Article

Caught in the rye: Novice teachers' journeys of self-discovery and identity formation

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the experiences of novice teachers as they navigate the complexities of identity formation and self-discovery during their early careers. Grounded in Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and themes from J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, the research employs thematic analysis of interviews and reflective notes from eight novice teachers to uncover their emotional and professional struggles. Four key themes emerged: Alienation, identity and self-discovery, rejection of societal norms, and the search for genuine connections. Findings indicate that feelings of alienation often undermine teachers' confidence and motivation, while self-discovery fosters resilience and adaptability. The rejection of standardized norms prompts educators to seek more meaningful teaching practices, enhancing student engagement and empowerment. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of building authentic relationships with colleagues and students in creating a supportive teaching environment. This research underscores the need for systemic support, including mentorship and collaborative practices, to improve novice teacher retention rates. By linking literary themes to educational experiences, this study advocates for the integration of narrative inquiry in teacher training programs, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by new teachers.

Keywords: the catcher in the rye; transformative learning theory; novice teachers identity formation; teacher education

1. Introduction

The transition from pre-service training to professional practice is a critical period for novice teachers, usually marked by intense self-reflection and identity formation [1]. This study explores how new English language teachers navigate their early careers, focusing on their emotional, social, and professional challenges. The significance of this research lies in its unique approach, utilizing *The Catcher in the Rye* as a literary framework to analyze the experiences of these teachers. By drawing parallels between Holden Caulfield's journey of self-discovery and the professional development of novice teachers, this study contributes fresh insights into identity formation in the early stages of teaching.

This research also fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing on novice teachers' emotional and contextual complexities, particularly the impact of societal norms, professional expectations, and personal aspirations on their growth. Additionally, the findings offer practical implications for teacher education programs, highlighting the importance of mentorship, reflection, and resilience-building strategies. As a contribution to *Forum for Education Studies*, this study deepens the understanding of novice teacher identity formation and proposes innovative ways of

incorporating literary themes into teacher education, opening up new avenues for research and pedagogy.

2. Review of literature

Novice teachers undergo significant identity formation during their early careers, navigating the complex transition from learners to professionals. This process involves the evolution of their teaching beliefs and the negotiation of contextual realities, which can positively or negatively influence their identity construction [2,3]. As these teachers progress through their first years, they encounter various challenges that shape their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and professional commitment. Longitudinal studies indicate that novice educators develop increasingly complex identity narratives as they reconcile idealistic aspirations with the realities of the classroom [4,5]. While personal attributes contribute to this transformation, institutional support and working conditions are pivotal in shaping novice teachers' professional identities [5]. A supportive environment, characterized by coherent teacher policies and effective mentorship, is crucial for facilitating workplace learning and fostering a positive identity construction among novice educators [2,5].

The first year of teaching is particularly critical, as novice teachers grapple with fundamental personal questions that extend beyond their teaching effectiveness [6]. The identity transformation process involves negotiating with school contexts and adapting to new social settings [7]. The research underscores the importance of Communities of Practice (CoP) in providing novice teachers with the social support necessary to navigate these challenges and develop resilience [8]. Continuous self-reflection and professional development become essential strategies for these teachers to foster their sense of self-efficacy and promote their growth [7].

Research on novice English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers highlights a complex range of challenges and influences shaping their professional development. Akcor and Savasci [9] identify two main categories of challenges: Professional adaptation issues and social integration obstacles, with recommendations for bolstering pre-service and in-service support. In language assessment, Gan and Lam [10] explore how novice teachers construct assessment identities, which reveals diverse trajectories influenced by self-efficacy, reflection, and institutional demands. In Malaysia, Macalister [11] shows that study abroad experiences, though beneficial, can create a disconnect in primary school settings by impacting pedagogical decision-making. Meanwhile, Tajeddin and Bolouri [12] report that novice teachers' pedagogical reasoning is often inconsistent, shaped by changing beliefs and a lack of reflective practice. Finally, Zorba [13] underscores the pivotal role of school context in facilitating or hindering professional development by identifying both structural supports and limitations. Together, these studies emphasize the importance of adaptive, contextually responsive professional support in fostering the growth of novice EFL teachers.

The process of identity formation in novice teachers is complex and influenced by various factors, ranging from personal experiences to contextual challenges. Seyri and Nazari [14] highlight the co-constitutive influence of past experiences, current practices, and future aspirations on teacher identity development. Their longitudinal

study demonstrated that the gap between the identities teachers form during their education and those constructed in practice often leads to emotional conflicts, resistance to imposed identities, and even turnover intentions. This underscores the importance of bridging teacher education programs with actual teaching practice to smooth the transition for new teachers. Similarly, Goktepe and Kunt [15] explored how induction programs in Turkey can restrict novice teachers' professional growth. Their study revealed that the imposed identity formed during mentorship and early classroom experiences often conflicts with the teacher's own beliefs and pedagogical perspective. This aligns with Nazari et al. [16], who emphasized how power dynamics and contextual discourses shape novice teachers' identities. While all novice teachers experience challenges like emotional labor and agency conflicts, individual differences—such as their sense of belonging and future self-images—add complexity to their identity construction.

Adding to this, Derakhshan and Nazari [17] focused on the emotional critical incidents (CIs) that impact novice teachers' identity formation. Their findings showed that emotional tensions—whether at an interpersonal or institutional level—create significant obstacles in developing professional identity, often leading teachers to adopt defensive stances or reevaluate their career paths. Similarly, Atai et al. [18] found that novice English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers face unique identity struggles as they grapple with the dual demands of language and content instruction. These struggles are often rooted in the mismatch between teachers' professional understandings and the realities of EAP instruction in specific contexts.

Finally, Lomi and Mbato [19] explored the experiences of novice teachers in an underdeveloped region of Indonesia, where both internal struggles (such as self-efficacy and emotional control) and external challenges (such as lack of resources and low salaries) heavily influenced the teachers' identity development. This study highlights how the context in which a teacher works plays a crucial role in shaping their professional identity, particularly in less privileged areas where resources are limited.

Understanding the complexities of identity formation and self-discovery among novice teachers is crucial for designing effective teacher education programs and supporting their transition into the teaching profession. By examining the interplay between personal attributes and institutional factors, we can better appreciate the journey of novice teachers as they strive to define their roles within the educational landscape.

3. Theoretical framework

This study is framed by Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), which posits that learning occurs through critical reflection and the reassessment of personal beliefs and assumptions. Developed by [20], TLT emphasizes the importance of transformative experiences that lead individuals to question existing paradigms and develop new understandings of themselves and their environments. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for novice teachers navigating the emotional and professional challenges of their early careers.

In this research, TLT serves as a lens to analyze how novice teachers experience identity formation and develop their teaching philosophies amid the complexities of their professional contexts. The participants' narratives reveal a process of critical reflection that aligns with TLT, as they confront dissonance between their pre-service training ideals and the realities of teaching practice. Through this reflective process, teachers engage in transformative experiences that challenge their preconceived notions about effective teaching and assessment, facilitating their growth and development as educators.

The Catcher in the Rye, a novel by J.D. Salinger, follows the journey of Holden Caulfield, a disillusioned teenager who struggles with feelings of alienation, identity confusion, and a deep-seated rejection of societal norms. Wandering through New York City after being expelled from his prep school, Holden grapples with the complexities of adulthood and seeks genuine connections amid a world he finds overwhelmingly "phony". His character's inner turmoil and search for meaning resonate deeply with the transformative challenges faced by novice teachers in this study, who similarly experience isolation, question established norms, and seek authenticity in their professional journeys.

The themes from *The Catcher in the Rye*—alienation, identity formation, rejection of societal norms, and the search for genuine connections—complement the framework of TLT by providing a narrative context for understanding the participants' experiences. The use of these themes, drawn from Salinger's exploration of Holden Caulfield's struggles, enhances the analysis by illustrating how novice teachers relate to the emotional conflicts and societal pressures depicted in the novel.

In summary, this theoretical framework combines Transformative Learning Theory with the thematic insights from *The Catcher in the Rye* to provide a comprehensive understanding of novice teachers' identity formation. By intertwining these perspectives, the study highlights the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching, emphasizing the need for supportive environments that foster critical reflection and personal growth.

4. Research design

The design of this qualitative study incorporates a phenomenological approach, an ideal framework for capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology allows for a deep exploration of personal perceptions and emotions, offering a richer understanding of how novice teachers make sense of their professional identity formation [21]. By centering on the participants' subjective experiences, this approach provides valuable insights into their journey. As [22] explain, phenomenology is particularly useful for exploring common experiences among individuals, enabling researchers to identify key themes and underlying meanings shared across participants.

In applying this approach, the study emphasized exploring participants' firsthand experiences of challenges, successes, and emotional shifts during their early careers. This focus allowed for an authentic representation of their perspectives on alienation, self-discovery, and relational dynamics in their work environments, aligning well with

the phenomenological aim of uncovering deeper understandings of human experiences within a specific context.

5. Participants

The study focused on eight novice English teachers who had completed their teacher training programs and were in the early stages of their teaching careers (see **Table 1** for participant demographics). All participants had one and one-and-a-half years of work experience in English language teaching. They were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a focused exploration of their early career experiences, particularly regarding feelings of alienation, identity development, and professional connections. By selecting teachers with similar training backgrounds and experience levels, the study aimed to identify shared patterns while highlighting individual differences in their reflections.

Table 1. Teachers' demographic information.

Teacher	Gender	Age	Experience	Education
A	Female	20	1 year	BA student TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)
B	Female	21	1 year	BA student TEFL
C	Male	20	14 months	BA student English Literature
D	Female	19	1 year	BA student TEFL
E	Male	22	13 months	BA student Psychology
F	Male	21	13 months	BA student English Translation Studies
G	Female	20	15 months	BA student English Literature
H	Male	20	18 months	BA student TEFL

6. Data collection

Data were collected through two primary methods: Semi-structured interviews and reflective narrative notes. The semi-structured interviews, lasting between 20 minutes and 30 minutes each, allowed participants to explore and elaborate on their personal experiences related to the themes of the study. The flexible interview format ensured that while core topics were consistently addressed, participants could reflect on their experiences in their own words. Following the interviews, participants were asked to complete reflective narrative notes to provide further depth and context to the data. This approach, aligned with a narrative inquiry framework, allowed participants to reflect on their evolving professional identities, emotions, and challenges with greater clarity, supporting the thematic analysis.

The interview guide was developed based on readings of *The Catcher in the Rye* and themes relevant to novice teachers' experiences identified in the literature. Questions focused on participants' feelings of isolation, identity development,

challenges with societal norms, and desires for connection in their teaching environments. For example, questions like "Can you describe a moment when you felt sidelined in your role?" aimed to elicit detailed responses about their experiences, thus linking directly to TLT's emphasis on critical reflection. Moreover, the reflective notes were completed by participants. Reflective notes are written reflections that participants completed after each interview, which allowed them to process their thoughts and emotions in more depth. These notes encouraged participants to revisit key moments, challenges, and learning experiences by providing further context to their initial responses. Participants were instructed to focus on any new realizations or feelings that emerged after discussing their teaching experiences.

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the rights and privacy of participants. All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement, with full disclosure regarding the study's purpose, their role in it, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participants' identities through pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the data.

7. Data analysis

The analysis of the gathered data followed [23] the thematic analysis framework. This approach involved a detailed, six-phase process to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis explored how the participants experienced alienation, identity formation, rejection of societal norms, and the search for genuine connections as novice teachers. A narrative inquiry framework was employed to enhance the robustness of the findings. After the interviews, participants were asked to complete reflective narrative notes to provide further insights and support data triangulation.

In the pre-analysis phase, I engaged in multiple readings of *The Catcher in the Rye* to extract and refine the central themes relevant to my research. This thorough examination provided a rich literary context for understanding the emotional and psychological challenges faced by novice teachers. As I conducted interviews with eight novice educators, I encouraged them to share their personal experiences related to these themes. During the thematic analysis process, I systematically identified patterns within the participants' narratives, which aligned with the themes I had previously delineated: Alienation, identity formation, rejection of societal norms, and the quest for authentic relationships.

The first phase of analysis involved familiarizing ourselves with the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the narrative notes. All interviews, which lasted between 20 minutes and 30 minutes, were transcribed verbatim. The reflective notes gathered after the interviews provided additional context and personal reflection from the participants. By reading through both the transcriptions and notes multiple times, preliminary observations about recurring patterns and keywords were made.

Next, the coding process began, informed by TLT, which emphasizes critical reflection and transformation. Each piece of data. Each piece of data—whether from an interview or a narrative note—was broken down into smaller units of meaning. For example, in response to the theme of "Alienation", one participant, Teacher A,

mentioned feeling "sidelined" during a staff meeting when her ideas were not considered. This led to the initial code "feeling undervalued". Another participant, Teacher C, noted difficulties in introducing new technologies, contributing to the code's "lack of support".

Here's an illustration of how these codes emerged:

- **Interview Data:** "I felt sidelined in that meeting… my ideas were ignored". → **Code**: "Feeling undervalued".
- **Reflective Notes:** "I often thought my opinions were too new to be welcomed by senior teachers". → **Code:** "Self-doubt due to hierarchy".
- **Interview Data:** "There wasn't anyone to help me when I introduced new technology in the classroom". → **Code:** "Lack of support for innovation".

Through open coding, multiple codes were generated from various data segments. This iterative process ensured that the codes accurately captured different aspects of the participants' experiences.

Once the data had been coded, the next step was to group the codes into potential themes. At this point, patterns began to emerge that reflected the broader experiences of the novice teachers. For example, codes like "feeling undervalued", "lack of support", and "self-doubt" were combined under the theme of "Alienation". Meanwhile, codes such as "adapting teaching methods" and "redefining teaching identity" were clustered under the theme "Identity and Self-Discovery".

The narrative notes were handy here, as they provided deeper insights into how the teachers' feelings evolved over time. For instance, after an interview, Teacher E reflected on her growing confidence in expressing her ideas. This note enriched the code "finding a voice" and contributed to the theme "Search for Genuine Connections".

The initial themes were reviewed to ensure they reflected the data comprehensively. The narrative notes were cross-checked with the interview data to ensure consistency and depth. For instance, during the interview, Teacher G expressed dissatisfaction with the standardized testing system. In her reflective note, she expanded on this by linking it to her rejection of traditional educational norms, adding depth to the theme of "Rejection of Societal Norms".

After reviewing and refining, the final themes were clearly defined and named. The four major themes were:

1) **Alienation**—capturing the participants' feelings of isolation and undervaluation in their work environment.
2) **Identity and Self-Discovery**—reflecting how participants' teaching identities evolved through trial and error.
3) **Rejection of Societal Norms**—highlighting the rejection of traditional norms like standardized testing.
4) **Search for Genuine Connections**—emphasizing the desire for meaningful relationships with colleagues and students.

Each theme was supported by multiple quotations from both the interviews and narrative notes to provide rich, detailed examples of the participants' experiences. For example, under the theme of "Alienation", Teacher F described a "constant sense of proving myself", which linked back to her reflective note where she mentioned feeling like "an outsider despite being part of the staff".

8. Findings

Through the analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and reflective notes, it becomes evident that the experiences of novice teachers are intertwined with feelings of alienation, identity formation, rejection of societal norms, and the search for genuine connections (see **Figure 1** for a visual representation of these themes). The insights gained from these themes reflect the challenges they face and their resilience and commitment to evolving as educators.


Novice Teachers' Journeys: Identity, Alienation, and Self-Discovery through The Catcher in the Rye

Alienation

Novice teachers often feel alienated, especially when their ideas are dismissed or undervalued in staff meetings.
Like Holden, who constantly feels misunderstood by the world around him, novice teachers experience alienation within the institutional hierarchy, struggling to assert their voice.
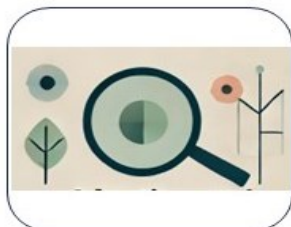
Identity and Self-Discovery

Teachers gain insights into their resilience, adaptability, and the importance of collaboration—echoing Holden's journey of self-discovery as he navigates through complex emotional challenges.

Rejection of Societal Norms

Novice teachers question the rigidity of the education system, especially the overemphasis on standardized testing, and seek innovative teaching methods.
This mirrors Holden's rejection of societal conventions. Like Holden's disdain for the "phoniness" of the adult world, novice teachers challenge educational norms that they believe stifle real learning and creativity.

Search for Genuine Connections

Establishing meaningful connections with students and colleagues plays a crucial role in novice teachers' emotional well-being and professional growth.
Holden's search for authenticity in relationships resonates with novice teachers' quest for meaningful connections in the classroom and with peers, offering emotional support and professional development.

Figure 1. Summary of key findings.

Theme 1: Alienation

Analysis of Alienation in the Teaching Environment

The theme of alienation emerged strongly from the teachers' accounts, illustrating a pervasive sense of being marginalized within their professional contexts. Many teachers recounted experiences during staff meetings that left them feeling dismissed and undervalued. For example, Teacher A expressed, "During a recent meeting, I shared an innovative approach I had read about, and it was completely ignored. It made me feel like my ideas don't matter". This quote encapsulates the dismissive atmosphere that can stifle creative contributions from novice educators. According to TLT, such feelings of marginalization may initially challenge a teacher's assumptions about their professional worth, which potentially serves as a 'disorienting dilemma' that prompts self-reflection and an eventual reframing of their role and value within the institution.

Moreover, the impact of these experiences on their confidence was profound. Teacher D reflected, "After being shot down in meetings, I doubted my teaching abilities. It's like every time I spoke up, I was reminded I didn't belong here". This sentiment illustrates how feelings of alienation can lead to decreased motivation and self-doubt, ultimately affecting their enthusiasm for teaching. In TLT, experiencing rejection and self-doubt can lead to critical reflection on personal beliefs and assumptions about teaching. For Teacher D, overcoming self-doubt could involve recognizing and discarding internalized expectations from others, a transformative process central to TLT.

Several teachers also identified the broader context of their work environment as contributing to their sense of isolation. Teacher F stated, "Every day feels like a test; I'm constantly trying to prove my worth, and that takes a toll on my mental health". This competition fosters an environment where collaboration is undermined by individual performance metrics, intensifying feelings of alienation. Under TLT, the competitive nature described by Teacher F may initially hinder transformation by intensifying isolation; however, it can also encourage teachers to challenge institutional norms and redefine their purpose, a key aspect of transformative change.

The hesitancy to innovate in their teaching practices is another consequence of alienation. Teacher E remarked, "I often revert to traditional methods because I'm afraid to face more criticism. It feels safer, but I know my students would benefit from more engaging activities". This reflects a cycle where feelings of alienation stifle creativity and limit the potential for pedagogical innovation, negatively impacting student learning outcomes. TLT suggests that such hesitancy to innovate may represent a barrier to transformational change. However, confronting this reluctance could also catalyze critical reflection on existing practices, leading to more empowering professional identities focused on student-centered learning.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield's pervasive sense of alienation resonates deeply with the novice teachers' experiences. The feelings of being marginalized and dismissed in professional settings parallel Holden's experiences in a world he perceives as phony. Teacher A's expression of feeling ignored during meetings mirrors Holden's constant struggle for acknowledgment and validation. Similarly, Teacher D's reflection on self-doubt echoes Holden's lack of belonging, as he often feels out of place among his peers. The competitive environment described

by Teacher F, where individual performance metrics overshadow collaboration, resonates with Holden's disillusionment with societal expectations and norms. In TLT terms, Holden's alienation and rejection of societal expectations resemble the transformative journeys these teachers experience as they critically assess and redefine their professional beliefs and values.

Theme 2: Identity and Self-Discovery

Exploring Self-Discovery Through Teaching Experiences

The journey of self-discovery among novice teachers revealed a significant transformation in their understanding of their teaching identities. Key experiences acted as pivotal moments that reshaped their perspectives. Teacher B articulated, "When my group project succeeded, it hit me how important collaboration is—not just among students but among us as teachers". This statement highlights the realization that successful teaching requires a community of practice, which can be nurtured through collaboration. In TLT, this realization can be seen as a transformative insight that alters Teacher B's understanding of collaboration, reinforcing the idea that collective engagement is essential to professional growth and efficacy.

Challenging experiences often prompted teachers to reassess their beliefs and methods. Teacher D reflected on a tough lesson: "I had a class where none of my usual methods worked. It forced me to rethink everything and adapt my approach to meet their needs". This pivotal moment of struggle ultimately led to a shift towards a more student-centered methodology, illustrating the connection between adversity and growth in teaching identity. According to TLT, such challenges serve as disorienting dilemmas that compel teachers to engage in critical reflection, enabling them to reconsider their teaching practices and adopt new perspectives that better align with their students' needs.

Teachers expressed a strong desire for their identities to evolve, with many envisioning a future that includes flexibility and responsiveness in their teaching styles. Teacher F stated, "I want to be a teacher who integrates social-emotional learning. It's essential for my students' well-being, and I believe it'll make me a better educator". This ambition reflects an understanding of the importance of emotional intelligence in teaching and the desire to cultivate a holistic approach to education. This aspiration can signify a transformative shift in Teacher F's identity, where integrating social-emotional learning represents a new conceptual framework for understanding the role of empathy and connection in teaching.

Furthermore, balancing personal values and institutional expectations was a common theme. Teacher A stated, "I feel torn between my creative lesson ideas and the rigid curriculum we have to follow. It's a constant struggle to stay true to my beliefs". This highlights the tension novice teachers face in aligning their teaching philosophies with institutional demands, ultimately influencing their professional identities. This struggle resonates with TLT's emphasis on the need for critical reflection in reconciling personal values with external pressures, suggesting that navigating this tension can be a transformative process that shapes their professional identities and teaching practices.

Holden's journey throughout the novel reflects a profound struggle for self-identity, much like the novice teachers' transformative experiences in their teaching careers. Teacher B's realization of the importance of teacher collaboration resonates

with Holden's quest for genuine connections and meaningful relationships. Teacher D's moment of rethinking teaching methods in response to student needs is akin to Holden's ongoing reassessment of his values and beliefs as he navigates a complex world. Teacher F's desire to integrate social-emotional learning into their practice aligns with Holden's intrinsic understanding of young people's emotional turmoil, highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence in teaching. Holden's journey can be interpreted as an ongoing process of self-discovery, paralleling the teachers' transformative experiences as they redefine their professional identities and engage in deeper reflections on their roles as educators.

Theme 3: Rejection of Societal Norms

Questioning and Reassessing Educational Norms

Teachers expressed a growing awareness and rejection of societal norms that prioritize standardized testing over genuine learning experiences. Teacher D noted, "The pressure of standardized testing has made teaching less about learning and more about cramming facts. I don't want my students to lose their love for learning". This quote articulates a testing-focused culture's detrimental effects on educators and students. Teacher D's realization represents a critical reflection that challenges dominant educational paradigms, paving the way for transformative change in teaching philosophy.

As they began to witness the negative impact of these norms, many teachers felt empowered to advocate for more flexible and innovative teaching practices. Teacher G remarked, "Initially, I thought standardized testing was necessary, but seeing my students disengaged changed my mind. We need to explore different ways to assess their learning". This realization indicates a significant shift in perspective, where teachers are beginning to question the validity of traditional assessment methods. This shift can be understood as a transformative learning experience that encourages teachers to redefine their beliefs about assessment, emphasizing the importance of engagement and meaningful learning over compliance with conventional measures.

Teachers desired to implement alternative teaching practices that foster creativity and engagement. Teacher F stated, "I'm committed to project-based learning. I want my students to explore their interests and learn through real-world applications, not just textbooks". This aspiration reflects a rejection of norms that confine learning to rigid structures and an eagerness to embrace a more holistic approach. From a TLT perspective, Teacher F's commitment to project-based learning signifies a transformation in understanding educational practices, where the emphasis shifts from rote learning to experiential, student-centered approaches that promote deeper engagement.

Rejecting societal norms also transformed their interactions with students. Teacher H noted, "By stepping away from those expectations, I noticed my students felt more comfortable sharing their ideas. It made our classroom much more collaborative". This transformation enhanced classroom dynamics and created an environment where students felt valued and empowered.

The teachers' rejection of societal norms regarding standardized testing mirrors Holden's rebellion against societal expectations throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*. Teacher D's observation about the detrimental effects of a testing-focused culture resonates with Holden's disdain for the phony aspects of adult society that prioritize

superficial measures over genuine learning and personal growth. Teacher G's advocacy for alternative teaching practices reflects Holden's desire for authenticity as he seeks to connect with students beyond conventional measures. Teacher F's aspiration for project-based learning embodies a rejection of rigid educational structures, similar to Holden's quest for deeper meaning and personal relevance in his interactions. The parallels between the teachers' transformations and Holden's journey underscore the importance of critical reflection in questioning societal norms and fostering authentic connections in educational settings.

Theme 4: Search for Genuine Connections
The Importance of Relationships in Teaching

Building genuine relationships emerged as a central theme in the teachers' reflections, highlighting the emotional and professional importance of connections with students and colleagues. Teacher A shared a poignant interaction: "A student opened up about his struggles with English, and that conversation meant the world to me. It reminded me why I became a teacher". This moment illustrates how authentic connections can reinforce a teacher's sense of purpose and commitment. From a TLT perspective, this moment reflects the transformative power of relationships in fostering personal growth and reaffirming a teacher's identity, as meaningful interactions can lead to profound realizations about one's role and responsibilities as an educator.

The impact of these relationships on emotional well-being was profound. Teacher D articulated, "Having supportive colleagues who understand the challenges makes a difference. It's reassuring to know I'm not alone in this". This sentiment underscores the importance of collaboration and support within the teaching community, which can significantly enhance teachers' emotional resilience. The collaborative support described by Teacher D can be seen as a catalyst for transformative learning, as the shared experiences and mutual understanding among colleagues create an environment conducive to growth and reflection.

However, teachers also identified barriers to forming these connections, such as time constraints and a competitive atmosphere. Teacher F remarked, "With everything on our plates, finding the time for meaningful interactions is hard. I want to connect more with my students, but the workload is overwhelming". This challenge reflects the systemic issues that can inhibit relationship-building in educational settings. This acknowledgment of barriers aligns with TLT, which emphasizes the importance of context in learning. The systemic challenges faced by teachers highlight the need for transformative change at institutional levels to prioritize relational practices.

To foster deeper connections, teachers suggested prioritizing informal interactions. Teacher G proposed, "We need to create opportunities for casual check-ins with students. Even a few minutes can build rapport and trust". This proactive approach indicates a collective understanding that relationship-building is essential for creating a supportive learning environment. Teacher G's suggestion embodies TLT's emphasis on experiential learning; informal interactions can facilitate a more authentic exchange between teachers and students, fostering trust and deeper connections.

The theme of genuine connections echoes Holden's profound desire for authentic relationships throughout the novel. Teacher A's poignant interaction with a student captures the essence of what Holden seeks: a meaningful connection that reinforces one's purpose. Teacher D's acknowledgment of supportive colleagues reflects the

camaraderie Holden yearns for, contrasting with his feelings of isolation. The barriers to forming connections highlighted by Teacher F echo Holden's struggles to navigate his relationships amidst the pressures of conformity. Furthermore, Teacher G's suggestion to prioritize informal interactions embodies the essence of human connection that Holden desperately seeks throughout his journey.

Much like Holden Caulfield's tumultuous journey through a world rife with superficiality, these teachers wrestle with feelings of isolation and the yearning for authenticity among institutional constraints. Their reflections reveal a desire for meaningful engagement with their students and within a community that values collaboration over competition. As they confront the pressures of conformity and the challenges of self-discovery, these teachers echo a universal truth: The essence of teaching transcends mere pedagogy; it is an act of profound human connection and vulnerability. In a society that often prioritizes performance metrics over genuine learning, the voices of these educators remind us of the transformative power of empathy, creativity, and the relentless pursuit of authentic relationships, which reminds us of the principles that lie at the heart of meaningful education and echo the timeless struggles of selfhood depicted in Salinger's narrative. Ultimately, this exploration serves as a call to embrace the complexities of the teaching journey, inviting educators to cultivate an environment where both they and their students can thrive in authenticity, resilience, and shared purpose.

9. Discussion

The findings from this study resonate with and expand upon previous research on novice teacher identity formation, particularly the emotional and professional challenges they face in their early careers. As revealed in the data, novice teachers experienced significant dissonance between their idealized teacher identity—shaped during pre-service training—and the realities of teaching practice. This aligns with the work of [14], who demonstrated that the transition from teacher education programs to actual practice often results in emotional conflicts and resistance to imposed identities. In this study, many participants reported a similar sense of tension, particularly when they encountered institutional norms and practices that clashed with their personal teaching philosophies. Moreover, the role of context, highlighted in [15], emerged as a crucial factor in shaping novice teachers' professional identities. Several teachers in this study described feeling restricted by the top-down mentorship model, which mirrors Goktepe and Kunt's findings about the negative impact of mentorship programs that limit the autonomy of novice teachers. This study further reinforces the idea that the freedom to experiment with pedagogical practices is critical to helping teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice. The lack of opportunities to fully engage in such experimentation can stifle identity growth and contribute to professional dissatisfaction. This aligns with Transformative Learning Theory [20], which posits that critical reflection on one's experiences can lead to a transformative shift in perspectives and beliefs. In the context of novice teachers, the emotional dissonance they experience can serve as a catalyst for critical reflection, allowing them to re-examine their teaching practices and identities.

Research on novice EFL teachers highlights a range of challenges that align closely with the findings of this study, particularly regarding the complexities of identity formation, adaptability, and support needs. Akcor and Savasci [9] identify both professional adaptation and social integration as critical challenges, underscoring the necessity for targeted support that mitigates the feelings of *alienation* described by participants in this study. Ganand Lam [10] similarly addresses the challenges of self-efficacy and reflective practices in assessment identity formation, echoing the transformative potential of *identity and self-discovery* highlighted here. Both studies suggest that structured reflection and adaptability can bolster novice teachers' resilience, as facilitated by Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) in this study.

The complexities around rejecting prescriptive norms also find support in [11] findings, which reveal that exposure to idealized teaching practices can clash with local educational contexts. This aligns with the study's theme of *rejection of societal norms*, where novice teachers challenge traditional methods to foster more meaningful connections with students. Moreover, [12] work on inconsistent pedagogical reasoning emphasizes the need for stable connections, resonating with this study's findings on the *search for genuine connections* as a source of professional grounding. Zorba [13] further reinforces the role of school context in either facilitating or hindering growth, which supports the recommendation for context-responsive mentorship and structural supports. Together, these studies reinforce the need for adaptive support structures that honor the evolving journeys of novice teachers, advocating for TLT-based approaches that incorporate narrative and reflective practices to foster resilience, connection, and professional self-discovery.

The emotional dimension of identity formation, explored by [17], also surfaced in the participants' reflections. Emotional conflicts related to classroom management, student expectations, and institutional pressures often left teachers questioning their suitability for the profession. Like Derakhshan and Nazari's findings on emotional critical incidents, participants in this study faced interpersonal and institutional tensions that influenced their self-perception and agency. In line with this, many participants expressed concerns about how their emotional struggles might impact their teaching, echoing the concerns raised about teacher attrition rates tied to emotional challenges. This reflects the transformative learning process, wherein emotional experiences can trigger critical self-reflection, leading to shifts in identity. As novice teachers confront these emotional challenges, they have the opportunity to engage in transformative learning by critically analyzing their responses and adapting their teaching philosophies.

The theme of alienation emerged prominently in the participants' narratives, echoing the work of [2] and [4], who highlight that novice teachers often experience feelings of isolation, particularly in environments where their ideas are dismissed. Teacher B's observation of a lack of mentorship aligns with the assertion that institutional support is vital for positive identity construction [5]. This study's findings reveal how such feelings of alienation can diminish confidence and motivation, reflecting the challenges outlined by [7], who note that novice teachers grapple with reconciling idealism with the reality of their work environments. Nazari et al. [16] further contribute to this discussion by highlighting how power relations and contextual discourses shape novice teachers' identities. The participants in this study

frequently referenced tensions related to administrative policies and classroom dynamics, suggesting that external factors often diminished their sense of agency. This reflects Nazari et al.'s notion that identity construction is about personal growth and negotiating one's role within a larger system of power. Transformative Learning Theory emphasizes that such challenges can lead to critical reflection, allowing teachers to examine their beliefs about their roles and the constraints they face. This reflective process is essential for developing a more authentic professional identity, as it enables teachers to question and redefine their understanding of what it means to be an educator in a complex and often contradictory environment.

The participants' reflections on identity formation illustrate a journey marked by resilience and adaptability, in line with [3] and [6], who argue that identity transformation occurs through a complex interplay of experiences. Teachers reported pivotal moments, such as Teacher D's reevaluation of her teaching methods. The desire for a more student-centered approach echoed the findings of [24], which underscore the need for novice teachers to actively contribute to their own professional development by fostering positive relationships and seeking support. In the framework of Transformative Learning Theory, these moments of reevaluation can be seen as transformative learning experiences that facilitate personal and professional growth, allowing teachers to move beyond mere survival in their roles and engage more deeply with their students' learning needs.

The findings also reflect a critical stance towards societal norms, particularly the pressures of standardized testing. Teacher D's rejection of test-centric approaches is consistent with the concerns raised by [7], who argue that such norms can undermine the joy of learning and stifle creativity. The participants' aspirations to adopt innovative practices, such as project-based learning, underscore a broader trend in educational discourse advocating for holistic teaching methodologies. This rejection of conventional norms is crucial for fostering an engaging and supportive classroom environment, aligning with the findings of [25], which highlight the transformative potential of adaptive teaching practices. By challenging these norms, novice teachers engage in transformative learning, allowing them to redefine their teaching philosophies and practices. This process not only enhances their own identity development but also contributes to a more dynamic and responsive educational environment for their students.

Moreover, the theme of seeking genuine connections resonates deeply with the participants' experiences, reinforcing the significance of interpersonal relationships in the teaching profession. Teacher A's heartfelt interaction with a struggling student exemplifies the emotional connections that enhance teacher well-being, mirroring findings by [7] that emphasize the role of supportive relationships in professional development. The barriers identified, such as time constraints and competitive atmospheres, align with the concerns raised by [8], suggesting that systemic changes are needed to facilitate deeper, more authentic connections among educators and students.

Finally, the challenges faced by the novice teachers in this study can be linked to the themes in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Much like Holden Caulfield's struggle with societal norms and personal expectations, the novice teachers in this study experienced a sense of alienation and conflict between their internal beliefs and external realities.

Holden's resistance to the adult world mirrors the participants' resistance to institutional norms, while his search for authenticity resonates with the teachers' search for a genuine professional identity. Just as Holden struggles to reconcile his identity amidst conflicting expectations, the novice teachers grapple with the expectations their institutions, students, and themselves placed upon them. This parallel underscores the transformative journey of both the characters and the teachers, as they seek to reconcile their internal desires with external realities. The narrative of Holden Caulfield can serve as a metaphor for the novice teachers' struggles, illustrating the broader human experience of seeking identity and meaning in a world filled with conflicting expectations. Through this lens, novice teachers' journeys are not merely individual battles; they represent a universal quest for authenticity and self-definition amidst external pressures.

10. Conclusion

This study sheds light on novice teachers' intricate challenges during their early careers, focusing on identity formation and self-discovery. Four key themes emerged through the thematic analysis of interviews and reflective notes: Alienation, identity and self-discovery, rejection of societal norms, and the search for genuine connections. These findings resonate with existing literature and underscore new educators' emotional and professional struggles in navigating their roles within the educational landscape.

Integrating themes from *The Catcher in the Rye* into this analysis provides a unique framework for understanding the complexities of novice teacher experiences. The literary lens enriches the discourse on teacher identity and emphasizes the importance of emotional resilience and the development of authentic relationships in fostering a supportive teaching environment. This study highlights the need for systemic changes and advocates for enhanced mentorship programs, collaborative practices, and institutional support to empower novice teachers and improve their retention rates.

Beyond the insights drawn from the novel, this analysis contributes new dimensions to the existing literature on novice teachers by illustrating how themes of alienation and identity formation can inform practical strategies for teacher education. By bridging literary analysis with educational practice, the findings advocate for a more holistic approach to supporting new teachers, emphasizing not only their professional development but also their emotional and relational needs. This approach suggests that fostering an environment where novice teachers feel valued and connected can significantly enhance their sense of belonging and, ultimately, their effectiveness in the classroom.

Future Research

Future research should expand upon the findings of this study by exploring the following avenues:

1) **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting longitudinal studies that track novice teachers over multiple years could provide deeper insights into how their identities evolve and how their experiences shape their professional practices over time.

2) **Diverse Contexts:** Investigating the experiences of novice teachers in diverse educational contexts, including different cultures, settings, and school structures, would help to identify commonalities and differences in identity formation processes.

3) **Impact of Mentorship:** Research focusing specifically on the role of mentorship in supporting novice teachers could shed light on effective practices and the characteristics of successful mentoring relationships.

4) **Literary Analysis in Teacher Training:** Exploring the use of literary themes in teacher education programs could enhance understanding and empathy among pre-service teachers, helping them navigate their emotional journeys in the classroom.

5) **Quantitative Measures:** Future studies could incorporate quantitative methods to measure the impact of identified themes (e.g., alienation, professional connections) on teacher retention and effectiveness, providing empirical evidence to support qualitative findings.

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