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Exploring the intersection of literature and professional identity: A comparative study of a Vietnamese EFL teacher and the literary character Chi Pheo

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Abstract: This study presents a unique exploration of the professional identity of a Vietnamese male teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through a comparative analysis with Chi Pheo, a character from Nam Cao's Vietnamese literature. Conducted in the culturally rich Mekong Delta region, the research employs a qualitative case study methodology, utilizing in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to delve into the intricate relationship between cultural narratives and educational practices. The findings reveal a complex professional identity marked by resilience, innovation, empathy, and a sophisticated balance between traditional and modern teaching methods. These characteristics, while showing parallels with Chi Pheo, particularly in terms of resilience and the quest for authenticity, also exhibit significant differences, most notably in the teacher's constructive approach to challenges and commitment to student engagement. The study underscores the impact of cultural narratives on educational practices and highlights the dynamic nature of teacher identity in the Vietnamese context. It contributes to the literature on teacher identity by emphasizing the role of cultural and literary influences in shaping educational roles and practices. The research has implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and policy-making, advocating for approaches that are culturally responsive and pedagogically innovative. This investigation into the professional identity of a Vietnamese EFL teacher offers new perspectives on the interplay between literature, culture, and education, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in the field of teacher identity and education.

Keywords: a Vietnamese EFL teacher; professional identity; the literary character Chi Pheo

1. Introduction

The fusion of literary narratives and professional identities in educational contexts presents a fascinating area of study, particularly in culturally rich settings like Vietnam [1]. This research focuses on the intriguing comparison between a Vietnamese male teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Chi Pheo, a character from the esteemed Vietnamese author Nam Cao's literature. Chi Pheo, known for his depiction of the marginalized and resilient individual against societal challenges, offers a compelling lens through which to examine and understand the professional identity of a contemporary EFL teacher in Vietnam [2].

Set against the backdrop of the Mekong Delta, a region emblematic of Vietnam's cultural and educational landscape, this study seeks to unravel how the characteristics of Chi Pheo resonate within the professional life of a Vietnamese EFL teacher. The research is driven by the hypothesis that the teacher's professional identity may mirror,

in various aspects, the traits and struggles of Chi Pheo, reflecting a deeper connection between cultural narratives and educational practices.

Guided by this thought-provoking hypothesis, the study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do the defining characteristics of Chi Pheo align with the professional identity of a Vietnamese EFL teacher?
- 2) In what ways does the teacher's professional practice reflect or diverge from the themes presented in Chi Pheo's narrative?

By employing a qualitative case study approach, this research intends to offer a detailed examination of these questions. The study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on teacher identity, particularly in the context of Vietnamese education, and to explore how literary figures can profoundly influence professional identities and practices. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide insights into the complex interplay between cultural narratives, societal roles, and educational professions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Chi Pheo in Vietnamese literature and culture

Chi Pheo, a character from Nam Cao's classic short story, stands as a symbol of the downtrodden and oppressed in Vietnamese society. Literary scholars like Rato [2] extensively analyzed Chi Pheo, emphasizing his representation of the social underclass during French colonial rule. Recent works by Quach [3] extend this analysis to post-colonial contexts, illustrating Chi Pheo's enduring relevance. The character's journey from an oppressed individual to one who challenges societal norms has been a focal point in understanding the complexities of Vietnamese social structures.

2.2. Professional identity of EFL teachers

The concept of professional identity for EFL teachers has been a subject of extensive research globally. Pennington and Richards [4] and Beijaard et al. [5] have explored how professional identity is not static but evolves through interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational community. In the context of Vietnamese EFL teachers, studies by Nguyen and Loughland [6] and Le et al. [7] highlight how cultural and educational reforms in Vietnam have impacted teacher identities, emphasizing the struggle between traditional teaching methods and modern pedagogical approaches.

2.3. Sociocultural context of Vietnam

Vietnam's unique sociocultural landscape is pivotal in understanding the professional identity of its educators. Works by Truong et al. [8] and Pham and Saltmarsh [9] provide insights into the historical and cultural dynamics that shape professional roles in Vietnam. These studies emphasize the influence of Confucian values, colonial history, and economic transformations on the professional ethos of educators in Vietnam.

2.4. Intersection of literature and professional identity

Few studies have directly connected literary characters with professional identities in educational settings. However, the works of Giroux [10,11] and Zembylas [12] delve into the role of literary narratives in shaping teacher identities. Giroux [10,11] argued for the power of narratives in understanding educational practices, while Zembylas [12] emphasized the emotional and ethical dimensions of teaching as reflected through literature. These perspectives offer a framework for analyzing how a character like Chi Pheo can symbolize aspects of an educator's professional identity.

2.5. Case studies in teacher identity

Case study methodology in teacher identity research, as shown in the works of Chong and Low [13] and Day et al. [14], provides in-depth insights into individual experiences. These studies highlight the diversity and complexity in the development of teacher identities, influenced by personal, cultural, and institutional factors. This approach underlines the importance of contextualizing teacher identity within specific socio-cultural milieus, aligning closely with our study's focus on a single Vietnamese EFL male lecturer.

While there is extensive literature on Chi Pheo and the professional identity of EFL teachers, there is a noticeable gap in studies that directly connect literary characters with the professional identities of educators, especially in the Vietnamese context. Additionally, the unique challenges and experiences of Vietnamese EFL lecturers in relation to cultural icons like Chi Pheo remain underexplored. Our study aims to fill this gap by offering a focused analysis of how the characteristics of Chi Pheo are mirrored in the professional life of a Vietnamese EFL male lecturer, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between literature, cultural identity, and professional roles in education.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The research design of this study is anchored in a qualitative case study methodology, focusing on the professional identity of a single Vietnamese EFL male lecturer and its comparison to the literary character Chi Pheo from Nam Cao's work. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of this unique phenomenon, providing rich, contextual insights into the interplay between literature, culture, and professional identity [15].

Theoretical frameworks play a crucial role in guiding this investigation. The first framework is the concept of professional identity in education, as proposed by Beijaard et al. [5], which posits that professional identity is dynamic, evolving through interactions within the professional community. This framework provides a lens to understand how the lecturer's identity is shaped by his experiences, beliefs, and the socio-cultural context of Vietnamese education.

Another critical framework is the sociocultural theory, particularly as it relates to the influence of cultural narratives on professional roles. This perspective, drawing from the works of Vygotsky [16] and later scholars [17,18], emphasizes the

importance of cultural and social contexts in shaping individual cognition and behavior. In applying this theory, the study explores how the character of Chi Pheo, deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture, influences the perceived identity of the lecturer.

Additionally, the study incorporates narrative inquiry, as outlined by Clandinin and Connelly [19]. This approach views personal experience and storytelling as fundamental to understanding human experience. By analyzing the narrative of Chi Pheo and its parallels in the lecturer's professional life, the study seeks to uncover deeper meanings and connections between literature and real-life professional experiences.

3.2. Participants

The participant of this study is a single Vietnamese EFL male teacher, working in a public higher education institution located in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. This region, known for its rich cultural heritage and distinct societal norms, provides a unique backdrop to the study, potentially influencing both the professional and personal identity of the participant.

The selection of the participant for this study was a carefully considered decision, designed to deeply explore the multifaceted relationship between professional identity and cultural influences. The participant, a male lecturer with four years of experience in EFL teaching at a Vietnamese public university, presents an intriguing case for this investigation. Notably, he is often humorously referred to as "Chi Pheo" by his students and colleagues, a nickname derived from the literary character in Nam Cao's work. This moniker, used in jest, signals a perceived alignment or resemblance to the character, making his case particularly relevant for this study. His professional journey, teaching style, and interactions with students and colleagues are of prime interest in this context. The comparison of his identity with that of Chi Pheo's character becomes especially poignant given this informal association. The study aims to delve into how this label, albeit used humorously, reflects deeper perceptions and realities of his professional identity and how it intertwines with cultural narratives represented by Chi Pheo. This unique aspect of the participant's professional experience offers a rich opportunity to explore the dimensions of an educator's identity within the specific socio-cultural framework of Vietnamese education.

The participant's consent for involvement in the study was obtained through a process that ensured his understanding of the study's purpose, the extent of his participation, and the confidentiality and ethical considerations involved. He was informed that his participation was voluntary and that he could withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. Given the focused nature of the study, the selection of a single participant allows for a detailed and concentrated analysis. This approach enables the exploration of specific, individual experiences and perceptions, offering valuable insights into the broader phenomenon of how cultural and literary narratives can shape and reflect professional identities in the Vietnamese educational context.

3.3. Data collection

The data collection for this study was meticulously planned to capture a comprehensive understanding of the professional identity of the Vietnamese EFL male teacher and its comparison to the literary character Chi Pheo. To achieve this, a multi-faceted approach was employed, encompassing in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

In-depth interviews were central to the data collection process of this study, with a focus exclusively on the participant, the Vietnamese EFL male teacher. These interviews were designed to delve into his personal experiences, beliefs, teaching philosophy, and perceptions of his professional role, offering a rich, singular perspective on his professional identity. Conducting multiple sessions allowed the participant to explore various aspects of his professional life in a reflective and detailed manner. The interviews were semi-structured, providing a balance between guided questions and the flexibility for the participant to share insights and experiences spontaneously. This approach enabled the exploration of specific themes related to his professional identity and its parallels with the character of Chi Pheo. The questions were crafted to elicit detailed responses about his teaching practices, the challenges he faces in the educational system, and how he perceives his role and identity as an educator within the Vietnamese cultural and educational context. By focusing solely on the participant, the study was able to gain an in-depth understanding of his unique professional journey. The interviews provided a platform for him to articulate his experiences, struggles, and triumphs, offering valuable insights into the complexities of being an EFL teacher in Vietnam. This singular focus on the participant ensured a rich and nuanced exploration of the study's key themes, particularly the interplay between his professional identity and the literary character of Chi Pheo.

Classroom observations were another vital component of the data collection. These observations provided direct insights into the participant's teaching practices, interactions with students, and the classroom environment. The observations were conducted over several sessions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participant's teaching style and behaviors in different contexts and with various student groups. This approach allowed for capturing real-time examples of how the participant's professional identity is manifested in his pedagogical practices. Special attention was given to aspects such as his instructional methods, classroom management techniques, and the ways in which he engaged with and responded to students. These observations were non-intrusive and conducted with the consent of both the participant and the students involved.

Document analysis was the third critical component of the data collection process. This involved reviewing a range of documents related to the participant's professional life. These included his teaching materials, lesson plans, and any available performance reviews or evaluations. Additionally, the study examined relevant policy documents and curricular guidelines from the educational institution where the participant worked to understand the broader educational framework within which he operated. This analysis provided context to the participant's teaching practices and philosophies, as well as insights into the institutional expectations and norms that shape his professional role.

The combination of these three data collection methods—in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis—was designed to provide a rich, triangulated perspective on the professional identity of the Vietnamese EFL teacher. This comprehensive approach ensured a deep and multifaceted understanding of the participant's professional life and how it aligns with or diverges from the characteristics of Chi Pheo, thus offering valuable insights into the interplay between cultural narratives and professional identities in the context of Vietnamese education.

3.4. Data analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted with a view to understanding the nuanced dimensions of the professional identity of the Vietnamese EFL male teacher and its comparison to Chi Pheo, a character in Vietnamese literature. To achieve this, a thematic analysis approach was employed, which allowed for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data [20,21]. To illuminate this analysis, actual samples of narrative inquiry were used, including detailed interview excerpts that demonstrate the intersection of professional identities and literary prototypes. This provided a tangible foundation for the qualitative analysis, directly addressing the research questions.

Initially, all interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents were read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. This immersive process enabled the identification of initial codes, which were segments of data that appeared to capture something important in relation to the research questions. These codes were then collated into potential themes, carefully examining how they relate to each other and to the overall research questions. For instance, one interview excerpt with the male teacher revealed his perception of Chi Pheo as a reflection of his own struggles with cultural expectations in teaching, highlighting the parallels and divergences between his real-life experiences and the literary figure. This phase involved a constant moving back and forth between the entire data set, the coded extracts, and the developing themes, ensuring a rigorous and reflexive analysis. The themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data and the research objectives. This stage involved a critical evaluation of each theme, considering its relevance to the research questions and the study's theoretical frameworks. Some themes were merged, others split, and some discarded, in a process that aimed at a coherent and insightful thematic map of the data. Subsequently, the themes were defined and named, capturing the essence of what each theme represented in relation to the professional identity of the participant and its parallels with Chi Pheo's character. Moreover, the differences between the professional identity of the actual male teacher and Chi Pheo were explicitly outlined, delineating how real-life teaching experiences both align with and diverge from the literary portrayal. This process was not merely about summarizing the data; it involved a deeper interpretative act, where the significance of the themes in relation to the research questions and the broader literature was elaborated. The analysis also paid close attention to any contradictions or divergences within the data, recognizing that these might offer important insights into the complexities and nuances of the participant's professional identity. Moreover, considering the case study approach, the analysis remained sensitive to the specific

context of the participant - the Vietnamese EFL educational setting and the socio-cultural environment of the Mekong Delta region. Finally, the findings were integrated with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, namely the concepts of professional identity in education, sociocultural theory, and narrative inquiry. This integration provided a more comprehensive understanding of the data, situating the participant's professional identity within broader educational, cultural, and literary contexts.

Through this rigorous thematic analysis, the study aimed to offer a rich, detailed, and nuanced understanding of how the character of Chi Pheo resonates with and contrasts against the professional identity of a Vietnamese EFL male teacher, contributing to the broader discourse on teacher identity, cultural narratives, and their interplay in the context of Vietnamese higher education.

4. Findings

4.1. Findings from interviews

The analysis of the interview data with the Vietnamese EFL male teacher revealed significant insights into his professional identity and its nuanced connections to the character of Chi Pheo. The participant's reflections and narratives provided a rich tapestry of themes that highlighted both parallels and divergences from the literary character.

A prominent theme that emerged was the participant's sense of resilience and determination in his teaching career. He expressed this sentiment poignantly, "Just like Chi Pheo, I have faced numerous challenges in my journey. But my goal has always been to overcome these hurdles and make a positive impact on my students' lives." This statement underscores a parallel with Chi Pheo's struggle against societal constraints, yet unlike Chi Pheo's often tragic defiance, the teacher demonstrated a constructive approach, emphasizing perseverance and positive influence. The participant also discussed his innovative teaching methods, reflecting a departure from traditional Vietnamese educational practices. He noted, "I constantly seek new ways to engage my students, to make learning more meaningful. It is not just about following the textbook; it is about connecting the lessons with their lives." This approach resonates with Chi Pheo's character, who, despite his circumstances, exhibited a desire for authentic connections and experiences. Further, the teacher expressed a deep sense of empathy and commitment to his students, aligning with some of Chi Pheo's lesser-known qualities. He shared, "I see my role as not just an educator but also as a mentor. My students' success and well-being are what drive me." This perspective echoed Chi Pheo's underlying humanity and desire for meaningful relationships, a contrast to his more often highlighted struggles. Interestingly, the teacher acknowledged the cultural and societal pressures inherent in the Vietnamese education system, reflecting on the balance he strives to maintain between traditional and modern pedagogical approaches. "Navigating the expectations of our educational culture while trying to be innovative can be challenging," he remarked, highlighting a critical aspect of his professional identity.

In summary, the interview data painted a complex picture of the participant's professional identity. The themes of resilience, innovation, empathy, and the balancing

of traditional and modern teaching methods emerged as key facets. While there were evident parallels with Chi Pheo, the teacher's narrative also revealed significant distinctions, illustrating a professional identity that is both shaped by and transcends the cultural narratives encapsulated in Chi Pheo's character.

4.2. Findings from in-class observations

The in-class observations of the Vietnamese EFL male teacher provided a dynamic perspective on his professional identity and its reflections in his teaching practices, offering a vivid contrast and comparison to the literary character of Chi Pheo. To expand on these observations, detailed examples from the classroom settings were meticulously analyzed to provide a deeper understanding of the teacher's methods and his philological implications.

During the observations, one of the most striking aspects was the teacher's interactive and engaging teaching style. He often used innovative techniques to involve students, such as group discussions and interactive media, which brought a lively and participative atmosphere to the classroom. For example, in one observed lesson, the teacher used a popular Vietnamese poem to facilitate a discussion on language and cultural identity, effectively bridging literary content with language learning. This method not only enhanced student engagement but also demonstrated a sophisticated approach to incorporating cultural elements into language education. This approach aligns with his earlier statement about striving for meaningful and engaging learning experiences, moving beyond traditional textbook methods. The teacher's ability to establish a rapport with students was evident. He frequently interacted with students in a manner that was both respectful and approachable, encouraging them to express their opinions and questions. In a notable instance, he skillfully navigated a student's question about a cultural reference in a text, leading to a rich class discussion that illuminated the text's deeper meanings and its relevance to contemporary society. This behavior resonates with the empathetic and human side of Chi Pheo, showcasing the teacher's desire for genuine connections with his students. An interesting observation was his method of integrating cultural and societal themes into the language lessons. One particularly effective lesson involved analyzing a short story that paralleled Chi Pheo's narrative, fostering a critical discussion about character development and societal values. This not only enriched the students' linguistic skills but also deepened their literary understanding. This integration not only made the lessons more relevant to the students but also demonstrated the teacher's awareness of his role in shaping students' understanding of their cultural identity. This aspect of his teaching could be seen as reflecting Chi Pheo's deep connection with the societal issues of his time, albeit in a more constructive and educational manner. Additionally, his classroom management skills were noteworthy. He maintained a balance between a structured learning environment and a space for open dialogue and exploration. For instance, during a complex grammar lesson, he utilized a story from Vietnamese folklore to illustrate a grammatical point, effectively maintaining student interest while conveying the lesson's objectives. This balance echoes his earlier reflections on managing the expectations of the traditional Vietnamese educational system while introducing innovative teaching methods.

Through these observations, it became clear that the teacher's professional identity is marked by a commitment to student engagement, cultural relevance in teaching, empathy, and a blend of traditional and modern educational practices. The detailed analysis of these classroom interactions and the philological interpretation of his teaching materials provided a richer, more nuanced understanding of the teacher's professional identity and its literary echoes. While parallels with Chi Pheo can be drawn in terms of resilience and the desire for authentic connections, the teacher's approach in the classroom highlights a distinct path, one that transforms challenges into opportunities for growth and learning, both for himself and his students.

4.3. Findings from document analysis

The document analysis, encompassing the participant's teaching materials, lesson plans, performance reviews, and institutional policy documents, provided additional layers of understanding regarding his professional identity and its interplay with the literary character Chi Pheo. To considerably expand on this, specific examples from the document analysis were meticulously examined, including detailed philological interpretations of the teaching materials and policy documents.

The participant's teaching materials and lesson plans revealed a thoughtful and student-centered approach. The lesson plans were meticulously crafted, integrating interactive activities, real-world examples, and multimedia resources. For instance, one lesson plan incorporated an analysis of a Vietnamese folk tale, allowing students to explore language structures while engaging with cultural narratives. This exemplified the teacher's ability to intertwine linguistic and cultural education, a method resonant with Chi Pheo's deeply rooted cultural identity. This approach demonstrated his commitment to creating engaging and relevant learning experiences, resonating with his stated goal of making learning meaningful for students. These materials also reflected his innovative spirit, much like Chi Pheo's non-conformist nature, but channeled positively towards educational objectives. A notable example was a unit plan focused on modern Vietnamese literature, where the teacher drew parallels between the themes in the texts and contemporary societal issues, illustrating a sophisticated understanding of text-to-world connections. Performance reviews and evaluations of the teacher highlighted his competence and dedication. Colleagues and institutional leaders praised his ability to connect with students and his contributions to the academic community. The evaluations consistently noted his effective teaching strategies and his positive impact on student learning outcomes. Significantly, one review highlighted his innovative approach to language instruction, citing his use of diverse literary genres to enhance language comprehension and cultural awareness, aligning with Chi Pheo's multifaceted character. Interestingly, these reviews often mentioned his ability to balance respect for traditional teaching methodologies with the incorporation of innovative practices, a trait that aligns with his narrative of navigating the expectations of the Vietnamese educational system. This balance was evident in a curriculum review document, where his course was commended for seamlessly integrating traditional linguistic theories with contemporary pedagogical techniques. Furthermore, the analysis of policy documents and curricular guidelines from the educational institution shed light on the broader framework within which the

participant operated. These documents emphasized the importance of both preserving cultural heritage in education and adopting modern pedagogical approaches. An institutional policy on curriculum development, for instance, underscored the need for cultural relevance in language education, a principle that the teacher embodied in his lesson designs and teaching philosophy. The teacher's practices, as observed in his lesson plans and teaching materials, demonstrated his alignment with these institutional goals. His ability to navigate these dual expectations mirrored the complexity of Chi Pheo's character, who similarly navigated the tensions within his societal context. The philological interpretation of these documents revealed a deep alignment between the teacher's instructional approaches and the thematic elements of Chi Pheo's narrative, highlighting a nuanced understanding of the interplay between literature and pedagogy.

In summary, the document analysis reinforced the themes identified in the interviews and observations. It highlighted the teacher's innovative and empathetic approach to teaching, his resilience in the face of challenges, and his ability to adeptly balance traditional and modern educational practices. These findings collectively paint a picture of a professional identity that, while exhibiting parallels to Chi Pheo, especially in resilience and authenticity, also stands out in its constructive and progressive approach to education and student engagement.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study, drawn from interviews, in-class observations, and document analysis, contribute significantly to the existing body of research on professional identity in education, particularly in the context of Vietnamese EFL teachers. By focusing on a single participant and drawing comparisons with a literary character, this study offers unique insights that both align with and diverge from previous studies.

The theme of resilience, a prominent aspect of the participant's professional identity, echoes the findings of Le et al. [7], who observed similar qualities in Vietnamese EFL teachers. However, unlike the often tragic defiance of Chi Pheo, the participant's resilience is marked by constructive perseverance and a positive impact, demonstrating a significant deviation from the literary character. This difference highlights an important contribution of this study, illustrating how educators can transform challenges into opportunities for growth, a perspective less explored in existing literature.

The innovative teaching methods of the participant, emphasized in both interviews and observations, resonate with the findings of Pennington and Richards [4] and Beijaard et al. [5], who highlighted the evolving nature of professional identity among educators. However, this study extends these findings by illustrating how such innovations can be deeply influenced by cultural narratives, as seen in the participant's connection to Chi Pheo. This intersection of literature and professional practice is a novel contribution of the current study, offering new insights into how cultural icons can shape educational practices.

The participant's empathy and commitment to student well-being, aligning with some of Chi Pheo's lesser-known qualities, adds a new dimension to the discourse on

teacher identity. While previous studies have focused on the professional competencies of teachers [22,23], this study illuminates the emotional and relational aspects of teaching, reflecting a more holistic view of professional identity.

The acknowledgment of cultural and societal pressures, and the balance between traditional and modern pedagogical approaches, further differentiates this study from existing literature. While previous research has often highlighted the dichotomy between traditional and modern teaching methods [24,25], this study reveals how educators like the participant navigate these complexities in a manner that is reflective, adaptive, and culturally sensitive.

6. Conclusion

This study embarked on a critical exploration of the professional identity of a Vietnamese EFL male teacher, drawing a unique comparison to Chi Pheo, a character from Nam Cao's Vietnamese literature. Situated in the context of the Mekong Delta region, the study aimed to understand how cultural narratives and educational practices intertwine to shape an educator's professional identity.

Employing a qualitative case study methodology, the research delved deeply into the participant's professional life through in-depth interviews, in-class observations, and document analysis. The interviews provided a platform for the participant to articulate his experiences, beliefs, and teaching philosophy. In-class observations offered a window into his pedagogical practices and interactions with students, while document analysis of teaching materials, lesson plans, and institutional documents contextualized his professional practices within the broader educational framework.

The findings revealed a complex professional identity characterized by resilience, innovation, empathy, and a balancing act between traditional and modern teaching methods. These attributes, while showing parallels with Chi Pheo, also highlighted significant distinctions. The participant's resilience was constructive, his innovative teaching methods sought to make learning meaningful, his empathy was evident in his relationships with students, and his ability to navigate cultural and educational expectations demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of his professional role.

The implications of this study are manifold. First, it contributes to the literature on teacher identity by highlighting the impact of cultural narratives on educational practices. The comparison with Chi Pheo provides a unique lens through which the professional identity of educators can be viewed, emphasizing the role of cultural and literary influences. Second, the study offers insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Vietnamese EFL teachers in balancing traditional and modern pedagogical approaches. This balance is crucial in a rapidly globalizing world where educators are required to be adaptable yet culturally grounded. Finally, the findings underscore the importance of understanding teacher identity as a multifaceted and dynamic construct. For policymakers and educational leaders, this study suggests the need for supportive frameworks that recognize and nurture the diverse aspects of teacher identity, facilitating professional development that is both culturally sensitive and pedagogically innovative.

In conclusion, this study not only enriches the understanding of teacher identity in the Vietnamese context but also opens up new avenues for exploring how literary

and cultural narratives shape educational practices. The case of the Vietnamese EFL male teacher, juxtaposed with the character of Chi Pheo, illustrates the profound ways in which an educator's identity is influenced by both personal experiences and the broader socio-cultural milieu. This exploration contributes to a more holistic view of teaching as a profession that is not only about imparting knowledge but also about embodying and navigating complex cultural and societal narratives. The insights gained from this study have significant implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and policy-making in education, emphasizing the need for approaches that are responsive to the cultural and personal dimensions of teaching. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of understanding and valuing the intricate tapestry of factors that contribute to the shaping of a teacher's professional identity, paving the way for more effective and culturally resonant educational practices.

7. Limitations and recommendations for further studies

This study, while providing valuable insights into the professional identity of a Vietnamese EFL male teacher in relation to a literary character, has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the focus on a single case study, though rich in depth and specificity, limits the generalizability of the findings. The experiences and perspectives of one individual may not fully represent the diverse range of experiences of EFL teachers in Vietnam or in other cultural contexts. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative methods, while effective in exploring complex themes and personal narratives, may not capture the broader statistical trends or quantifiable aspects of teacher identity. Another limitation lies in the cultural and literary focus of the study. While the comparison with Chi Pheo offers a unique lens, it may overlook other influential factors such as educational policies, economic conditions, and global influences that also shape professional identities.

Given these limitations, future research could expand the scope by including a larger and more diverse sample of EFL teachers, both within and beyond Vietnam. This would allow for a broader understanding of professional identities across different educational and cultural settings. Quantitative studies could complement this qualitative research, providing a more comprehensive view that includes statistical analysis of factors influencing teacher identity. Further, exploring comparisons with other literary characters or cultural narratives from various contexts could enrich the understanding of the interplay between literature, culture, and professional identity in education. Additionally, studies that incorporate the impact of policy changes, technological advancements, and global educational trends would provide a more holistic view of the challenges and opportunities facing EFL teachers today. These avenues for future research would not only broaden the understanding of teacher identity in diverse contexts but also contribute to the development of more culturally responsive and effective educational practices.

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supervision, LTT; project administration, LTT. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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