

Constructing Futures: Teacher Trainer Investments and Emotional Entanglements in Exploring GenAI

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry examines how a professional development (PD) facilitator/teacher's evolving engagement with Generative AI (GenAI) for inquiry-based PD is shaped by identity, ideology, and capital, as theorized by investment framework (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Drawing on a longitudinal reflective journal involving field notes and in-depth exploration of emotions, lesson plans, colleague feedback, and the two authors' reflective dialogue, we found four emergent themes: emotions, legitimacy, agency, and role overload. Findings showed that (a) emotions regulated agency and emotional labor was a key part of investment, (b) legitimacy was negotiated through symbolic capital and institutional access to resources and recognition, (c) agency was exerted to enact imagined identities, and (d) role overload constrained investment.

Keywords: GenAI, artificial intelligence, teacher education, professional development, in-service teacher education

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Introduction

This self-narrative aimed to provide an account of a PD facilitator and English language teacher (Author 1) at a Turkish university's Intensive English Program as she undertook efforts to contribute to her institution's adaptation of GenAI and expand her GenAI knowledge for her classroom and research practices. The overarching question for the current inquiry was: *How does a PD facilitator / teacher trainer's investment in GenAI literacy work unfold across time under conditions of shifting educational landscape due to GenAI advancements?*

More specifically, the guiding question was posed under these conditions: The first author's institution aspires to adapt to the advancements in the field of GenAI and she aimed to expand her repertoire as an avid follower of educational technologies, an emerging researcher, and PD facilitator. She undertook a PD initiative and delivered sessions on GenAI tools and inquiry-based means to explore them while actively trying them out in her own classroom. However, this new job and related additional roles influenced emotional trajectories that greatly shaped the way she navigated her responsibilities, and urged a redefinition of her identities. Through collecting detailed narratives of her experiences, this paper seeks to contribute to the evolving scholarship on GenAI in education. It further aims to explore how GenAI practices may reshape future professional responsibilities and perceptions of legitimacy among education stakeholders.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Norton's conceptualization of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) is our theoretical foundation. Originally having been coined to investigate the language learning experiences of immigrants (Norton, 1995), the term investment later informed studies from various contexts and situations, including those that explored the changing nature of English in an increasingly digitalized world and teachers' identity formations. Darvin Norton (2015) proposed investment to be at the center of three constructs: ideology, capital and identity. Viewing ideology as part of investment entails deconstruction of power in micro and macro social settings, the positioning of the individuals or groups within each setting, and structuring of habitus (a system with affordances of meaning making). Secondly, capital refers to one's social, cultural and symbolic resources. Darvin and Norton (2015) explicated that symbolic capital is particularly key in the changing world order in which social environments are formed first and foremost through online connections. The value of our resources according to those in power makes them symbolic capital and our symbolic capital enables us to exert agency and choose our investments. Thirdly, Darvin and Norton (2015) posit that identity is multiple, it's a site of struggle, and it continually evolves over time and space.

Considering its components, investment proved to be a valuable lens to look into the first author's experiences as a PD facilitator and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher from a higher education institution: It helped us unpack how her efforts to construct a future for her environment (as a teacher trainer) and herself (as a teacher and researcher) in the era of GenAI. As she strived to achieve this through enhancing her AI literacy and designing a PD course, she also worked towards redefining her professional identities, boosting her symbolic capital by acquiring new knowledge and inquiring her practice for GenAI integration, legitimizing her role as a GenAI-literate teacher trainer in an institution that seeks to reap the benefits of AI as part of its mission and vision.

Method

This qualitative study used a narrative approach (Clandenin and Connelly, 2000) and reported on a longitudinal identity work of the first author with the second author assuming the role of co-inquirer. We drew data from several sources, collected as the first author was piloting GenAI-infused PD and classroom activities:

- An over-six-month reflective journal (December in 2024 to mid-June in 2025) that included field notes and an in-depth report of the narrator's experiences and affective states,
- GenAI-infused lesson plans that involved using AI tools such as ChatGPT, Diffit, Quizlet, Padlet AI, Blooket, Napkin AI, etc, and seeking feedback from the students,
- informal teacher feedback forms collected throughout the piloting of the PD,
- and audio-recorded reflective dialogue of the two authors, which predominantly focused on negotiations over the roles and identities of the first author.

We used thematic analysis to identify the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a starting point, the first author merged all the data on a single document and coded the recurrent themes inductively in several rounds and had conversations with her custom GPT, which acted as a critical researcher. In the following step, the two authors of this paper discussed the themes in light of the investment theory dimensions.

We gave ethical issues the utmost care during the whole enterprise, the narratives of which we reported here. No identification of teachers and students appears throughout the text. Also, GenAI itself poses clear ethical questions (Pegrum, 2025). Therefore, during the piloting and data collection, ethical concerns were explicitly discussed: Privacy and data safety were cared for, and responsible use of AI was promoted as a matter of principle and emergent needs in the context (Sperling et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

The data revealed four dominant themes for this self-narrative. Emotion, legitimacy, agency and role overload underlied the narrator's experiences through her investment journey of designing PD, using GenAI productively and enhancing her educational technology use and research skills. We reported each theme separately below by using the third person pronoun (she) in the remaining sections of the paper.

Emotions

Throughout her GenAI journey, the EFL researcher/teacher trainer/teacher focused heavily on her emotions and this led to insights into how emotions shaped agency. Additionally, emotional labor emerged as a significant part of investment. She reported the emotions and affective states of anxiety, exhaustion, frustration, excitement, satisfaction, curiosity, and joy repeatedly. As she described herself as an enthusiastic and ambitious professional, she used these emotions to drive her engagement even though they led to poor wellbeing at times. Undertaking the responsibility of AI amid the other responsibilities provoked a great deal of anxiety particularly due to the fact that it required obtaining technical AI knowledge and synthesizing this knowledge with PD principles, and it involved careful attention to ethical matters. Still, anxiety was conducive to maintaining her agentic work as seen in the below entry: "It's been two days since I finally took action and started watching videos about AI

tools. I thought it is better to take action rather than dread about it... But it is also good to have some anxiety which prompts me to think more.” [Sic]

In several instances, she felt exhaustion and frustration when she had little time to focus on her GenAI endeavors due to other responsibilities within the institution. The low interest her students exhibited during her reading class was particularly challenging and caused frustration.

Positive emotions included excitement of upskilling herself with expanding GenAI literacy and use and feeling more competent in the GenAI for education. She felt satisfaction and joy when a PD session and/or a GenAI-enhanced lesson plan went smoothly as these seemingly validated her acquisition of symbolic capital.

Legitimacy

Perceived success of the GenAI initiatives within and beyond the classroom and institutional support to stay on the frontlines of the GenAI evolution at school reinforced the legitimacy of her identity as a trainer/teacher/researcher who productively uses GenAI. Through symbolic capital, the knowledge she built over months and the opportunities she took to join GenAI trainings and events in Istanbul, she was perceived as a legitimate facilitator of the GenAI community in her school.

It was not all external drivers that gave her legitimacy. Through continuous investment to upskill herself in GenAI—the time, money and energy she spent on the courses and trainings—and the inner satisfaction and validation she felt in her interactions with the colleagues from immediate and more distant settings (e.g., colleagues working in other institutions) prompted her to own this legitimacy.

On the other hand, at times she felt her legitimacy was threatened due to externally- and/or internally-rooted influences. When she was treated as an expert and the expectations were too high, she rejected this and voiced her feelings of inadequacy and anxiety: AI is a moving target, and she refused to be treated as if she had figured it all out and had been willing to undertake additional AI projects. She expressed her fear of feeling and being perceived as a fraud who seem to have figured everything out about AI, which seems implausible.

Agency

Several imagined identities and efforts to close the discrepancy between imagined and actual identities propelled her to exert her agency for GenAI upskilling. She imagined her identity to be a teacher training facilitator who learns with other colleagues and leads initiatives as a critical friend in this role, a teacher who guides students for ethical, responsible and effective use of GenAI in language learning studies, a researcher who contributes to the literature of educational studies and practitioner knowledge. These self-assigned imagined identities fueled her agency for action. The journal data and reflective discussions between the authors showed recurrent examples of these identity negotiations and ensuing action-taking. Her agentic moves sought to enhance her symbolic capital and utilize the institutional access and recognition to seek further legitimacy. Additionally, she continued to further refine her imagined identities and future actions, which is exemplified in the excerpt: “I’m even thinking about some ‘learn to learn with AI’ after school course... to gather some qualitative narrative insights.” [Sic]

Role Overload

Her investment into GenAI-related endeavors was seriously challenged several times due to role overload and the feeling of being depleted physically, mentally and emotionally. As she undertook the GenAI teacher training role in her institution, she was also juggling administrative and teaching duties at school, parenting duties at home, and PhD duties whenever and wherever possible. All these were draining her available capital, leaving insufficient resources (e.g., time, energy, creative and critical thinking) for her GenAI investments. She wrote in her journal and mentioned during the reflective discussions with the second author that she was overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities and said her “hands are already full.” One instance exemplified her loss of agency and disinvestment as shown in the excerpt: “I was going to join an academic project... Suddenly it became too much. Everything became too much. panicked really bad... I withdrew in the final possible moment.” [Sic]

Implications

This paper produced several implications for scholarly work and GenAI initiatives in educational institutions. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that emotions drive teachers’ investment in GenAI learning and literacy-building. Normalizing anxiety and building resilience are good strategies in this respect. Secondly, supporting teachers to gain symbolic capital and acknowledging this capital is essential to evolving practice through GenAI. Thirdly, teacher agency can be promoted through sustainable PD activities that encourage teachers to inquiry their practice and to appreciate in what ways GenAI might prove useful to promote student learning and their own PD. Finally, it is important to devise actionable plans that respect multiple responsibilities of teachers and care for teacher wellbeing.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Regarding the use of GenAI in the write-up of this paper, the first author created a custom GPT to aid her as a critical friend in conceptualizing this study. Following a long conversation, she mapped the study features: the format, the recurrent and dominant ideas in the data, and how they relate to investment. She sought proofreading and editing in a very limited manner only to check certain phrases and avoided its use as a principle to ensure the presence of the authors’ voice. The second author did not consult GenAI at any stage.

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