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Thai Female EFL Teachers' Professional Identity Negotiation after PhD: A Critical–Dialogical Self Approach

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Abstract: Teacher professional identity (TPI) has become central to understanding teachers' agency, emotions, and career development, yet existing studies remain largely Western-centric and overlook how gendered hierarchies shape identity in Asian higher education. Little research has examined how female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers with PhDs in Thailand negotiate their professional selves amid prestige-driven and patriarchal institutions. This study investigates how Thai female EFL teachers with PhDs negotiate professional identities within the intersecting pressures of teaching, research, gender expectations, and hierarchical academic systems. Adopting a critical–dialogical self approach that integrates dialogical self theory (DST) with a feminist perspective, we conceptualize teacher identity as dialogical, relational, and shaped by power-laden structures. Drawing on narrative inquiry supported by corpus-informed thematic analysis, life stories of two Thai female EFL academics were analyzed through the lenses of self-, other-, and structural positioning. Findings reveal hybrid "I-positions" (e.g., educator, mentor, supervisor-researcher) negotiated within institutional hierarchies that reward productivity but undervalue care work. Tensions of role overload, emotional labor, and neoliberal accountability shaped participants' self-efficacy and resilience. The study extends DST by theorizing professional identity as affective, relational, and structurally embedded, urging institutional policies that recognize hybrid roles and foster equitable, emotionally sustainable academic cultures in non-Western contexts.

Keywords: Teacher Professional Identity (TPI); Thai EFL Teachers; Critical-Dialogical Self Approach; Narrative Inquiry; Corpus-Informed Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

Teacher professional identity (TPI) is central to understanding teachers' work, learning, and career development. It is commonly defined as a meaning-making process through which teachers position themselves in relation to students, colleagues, institutions, and wider sociocultural discourses [1,2]. As a dimension of self-concept, TPI integrates values, motivations, and ethical orientations that shape how teachers respond to policy and professional demands [3,4]. Over recent decades, scholarship has shifted from static, trait-based notions to viewing TPI as dynamic and socially constructed, emerging through interactions among personal histories, institutional structures, and cultural expectations [5,6]. Yet much of this research remains Western-centric, with limited attention to how teachers in non-Western systems negotiate identity amid hierarchical cultures, gender norms, and prestige-driven institutional logics [7]. While studies on female academics in such contexts often highlight structural barriers such

as glass ceilings or promotion inequities [8–10], they rarely examine how women academics themselves dialogically negotiate their professional selves within and against these constraints.

Dialogical self theory (DST) [11, 12] has illuminated the multiplicity and fluidity of "I-positions" in teacher identity but has been critiqued for underplaying how power and gender shape which voices are legitimized or silenced [13,14]. Responding to this critique, Yazan [15] calls for dynamic, socio-politically aware identity models, and Yazan [16] further integrates intersectionality and affect, showing that teacher identity work is both emotional (confidence, motivation, anxiety) and structural. However, few studies combine these insights to explore women's identity negotiation within prestige-driven, patriarchal academic cultures such as Thailand's.

This study addresses that gap by examining how Thai female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers with PhDs negotiate professional identities across teaching, research, gendered expectations, and institutional hierarchies. It advances a critical-dialogical self framework integrating DST with feminist and intersectional perspectives to reveal how identity is co-constructed through internal meaning-making and power-laden cultural and institutional forces. By illuminating the emotional, structural, and cultural struggles shaping women's academic selfhood, this study informs teacher development and higher education policy, calling for mentoring systems, equitable workload models, and recognition of hybrid educator–researcher roles to support sustainable careers for female academics in non-Western contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Identity as a Dynamic Construct

TPI has increasingly been recognized as a dynamic, multifaceted, and dialogical construct rather than a fixed attribute of teachers. As Akkerman and Meijer [1] argue, TPI emerges through continuous negotiation between internal and external voices, shaped by both personal meaning-making and social interaction. Grounded in DST, their perspective highlights the interplay of multiple and sometimes contradictory "I-positions" that teachers occupy as their professional contexts evolve. Unlike static models such as social identity theory [17], this view frames identity as fluid, relational, and historically situated, adapting across career stages and shifting in response to values, expectations, and power relations [18]. Beijaard et al. [2] identified three interrelated dimensions of TPI: subject matter expertise, pedagogical competence, and interpersonal relations, but stressed that these are continuously renegotiated as teachers encounter changing classroom realities, institutional policies, and personal growth. Akkerman and Meijer [1] further describe TPI as a multiplicity of "I-positions", such as teacher, researcher, or mentor, which may conflict or harmonize depending on context. For example, an English language teacher may move between an "I as a nurturing instructor" and an "I as a rigorous researcher" depending on whether they are mentoring students or preparing publications [19,20]. These identity shifts are not random but socially and institutionally mediated, responding to policy reforms, evaluation systems, and cultural expectations [5,12].

For Thai female EFL teachers, this dynamism is further intensified by the intersection of gendered cultural norms, hierarchical institutional structures, and neoliberal academic pressures. These teachers often engage in constant balancing acts: sustaining personal beliefs about being caring educators and ethical mentors while responding to external pressures such as heavy teaching loads, key performance indicators, international publication demands, and unpaid service roles. This tension forces ongoing negotiation between self-defined professional ideals and structural constraints, making identity both a site of agency and adaptation and a response to power-laden contexts.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes TPI as a dynamic and relational sense of self produced through the interaction of gender factors, institutional structures, and cultural norms. It encompasses multiple intersecting roles, such as teacher, researcher, mentor, and caregiver, and is continuously reworked to maintain coherence while responding to shifting demands, values, and power relations [1,20]. This perspective informs the study's choice of a critical–dialogical self framework, which captures both the inner multiplicity of professional selves and the external gendered and institutional forces shaping how Thai female EFL PhDs negotiate their identities.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on DST to conceptualize TPI as a dynamic multiplicity of dialogical positions or "selves" that interact through ongoing internal and external dialogues [11]. DST emphasizes that individuals occupy and nego-

tiate sometimes contradictory "I-positions" (e.g., educator, researcher, mentor, or mother) which shift in response to social interaction and self-reflection [12,19,20]. Unlike static identity models, such as social identity theory [17], DST foregrounds identity as fragmented, fluid, and evolving, shaped simultaneously by personal agency and sociocultural structures. This dual focus on the intra-psychological (self-concept, cognition) and inter-psychological (social relations, institutional dynamics) dimensions makes DST well-suited for examining the complex, multi-voiced experiences of Thai female EFL teachers [21].

However, while DST provides a nuanced understanding of internal self-dialogue, it has been critiqued for insufficiently addressing the power-laden and gendered conditions under which these dialogues occur. Feminist scholarship shows that women in academia often navigate patriarchal organizational cultures and institutional practices that marginalize or undervalue their scholarly contributions [14,22]. Furthermore, intersectionality [13] reveals that these challenges are not singular but emerge from the entanglement of gender with cultural hierarchies, class expectations, and neoliberal academic pressures. For Thai female academics, these intersections are especially salient as they are frequently expected to act as dedicated teachers, family caregivers, and community contributors, roles that may conflict with institutional demands for research productivity and academic prestige [23].

To address this gap, the present study adopts a critical–dialogical self framework (**Figure 1**) that integrates DST with feminist and intersectional insights. This approach brings core DST concepts, such as I-positions, internal and external dialogue, and dynamic self-negotiation, into conversation with feminist understandings of gendered hierarchies, structural inequality, and institutional norms. The integration enables an analysis of identity that accounts for both agency and constraint, showing how participants actively reposition themselves while negotiating patriarchal cultural logics and productivity-driven academic systems [8,16].

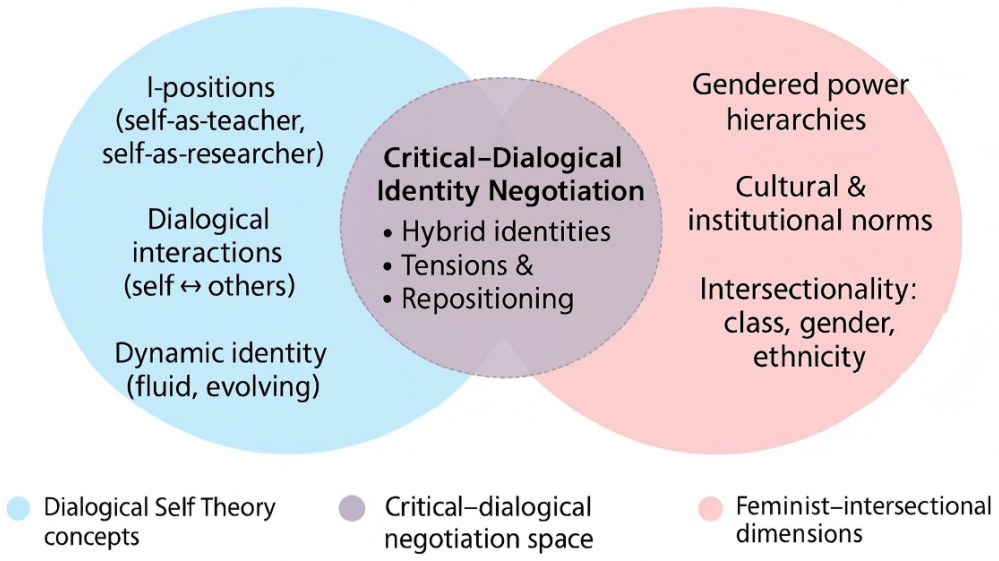

Figure 1. Critical-Dialogical Framework for Thai Female EFL Teachers' Identity Negotiation.

This framework integrates DST (blue) with feminist and intersectional analysis (red) to conceptualize how professional identities emerge at the intersection of internal dialogical positioning and external gendered and institutional constraints. The overlap (purple) represents the critical–dialogical negotiation space, where teachers construct hybrid identities, resist marginalizing structures, and strategically reposition themselves within hierarchical, gendered academic systems. In this framework, professional identity negotiation is conceptualized through three guiding lenses:

(1) Self-positioning ("Who am I?"): how teachers articulate multiple, sometimes conflicting, internal self-definitions.
(2) Other-positioning ("Who am I in relation to others?"): how they are recognized, challenged, or marginalized by colleagues, students, and academic networks.

(3) Structural positioning ("How do institutional and sociocultural structures position me?")—how broader power relations, gender norms, and academic hierarchies constrain or enable identity possibilities.

By explicitly merging dialogical and feminist–intersectional perspectives, this study captures TPI as both an inner process of meaning-making and a socially structured negotiation of power. This framework was chosen because it allows a richer, more contextually grounded understanding of Thai female EFL PhDs' identity work than either DST or feminist theory alone: DST illuminates the multiplicity and fluidity of "I-positions," while feminist and intersectional lenses expose the structural and cultural forces that limit recognition and advancement.

2.3. Related Studies

2.3.1. Cultural and Gendered Power Relations in EFL Teachers' Identity Negotiation

Research consistently shows that patriarchal traditions, collectivist cultural values, and caregiving expectations profoundly shape how women construct and perform professional identities in higher education. Acker's [22] feminist analysis remains seminal in exposing academia as a gendered organization that channels women into service and nurturing roles while undervaluing research leadership. Yet her theorization is grounded in Western institutional logics, offering limited insight into the culturally embedded hierarchies of Asian systems. Dang [9] provides a rare Southeast Asian account, narrating how Vietnamese women navigate invisible gendered barriers while balancing familial duties and academic ambition. However, her autoethnographic approach is highly individualized, leaving the inner multiplicity of the self undertheorized. Similarly, Liu et al. [24] broaden the East Asian perspective, showing how patriarchal caregiving norms and filial expectations constrain women's career advancement, but their analysis leans toward structural determinism, emphasizing external barriers over internal self-repositioning. Bao and Tian [10] extend this discourse by theorizing how recognition and identification intersect in Chinese women academics' pursuit of professorship. Their findings reveal that women internalize patriarchal academic norms and seek validation both as competent scholars and as socially acceptable women, yet this dual aspiration becomes self-limiting. The study identifies three structural "sticking points", such as lack of funding and networks, gendered career aspirations, and absence of role models, that reproduce male-dominated hierarchies and compel women to reshape their agency within restrictive institutional discourses. Crucially, Bao and Tian [10] conceptualize recognition not merely as external validation but as a performative process that simultaneously enables and constrains agency, situating women's career stagnation within the circular tension of desiring acceptance and resisting exclusion. In the Middle East, Alturki and Alharbi [8] show how Saudi female English teachers' agency is constrained by sociocultural norms, institutional hierarchies, and neoliberal productivity regimes. Yet their interpretive–structural approach does not conceptualize identity as a fluid, multi-voiced process, nor does it interrogate how prestige metrics and hierarchical recognition silence alternative professional narratives.

Collectively, this body of work confirms the persistence of gendered constraints but reveals a key gap: few frameworks fully integrate the inner positioning work of the self with the outer prestige-driven, patriarchal, and cultural power relations that validate or marginalize female academics' voices.

2.3.2. Institutional Demands and Hybrid Professional Roles

EFL teachers' professional identities are increasingly destabilized by contradictory institutional demands that compel them to navigate exhausting hybrid roles. Mirroring the "glonacal" (global–national–local) tensions observed by Dai and Hardy [25], teachers must balance locally responsive pedagogy with globally standardized research and curriculum expectations. For instance, while committed to students' linguistic and cultural needs, they are simultaneously pressured to publish in English-language journals or align teaching with frameworks.

Under neoliberal regimes, teachers face intensified accountability pressures that shape professional identities [26]; in practice, this often coincides with heavy teaching loads and publication demands without commensurate institutional support for research time, training or mentorship [27]." This mismatch creates a "hybridity gap," where teachers lack the structural and psychological means to integrate competing roles into a stable professional identity. The problem deepens in systems dominated by Western prestige metrics, as shown by Kuoppakangas et al. [28] and Schulze [29], which marginalize locally grounded teaching knowledge. Consequently, EFL educators experience epistemic injustice and increasing professional fragmentation. Köksal [30] captures this fragmentation through the notion of "nomadic identities," describing how teachers oscillate among roles of instructor, researcher,

and administrator. Yet such mobility often leads to burnout rather than empowerment. Dai and Hardy's [25] findings suggest that sustainable hybrid identities emerge only when institutions recognize and accommodate these tensions—through collaboration, mentorship, and flexible evaluation. For EFL teachers, this means fostering supportive ecosystems that value diverse contributions and contextual teaching excellence alongside research productivity. Without such structures, teachers remain "fragmented actors," struggling to reconcile the multiple, conflicting logics shaping their professional lives.

This literature underscores that neoliberal productivity regimes and poorly supported hybrid roles intensify identity conflicts for EFL academics, but current analyses often remain structural or psychological rather than connecting dialogical self-positioning with gendered power and prestige systems.

2.3.3. Emerging Dialogical and Critical Perspectives on Teacher Identity

Over the past decade, TPI scholarship has moved from static, role-based models toward relational, socio-politically attuned frameworks. Jiang [7] foregrounds teachers' beliefs and lived experiences but offers a largely descriptive account with limited engagement with power. Posada-Ortiz [31] uses decolonial narrative inquiry to show how pre-service teachers navigate acceptance, struggle, and resistance to imposed norms, yet does not apply a dialogical self perspective to theorize internal plurality. Yazan [15] explicitly calls for dynamic, socio-politically aware models of teacher identity, and Yazan [16] advances this through critical autoethnography, integrating intersectionality and emotional dimensions to show that identity work is both affective and structural. Yet even these theoretically rich studies stop short of combining DST with feminist–intersectional analysis, leaving unexplored how gendered prestige structures and hierarchical academic cultures shape the inner multi-voiced positioning of teachers.

Although prior research has advanced understanding of women's academic identities, significant gaps remain. Feminist studies reveal structural and cultural barriers but seldom examine the multi-voiced, inner negotiations women enact to sustain agency under constraint. Institutional analyses describe hybrid role conflicts yet lack a theoretical bridge linking these tensions to dialogical self-positioning and gendered prestige systems. Meanwhile, emerging dialogical and critical studies propose dynamic, power-aware models but have not fully integrated DST with feminist–intersectional perspectives to explain how prestige, culture, and institutional hierarchies shape female academics' internal identity construction.

This study responds by adopting a critical–dialogical self approach, extending DST beyond its psychological roots to interrogate how Thai female EFL teachers with PhDs negotiate hybrid professional identities within gendered, prestige-driven academic systems. This study, therefore, addresses the following questions:

(1) How do Thai female EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities after completing their PhDs?
(2) What tensions and challenges do they experience in these identity negotiation processes?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design integrating narrative inquiry with corpus-informed thematic analysis to examine how Thai female EFL teachers negotiate professional identity. Narrative inquiry was chosen because it frames identity as storied, relational, and socially situated, making it well-suited to foreground the voices of women navigating hierarchical, gendered academic systems [32,33]. Unlike variable-based approaches, it captures how participants construct and reinterpret their professional trajectories over time, revealing tensions between personal ideals and structural demands.

For Thai female academics working within prestige-driven, patriarchal, and collectivist contexts, narrative inquiry provides a rare space to articulate lived experience often muted by institutional discourse. It also aligns with the study's critical–dialogical self framework, which integrates DST with feminist and intersectional perspectives. This design enabled analysis of participants' self-positionings ("Who am I?"), relational negotiations ("Who am I in relation to others?"), and structural encounters ("How am I positioned by institutional norms?"), highlighting the multi-voiced and power-laden nature of identity work.

To enhance rigor, corpus-informed thematic analysis complemented narrative inquiry by systematically identifying recurrent linguistic patterns and thematic clusters, adding transparency and analytical depth while preserving

the rich, subjective meaning-making central to narrative research.

3.2. Participants

The study selected only two participants due to a combination of strict criteria, practical constraints, and the qualitative, in-depth nature of the research. Researchers employed purposive sampling to identify Thai female EFL teachers who had graduated from a single renowned Thai university with the most influential doctoral program in Applied Linguistics, ensuring their experiences directly aligned with the focus on identity negotiation over five years after obtaining a PhD. Participants were selected due to the combination of the strict criteria, practical constraints, and the in-depth qualitative nature of the research. A purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants based on the following criteria: (1) they obtained their PhDs in applied linguistics from the same Thai university in the same year of 2017, ensuring their doctoral experiences directly aligned with the focus on identity negotiation over eight years after PhD; (2) they have been actively engaged in research (evidenced by publications accessible via Google Scholar); (3) they are currently teaching at Thai universities on government contract, and willing to share detailed insights into their professional journeys. Practical limitations, such as the scarcity of graduates with publicly trackable research outputs and the availability of candidates willing to commit to the study's demands, further narrowed the pool. Ultimately, only two Thai female EFL teachers were involved in this study, May and Tina, both in their mid-forties and employed at government universities on contractual terms. May has 22 years of teaching experience, while Tina has 23 years, reflecting long-standing careers in Thai higher education. Both participants completed their doctoral degrees and currently teach English in faculties where research output is increasingly emphasized alongside traditional teaching duties. Their employment at government universities situates them within institutions that are simultaneously influenced by global academic productivity metrics and deeply rooted Thai hierarchical and collectivist values. Their contractual status, rather than permanent tenure, also reflects a precarious employment landscape for many female academics in Thailand, which can intensify identity negotiations and limit institutional agency. Together, May and Tina provide rich, longitudinal perspectives on how experienced female EFL educators with PhDs navigate complex professional roles, balancing teaching, research, and gendered cultural expectations in a competitive academic environment.

3.3. Researchers' Role and Influences

The researchers' backgrounds and relationships played an important role in shaping this study. As doctoral siblings graduated from the same PhD program in Thailand, the two researchers share both personal and professional connections closely with the two participants, giving them valuable insider insight into the lived realities of Thai female academics. The first researcher was in the same cohort as May and Tina during the PhD study and later worked in Thailand while maintaining close personal and professional contact with them. This long-term relationship fostered trust and openness, enabling the collection of rich and candid narratives. The second researcher, three years younger in academic experience, has been teaching at a Thai university since graduation and has contributed contemporary insights into current institutional dynamics and the expectations placed on female PhDs. While this insider status facilitated Insightful cultural and professional understanding, it also required deliberate reflexivity to mitigate potential bias. Both researchers engaged in reflexive journaling and peer debriefing to maintain analytical rigor and balance empathy with critical distance throughout the research process.

3.4. Data

Qualitative data were collected through narrative interviews [34], conducted online via Zoom with each participant. Each session, conducted in English since both participants and researchers are English EFL teachers, and they usually communicated in English during their doctoral study in the same program of applied linguistics. May's session lasted about 90 min, and Tina's session lasted around 70 min, and were audio-recorded with participant consent (see **Appendix A** for the list of interview questions and **Appendix B** for the consent form).

Data were transcribed by the second researcher and cleaned by both researchers to exclude redundantly repeated words or phrases. Finally, 11,400 words from May's session and 8850 words from Tina's session were generated. The transcripts were sent to the participants for member checking via email to verify the accuracy of their contributions and confirm their consent to how their data is represented. It enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the research by ensuring the data aligns with participants' intended meanings. All names are

pseudonyms.

The relatively small size of the dataset is methodologically appropriate and sufficient for this study's aims. In narrative and life-history research, it is common to work with one to three participants, each contributing 5000–10,000 words of transcript, when the goal is to generate rich, thick description rather than statistical generalization [33,35]. In this study, the two participants together produced approximately 21,000 words across interviews lasting more than an hour each. Such depth aligns with the principles of narrative inquiry, which values coherence, context, and meaning-making over sample size. Additionally, the use of member checking and reflexive analysis enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, compensating for the limited number of participants. This focus on depth over breadth is particularly suitable for exploratory research aimed at understanding the complex professional identity negotiations of an underexplored group rather than producing broadly generalizable findings.

3.5. Corpus-Informed Thematic Analysis

This study employed a corpus-informed thematic analysis to examine the participants' narratives, integrating computational linguistic tools with qualitative interpretive techniques to enhance both analytical rigor and depth of insight. The approach involved two complementary stages: (1) keyness-based keyword analysis to surface salient linguistic patterns; and (2) reflexive thematic analysis to interpret these patterns within the critical–dialogical self framework. The integration of corpus-informed keyword analysis with reflexive thematic analysis strengthened the study's methodological robustness. The computational keyword analysis provided an objective, frequency-based overview of salient lexical patterns, such as the prominence of terms related to workload, recognition, and contractual status, helping to surface patterns that might otherwise be overlooked. The subsequent reflexive thematic interpretation allowed the researchers to situate these patterns within personal meaning-making processes, cultural norms, and gendered power relations. This triangulation of computational and interpretive lenses enhanced validity and transparency, demonstrating how linguistic salient features in the transcripts were meaningfully connected to participants' lived experiences and theoretical framings.

3.5.1. Keyness-Based Keyword Analysis

To identify salient lexical patterns, the verbatim interview transcripts were compiled and preprocessed (tokenizing, lemmatizing, and cleaning text). The British National Corpus (BNC) served as the reference corpus to detect words and multi-word expressions significantly overrepresented in the participants' narratives compared with general English usage [36,37]. Using the corpus analysis software AntConc 4.3.1 [38], word frequency lists were compared to the BNC word list to calculate keyness scores (Odds Ratio and Log-Likelihood Ratio). This process highlighted terms strongly associated with participants' accounts of professional life (e.g., researcher, teaching load, recognition, mentor, contractual). Clusters of related keywords were then examined to identify initial thematic directions, such as nurturing supervisor roles, struggles for research recognition, and precarious employment.

3.5.2. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Building on the keyword clusters generated through corpus analysis, the study employed reflexive thematic analysis [39] to explore how participants made sense of their professional identities within the critical–dialogical self framework. The analytic process was intentionally hybrid, combining both deductive and inductive strategies to ensure theoretical depth and responsiveness to the data.

Familiarization and Initial Coding

Both researchers began by immersing themselves in the data, listening to the audio recordings, reading the verbatim transcripts repeatedly, and writing analytic memos to capture early reflections on tone, emotion, and key identity tensions. Deductive codes were drawn from DST, such as self-positioning (how participants defined their roles), other-positioning (how they perceived others' expectations), and structural positioning (how gender and institutional hierarchies shaped identity possibilities). Inductive coding was used to capture unanticipated issues emerging directly from the narratives.

Theme Development and Refinement

Initial codes were then clustered into candidate themes such as hybrid academic roles, gendered caregiving expectations, and institutional precarity. Themes were reviewed and refined through iterative comparison, en-

suring internal coherence and clear boundaries. For instance, codes related to balancing heavy teaching with research and being positioned as a supportive service worker rather than an autonomous scholar were integrated into the broader theme of nurturing academic selves under gendered expectations. These themes were subsequently mapped back to the critical–dialogical self approach, illuminating how internal identity negotiations intersect with external gendered hierarchies and institutional demands (see **Figure 2** for a coding flowchart with extracted exemplars).

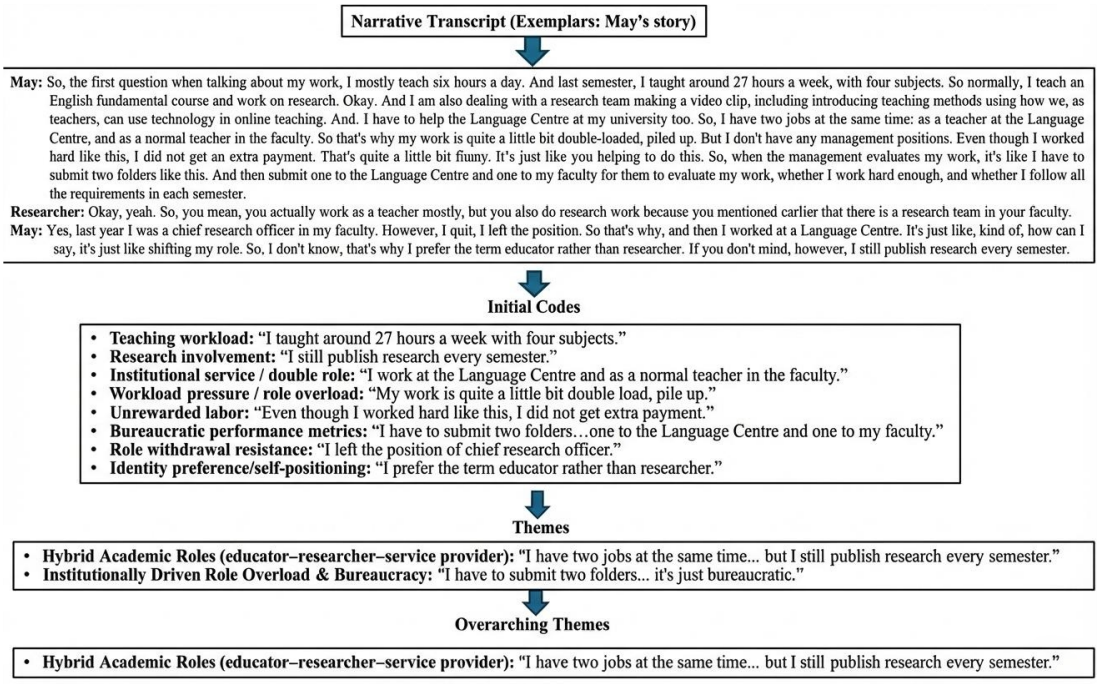

Figure 2. Coding flowchart with exemplars.

Reliability and Reflexivity

To strengthen trustworthiness, both researchers independently coded 25% of the transcripts and compared their coding. Cohen's Kappa (κ) was calculated to measure inter-rater agreement, yielding a coefficient of 0.84, which indicates substantial agreement [40]. Any coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved through peer debriefing, and a shared codebook was finalized before collaboratively coding the remainder of the data. Given the researchers' insider positionalities (shared academic histories and personal ties with participants), reflexive journaling and critical dialogue were integral throughout the analysis. These practices helped maintain analytical rigor, balance empathy with critical distance, and minimize potential bias.

3.6. Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, multiple strategies were employed, including member checking, triangulation of data sources, and reflective journaling by the researcher [35]. Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate interpretations [41]. During the analysis phase, the narratives were re-examined to uncover the participant's deeper intention. To ensure participant involvement, participants were asked to review data analysis, offering insightful feedback that played a key role in refining the findings. This collaborative analysis strengthens the credibility of the research outcomes by integrating participant perspectives directly into the analytical process.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized, including informed consent and the use of pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality [35]. The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and institutional guidelines for human participant research. Participants were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, and potential risks

at the commencement of this research.

4. Findings and Interpretations

Guided by the two research questions: (1) *How do Thai female EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities after completing their PhDs?* and (2) *What tensions and challenges do they experience in these identity negotiation processes?* This section presents the findings derived from the corpus-informed thematic analysis of narrative interviews with May and Tina. The results are organized to reflect how each participant's story illustrates the interrelated processes of self-positioning, other-positioning, and structural positioning within the critical–dialogical self framework. Through these analytical lenses, the findings are presented and interpreted case by case, revealing how both participants construct hybrid and fluid professional identities while negotiating institutional hierarchies, gendered expectations, and prestige-driven performance regimes. Each case is therefore presented not merely as a personal narrative but as an illustration of how Thai female EFL PhDs dialogically navigate their professional selves across emotional, relational, and structural dimensions.

4.1. May's Case

4.1.1. Keyness in May's Narratives

Table 1 presents keywords from May's narratives, highlighting her identity negotiation between being a researcher (e.g., "research," "PhD") and being a teacher (e.g., "teacher," "semester"). The identified contents keywords are based on log-likelihood (LL) with the corresponding excerpts based on the concordance lines, which uncovers more general and common words. In contrast, **Table 2** presents the generated content keywords based on odds ratio (OR) analysis, which highlights lower-frequency words that are more specialized and specific to a target corpus. It suggests that May's professional identity negotiation is more influenced by interpersonal factors (e.g., "graduation", "inspirations") from an interpersonal perspective. However, words like "novice", "workplace", "evaluation", and "manipulation" are particularly worthy of exploring as they might be related to institutional and sociocultural factors, which call for the ensuing in-depth qualitative exploration of her storied experiences.

Table 1. Keywords in May's narratives describing aboutness (BNC; LL).

Rank	Keywords	Freq.	Freq. BNC	Keyness (LL)	Excerpts (Based on Concordance Lines)
1	I	593	877,833	1375.74	… But I leave all my extra work because I want to get an academic title and get Scopus publications
2	research	70	26,893	337.48	'I gave my colleague consultation for, how can I say, she asked for research advice on how her research can be completed…'
3	my	124	146,745	336.63	After my PhD graduation, I followed my dream to do whatever I wanted to do.
4	researcher	27	981	255.19	Within eight months, I got promoted to be chief researcher in the research and development office… it gave me a chance to improve myself to become like a research mentor for the new researcher.
5	semester	16	39	232.20	Thai cultural festival, at least five festivals a semester, and fire festivals per semester. I have to complete at least four assignments in each semester as community cultural work.
6	PhD	202	6672	209.88	…of them is that I want to continue doing research because of my PhD siblings.
7	teacher	33	9290	178.98	About my position, my boss said, I have to be a language teacher. But my specialty is innovation and technology.
8	myself	33	12,000	162.60	… But I joined the national level, which means that I developed myself differently.

Table 2. Keywords in May's narratives describing aboutness (BNC; OR).

Rank	Keywords	Freq.	Freq. BNC	Keyness (OR)	Excerpts (Based on Concordance Lines)
1	graduation	4	177	254.51	After my PhD graduation, I followed my dream to do whatever I wanted to do. To be a specialist in what field? I don't know. But I know that being a specialist in terms of Applied Linguistics, text analysis, language testing, or whatever, is still making headway.
2	workplace	1	46	234.75	In my workplace, it is a small, local university. I can, I mean, I could apply for a better place.
3	inspiration	1	48	234.55	I attended the webinar, TAAL, the Thai Association of Applied Linguistics. I use a kind of inspiration from my colleagues and PhD friends.
4	novice	6	438	154.31	I saw myself as a novice teacher here because I have worked here for only two years.
5	evaluation	1	73	154.22	I got an evaluation of my academic performance of more than 90% every semester. I publish three to four papers. I also became a committee member. I also got research awards. So, wasn't I working hard enough?
6	manipulation	1	100	112.58	It was a kind of power manipulation or a kind of power harassment in some way.

4.1.2. Stories of May

Self-Positioned as an Educator

After her PhD, May found herself loaded with work at her university. Despite being involved in research projects, May preferred to identify as an "educator" rather than a researcher or teacher. Looking back on her lived experience, to our surprise, May did not see herself as a teacher or a researcher due to the nature of the job and the scope of the subject matter. In her mind, she positioned herself as more of an educator. As she recollected:

Researcher: Okay, yeah. So, you mean your typical day, you actually work as a teacher mostly, but you also do research work because you mentioned earlier, there is a research team in your faculty.

May: Yes, last year I was a chief research officer in my faculty. However, I quit, I left the position, and then I worked at a language centre. It's just like shifting my role. So, I prefer the term educator rather than researcher. If I still have a position as a chief researcher, I mean, if I become a chief, then I can say that I'm a strong researcher, but right now, I work on innovations and education technology. So that's why I picked the word educator rather than teacher.

The excerpt reflects the theme "Self-positioned as an educator" because it demonstrates May's conscious decision to define her professional identity beyond the traditional labels of "teacher" or "researcher." Her deliberate shift in role is manifested by her explicit statement saying that she left her position as a chief research officer and transitioned to working at a language centre, which she describes as a shift in role. This transition marks a redefinition of her professional identity, aligning more with the broader role of an educator rather than a researcher or a subject-specific teacher. Meanwhile, her narratives create a distinction between researcher and educator: May acknowledges that if she were still a chief researcher, she could call herself a "strong researcher", but since she now works on innovations and educational technology, she prefers the term educator. This distinction highlights that she sees education as a holistic practice that goes beyond conducting research or teaching specific subjects. The phrase "I prefer the term educator rather than researcher" shows May's intentional effort to define her own professional identity based on how she perceives her contributions. By choosing "educator," she asserts an identity that encompasses multiple roles—teaching, innovation, and research—without being confined to just one category. In brief, this excerpt reflects the theme "Self-positioned as an educator" because it captures May's intentional shift in professional identity, her distinction between different academic roles, and her preference for a broader, more holistic educational engagement. She defines herself not by institutional labels but by the impact and nature of her work in education and innovation.

Other-Positioned as an Inspirer

At the time of the interview, May had been at her university for three years. Overall, it is a bittersweet experience for her. On a positive note, she knows her academic strengths, recognises the value of conducting research, and takes pride in her research achievements as a novice. Strikingly, in the course of working with others, she discovered that she was positioned as a role model. She recalled,

May: …The master's degree student. She was with me. And she is also in my research team. She got accepted into the PhD programme in New Zealand already? (wow)

Researcher: Yeah. But she is not ready to go there. Because, you know, it's kind of, you know, self-funded.

May: She will start by the end of this year, as far as I know. And she's gonna apply for the scholarship in New Zealand. Whenever you ask me about what I'm proud of. It's not about my own achievement only. But it is because I work with others, and I push them to go forward. One of them is (XXX). I mean, she was with me. And even right now, she also thanks me. She, I mean, she always thanked me for pushing her. We went to university every week, to work on research, keep writing, and reviewing. I also commented on her proposal, and she did not stop there. She keeps working on research. Because of doing research, it's just like she said that I was her role model. I inspired her indirectly. She said she just wanted to continue her PhD. So, whenever you ask me about what I'm proud of, it's not about my achievements only. It is I who push them to go forward. Although it's not necessarily about my role, I can help encourage others to succeed in that job and follow their dream. That's why I'm so proud of them.

Researcher: Yeah. You are feeling so proud of her, actually, right? As her team partner.

May: Not only that, but I know she's going to succeed because she worked really hard. I commented on her proposal, and she also did not stop. I mean, she did not stop only at that. But she keeps working on research. And sometimes she works with me. Sometimes she works with XXX. Sometimes she worked with XXX. Because of doing research, it's just like she said that I was her role model. I inspire her indirectly. So, she said that she just wants to continue her PhD.

Researcher: We need to add another question. Actually, you give, like, some information we didn't expect. That is great. You are not just doing research, you are inspiring people to do research. So we have to create another term.

Researcher: Being an educator, being a researcher, being kind of an enlightener?

The excerpt reflects the theme "Other-positioned as an inspirer" because it highlights how May is perceived by others as a motivating force in their academic and professional journeys. This positioning is evident through the recognition she receives from others, her active role in supporting her peers, and her focus on collective success rather than personal achievement. First, May is explicitly recognized as an inspiration by her research partner, who acknowledges her role in providing motivation and support. Statements such as "She always thanks me for pushing her" and "She said that I was her role model. I inspired her indirectly" illustrate how others see her as a guiding figure. This recognition is not self-proclaimed but comes from external validation, reinforcing the idea that her influence extends beyond her personal view of her role. In addition to being recognized, May actively engages in mentorship by offering academic guidance and support. Her involvement is evident in her commitment to working alongside her peers: "We went to university every week, to work on research, keep writing and reviewing," and "I also commented on her proposal, and she did not stop there." Rather than merely serving as a passive inspiration, she plays an active role in mentoring, guiding, and pushing others toward academic growth. Her continuous engagement in collaborative research and knowledge-sharing demonstrates that her impact is hands-on and sustained. May's sense of pride is not solely derived from her own achievements but from the success of those she has supported. She states, "Whenever you ask me about what I'm proud of, it's not about my achievement only. It is that I push them to go forward." This statement underscores her focus on collective progress rather than individual recognition. Her identity as an inspirer is shaped by her investment in the development of others, highlighting her commitment to fostering academic growth within her community. In short, this excerpt reflects the theme "Other-positioned as an inspirer" by showcasing how May is perceived by others as a source of encouragement, guidance, and academic motivation. Through external recognition, active mentorship, and her focus on collective success, May's professional identity and influence are positioned as inspiring and instrumental in pushing others toward achieving their academic goals.

Institution-Imposed as a Freedom Pursuer

May's narrative below illustrates an institutionally imposed paradox of freedom: while positioned as a capable academic expected to meet productivity targets, she is simultaneously constrained by rigid hierarchies, prestige logics, and politicized control.

May: No publication, and then after you work for five years, then you're just you know, in my university, if you don't get an academic title in five years, then you get fired, you know, right? Yeah. But for me, I don't care about that, because I work really hard each semester. I prepare myself for, I know, what my goal is. And I know that I plan this year, for example, the first year I will go to the national level. This year, the second year, I'm going for the Scopus level, something like that. It's just like pushing me forward. I thank all of them that they listen to me. We are not competitors. But because I contacted them. I talked to them. And I realised my own, what I really want to do. It is a kind of positive force for you directly. For example, everyone has got their own problems even in their own workplace or whatever situation. But you know, right, in one way I know that they did that best. And I learned to accept that. I learned to understand each person better, and I want to be like that. That's how I came up with my own answer. I want to be modest. I want to be polite. I want to treasure my own academics. It's just like kind of aspect, and my asset is my colleagues, my supervisors. It's not about a kind of strong relationship as a friendship or something like that. But it depends in terms of my academic ethics or something. I don't know how you can say that. It's kind of at that time staying together, and after graduation, we still contact each other. It really helps me a lot in terms of adjusting myself to work as a university teacher and as a researcher at my university. Okay. Let me tell you one thing. Someone in a higher position, he told me, Ajarn OM, I want you to be a language teacher, not a specialist in technology.

Researcher: You are specialised in technology. They just easily ignored that you have a PhD in applied linguistics.

May: So I said, Okay, you know, right, if you say yes or if you say no, it's going to resolve your relationship, or maybe you've got a kind of political issue. Okay. I am just trying to. So in the end, I just What? Do I have to? Do I have to follow what I want to do? Do I have to follow them something like that? No…I need a kind of academic freedom. I want to do what I really want to do, not something like Ajarn May, throw it away, I want you to be a language teacher only. It's stupid. But that really happened in Thailand in my university too. And that person in the higher position asked me to write a paper for him, so that he could get an associate professor position.

First, May's defiance of institutional constraints is evident in her response to the five-year academic title requirement. The university enforces high-stakes benchmarks, such as obtaining an academic title within five years under threat of dismissal, yet May resists internalizing this mandate, stating, "But for me, I don't care about that… I know what my goal is." Instead of succumbing to fear of job insecurity, she charts her own trajectory, planning a progression from national to Scopus-indexed publications. This deliberate self-direction reveals the constant balancing act between survival in a system driven by rankings and metrics and the desire to maintain scholarly autonomy. Her stance underscores how institutional structures simultaneously demand productivity while restricting how female academics define success. Second, May frames her professional journey as a personal mission rather than a competition. She states, "We are not competitors... I realised my own, what I really want to do." This suggests that instead of conforming to institutional demands, she relies on her own academic ethics and values, shaping her career on her terms. She expresses gratitude for her research community and mentors, reinforcing that her academic freedom is fostered through intellectual collaboration rather than institutional directives. Moreover, May explicitly rejects imposed professional labels and restrictions set by institutional authorities. When a person in a higher position insists, "I want you to be a language teacher, not a specialist in technology", May resists, questioning whether she should comply or follow her own aspirations. Her decisive stance, "No... I need a kind of academic freedom. I want to do what I really want to do", illustrates her firm rejection of external control over her career identity. By resisting the institutional attempt to confine her to a singular role, she asserts her right to self-determination in shaping her professional path. Lastly, May exposes the unethical power dynamics within the institution, highlighting how those in higher positions manipulate the system for personal gain. She recounts an incident where a superior demanded that she write a paper for him to secure an academic promotion. This situation reinforces the idea that institutional structures can be restrictive and exploitative, compelling her to resist and forge her own academic journey rather than succumbing to hierarchical pressures.

May's narrative also reflects tensions arising from institutional politics and unethical academic practices. She criticized how research team contributions were unfairly recognized: *"Most teachers didn't do anything. They just put their name in."* Furthermore, she resisted institutional pressures that attempted to control her research contributions:

"Another person in a higher position said to remove my name and add another person… I didn't care about that. I knew I had the right to choose."

She also described how powerholders attempted to exploit her labor by requesting that she write papers to secure their promotions and pressured her to remove her own authorship: *"I knew I had the right to choose… I still put my head high and maintain my research ethics."* These encounters expose how prestige-driven academic systems marginalize women's voices while rewarding conformity and patronage. In conclusion, this excerpt reflects the theme "Institution-positioned as a freedom pursuer" because it demonstrates May's persistent effort to carve out her own academic space despite institutional pressures. Her resistance to rigid academic expectations, rejection of imposed roles, and insistence on intellectual autonomy illustrate her commitment to navigating academia on her own terms rather than being confined by institutional constraints.

4.2. Tina's Case

4.2.1. Keyness in Tina's Narratives

Table 3 illustrates the identified contents keywords based on log-likelihood (LL) with the corresponding excerpts based on the concordance lines, which uncovers more general and common words, showing that the about-

ness Tina's professional development over five years after PhD is more being a teacher (e.g., students, programme, undergrad) than being a researcher (e.g., research, PhD). In contrast, the generated content keywords based on odds ratio (OR) in **Table 4** draw attention to terms with lesser frequency that are more specialized and particular to a target corpus. Keywords such as "logistics," "TAAL", "collaboration," and "advisor" highlight institutional expectations shaping her identity. Particularly, words like 'reputation' and 'evaluation' can be associated with institutional and sociocultural factors, which call for the subsequent in-depth qualitative investigation of her storied experiences.

Table 3. Keywords in Tina's narratives describing aboutness (BNC; LL).

Rank	Keywords	Freq.	Freq. BNC	Keyness (LL)	Excerpts (Based on Concordance Lines)
1	research	59	26,893	402.78	So, I keep doing the research, but instead of doing research for myself, it is just doing research with the students and doing the research for them.
2	I	161	877,833	343.55	After I graduated, I was still interested in doing research. I prefer researching to teaching
3	students	38	14,564	272.43	… I need to research a lot with my students, even though I'm a supervisor, but you know, they're just undergrad students, they can't do the research by themselves.
4	me	31	131,658	79.63	I consider myself a researcher, okay…hahaha…because I have a passion in me.
5	programme	13	18,455	59.90	'I'm not only working as a teacher but also the head of the programme.
6	undergrad	3	1	58.65	I think I feel better when I see my students and when I get feedback from the participants at an international conference. When they found out that the presenter is only an undergrad.
7	PhD	5	301	54.20	If you look at the number of PhDs in our faculty, you will see that the number is low. I'm the only one in the programme who got a PhD…
8	my	25	146,745	50.22	I need to research a lot with my students, as I'm a supervisor, you know, they're just undergrad students, they can't do the research by themselves.

Table 4. Keywords in Tina's narratives describing aboutness (BNC; OR).

Rank	Keywords	Freq.	Freq. BNC	Keyness (OR)	Excerpts (Based on Concordance Lines)
1	logistics	1	1	111747.70	'I teach English for logistics. So, I don't just teach them the language of the logisticians, but I teach them, and I applyy AntConc, for example, and let them be the researchers themselves…'
2	TAAL	2	5	14894.14	'I have the responsibility for taking care of the TAAL Facebook page. And I learn many things… I have to learn how to upload and write the content. and post everything. So, I learn new things and meet new people. I think it helps me to be in the academic environment.'
3	collaboration	1	57	653.01	'I don't have much collaboration with my colleagues at the university.'
4	researching	4	311	479.27	I prefer researching to teaching… that's why I asked to be a lecturer of the research subject of the research course, and it's not a must that I have to, you know, to set the objective of my course, for the students to complete and write the research articles.
5	advisor	1	199	187.04	'I have to teach and be responsible for the course and for the students…I have one batch of students, and I also have to be their advisor…'
6	reputation	1	204	182.46	'When the students get published or present their research at an international conference, we will get, you know, it's a reward. Students get the reward and bring the programme a reputation. Yeah, so it's a win-win.'
7	evaluation	1	217	171.53	'…it's one of our criteria, as for evaluation. So, we need to do research; at least the minimum is that they have to do research, one research a year, and we have to get it published at least in the international proceedings.

4.2.2. Stories of Tina

Self-Positioned as a Supervisor-Researcher

Looking back on her trajectory after her PhD, Tina acknowledged that her "passion" for doing research was rooted in her professional life. However, different from the normative notion of a researcher, Tina conceived herself as a supervisor-researcher, as evidenced below.

Researcher: Oh, okay. So that means after your PhD study, you don't really consider yourself as a researcher, right? It's more like you are a teacher.

Tina: I consider myself a researcher because I have a passion in me. But I need to research a lot with my students as a supervisor, you know, they're just undergrad students. They can't do research by themselves. So, it has to be me who guides them. They might come to me and show me their areas of interest. But I have to be the one who gives them clear guidelines. So, I need to read the research articles to do a literature review and find a concrete way for them to do research. I consider myself a researcher. It's also because I let the students do the research on other subjects. I mean, for example, I teach English for logistics. So, I don't just teach them the language of the logisticians, but I teach them, I applied AntConc, for example, and let them be the researchers themselves. I mean, they have to use AntConc to analyse the language of, you know, a specific context.

The excerpt reflects the theme "Self-positioned as a supervisor-researcher" because Tina explicitly frames her role as both a researcher and a supervisor who actively guides her students in the research process. Tina identifies herself as a researcher because she has a passion for research and takes an active role in the research process, particularly by guiding students. She emphasizes that undergraduate students are not yet capable of conducting independent research, so it is her responsibility to provide guidance and structure. This positions her as both a researcher and a mentor, actively involved in shaping her students' research skills. Meanwhile, Tina acknowledges that she guides students through the research process, from literature review to finding concrete ways to conduct research. This highlights her supervisory role as she supports her students' research projects, blending her own research responsibilities with her duty as a supervisor. Additionally, by introducing AntConc, a tool used for language analysis, Tina not only teaches language but also encourages students to engage in research themselves. This reflects her role as a supervisor-researcher, where she both conducts research and encourages students to conduct research in applied contexts. It is this intentional act that further elucidates what a researcher's identity means to Tina. Thus, this excerpt justifies the theme "Self-positioned as a supervisor-researcher" because Tina sees herself as both conducting research and leading students through the research process, integrating her research passion with her supervisory responsibilities.

Self-Positioned as a Mother-Figure Researcher

As Tina's narratives unfold, her feeling of being "proud" has become an essential part of doing research. However, different from what we perceive, this self-acclaimed pride does not have a bearing on her research but originates from the collaboration with her students. She explained,

Researcher: What made you feel proud of your role as a researcher?

Tina: One thing that I'm very proud of is that I have a chance to do many research projects with my students. I think it makes me so proud because when you do research, you know, you do want to do high-quality research to get published in international journals. I know someone might think that it's an excuse, but for me, I think I'm happier, or I feel better when I see my student…and when I get the feedback from the participants at an international conference saying that the presenter is only an undergrad. I feel proud of myself, like a mother. So sometimes I feel envy for some people who have time to do their own research and get published, you know, with their names on it. But for me, it's not only the name. I just feel the moment when my students finished presenting their work at conferences, and other people who were surprised and praised them by saying "Wow, you are just an undergrad". Most of the time, they didn't understand the questions from the audience, or they didn't know how to answer the questions. But after conferences, they said that they felt proud of themselves, and that made me feel proud of myself.

The above excerpt paints a picture of how Tina negotiates a motherly facet of her researcher self because Tina describes her role in a way that emphasizes a nurturing and supportive aspect of being a researcher, especially in her relationship with students. Tina takes pride in the research projects she conducts with her students, highlighting that her role extends beyond conducting research for personal gain. Instead, she positions herself as a mentor and guide, supporting her students in presenting their work at international conferences. This suggests she is emotionally invested in their development and success, much like a mother figure would be in the growth and achievements of her child. Tina expresses greater pride in seeing her students succeed, particularly when they receive praise for their work at international conferences, than in her own individual accomplishments. She compares her pride to that of a mother, saying, *"I feel proud of myself, like a mother."* This emotional fulfilment from witnessing her students' success underscores the mother-figure role she embraces, where her satisfaction comes from nurturing and supporting others rather than focusing on her own academic accolades. Tina acknowledges a feeling of envy towards others who can focus on their own research, but emphasizes that her satisfaction comes from seeing her students grow and gain recognition. This suggests she places her students' development above her personal academic ambitions, reinforcing the self-sacrificial and nurturing characteristics of a mother-figure. In brief, the excerpt reflects the theme "Self-positioned as a mother-figure researcher" because Tina negotiated her role as that of a nurturing guide and researcher, prioritizing her students' growth and success over her personal achievements, and deriving pride from their accomplishments rather than her own.

Other-Positioned as an Advisor

When inquired about the research environment at her workplace, Tina recounted the reasons why she served in an advisory role to her colleagues.

Researcher: Like, for example, you want to do particular research and you need people, maybe your staff or your colleagues, to support you. Are they cooperative? Are they supportive? Something like that?

Tina: I'm the only person in the programme who got a PhD. I'm not the oldest one, but most of my colleagues, no matter whether they are younger or older, give me some respect. When they do research, if they have some problems, they will come to ask me for advice. I just give them some ideas. I mean, if I tell them that they should do this, and if they are available, they will do it…But, you know, you have to understand that my university focuses more on training teachers. The students will be the teachers in the future. So, the focus is more on teaching rather than researching. This is the typical environment in my university. So, there are not many teachers in the university who will have the same mindset as I have, you know, like a typical PhD graduate.

The excerpt reflects the theme "Other-positioned as an advisor" because Tina describes how her colleagues seek her expertise and guidance in research, positioning her as a trusted figure for academic support. Tina states, *"I'm the only person in the programme who got a PhD."* This establishes her as a knowledgeable and experienced academic, distinguishing her from her peers. She acknowledges that, regardless of age, her colleagues respect her expertise, reinforcing her academic identity which others view her as a reliable advisor in research-related matters. In addition, Tina explicitly mentions that when her colleagues encounter research problems, *"they will come to ask me for advice."* Her response suggests that she offers insights and guidance, even if she does not impose decisions on them (*"I just give them some ideas."*). This demonstrates her advisory role, where she provides direction and support while allowing others to make their own research choices. Furthermore, Tina highlights that her university prioritizes training teachers over research, leading to a lack of research-oriented colleagues. Because she has a PhD and a strong research mindset, she stands out as a go-to advisor for those who wish to engage in research. In conclusion, this excerpt reflects the theme "Other-positioned as an advisor" because Tina is recognized by her peers as a respected research mentor, sought out for guidance and academic insight in an environment where research is not a primary focus.

Institution-Positioned as a Lecturer, Administrator, and Researcher

Researcher: Are there any critical episodes or significant others that have affected your research practice?

Tina: You mean …Are there any problems with me?

Researcher: It doesn't have to be a problem; it's just some kind of moments or some people you think have influences on your research.

Tina: Um, it's one of our criteria, as I told you, for evaluation. So, we need to do research; at least the minimum is that they must do research, one research a year, and we have to get it published in the international proceedings. But I was encouraged because there are many supports and budgets from the faculty that allow me to do research and ask for help from experts, but the struggle is that I don't have much time. I mean, I have many responsibilities. I'm not only working as a teacher but also as the head of the programme. It means I have to teach and be responsible for both students and teachers in my programme. I also need to do the documentary work, develop the curriculum, and collaborate with another department. I have to take care of many problems that will run to me and help fix the problems. So, I don't have much time to do my own research that is qualified for international journals. I don't feel comfortable. I mean, I'm not confident enough to do research, qualified research with limited time. If I don't have much time, I don't think I can do a good one.

Tina's narrative reveals a deep identity dilemma arising from the competing demands of teaching, administration, and research within her institution. She describes how research is mandated as part of the university's evaluation system, "we need to do research, at least… one research a year… and get it published at the international proceedings", yet this obligation is embedded in a work environment that already requires her to manage heavy teaching loads and extensive administrative responsibilities. As the head of her programme, she explains, "I'm not only working as a teacher but also as the head of the programme… I have to teach and be responsible for both students and teachers… develop the curriculum, and fix problems." This triple positioning as lecturer, administrator, and researcher stretches her professional identity across divergent expectations, creating what she experiences as role overload. Although Tina acknowledges institutional support in the form of budgets and access to experts, these resources cannot offset the time poverty caused by administrative work. She admits, "I don't have much time… I don't feel comfortable… I'm not confident enough to do research, qualified research with limited time." This state-

ment reflects how anxiety emerges when research, framed as a key measure of academic prestige, is experienced as an externally imposed requirement rather than an internally driven scholarly pursuit. Her uncertainty about producing "qualified research" echoes a broader tension for EFL teachers in teaching-oriented institutions, that is, research is necessary for professional legitimacy, but often structurally unsupported.

Tina's case illustrates a constant balancing act between her personal belief in mentorship and professional growth and the external pressures of meeting productivity criteria tied to institutional prestige. She self-positions as a caring mentor and supervisor, guiding undergraduates, integrating tools such as AntConc, and taking pride in their success, while colleagues position her as an advisor and resource person in a context that still values teaching over research. Yet these meaningful roles coexist with systemic expectations to publish internationally, creating a paradoxical identity space where she must sustain academic integrity and growth despite feeling underprepared and time-constrained. This dilemma reinforces a key thread in the study's critical–dialogical analysis: Tina's I-positions as "mentor," "administrator," and "aspiring researcher" are continually reshaped through dialogue with prestige-driven systems and gendered academic hierarchies, showing how identity anxiety emerges when female EFL teachers must reconcile self-defined aspirations with institutional demands that privilege productivity over support.

To sum up, the findings collectively illuminate how Thai female EFL teachers with PhDs negotiate their professional identities and confront structural challenges within gendered, prestige-oriented academic systems. Addressing RQ1, both May and Tina's stories reveal that identity negotiation operates through dynamic processes of self-positioning, other-positioning, and structural positioning, generating hybrid "I-positions" such as educator, supervisor-researcher, mentor, and administrator. These dialogical positions reflect ongoing efforts to achieve coherence between personal values and institutional demands. Addressing RQ2, the narratives also uncover layered tensions and challenges, from role overload, gendered expectations, and bureaucratic performance pressures to emotional strains of maintaining confidence and research self-efficacy. May's trajectory underscores how self-motivation and ethical autonomy enable agency and resilience under constraint, whereas Tina's experience exposes how neoliberal evaluation regimes and care-laden roles erode confidence and intensify affective labor. Together, these findings demonstrate that Thai female EFL academics' professional identity work is not merely an internal psychological process but a critical–dialogical negotiation shaped by power, gender, and emotion. Through their contrasting yet complementary experiences, May and Tina exemplify how women academics in Thailand construct meaning and sustain agency amid intersecting pressures of prestige, institutional hierarchy, and cultural expectation.

5. Discussion

This discussion interprets the findings in direct response to the two guiding research questions: (1) How do Thai female EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities after completing their PhDs? and (2) What tensions and challenges do they experience in these identity negotiation processes? Drawing upon the critical–dialogical self framework, the analysis demonstrates that identity negotiation is a continuous process of self-, other-, and structural positioning, mediated by affective, relational, and institutional forces. The participants' narratives reveal that professional identity is not merely an individual or cognitive phenomenon, but a multi-voiced and power-laden negotiation shaped by prestige politics, gendered labor divisions, and hierarchical academic cultures. Through the juxtaposed experiences of May and Tina, the discussion examines how emotional resources, agency, and institutional constraints interact to sustain or erode self-efficacy, thereby illustrating the affective and structural dimensions of teacher professional identity within the Thai higher-education context.

RQ1: Negotiating professional identities through self-, other-, and structural positioning

The narratives of May and Tina illuminate how identity negotiation unfolds dialogically through the interplay of self-positioning, other-positioning, and structural positioning, each shaped by emotional and sociocultural contexts. May actively constructs herself as an educator committed to pedagogical innovation, resisting being reduced to a teaching-only role within her university's hierarchical structure. Tina, by contrast, inhabits multiple hybrid "I-positions," including supervisor-researcher and mother-figure mentor, reflecting the layered nature of her academic and caregiving roles. From a DST perspective [11], these identities reveal the multiplicity and fluidity of voices within the self. Yet, viewed through feminist and intersectional lenses [14,22], these voices are not freely chosen but negotiated within gendered institutional systems that reward research productivity and undervalue

pedagogical and emotional labor. This dual interpretation clarifies how Thai female academics construct their identities dialogically, yet remain structurally positioned within a system that privileges prestige over care.

RQ2: Experiencing tensions and challenges in identity negotiation

The findings also expose the complex tensions and affective struggles accompanying these identity negotiations. May's case illustrates how self-efficacy, ethical autonomy, and long-term goal orientation function as protective emotional resources against structural constraints. She reframes institutional expectations, such as rigid promotion timelines and authorship hierarchies, into opportunities for self-definition, maintaining academic integrity and agency amid external pressures [8]. In contrast, Tina's narrative reveals the debilitating impact of role overload, time poverty, and neoliberal performance regimes on her sense of competence and well-being. Expected to function concurrently as lecturer, administrator, and mandated researcher, she reports a deepening sense of inadequacy and anxiety, echoing Köksal's [30] and Yazan's [16] observations on the emotional toll exerted by audit-driven academic cultures. Despite the presence of institutional resources, the absence of structural support for affective well-being leaves her struggling to sustain self-efficacy. Together, these accounts affirm that identity negotiation is inseparable from the emotional labor and structural inequities embedded in prestige-driven academic systems.

Viewed through a critical–dialogical self lens, these patterns show that Thai female EFL PhDs' identity formation is not merely a cognitive alignment but a situated negotiation of agency within gendered, institutional, and affective economies. May's resilience exemplifies dialogical resistance, such as mobilizing reflexivity and affective labour to redefine academic prestige on her own ethical terms; whereas Tina's constrained agency reveals how performative compliance with neoliberal accountability regimes exhausts emotional capital and undermines self-worth. This oscillation between assertion and depletion demonstrates that TPI is simultaneously affective and structural [15,16], constituted through the dialogic interplay of institutional power, emotional survival, and recognition politics.

Comparable dynamics emerge across non-Western contexts where women's academic selves are produced within intersecting hierarchies of gender, culture, and neoliberal governance. In Saudi Arabia, female EFL educators encounter prestige-laden evaluation systems that reward quantifiable productivity while erasing pedagogical care work [8]. In Vietnam, women scholars juggle collectivist caregiving obligations with globalized research expectations [9]. Likewise, Bao and Tian [10] reveal that Chinese women academics' pursuit of professorship is framed by a "dual recognition struggle", the need to be acknowledged both as legitimate scholars and as socially conforming women. Their participants faced structural "sticking points," including exclusion from networks, gendered career aspirations, and the scarcity of female mentors. Crucially, recognition functions not as an endpoint but as a performative process that both authorizes and constrains agency, compelling women to reproduce male-coded academic norms even as they seek to subvert them.

Collectively, these patterns indicate that women's professional identity formation in academia follows global trends but remains shaped by local cultural and institutional contexts. Prestige hierarchies, gendered expectations, and performance-driven systems continue to influence how women define their roles and sense of agency. In the Thai higher education context, promoting sustainable professional growth requires both structural and emotional support. This includes developing fair and inclusive evaluation systems, ensuring balanced workloads, establishing mentoring programs that value teaching as well as research, and fostering institutional cultures that prioritize well-being as a foundation for long-term academic engagement and productivity.

6. Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

This study explored how Thai female EFL teachers with PhDs negotiate their professional identities and navigate the tensions embedded in gendered, prestige-driven academic systems. By addressing RQ1: how they negotiate professional identities after completing their PhDs, the findings revealed that identity construction operates through dynamic and dialogical processes of self-, other-, and structural positioning, producing hybrid "I-positions" such as educator, mentor, and supervisor-researcher. Through these fluid positions, participants continuously negotiated coherence between personal aspirations and institutional expectations. Addressing RQ2: the tensions and challenges encountered, the study uncovered how role overload, gendered labor hierarchies, and neoliberal accountability pressures generate emotional strain, time poverty, and fluctuating research self-efficacy. Together, these findings confirm that professional identity is not merely psychological but affective, relational, and struc-

turally embedded within institutional power systems.

Theoretically, the study extends the DST by incorporating feminist and intersectional perspectives, thereby proposing a critical–dialogical self framework for understanding TPI. This framework reconceptualizes identity negotiation as both internally dialogical and externally political, shaped by emotion, care, and power. It also advances Yazan's [15,16] argument that teacher identity is simultaneously affective and structural, highlighting how institutional systems validate certain identity voices while silencing others. Methodologically, the integration of narrative inquiry and corpus-informed thematic analysis demonstrates a transparent, reflexive approach for analyzing complex identity work among underrepresented groups in non-Western contexts.

Practically, the study highlights the need for institutional reforms that acknowledge hybrid academic roles—those that bridge research, teaching, and mentorship rather than privileging one over the others. Policies promoting equitable workload distribution, supportive mentoring networks, and targeted professional development could help sustain female academics' agency and emotional well-being. Cultivating inclusive evaluation systems that value pedagogical innovation and relational labor alongside publication output would mitigate the emotional exhaustion linked to neoliberal metrics.

Finally, while this study's focus on two Thai female EFL PhDs enabled rich, context-specific insights, it also presents limitations related to sample size and scope. Future research could adopt comparative or longitudinal designs to examine how identity trajectories evolve across institutional types, disciplines, and cultural settings. Expanding this inquiry could further illuminate the global–local interplay of gender, prestige, and affect in shaping academic identities. Overall, this study contributes to a more nuanced, critical understanding of teacher identity as dialogically negotiated, emotionally sustained, and institutionally contested—an understanding essential for fostering equitable and resilient academic cultures in the Global South.

Author Contributions

W.T. made contributions to research design, literature review, data collection, data analysis, manuscript drafting, and revising. H.L. contributed to research design, data collection, transcription, data analysis, manuscript drafting, and formatting. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was retrospectively approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University, China (Approval Number: IRB-2025-001) on March 23, 2025, in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and institutional guidelines for human participant research.

Informed Consent Statement

The participants were provided with a list of interview questions via email before data collection. We informed them of the purpose and procedures of the study, their rights, and the protection of their privacy. Upon confirmation, a Zoom meeting was scheduled. By joining the Zoom interview, they gave their informed consent to take part in this study.

Data Availability Statement

To protect the participants' privacy, the data of this study cannot be shared openly.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Appendix A. Consent Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering participation in our research study. This study aims to understand how Thai female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers negotiate their identities in the context of their professional lives using a Dialogical Self Theory. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an online semi-structured interview via Zoom. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes focusing on your experiences and perspectives on your professional identity development after PhD.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. No personal identifiers will be used in the research report or any publications that result from the study. Data will be stored securely and will be accessible only to the research team. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have any questions about the research, you may contact the Principal Investigator at [_____].

Thank You!

Appendix B. Narrative Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your typical day at work?
2. Do you consider yourself a researcher after you obtained your PhD? Why or why not?
3. What inspires you to continue doing research after your PhD?
4. What challenges do you have in doing research after PhD? How do you overcome them?
5. Are there any critical episodes or significant others that have influenced your research practice after PhD? If so, what are they?
6. What is the research environment in your faculty currently?
7. Can you share with us some stories you feel proud of yourself?

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