary participant (P1), who is purposively selected because he meets all core criteria. Following his interview, P1 refers a colleague who is also pursuing a Master’s degree in TEFL while teaching full-time. The recruitment chain then moves sequentially, with P1 referring P2, P2 referring P3, P3 referring P4, and P4 referring P5, resulting in a final cohort of five participants. To ensure they possess sufficient experience with the challenges of balancing work and postgraduate studies, all selected participants have completed at least one academic year of graduate education (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants’ demographic information.

Case	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	School Type
P1	Male	29	6 years	Public High School
P2	Female	34	12 years	Public College
P3	Female	27	4 years	Private High School
P4	Male	31	8 years	Private Lower Secondary
P5	Female	28	6 years	Public Lower Secondary

Because this recruitment relies on a single seed, there is a potential risk of network homogeneity, where participants might share overly similar perspectives or belong to the same close social circle. Additionally, since this is a referral chain, participants know each other to varying degrees within their professional networks. However, this does not compromise the cross-case rationale or lead to artificial data saturation. Although they are professionally connected, they work in entirely separate environments. As shown in Table 1, the sample naturally expands across different educational sectors. This wide range of institutional settings means that each participant faces different workplace pressures and administrative demands, providing a robust foundation for cross-case comparison. To maintain data independence, all interviews are conducted privately and kept strictly confidential, ensuring that individual accounts are not influenced by one another.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

Data collection utilizes two rounds of semi-structured interviews conducted over four months from September to December 2025. The interview protocol builds upon the foundational principles of Hobfoll’s [19] COR theory, converting theoretical dimensions into conversation-based prompts.

The first round focuses on resource identification and the principle of the primacy of resource loss. Interview questions trace how participants perceive the sudden expansion of their professional responsibilities, tracking the depletion of physical stamina and emotional energy under institutional deadlines. A sample inquiry asks participants to describe the professional assets that undergo the heaviest depletion as graduate education overlaps with teaching duties.

The second round, done eight weeks later, traces principles of resource investment and the manifestation of resource gain/loss corollaries. This phase utilizes prompts regarding coping strategies, social-support networks, and classroom strategies that participants deploy to protect the remaining capital, recover from exhaustion, and enhance competencies. A sample question explores how participants invest remaining emotional resources to establish support caravans with fellow graduate students.

Regarding the spatial environment, all interviews occur via the digital communication platform Google Meet, allowing participants to join from the privacy and comfort of their homes. The interaction uses Vietnamese as the medium of communication, ensuring that the five teachers express their affective states without any linguistic barriers. All interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated. The translation follows a forward-and-back protocol; the researchers translate the Vietnamese transcripts into English, and an

independent bilingual scholar verifies the semantic equivalence of the texts. Each interview session lasts 60–90 min, utilizing high-definition audio recording technology after obtaining written consent from the participants. This data-generation process yields ten interview profiles, resulting in a corpus of textual evidence for analytical phases (Table 2).

Table 2. Data collected from five participants.

Case	Round 1	Round 2	Audio Material	Transcribed Pages
P1	72 min	68 min	140 min	24 pages
P2	85 min	78 min	163 min	28 pages
P3	65 min	70 min	135 min	22 pages
P4	90 min	82 min	172 min	31 pages
P5	74 min	76min	150 min	26 pages
Total	386 min	374 min	760 min	131 pages

Following the completion of the individual case analysis, the current study implements a cross-case analysis procedure to synthesize empirical findings. The researchers utilize a cross-case display matrix to contrast the thematic configurations of participants systematically, isolating underlying regularities and variations across the cases. This comparative juxtaposition focuses heavily on identifying shared commonalities. Simultaneously, the cross-case analysis uncovers nuanced differences, particularly tracing how variations in teaching experience and school environments influence participants' academic buoyancy.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis follows the six-phase inductive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke [24]. The first phase entails data familiarization, beginning during the transcription and translation process. The researchers listen to audio recordings and read each English transcript line-by-line. During this immersion, they also record notes regarding participant remarks, focusing on moments when participants express pressure and identify support systems. The second phase involves generating initial codes across the textual corpus. The researchers examine the text segments to assign codes without predetermined frameworks. Every transcript undergoes coding, ensuring that all data segments receive equal attention. The third phase focuses on searching for themes, wherein the researchers collate codes into categories based on shared characteristics. This process utilizes a mapping technique to gather related codes under COR's construct umbrellas. These clusters capture patterns of how resources deplete or accumulate within the participants' insights. The fourth phase requires a (re)review of the candidate themes against two levels of data. At the first level, the researchers check the candidate themes against the coded extracts to ensure consistency. At the second level, they evaluate the themes against the entire dataset to confirm that the conceptual framework accurately represents the realities of the cases. Any theme that lacks sufficient empirical evidence undergoes restructuring or integration into another category. The fifth phase includes refining, defining, and naming each theme. This stage aims to create definitions that delineate the boundaries of each theme, ensuring that no overlap exists between different categories. Thematic labels are rechecked during calibration to reflect the essence of the teachers' lived experiences, transitioning from descriptive groupings into analytical structures. The final phase consists of producing the report. The researchers select direct quotes from the transcripts to illustrate each theme. The analytical data-based narrative weaves these testimonies with interpretive commentary, establishing a connection between the "real" insights of the participants and the premises of COR theory. Table 3 provides an illustrative overview of this inductive coding process.

Table 3. Data coding example of the current study.

Interview Excerpt	Initial Interpretation	Theme	COR Alignment
"I have to stay up until 1 AM or 2 AM every single night just to grind through all the reading assignments and finish my weekly reflections after Everything will just pile up." (P5)	P5 experiences physical exhaustion and time pressure in graduate education. Despite resource depletion, she tries to maintain academic performance.	Personal resources	Primacy of resource loss and resource investment

Table 3. Cont.

Interview Excerpt	Initial Interpretation	Theme	COR Alignment
"In our culture, when one person enters graduate education, the whole family pitches in... This collective family sacrifice is the only reason I can keep my head above water." (P5)	P5 draws on family support to preserve time and energy. Family members contribute resources that enable sustained academic engagement.	Socio-cultural resources	Resource caravans and resource gain

2.5. Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and adhered to established standards for human subject research. Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed of the study’s objectives, procedures, data collection protocols, and their right to withdraw at any stage and at any time. To safeguard participants’ anonymity and professional standing, numerical identifiers replaced all personal names. Audio recordings, transcripts, and associated research materials were housed in encrypted, cloud-based storage, with access strictly restricted to the primary researcher.

Methodological trustworthiness was maintained utilizing the four criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln [25]. Credibility was established through the researchers’ engagement with all participants. Interview data were triangulated with probing questions concerning contextual influences to enrich context-based understandings. Member-checking was also used, allowing participants to review transcripts and preliminary interpretations to ensure the findings accurately reflected their lived experiences. Transferability was facilitated by descriptions of the research setting and the participant profiles detailed in **Table 1**, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other comparable contexts. Dependability was secured through a comprehensive audit trail that documented all phases of the study, including raw audio files, transcription protocols, the coding process, and the theme development process. Finally, confirmability was enhanced through peer debriefing with an independent qualitative teacher-researcher who verified the alignment between raw data and interpretations.

2.6. Reflexivity

In strict alignment with the interpretivist paradigm, the researchers maintained reflexivity. The research team consisted of Vietnamese EFL teachers working within the national higher education system. This shared insider status was beneficial for establishing rapport and trust with participants, as the latter felt comfortable using professional jargon and discussing sensitive institutional pressures without fear of professional repercussions. Yet, this background also posed a risk of over-identification. The researchers might inadvertently project their experiences onto participants’ insights or take structural challenges for granted. To manage this subjectivity, the researchers utilized a reflexive journal to document personal assumptions, emotional responses, and biases after each interview session. During the coding analysis phases, these journal entries were cross-referenced with raw transcripts. It should be noted that peer debriefing with a qualitative teacher-researcher served as a check to question taken-for-granted assumptions and maintain analytical distance.

3. Findings

The inductive thematic analysis generates four themes that explain how different resources sustain five participants’ academic buoyancy during graduate education: personal, psychological, institutional, and socio-cultural resources (see **Figure 1**). Arguably, these resource-based domains enable participants to navigate the demands of teaching and graduate education, thereby becoming and remaining academically buoyant.

3.1. Personal Resources: The Inner Reservoir of Academic Buoyancy

The data reveals that personal resources served as a reservoir for maintaining academic buoyancy. It was found that these participants actively tapped into intrinsic motivations and capabilities to withstand professional shocks and block exhaustion when teaching duties and graduate education demands collided. However, this inner reservoir had clear limits because participants sometimes faced great depletion when their internal drives could not fully overcome daily situational pressures.

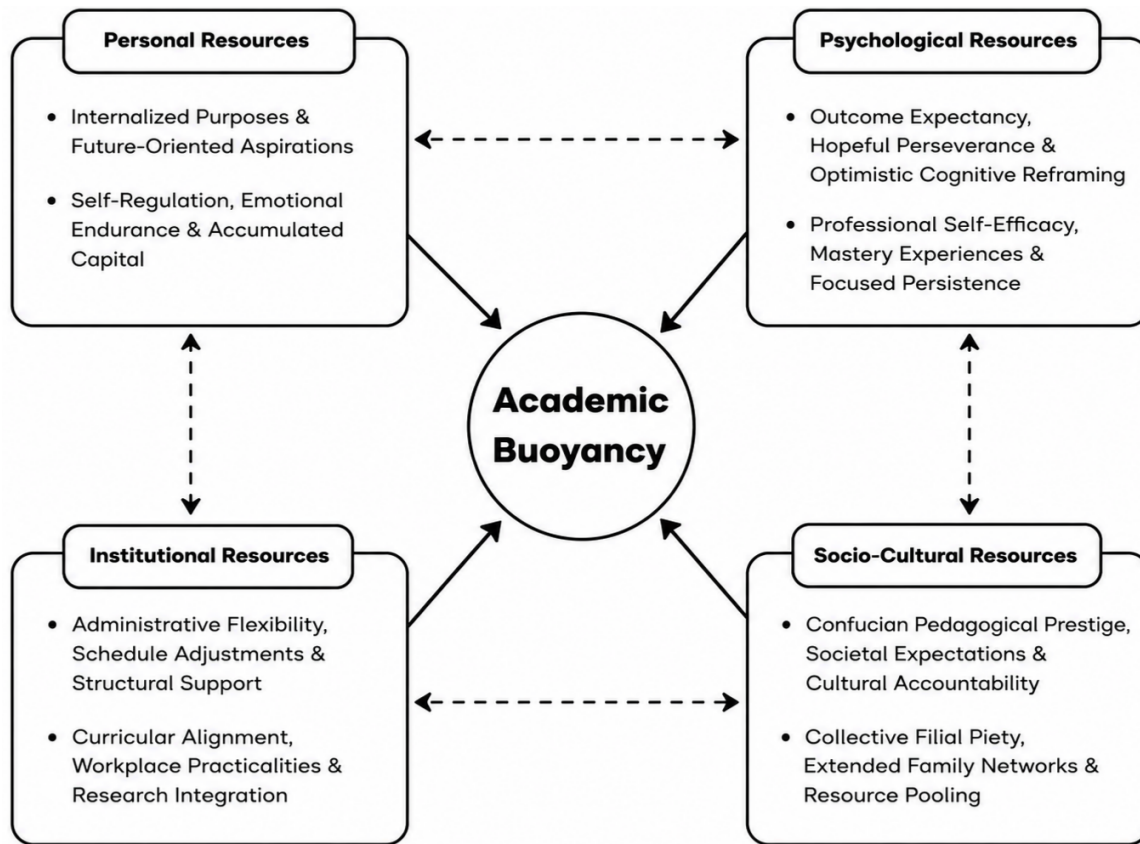


Figure 1. Interactions among resource domains sustaining academic buoyancy.

Source: authors' elaboration based on the findings of the current study.

3.1.1. Internalized Purposes and Future-Oriented Aspirations as Anchors for Academic Buoyancy

Long-term career goals provide participants with a great psychological anchor that preserves academic stamina during periods of intense hardship. Graduate education offers a very practical path to secure promotions, elevate professional rank, and build research capacity. When participants link the heavy pressure of graduate education directly to tangible rewards like promotions, they adjust their mental outlook to maintain academic buoyancy. P1 explains:

"To be honest, I just see this graduate education as a must-have stepping stone to get promoted and move up in the public school system, especially since the rules for teacher rank elevation are so strict nowadays. Besides, the heavy training here helps me learn how to do research, which is what I have really wanted to do since my university days."

P1 details a self-deployment of future goals to combat physical burnout. This mental alignment generates a steady supply of internal motivation. Consequently, P1 redefines exhaustion as a necessary cost to secure future stability and social standing. Besides, this forward-looking drive influences classroom teaching. Participants merge their identity in graduate education with their teaching persona, turning personal academic struggles into an inspirational pedagogical tool. P4 mentions this connection in a very clear reflection:

"Every single morning when I stand in front of my kids at school, I tell them straight out about how I have to stay up super late reading these thick English books and writing papers for my graduate education courses. I really want to be a real role model for them."

P4's reflection outlines a process wherein pedagogical purpose generates fresher psychological energy. This integration creates a resource loop: nighttime exhaustion from graduate education becomes daytime classroom

inspiration. Sharing personal vulnerability to engage students gives P4 a timely return in professional confidence, converting energy loss into emotional endurance.

In contrast to these positive experiences, participants also noted that future goals could temporarily lose their power when current workloads became too high. When daily tasks required excessive energy, long-term benefits felt less immediate, leading to periods of discouragement. As P1 later admits:

"There are weeks as the high volume of assignment deadlines makes those future goals feel quite distant. During these tough periods, I find myself trying to get through each day, and the degree can feel more like an administrative necessity than a personal goal."

In this case, future aspirations do not always supply energy. In fact, as participants experience high levels of fatigue, the connection between daily effort and future rewards can weaken, showing that internal drive needs to be balanced with manageable workloads to keep academic buoyancy stable.

3.1.2. Self-Regulation, Emotional Endurance, and Accumulated Capital in Driving Academic Buoyancy

Balancing classroom teaching with graduate education coursework forces participants to alter scheduling routines to protect dwindling time. To prevent a deficit threatening their own academic buoyancy, participants deploy self-regulatory strategies, sacrificing their physical stamina and sleep reserves to maintain the integrity of schedules. As P5 describes:

"I have to stay up until 1 A.M or 2 A.M every single night just to grind through all the reading assignments and finish my reflections after I am done with my school plans. [...] My eyes hurt so bad and I feel totally wiped out, but I force myself to keep going as I know damn well that if I miss just one university deadline, everything will just pile up..."

In this reflection, P5 illustrates the risk of resource loss under severe time constraints. Within this dual-role context, the participant recognizes that a delay can also trigger a severe deficit across her entire professional life. Consequently, she deliberately sacrifices her own physical health as a protective barrier to defend her academic status.

Furthermore, participants rely on prior classroom teaching experience as a form of professional capital that mitigates the severity of resource depletion. Participants with longer tenures leverage pedagogical routines, pre-established repositories, and classroom-management skills to minimize the time required for school preparation. This efficiency leaves them with surplus energy to remain academically buoyant. P2 explains:

"Having a decade of teaching under my belt gives me a massive shortcut when I have to deal with school stress while pursuing graduate education. I do not have to spend time planning daily lessons or making grading sheets, so I can save a whole lot of mental energy for working on my thesis proposal [...] and other research projects."

In this reflection, P2 confirms benefits of resource accumulation. Experienced participants easily complete daily school duties due to their well-established expertise, unlike early-career peers spending energies on basic instructional survival. Reflectively, this efficiency enables them to save mental health, reinvesting it into graduate research in a very direct way.

Additionally, key to this discussion is that relying on prior experiences can disadvantage participants who are still new to the profession. P5 shares this challenge during a particularly busy period:

"My scheduling routines did not work as my school duties increased. Because I lack the years of experience that others have, I had to create teaching materials from scratch. I tried to manage my hours carefully, yet I still had to rush to finish both school work and university papers [...] Additionally, I myself struggled a lot in managing my teaching and studying, too!."

This lived experience suggests that self-regulation depends partly on having prior professional capital. For

participants with fewer lived experiences, the lack of ready-to-use materials can create a time deficit, showcasing that personal time management alone cannot always resolve pressures of dual roles.

3.2. Psychological Resources: The Cognitive Engine of Academic Buoyancy

Along with personal resources, psychological resources are reported to be the cognitive engine required to sustain academic buoyancy. These participants themselves actively mobilize positive internal states, relying on a combination of buoyancy and optimistic thinking to navigate the emotional weight of their duties without losing momentum. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this engine can vary. When academic demands are sometimes very heavy, maintaining a positive outlook can probably introduce mental pressure.

3.2.1. Outcome Expectancy, Hopeful Perseverance, and Optimistic Cognitive (Re)framing

High outcome expectancy and optimistic outlooks are considered vital tools that protect participants from emotional exhaustion and support academic buoyancy. When confronted with heavy workloads, participants intentionally shift their focus from time scarcity toward rewards. This optimistic (re)framing alters their view of stress, turning barriers into manageable milestones. P1 explains this adjustment:

"Whenever I feel completely drained from grading essays and writing my own research papers, I just close my eyes and visualize my graduation day. I keep telling myself that this intense hardship is temporary and that the advanced knowledge I am gaining through graduate education will eventually make me a leading expert in my field, which instantly renews my drive."

P1 shows how hopeful perseverance functions as a psychological buffer to sustain academic buoyancy. This future-focused optimism can be deemed a resource investment where P1 uses positive thoughts to neutralize emotional depletion. Framing the pressure as a meaningful investment protects him from a negative emotional spiral. P3 shares a similar perspective:

"Instead of viewing these deadlines as a punishment, I choose to look at them as a masterclass in personal grit and time management. I genuinely believe that if I can survive this crazy graduate education journey while teaching full-time, I will have the mental strength to face absolutely any professional challenge in the future."

In this reflection, P3 asserts that optimistic (re)framing converts stressors into internal assets. Instead of allowing pressure to weaken academic buoyancy, exhaustion is regarded as a vital process for building endurance. Also, it decreases the threat of the workload, enabling her to maintain the emotional balance required to navigate both roles.

However, this strategy of optimism has its boundaries, especially during periods of in-depth fatigue. For P3, trying to maintain a positive viewpoint when physically tired occasionally led to mental fatigue:

"I tried to see every stressful week as a way to build my character, but when I am consistently short on sleep, forcing myself to stay positive can feel quite unnatural. There were moments I could not (re)frame the stress positively anymore. I feel disappointed for not being buoyant enough."

In P3's case, forced optimism itself can have unexpected limits. When workloads are high, expecting oneself to always conceptualize difficulties as positive growth opportunities can cause individuals to blame themselves for feeling tired, turning a helpful tool into an extra source of worry and overthinking.

3.2.2. Professional Self-Efficacy, Mastery Experiences, and Focused Persistence

Strong self-efficacy and past experiences are deemed the key drivers of academic buoyancy under pressure. Participants believing upon their pedagogical and academic ability show a greater level of buoyancy in managing unexpected crises in their classrooms or graduate education. This firm sense of efficacy allows complex research tasks to be approached with a problem-solving mindset, preventing paralysis during exhaustion. P2 discusses this situation:

"Having successfully designed innovative curricula for my school in the past gives me the confidence that I can handle this complex thesis methodology. When my research supervisor tears my drafts apart, I don't take it as a failure; I just rely on my experience to systematically fix the errors and make it right."

P2's insights reconfirm that past experiences do reinforce academic buoyancy. Her professional competence stabilizes her psychological state via evaluations. Because feedback is regarded as a puzzle rather than a threat, she herself saves emotional energy for research refinement. P5 reinforces this link between self-efficacy and academic buoyancy:

"There are days when I feel completely overwhelmed, but then I remind myself of how much I have already accomplished as an educator and a student. Believing that I actually have the intellectual capacity and the practical skills to excel in both worlds is what keeps me pushing forward when everything seems to fall apart."

Asserted by P5 in such a retrospective reflection, self-efficacy forms a self-reinforcing resource that sustains academic buoyancy through exhaustion. Arguably, this self-appraisal provides the drive necessary to withstand dual-role demands. Accordingly, drawing on this reservoir can help participants establish a stable foundation to sustain academic buoyancy.

Nonetheless, receiving critical academic feedback can temporarily disrupt this sense of self-efficacy, making it harder for participants to maintain focused persistence. When past achievements are not easily applied to new requirements, confidence itself can decrease, probably. As P2 explains regarding a research challenge:

"I feel much more confident now because of my experiences at school. But when my proposals were turned down sometimes for lacking the academic depth, I started to doubt my capabilities [...] My past successes felt less relevant to this field [...] I felt hesitant to continue writing for a while because I was worried about making further mistakes."

Recognizably, this case shows that confidence does not always transfer smoothly into graduate research. When participants face unfamiliar academic standards, their self-efficacy loop can face disruption, indicating that ongoing support and clear guidance are helpful for maintaining academic buoyancy.

3.3. Institutional Resources: Policy Alignment and Structural Facilitation

Institutional resources are mentioned as structural "backbones" for participants' academic buoyancy. When graduate programs offer administrative flexibility, participants experience a lower level of depletion, converting supportive workplace policies into a "base" for steady academic buoyancy. Conversely, a lack of institutional coordination possibly creates administrative difficulties, requiring participants to put in extra effort to balance their responsibilities.

3.3.1. Administrative Flexibility, Schedule Adjustments, and Structural Support at School

The presence of supportive school leadership and flexible scheduling is considered a powerful resource that protects participants from depletion. School administrations that recognize the long-term value of personal development grant practical concessions, such as optimized timetables or relief from non-teaching duties. These adjustments provide participants with critical breathing room, allowing them to manage their dual workloads without reaching exhaustion. P2 describes:

"My principal was super supportive when I showed him my university admission letter, and he actually adjusted my teaching schedule so I don't have any classes on Friday afternoons. The school board also excused me from leading extra-curricular clubs this year, which saves me a lot of energy and gives me a clear head to attend my graduate education seminars."

P2 provides clear evidence of how workplace support underpins academic buoyancy. Adjusting the teaching schedule is deemed an intervention that blocks resource loss before burnout occurs. Lessening weekly demands

converts the school into a space accommodating academic pursuits. As P5 details:

"During the midterm exam week at the university, my department head allowed me to swap teaching shifts with a colleague so I could focus on my papers. Having an administration that does not strictly micromanage every hour of your day creates a safe professional environment where you can balance both roles without constant fear of failing."

Encouragingly, structural flexibility is deemed a vital factor in maintaining P5's stamina. When leadership accommodates the demands of graduate education, the unexpected shocks are prevented from disrupting teaching duties. This protection reduces anxiety, allowing participants to navigate evaluation periods with confidence.

Yet, such flexibility is not available to everyone, and some participants have to work under administrative conditions. When policies focus strictly on immediate school metrics, scheduling can become difficult for those pursuing higher degrees. P5 shares her observations of these difficulties:

"Before my schedule was adjusted, I had to work within a very rigid setting. The administration could not offer timetabling concessions, and I was given extra tasks during university exam weeks. Managing both duties without administrative flexibility meant I arrived at my graduate seminars late and tired. It made it much harder to focus on my studies."

This perspective reveals that academic buoyancy is highly linked to workplace support. When institutions cannot provide flexibility, participants face greater day-to-day challenges, showing that personal effort is most effective when supported by helpful institutional policies.

3.3.2. Curricular Alignment, Workplace Practicalities, and Research Integration Opportunities

When participants align their learning assignments with their actual teaching workload, their dual roles are transformed from competing stressors into mutually reinforcing activities. This curricular synergy eliminates the need for cross-domain resource division, allowing participants to use classrooms as laboratories for academic development. P4 discusses this alignment:

"I 'use' my students as the samples for my graduate education thesis on vocabulary learning strategies, which makes my research incredibly practical. My school gives me the room to try out these new teaching methods during my lessons. I am basically doing my homework while doing my job."

P4 confirms that resource investment in one domain yields dividends in another. Turning teaching duties into research opportunities protects P4 from the time exhaustion of independent research. This connection forms an efficient cycle where practice sustains long-term buoyancy. In another case, P3 emphasizes this connection:

"The professors encourage us to design lesson plans for our graduate assignments that we can actually use in our real teaching contexts the next morning. This direct connection makes the heavy workload feel way less exhausting. I have to confess!"

In this case, P3 states that curricular alignment minimizes cognitive fragmentation and saves energy. When graduate requirements solve classroom challenges, coursework is perceived as a valuable asset. This synergy eliminates duplicate labor, allowing participants to optimize resources and maintain stamina in both systems.

Unfortunately, this helpful alignment is sometimes difficult to achieve when participants must follow highly established curricula that offer little room for adjustment. P4 describes this limitation when discussing his early efforts to conduct research in his classrooms:

"I initially planned to integrate my thesis data collection into my classes, but the guidelines required very strict adherence to the standard textbook pages to prepare students for upcoming exams. Because I could not change daily lesson structures, I had to run my research separately on weekends [...] Honestly, this separation increased my overall workload and required a lot of extra time."

In P4's reflection, this example is a very "real" challenge in educational settings. While graduate programs encourage innovative methods, school requirements may focus on standardized pacing. This lack of alignment is more likely to keep the two roles separate, turning them into competing demands on participants' energy.

3.4. Socio-Cultural Resources: Confucian Values of Academic Buoyancy

Socio-cultural resources rooted in the Vietnamese tradition represent an essential external support system for academic buoyancy. Participants themselves do not manage their workloads in isolation as they draw severe psychological and operational endurance from the historical prestige of the teaching profession and the collective safety nets embedded within Asian familial structures. Nonetheless, these values can involve complex balances, as high expectations and family sacrifices can introduce a sense of personal responsibility and possible concerns.

3.4.1. Confucian Pedagogical Prestige, Societal Expectations, and Cultural Accountability

The reverence for teachers in the Vietnamese Confucian tradition is considered a powerful asset that drives participants to maintain their academic stamina. Within this cultural environment, the teaching profession is thought of as a moral calling, placing societal expectations on teachers to upgrade their knowledge. Confronted with dual-role exhaustion, participants redefine academic struggles as an obligation to preserve respect and honor their communities. P1 explains this cultural drive:

"In Vietnam, there is an old saying, 'Muon sang thi bac cau Kieu, muon con hay chu thi yeu lay thay' (If you want to cross the river, build a bridge; if you want your child to be literate, love the teacher). People in my neighborhood look at my neighborhood look at my graduate education with immense respect because I am a teacher. This cultural prestige creates a huge sense of accountability; I cannot allow myself to fail or show weakness, and that societal honor gives me a massive boost to stay buoyant when deadlines hit."

P1 showcases how cultural accountability can help protect his academic stamina. This prestige is deemed a resource that brings self-pride to his professional life. Instead of letting exhaustion weaken him, his high social standing turns fatigue into motivation. P3 shares a very similar perspective on using community expectations to overcome academic friction:

"Being a teacher while pursuing graduate education means the community looks at you as a role model of lifelong learning. When I feel like giving up due to my own exhaustion, I remember the deep respect that my students' parents show me every day, and I realize that my buoyancy is not just for myself, but for the collective honor of my school and my profession."

P3 confirms that societal expectations create internal strengths to stop resource loss. She changes her view of fatigue, seeing it as proof of her high social status. This mindset provides a steady supply of energy, helping participants handle heavy academic work with dignity.

However, very high cultural expectations can result in an internal sense of personal accountability, making participants hesitant to discuss difficulties openly. The desire to fulfill a professional ideal can lead individuals to minimize their fatigue in public. As P1 notes down:

"People around me express very high expectations regarding my studies. While it is encouraging, I hesitate to mention how difficult the deadlines are. I prefer to keep my struggles to myself to maintain a positive image. I think it makes the journey feel a bit isolating."

P1's reflection suggests that social prestige is, in some cases, a sense of responsibility. As participants feel that they must meet high standards, cultural accountability can lead them to manage their challenges quietly, highlighting the value of having informal spaces in which they can speak openly about their lived experiences.

3.4.2. Collective Filial Piety, Extended Family Networks, and Generational Resource Pooling

Domestic adjustments and structural compromises driven by Asian family solidarity are considered another cornerstone for sustaining participants' academic stamina under severe limitations. The cultural emphasis on col-

lective advancement ensures that participants' success is re-conceptualized as a shared project. Consequently, extended family networks willingly mobilize to absorb household duties, providing them with the time blocks required for graduate research. P5 reflects on this collective domestic support:

"In our culture, when one person enters graduate education, the whole family pitches in. My mother-in-law moved in with us to take over the daily cooking and childcare completely because she wants me to focus entirely on my thesis."

P5 further explains:

"My husband also handles all the heavy household chores without a single complaint; this collective family sacrifice is the only reason I can keep my head above water."

In this explanation, P5 states that family support helps lower daily stress and protects her academic stamina. This helps save her time and energy. With fewer household worries, she can focus her remaining mental strength entirely on her graduate education requirements. In another case, P4 shares a view about family compromises rooted in cultural values:

"We had to make compromises at home, like canceling family visits and redirecting our savings toward my university tuition. My parents and siblings treat my study hours as a sacred family investment, and unconditional backing removes a weight of guilt from my shoulders, allowing me to focus entirely on my assignments."

Recognizably, P4 reconfirms that family sacrifice protects him from his burnout. This backing is deemed a shield against exhaustion. Remarkably, by removing the clash between home duties and studying, family support gives him the stability needed to finish his graduate education.

Template to this dynamic, this reliance on family sacrifice leads to a so-called "debt", saddling participants with a sense of self-guilt that severely disrupts their academic focus. When family networks pool resources, some of these participants themselves bear a big obligation to succeed immediately, turning familial help into pressure. P4 is described as follows:

"My family is doing everything for me. So, seeing my parents redirect their savings and cancel their plans for my study hours fills me with "self-guilt". Every single hour which I spend on my thesis feels like a stolen moment from them [...] This emotional weight makes it difficult to focus on my research. I am constantly terrified that if my thesis gets rejected, I will have wasted their massive sacrifices. This backing creates an unbearable sense of debt to me. I say this with my honesty!"

P4's account balances the "idealized" story of generational resource pooling. When the psychological weight of family sacrifice outweighs its practical utility, the resulting guilt causes cognitive distraction. In this light, socio-cultural resources simultaneously protect and undermine participants' academic buoyancy.

4. Discussion

The empirical findings of this study offer a "localized" understanding of how participants sustain academic buoyancy while navigating the dual commitments of school teaching and graduate education. Through the lens of COR theory, participants develop buffers to secure their emotional stability and protect their career longevity. This resource management provides evidence that academic buoyancy is a continuously (re)negotiated process, which thrives via the alignment of individual determination and environmental scaffolding.

This (re)negotiation depends much on cultural structures dictating how one's assets are gathered and used within the Vietnamese educational environment. When participants face heavy workloads, their ability to remain buoyant relies on their access to what Hobfoll calls "environmental resource caravans." These caravans exist rooted in Confucian traditions and collectivist family networks. The data show that the historical prestige of the teaching profession exists as a very powerful social asset. Participants actively transform societal expectations into a steady

supply of internal motivation. They self-perceive fatigue as a meaningful sacrifice and a collective obligation to honor communities, schools, and families. Shifting to the domestic sphere, the collectivist structure of Vietnamese families enables a system of generational resource pooling. Family members willingly absorb domestic responsibilities to create uninterrupted study blocks for participants.

The primary theoretical novelty of this study lies in the use of COR theory to explore academic buoyancy. While traditional scholarship focuses on inherent personal characteristics, psychological traits, or individual self-regulation, this study introduces a re-conceptualization toward a resource-based model. By analyzing academic buoyancy through this theory, the current study reveals that remaining buoyant is an active, dynamic process of investment, protection, and replenishment of resource pools. This perspective adds a new layer to the literature asserting that buoyancy is an indispensable psychological barrier protecting language teachers [5–8] and supporting emotional regulation and well-being [8]. While higher buoyancy drives long-term career commitment [11] and predicts work engagement [12], this study expands these ideas by showcasing that participants secure well-being by anchoring daily efforts in future-oriented aspirations and outcome expectancy. This investment strategy converts current energy expenditure into future socio-professional capital. Furthermore, while current literature emphasizes the downstream benefits of academic buoyancy on learners [9,10,13], the current findings offer a reciprocal perspective.

Additionally, the theoretical novelty of this study lies in using COR theory to reveal the complex, non-linear ways resource domains exist within a particular ecology. Resources are independent assets with clear limits, and fatigue introduces a critical disruption to resource investment cycles. While cultural backgrounds and family ties in Vietnam provide very rich social assets, this study indicates that these resource caravans can serve as a double-edged sword with potentially complex trade-offs. As unremitting exhaustion overburdens participants, cultural expectations transform into a heavy burden of personal accountability. This also makes participants hesitant to discuss professional difficulties openly. Concurrently, collective family sacrifices create a source of pressure to achieve quick, immediate success as a form of repayment. Similarly, as institutional policies restrict classroom autonomy, individual self-regulation strategies encounter boundaries, and forced optimistic adjustments create pressure or self-criticism. Consequently, applying COR theory to academic buoyancy clarifies that resource caravans depend on structural support, as over-mobilization can paradoxically complicate internal processes.

These coupled insights offer substantial theoretical and practical implications for the broader educational system. Theoretically, the study broadens the use of COR theory by showing that academic buoyancy represents a dynamic process of resource management instead of a stable psychological disposition. The four identified resource domains, personal, psychological, institutional, and socio-cultural resources, clarify how participants invest, protect, and replenish their resources to navigate everyday academic adversities while balancing school teaching and graduate education. This resource-based model also provides a “localized” re-conceptualization of academic buoyancy in the Vietnamese context, with Confucian values and collectivist family structures serving as channels for longer-term resource accumulation.

Practically, the data indicate that fostering academic buoyancy requires coordinated efforts across multiple educational levels. At the school level, administrators should establish structural support systems that protect participants’ time and psychological resources by implementing flexible timetables, reducing non-teaching duties, and accommodating graduate education schedules during academic periods. Such measures prevent unnecessary resource depletion while enabling participants to maintain their academic buoyancy. At the higher education level, graduate education providers should strengthen the integration between coursework and participants’ practices by designing authentic assessments, encouraging classroom-based research, and aligning academic assignments with instructional contexts. Continuous development initiatives should further cultivate participants’ self-regulation, professional self-efficacy, optimistic thinking, and future-oriented career planning, as these personal and psychological resources underpin their academic buoyancy. Beyond institutional support, teacher education providers should recognize the value of socio-cultural resources by incorporating culturally responsive practices that acknowledge the historical prestige of the teaching profession and the collective values embedded in the Confucian tradition. Finally, educational policymakers should promote family-friendly policies and professional communities that enable participants to balance work, study, and familial responsibilities. Such multilevel interventions position academic buoyancy as an ecological outcome resulting from the interaction of personal buoyancy, institutional support, and socio-cultural resources.

In conclusion, this study shows that sustaining academic buoyancy in the demanding intersection of school teaching and graduate education requires a resource-rich support structure. The competence of participants to withstand heavy demands relies on grit, responsive institutional policies, and protective socio-cultural traditions. Recognizing academic buoyancy via a resource management lens underpins the need for targeted interventions.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, sustaining academic buoyancy at the intersection of school teaching and graduate education requires a comprehensive, resource-rich support structure. Participants' buoyancy to deal with demands relies on self-regulation, responsive institutional policies, and protective cultural traditions. Analyzing these dynamics via COR theory confirms that academic buoyancy is thought of as sustainable as contextual resource caravans, particularly those rooted in Vietnamese Confucian values, accelerate resource investment.

While this study adds valuable qualitative depth, several limitations remain. Geographically, the empirical focus is restricted to EFL teachers in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. It probably limits the applicability of such resource caravans to other regional, institutional settings. Methodologically, while the qualitative design offers conceptual depth, the identified resource domains warrant statistical validation. Furthermore, the data capture teacher experiences only during their graduate education, leaving their long-term professional trajectories unexplored. These constraints offer avenues for future research. Firstly, deploying longitudinal designs allows researchers to track how resource investment cycles evolve from initial enrollment to post-graduation. Secondly, future studies should use quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to statistically validate the resource domains identified in this study. Finally, comparative analyses, both across different geographical regions in Vietnam and within other Confucian-heritage contexts, are needed to isolate how contexts (re)shape EFL teachers' academic buoyancy.

Author Contributions

P.N.H. and L.H.P. contributed equally to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing the original draft. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and adhered to established standards for human subject research. Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, procedures, data collection protocols, and their right to withdraw at any stage and at any time.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations. Anonymized excerpts supporting the findings are included in the article. Additional information may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to ethical considerations.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT-4 solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically (re)reviewed and edited by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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