SYNTHESIS

Understanding teacher identity in teachers' professional lives: A systematic review of the literature

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Abstract

This article presents a systematic review of a substantial body of literature that considers the ways in which the concept of teacher identity has been used to understand and explore teachers' professional lives. The aim of the review was to go beyond the limitations of specific areas of teachers' practice to explore the broad and rich field of teachers' professional lives. Drawing on 412 articles from 2000–2021, the review demonstrates the growth in teacher identity research, particularly since 2010. Results from the review are categorised into seven thematic groups that span key areas related to teachers' professional lives: (1) Models and frameworks of professional lives; (2) Narratives of professional lives; (3) Becoming a teacher; (4) Contexts; (5) Communities; (6) Change, transition and conflict; and (7) Subject specialisms. The review reveals gaps in teacher identity research, such as: few research studies from Global South countries; a limited number of studies focusing on non-core curriculum subjects, including arts, history, geography and physical education; fewer studies focusing on primary school and early years teacher identities; and a divide between identity scholarship and research, and policy and practice. The article concludes with a call for teacher
INTRODUCTION

This article presents a systematic review of a substantial body of literature that considers the ways in which the concept of teacher identity has been used to understand and explore teachers' professional lives. We draw on Rinke's (2008) understanding of teachers' professional lives from her research on teacher retention through teachers' perspectives on their professional lives. According to Rinke (2008, p. 9) rather than ‘allowing teachers' careers to boil down to a single moment in time’, their professional lives capture ‘the motivations and expectations of a variety of individual teachers in a variety of contexts over an extended period of time’. This perspective on teachers' professional lives forms a foundation from which identity research to be expanded and broadened with the aim to facilitate the progress of identity work in scholarship, policy and practice.

KEYWORDS
systematic review, teacher identity, teachers' professional lives

Context and implications

Rationale for this study
In the context of a growing body of research on teacher identity, particularly in the last decade, there remains a paucity of identity-focused systematic reviews. Existing systematic reviews tend to focus on specific fields such as subject specialisms, teacher education and beginning teachers. However, far fewer reviews span the broader field of teachers' professional lives; this article responds to this gap in the literature.

Why the new findings matter
The findings from this review are important in highlighting the most commonly explored areas in teacher identity research as it relates to teachers' professional lives. As such, the findings can inform policy and practice for teacher education and professional development at local, national and international scales. The findings also highlight gaps in the literature and the implications this may have on teacher identity scholarship.

Implications for educational researchers and educators
Firstly, educational researchers can identify key themes arising from existing teacher identity research studies. This can help them to focus on specific areas that would benefit from further research as well as providing them with a single space from which to draw on the existing corpus of research studies. Secondly, teacher identity research is important for the professional lives and practice of educators and this review provides educators with an opportunity to understand the teacher identity scholarly landscape and, in turn, apply findings from the research to their own professional practice.
we understand the ways in which teachers' identities are (re)constructed over the course of their careers.

Theoretical understandings of teacher identity have remained consistent for the past two decades with a consensus that identity is dynamic, flexible and hybrid and is influenced by a range of individual factors. These factors include discourse such as personal biographies and narratives (Alsop, 2006), emotion (Day & Leitch, 2001), social contexts and relationships with others (Beijaard et al., 2000; Rushton & Reiss, 2019). External and material factors have also been identified including school organisations (Day et al., 2005) and working conditions (Canrinus et al., 2011). The focus of this systematic review is not to explore the different definitions of teacher identity as such, but rather to consider a broad and representative range of understandings from across the field of teacher identity research. However, having an agreed definition of teacher identity was essential before proceeding to evaluate the literature. To summarise, our understanding of teacher identity is that it is socially constructed, dynamic and hybrid, that is shaped by discourse, narrative and emotions, and influenced by social and organisational contexts.

Review rationale and research questions

The research questions informing this systematic review arise from the authors' own research and teaching focused on teacher identity, as well as from our own professional lives as schoolteachers. Firstly, in our scholarly work exploring a variety of factors related to teachers' lives and work, the concept of teacher identity has been central to our research and teaching (e.g., Rushton & Reiss, 2021; Steadman, 2023). As such, engaging with new theoretical models and frameworks, and other conceptual approaches on teacher identity, is important as we continue our research and teaching focused on teachers' professional lives.

Secondly, our own professional lives inform our continuing interest in teacher identity. We have all been schoolteachers: three authors have taught in secondary schools, specialising in the subjects of English and geography, and one of the authors worked as a primary school teacher with music as a subject specialism. The authors are now teacher educators, working with teachers at different stages of their professional careers, in three Higher Education Institutions based in England. Given our experience of, and interest in teachers' professional lives, we are keen to research the range of literature to better understand how identity has and can be used to further understand this field of education research.

The systematic review is therefore guided by two main research questions:

RQ 1: What are the key models and frameworks used to explore identity in the context of teachers' professional lives?

a) How and in what ways are narrative approaches used to explore teacher identity?

RQ 2: How and in what ways has the concept of identity been used to understand and explore teachers' professional lives?

a) How are beginning teachers' identities understood?

b) How is teacher identity explored and understood in different contexts and communities?

c) In what ways do periods of change and transition shape teacher identity?

d) How is teacher identity understood in relation to subject expertise?

In what follows we set out our review methodology.
METHODS

A key strength of a systematic review is that such an approach reduces the inevitable bias in conventional literature reviews, where authors are more likely to consider studies with which they are already familiar. As Rushton and Reiss (2021) have previously highlighted, systematic reviews have the fundamental benefit of making explicit why certain studies are included and others are not. The review comprised four distinct stages as detailed in Table 1.

The completion of the first three stages of the review resulted in 412 items (Appendix 1) published in 68 different peer-reviewed journals (Table 2). A single country was identified in 394 items as the study context and in the remaining 18 papers, two or more countries were identified. This resulted in a list of 435 countries. The research was geographically widespread with research from 48 out of 193 UN-recognised countries included (Figure 1). This suggests that research that considers schoolteacher identity is of international interest. However, 60% of the 412 items were located in four countries: the United States (99), China (55), the United Kingdom (55) and Australia (39).

Quality assessment of included studies

A core aspect of the rigorous analysis of the literature for this systematic review included a quality assessment of all included studies. All studies were appraised using standard checklists of quality assessment criteria, for different types of study design. Where appropriate, we drew on critical appraisal checklists as set out by Spencer et al. (2004) to assess the quality of a specific study design in more detail. This involved starting with an assessment of the findings and then onto the different stages of the research process (design, sampling, data collection, analysis and reporting), concluding with general features of research conduct (reflexivity and neutrality, ethics and auditability).

Of the 412 items, 335 (over 80%) have been published since 2010, which indicates the significant growth of literature published in peer-review journals over the last decade and justifies the need for a systematic review at this point in time. Furthermore, only 12 of the 412 items that we include in our review come from the first 5 years of our time frame, which suggests that relatively few additional publications would have been included had we extended our time frame backwards (Figure 2).

Limitations

The decision to focus on studies that considered the professional identity of schoolteachers meant the exclusion of research that considers the experiences of teacher educators. The time frame for the review of 2000–2021 for material published in academic journals excluded material published prior to 2000 and research, including that found in conference proceedings, books and doctoral theses. Given these limitations, it is highly likely that other studies that consider schoolteacher identity exist and that these could have provided new and relevant insights to our review. Our study was limited by the inclusion of only English-medium journals and could be the reason why some countries located in South America and Africa as well as Russia are not represented in our dataset. As such, our review cannot make any claims about the universality of findings.
### TABLE 1  Four stages of the systematic review including research team discussion and actions (*items were originally published during 2000–2021 with final versions available after 2021).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the review</th>
<th>Summary of the research team’s discussions and actions</th>
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| Stage One: Discussion of the review strategy             | 1. Review strategy was informed by published guidance and experience Avraamidou (2014), Rushton and Reiss (2019), Siddaway et al. (2019).  
2. Review focused on identity as a conceptual device self-identified by the authors of the research items.  
4. Review to include schoolteachers of any subject and age-phase and at any career stage.  
5. Identification of key terms to be used in subsequent phases of literature identification: schoolteacher, identity, teacher development, teacher education, Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) |
| Stage Two: Identification of the literature             | 1. The websites of eight leading academic publishers were searched to identify journals with the key terms identified in Stage 1 in their aims, scope and/or vision:  
   a. Author one searched Springer, Oxford University Press (OUP) and Cambridge University Press (CUP), identifying 57 journals.  
2. For the period 2000–2021, 111 journals were reviewed.  
3. Using the search term ‘teacher identity’ authors one and two searched the journals identified in the previous stage and 73,860 results were identified and added to an Excel spreadsheet.  
4. Authors one, two and three reviewed approximately a third each of the 73,860 results. The title and abstract of each item were reviewed to confirm the research focus was identity in the context of schoolteachers. This phase resulted in 495 items to read in full. |
| Stage Three: Quality assessment and extraction of key information from the literature | 1. The following information from the 495 items was consistently recorded (where available) in an Excel spreadsheet: author, year, publisher, journal name, article title, abstract, keywords, hyperlink, full reference, open access status.  
2. Inclusion criteria were developed:  
   a. Self-identified by the research item author(s) as focusing on identity.  
   b. An empirical study  
   c. Focus on schoolteachers in the context of formal education.  
   d. Date of publication 2000–2021.  
3. A quality assessment was made and reasons for inclusion and exclusion were listed. Examples of exclusions included studies whose data was analysis of policy documents Spicksley (2022)* or those predominantly focused on a concept other than identity for example, leadership Collay (2014).  
4. Application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in 412 items.  
5. Author four provided an additional check of the 412 items to ensure the exclusion and inclusion criteria had been applied consistently. |

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<tr>
<th>Stage of the review</th>
<th>Summary of the research team’s discussions and actions</th>
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</table>
| Stage Four: Synthesis and critical appraisal of the literature | 1. Synthesis strategy was informed by Gough et al. (2012) and involved all authors in the following overlapping and iterative steps.  
2. Each author reviewed approximately a quarter of the research items to identify research foci and a critical appraisal process was taken guided by checklists as appropriate. Through discussions eight groups were identified: (1) Becoming a teacher; (2) Contexts; (3) Communities; (4) Change, transition and conflict; (5) Narratives; (6) Professional learning; (7) Subjects; (8) Literatures, models and frameworks.  
3. Each author was allocated two groups to synthesise and these written drafts were discussed by the authors as a group.  
4. Following discussions of these written drafts, the group ‘Professional learning’ was incorporated across the remaining seven groups as it was agreed that professional learning was an integral part of schoolteacher professional identity. The groups were confirmed as: (1) Becoming a teacher; (2) Contexts; (3) Communities; (4) Change, transition and conflict; (5) Narratives; (6) Subject specialisms; (7) Literatures, models and frameworks.  
5. All authors reviewed the draft synthesis sections for the seven groups against the full list of 412 research items to ensure coherence and discussions continued over a 3-month period.  
6. Author one drew together the seven draft sections and this was shared with the authorial team as part of revising the final article pre-submission.  
7. The final phases of synthesis occurred through writing (pre-submission) and following reviewer feedback. This included a revision of the foci and order of the groups which were finalised as: (1) Models and frameworks of professional lives; (2) Narratives of professional lives; (3) Becoming a teacher; (4) Contexts; (5) Communities; (6) Change, transition and conflict, and (7) Subject specialisms |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal title</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific Education Researcher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific Education Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Journal of Environmental Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Journal of Indigenous Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Educational Research Journal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Journal of Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Studies in Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Studies of Science Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education 3–13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Philosophy and Theory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Research for Policy and Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Review</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Studies</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Studies in Mathematics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Urban Society</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Educational Research Journal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Journal of Psychology of Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Journal of Teacher Education</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontiers of Education in China</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and Education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Educational Research</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Leadership in Education</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Music Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Science Education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of STEM Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Technology and Design Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Review of Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Educational Change</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Education for Teaching</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Education Policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of English Language Teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

With reference to our research questions, we present our synthesis of 412 items reviewed, grouped into seven distinct but related areas (Table 3).

The review of 412 articles emphasised the centrality of teacher identity in teachers’ lives and practice. Our findings, synthesised into seven groups, highlight the most common topics and areas in which teacher identity is explored and discussed in the literature. These are: (1) Models and frameworks of professional lives; (2) Narratives of professional lives; (3) Becoming a teacher; (4) Contexts; (5) Communities; (6) Change, transition and conflict; and (7) Subject specialisms (see Table 3 for each item of literature included in each group).

Group 1 and 2 of our findings responded to RQ1: What are the key models and frameworks used to explore identity in the context of teachers’ professional lives? Group 1 (Table 3), synthesised research which examines theoretical models and frameworks of identity to research teachers’ professional lives, including research that focused on specific models and frameworks of identity (37 items) and studies that presented new models and frameworks.
through which to understand identity (8 items). Group 1 is important for the future of identity research and scholarship as it considers the models and frameworks used in the exploration of teacher identity as part of teachers’ professional lives. Group 2 focused on the theme of narratives of professional lives and responded to RQ1a: How and in what ways are narrative approaches used to explore teacher identity? Group 2 included research that considers narratives as a methodological approach or conceptual framework for identity research (27 items), studies that foreground metaphor and stories (17 items) and research that considers narratives of possible and future selves (15 items) (Table 3). Group 2 is highly relevant to identity work because narratives can be deployed to represent past events, while also positioning the individual in the present and future and making explicit the audience of that narrative (Taylor, 2017).

Groups 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (Table 3) responded to RQ2 and the four supplementary questions as follows:

RQ 2: How and in what ways has the concept of identity been used to understand and explore teachers’ professional lives?

a) How are beginning teachers’ identities understood? (Group 3).
b) How is teacher identity explored and understood in different contexts and communities? (Groups 4 and 5).
c) In what ways do periods of change and transition shape teacher identity? (Group 6).
d) How is teacher identity understood in relation to subject expertise? (Group 7).

We labelled Group 3 ‘Becoming a teacher’ as this captured teachers’ identity formation and their personal and professional identities at the earliest stages of a teacher’s education and career. We found that much of the identity literature reviewed focused on the developing identities of beginning teachers and those training to teach (Beijaard et al., 2000) with some suggesting that ‘becoming a teacher’ is an identity-forming process (Danielewicz, 2001). We identified two distinct areas within Group 3, including research focused on identity formation (27 items) and studies that consider teachers’ personal and professional identities (16 items; Table 3).
We constructed the fourth and fifth groups of ‘Contexts’ and ‘Communities’ in response to RQ2b. These are two significant themes constructed from the literature and highlight the frequency in which these areas are discussed in shaping, changing and influencing teachers’ identity. Group 4, ‘Contexts’, focused on the ways in which different contexts influence, shape and impact on teachers’ identities across three sub-groups: the policy context (17 items), school contexts (18 items), and international and intercultural contexts (28 items; Table 3). Within Group 5, ‘Communities’, we identified two sub-groups, the first focused on identity as part of communities of practice (32 items) and the second considered professional collaborations (17 items; Table 3).

The literature on transition and change in teachers’ working lives is well established, particularly in the area of professional development (Guskey, 2002). However, we also found this to be the case in our review of identity, and through Group 6 we were able to explore how change and transition (in their many forms) shape teachers’ identities. Themes of change and transition tended to be situated within broader conceptualisations of conflict and tension, including risks and vulnerabilities experienced by individuals (Thompson & Russell, 2017). Therefore, we structured this group through three distinct but related sub-groups of change (11 items), transition (13 items) and conflict (24 items; Table 3). Finally, teachers’ subject specialisms play a key role in many teachers’ identity constructions and thus it was pertinent to explore the way in which the literature positioned different subjects in this context. Group 7 responds to RQ2d in exploring the ways in which teacher identity is understood in different subject specialisms. Some subject areas have a greater emphasis than others, and we explored the broader subject areas with a focus on specific subjects within them. Table 3 highlights the literature that explores teacher identity in the areas of arts and humanities (15 items), languages (21 items), mathematics (16 items), physical education (4 items) and science (49 items; Table 3). Our findings reveal those subjects that are more commonly written about (e.g., science, mathematics) and others that feature less frequently or not at all.

Across these seven groups, the systematic review underlines a nuanced appreciation of the different factors that shape identity and some commonality of experiences and professional lives across different contexts.
## TABLE 3  
Synthesis of the literature (*items were originally published during 2000–2021 with final versions available after 2021*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group name</th>
<th>Group sub-themes</th>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Number of publications (post 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of a new model or framework of identity</td>
<td>Canrinus et al. (2011), Cheung (2008), Dugas (2021), Philip and Benin (2014), Poole (2020), McNally and Blake (2012), Song and Wei (2007), and Vetter et al. (2016)</td>
<td>8 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group name</th>
<th>Group sub-themes</th>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Number of publications (post 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3: Becoming a teacher</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 43 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 4: Contexts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 63 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group name</td>
<td>Group sub-themes</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Number of publications (post 2010)</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group name</td>
<td>Group sub-themes</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Number of publications (post 2010)</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical education (PE)</td>
<td>Fletcher and Kosnik (2016), Lee and Jo (2016), Thorburn (2014), and Virta et al. (2019)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>412 (335)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

Gaps in teacher identity research

A notable outcome from this systematic review was what was identified as being missing rather than what was included in the review. In what follows, we discuss some key areas that we found to warrant further development in teacher identity scholarship. Within the discussion, we point to areas for further discussion focused on continuing to facilitate and develop teacher identity scholarship across a range of contexts and educational spaces.

Although there is plenty of literature that considers identity work within specific fields such as in teacher education, school practice, and even in new and changing educational landscapes and policy contexts, we contend that bridges linking identity research across these fields and into policy making continue to be needed. This may be, in part, because teacher identity remains largely undervalued in teacher education and educational policy (Beijaard et al., 2022; Rushton et al., 2023). This situation remains puzzling, given the importance of developing a positive teacher identity to maintaining a healthy and sustainable teaching workforce. Indeed, for some time now, it has been argued that a teacher’s commitment is inextricably linked to their sense of identity (Day et al., 2005) and teacher identity lies at the heart of teacher development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010). It is therefore imperative to consider teacher identity in an international context of persistent teacher recruitment and retention challenges, most notably in countries such as the UK (See & Gorard, 2020), USA (Dee & Goldhaber, 2017), Australia (Varadharajan & Buchanan, 2021) and continental Europe (European Commission, 2018). It is beyond the scope of this article to address the ways in which a better appreciation of teacher identity can contribute to solving pressing and enduring policy problems. However, this article is concerned with gaining a fuller and richer appreciation of what has been written about in this area for the past two decades and subsequently providing a clear rationale for policy makers to attend to teacher identity as part of teacher recruitment and retention initiatives. Not doing so seems to negate the obvious interest in issues of identity from within the teaching profession. As Sachs (2005, p. 15) underlines:

Teacher identity stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society.

Future research could consider how understandings of identity in a range of school and policy contexts can meaningfully inform persistent worldwide challenges of teacher retention and recruitment.

The second gap in the literature includes the types of teachers that tend to be researched in relation to teacher identity, specifically primary school teachers and teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds. There remains a dearth of literature on the teacher identities of primary school teachers and early years/foundation stage (EYFS) teachers. This is also evident in the abundance of literature that considers teacher identity and subject specialisms (Group 7), which tend to focus on secondary/high school teachers. Primary school teachers are generalists and are expected to teach a wide range of subjects, they are unique in that a primary school teacher spends all day and each day with the same class of 30 children (Towers & Maguire, 2017). The impact of the primary school context on teachers’ identities are specific and can be highly individualised as well as embedded within specific primary school cultures and environments (Nias, 1989). Could understanding more about how primary school and early years teachers construct and sustain their identities, enable a better understanding of the nuanced and varied ways in which different contexts, ages of children, relationships and professional practice can...
affect teachers' working lives? There are also a limited number of teacher identity studies that centre on teachers from minoritised backgrounds. We contend that there is a need for more empirical studies focused on the work of teachers and school leaders from minority ethnic backgrounds working in different (national) contexts. This includes more research that explores how teachers situate their perspectives within the diverse educational contexts in which they work, including the ways in which identities of these teachers may also in part be imposed externally through classification categories such as their race, ethnicity and cultural identities.

The third gap we found in the literature relates to global contexts. As discussed earlier in this article, 248 (60%) of the 412 items were located in four countries: the United States (99), China (55), the UK (55) and Australia (39), and the remaining studies are located in over 40 other countries. Despite the range of countries represented in teacher identity research, there remains limited engagement with identity literature in the Global South. A far greater emphasis on how teacher identity is understood and worked out in practice in Global South countries is very much needed, not only for the health and diversity of scholarship but also in better understanding teachers' lives and practices in other countries worldwide. Indeed, we argue that this is now an urgent priority in teacher identity research. Another related gap, identified through this review, was that most of the studies focused on a single nation, which was often a result of the small-scale and self-reflective nature of teacher identity research. Clearly, there is a need for large-scale cross-national research on teacher identity to better understand how teacher identity is constructed and sustained through different cultural and global contexts.

The final gap relates to the range of subject specialisms that have been researched in the teacher identity literature. The focus on STEM subjects and other core subjects such as English language teaching overshadows other areas of the curriculum such as history, geography, the creative arts and physical education. Indeed, the literature surrounding science teacher identity has grown rapidly in the past decade. For example, in this review, literature on mathematics and science teacher identities dominate subject specialisms group (Group 7), comprising 65 of the 105 studies reviewed. However, we argue that teacher identity must be understood in all subjects, including those subject areas that research shows are crucial for children and young people's long-term physical and mental health, such as creative arts (Clarke & McLellan, 2022) and physical education (Piñeiro-Cossio et al., 2021).

**Future priorities for the field of teacher identity research**

As well as noting these gaps in the literature, this systematic review of 412 items of literature provides an opportunity to consider priorities for researchers whose work focuses on identity in the context of teachers' professional lives, including ensuring research is grounded in clearly communicated conceptual and theoretical frameworks and that future policy development is informed by insights from the field of teacher identity.

**Clarity of conceptual and theoretical frameworks**

We contend that a key priority for the teacher identity research field is to ensure that there is clarity regarding the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that inform studies and that these are communicated coherently. Such an approach will likely ensure greater opportunities for researchers from different contexts to better understand the ways in which identity is conceptualised and understood across a range of literature and therefore support synergies and disconnections to be further identified. This systematic review of the literature demonstrates that the socio-cultural theory of teacher identity by Gee (2000) as being ‘a
certain kind of person', is frequently drawn on as a framework to underpin teacher identity research (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Goktepe & Kunt, 2023; Hsu et al., 2017; Marco-Bujosa et al., 2020; Menon, 2020; Seban, 2015; Settlage et al., 2009). Central to Gee's (2000) conception of identity is that it is socially constructed and performed with and for others. The social element of teacher identity development has been highlighted by some researchers (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Goktepe & Kunt, 2023) whereas others foreground the dynamic nature of Gee’s framework, which includes both personal and contextual factors (Hsu et al., 2017; Marco-Bujosa et al., 2020). Gee’s (2000) delineation of four ways to view identity across contexts of the individual, institutions, discourse and affinity groups is also incorporated into research frameworks (Menon, 2020; Seban, 2015; Settlage et al., 2009). Other frameworks, which are closely aligned to Gee (2000), have a focus on the social and collaborative nature of identity making. For example, Zhang et al. (2018) highlighted Akkerman and Meijer’s (2011) concept of identity as dynamic, multiple and social as providing the key theoretical underpinning for their work. Relatively, Garner and Kaplan (2019) conceptualise teacher learning and identity formation as a complex and dynamic system. However, we also noted studies that drew on a range of concepts to provide the theoretical framework for their research. For example, Munfaridah et al. (2022) combined Carlone and Johnson’s (2007) model of identity, which includes competence, performance and recognition, with Hazari et al.’s (2010) disciplinary-based identity framework. In two separate studies, Çetin and Eren (2019, 2022) provide a model for understanding identity by drawing on multiple concepts including teacher professional goals, teacher identity and teacher possible selves (Çetin & Eren, 2019) and also teachers’ achievement goal orientations for teaching, emotions about teaching, teacher identity and teachers' sense of personal responsibility (Çetin & Eren, 2022). Similarly, Yuan and Lee (2015) and Yuan et al. (2022) draw on the cognitive, social and emotional processes of identity construction to provide a context for their work. Elsewhere, Bukor (2015) included personal construct theory, Jungian ideas of the complementary nature of reason and intuition and the concept of perspective transformation. Although we do not advocate for theoretical or conceptual frameworks which are homogeneous, we do highlight the affordances for the research field as a whole when researchers provide a clear, coherent and explicit framework for their research in teacher identity.

**Integrating insights from teacher identity research into education policy development**

The policy context featured in much of the literature included in this systematic review (Day et al., 2005; Findlay, 2006; Huang & Asghar, 2018) and yet teacher identity remains largely absent in discussions and dialogue focused on policy initiatives that respond to persistent challenges, such as teacher retention and recruitment (Rushton et al., 2023). In the systematic review, research focused on the ways in which different policy contexts and educational reform shaped teachers' identities, including highlighting tensions between professional beliefs, values and sense of purpose with policy goals (Cohen, 2008; Day et al., 2005; McNally et al., 2008). The articles reviewed referred to the effects of policy reform context on teachers’ identities (Buchanan, 2015; George et al., 2003; Hendrikx, 2020; Trowman, 2008) as well as ways in which policy directives strengthen accountability and can erode trust (Czerniawski, 2011; Guenther, 2021). As Day et al. (2005 p. 566) have argued, ‘policy changes and reformist imperatives have left many teachers themselves feeling confused about their professional identity’.

In the more recent literature, research on teachers' well-being and its role in constructing identity was inextricably linked to the policy context (Skinner et al., 2021). Some research
also considered how teachers find ways of working within a set policy context that aligns with their identities through policy enactment and interpretation (Hennessy & Lynch, 2019; Stillman & Anderson, 2015). However, although individual or clusters of policies have direct and specific effects on teacher identity, these should also be seen in the wider socio-political context in which schools operate. Articles in this review also considered this wider context, which becomes embedded into the school structures and cultures, and which inevitably has marked effects on developing teacher identities (Assaf, 2008; Attard Tonna & Calleja, 2023; Leonard & Roberts, 2014). Almost all the articles reviewed provide recommendations for policy makers to consider teachers’ identities and the wider characteristics of other stakeholders, too, when formulating policy changes. Given the wealth of insight and understanding as to the intersections between teacher identity and the wider policy context, and inspired by Alexander and Bourke (2021), we advocate for those engaged in the field of teacher identity research to publicly challenge and collectively seek to address the absence or marginalisation of teacher identity research in the wider policy context.

CONCLUSION

Teacher identity scholarship is an important way to understand the professional lives of teachers across the world. Although teacher identity work cannot support all aspects of teachers’ professional lives, this review highlights how it can support varied areas of teachers’ professional experience, work and practice. This review highlights areas that are frequently explored in teacher identity research as well as significant gaps, including studies that focus on experienced teachers at different stages of their careers and research from a range of Global South contexts. We contend that a key priority for the field concerns the significant gap in teacher identity research located in Global South contexts. Indeed, encouraging and developing teacher identity research in under-represented countries and cultures is now an urgent priority. Although we acknowledge that the Global North has monopolistic control over research outputs, we argue that much more needs to be done to ensure that teacher identity work from under-represented jurisdictions is actively encouraged, resourced and promoted. Finally, we end with a call for greater emphasis on building bridges between scholarly research of teacher identity and policy and practice to ensure that ‘teacher identity’ genuinely informs policy making concerned with supporting and enabling flourishing professional lives for all teachers.

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APPENDIX 1

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