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REPOSITIONING ENGLISH:
FROM FOREIGN TO SECOND LANGUAGE

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VIETNAM ASSOCIATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH
THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGES PROJECT

NAVIGATING AFFECTIVE LABOUR AND TEACHER AGENCY

IN VIETNAM'S ESL TRANSITION (2025–2026) (ID: #2817)

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1. INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH GAP

Context: English education in Vietnam (2025–2026) intersects public EFL bureaucracies and private ESL markets.

Research gap: Scholarship predominantly centers on Western and East Asian contexts, leaving a striking scarcity of empirical studies in Southeast Asia on feeling rules during educational transitions.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What feeling rules and forms of affective labour do ESL/EFL teachers in Vietnam encounter during systemic educational transitions (2025–2026)?

2. How do teachers mobilize ecological dimensions (iterational, practical-evaluative) to enact agency and negotiate structural pressures?

3. How does the interplay between affective labour and teacher agency shape educators' professional identities and resilience against burnout?

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Qualitative narrative inquiry combined with in-depth interviews.

Participants: 15–20 ESL/EFL educators from public and private institutions in major urban centers of Vietnam.

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews (60–90 mins) and 4-week reflective teaching journals.

5. KEY FINDINGS

A. Affective Labour Burdens
Pressures stemming from commercialized service rules, toxic positivity maintenance, and administrative/commercial KPIs.

B. Manifestations of Ecological Agency
• *Iterational dimension*: Mobilizing historical trajectories from past transitions as a professional anchor.
• *Practical-evaluative dimension*: Subtly negotiating and improvising against rigid institutional regulations to protect classroom spaces.

CORE CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIP

Professional identity • Resilience • Reduced burnout
Emotional rewards through human-centric student connections

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Affective Labour Framework (Hochschild, Benesch)
Defining implicit feeling rules and teacher emotional regulation strategies.

2. Ecological Approach to Teacher Agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson)
Conceptualizing agency as an emergent phenomenon shaped by person–structure interactions.

3. *Theoretical Integration*
Bridging emotions as agency and the generation of emotional rewards (Miller & Gkonou).

5. KEY FINDINGS — CONTINUED

C. The Emotion–Agency Nexus & Rewards

How teachers overcome isolation, transform pressures into driving forces, and secure emotional rewards through human-centric student connections.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical: Expanding the ecological model of teacher agency by centralizing affective dimensions and power structures.

Management: Educational leaders and ESL/EFL institutions must dismantle toxic emotional KPIs, shifting from metric-driven control to psychologically supportive communities of practice.

Teachers: Establishing healthy professional boundaries to sustain long-term teacher agency and prevent burnout.

7. CONCLUSION

• Affective labour and teacher agency are deeply intertwined constructs within Vietnam's transitional educational landscape (2025–2026).

• By recognizing implicit feeling rules and actively enacting ecological agency, teachers can transform systemic pressures into spaces of resistance and professional growth.

• A sustainable educational ecosystem demands both institutional empathy and internal teacher autonomy.