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Beyond adaptation: meanings of (trans)formation among english language teachers in the internationalization of education

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BEYOND ADAPTATION: MEANINGS OF (TRANS)FORMATION AMONG ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION

Para além da adaptação: sentidos de (trans)formação de professores de inglês na internacionalização da educação

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ABSTRACT: Internationalization increasingly shapes the work of English language teachers in Brazil's Federal Network of Vocational, Scientific, and Technological Education, yet professional development often positions them as implementers of externally designed agendas. This article examines how three English language teachers collaboratively constructed meanings of teacher (trans)formation during a five-month online course on the internationalization of education. Grounded in Critical Applied Linguistics and critical-collaborative action research, the study draws on six collective reflective sessions held in 2022. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed through an iterative thematic process that attended to explicit statements, tensions, and silences. Six meaning domains were identified and reorganized into three interdependent movements: epistemic-pedagogical reorientation, which brought together the re-signification of classroom practice and the strengthening of teacher-researcher identity; relational-institutional reorientation, which involved peer collaboration and the recognition of systematic professional learning as an institutional need; and linguistic-political reorientation, which encompassed the decentering of English and the strengthening of teacher agency in internationalization. The findings show that participants constructed (trans)formation less as the acquisition of techniques than as a relational, unfinished process of questioning established practices, identities, language hierarchies, and institutional arrangements. Because the evidence is discursive and the action-research cycle was only partially implemented, the article does not claim to demonstrate sustained behavioral change. It argues that critical internationalization requires formally allocated time within teachers' workloads, institutional support, a multilingual orientation, and teachers' participation as knowledge producers and policy actors.

KEYWORDS: English language teacher education. Critical-collaborative action research. Internationalization of education. Teacher agency. Critical Applied Linguistics.

RESUMO: A internacionalização incide cada vez mais sobre o trabalho de professores de inglês na Rede Federal de Educação Profissional, Científica e Tecnológica, embora a formação continuada frequentemente os posicione como executores de agendas concebidas externamente. Este artigo analisa os sentidos de (trans)formação docente construídos colaborativamente por

três professores de inglês durante um curso on-line de cinco meses sobre internacionalização da educação. Fundamentado na Linguística Aplicada Crítica e na Pesquisa-Ação Colaborativo-Crítica, o estudo mobiliza seis Sessões Reflexivas Coletivas realizadas em 2022. As gravações foram transcritas e examinadas por meio de interpretação temática iterativa, atenta a enunciados explícitos, tensões e silenciamentos. Seis domínios de sentidos foram identificados e reorganizados em três movimentos interdependentes: reorientação epistêmico-pedagógica, que abrange a ressignificação da prática em sala de aula e o fortalecimento da identidade de professor-pesquisador; reorientação relacional-institucional, que envolve a colaboração entre pares e o reconhecimento da formação sistemática como necessidade institucional; e reorientação linguístico-política, que contempla a descentralização do inglês e o fortalecimento da agência docente na internacionalização. Os resultados mostram que a (trans)formação foi construída menos como aquisição de técnicas do que como processo relacional e inacabado de questionamento de práticas, identidades, hierarquias linguísticas e arranjos institucionais. Como as evidências são discursivas e o ciclo da Pesquisa-Ação foi implementado apenas parcialmente, não se afirma mudança comportamental comprovada. Defende-se que uma internacionalização crítica exige tempo destinado à formação na carga de trabalho docente, apoio institucional, orientação multilíngue e participação docente na produção de conhecimentos e políticas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Formação de professores de língua inglesa. Pesquisa-Ação Colaborativo-Crítica. Internacionalização da educação. Agência docente. Linguística Aplicada Crítica.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE SUMMARY: Internationalization involves much more than travel abroad. It also influences language teaching, school projects, partnerships, and what teachers and students regard as valuable knowledge. We studied a five-month online course in which three English language teachers from Brazil's Federal Network discussed these issues. The teachers reconsidered everyday classroom decisions, the isolation that often characterizes their work, and the assumption that English must always be the main language of internationalization. They also described themselves as researchers and as professionals who can shape international initiatives rather than simply carry out instructions. These shifts were evident in what the teachers said, planned, and reinterpreted during the meetings; however, the study did not follow their classroom practice long enough to confirm lasting change. The findings suggest that courses can create valuable spaces for reflection, but teachers also need dedicated time within their workloads, institutional recognition, and opportunities to collaborate. Internationalization becomes more equitable when it values multiple languages, connects global opportunities with local needs, and involves teachers in decision-making from the outset.

Introduction

Internationalization has become an increasingly visible dimension of education in Brazil. It takes shape institutionally through mobility programs, international partnerships, language policies, proficiency testing, curriculum initiatives, virtual exchange, and demands for cross-border publication and cooperation. The Federal Network of Vocational, Scientific, and Technological Education provides a particularly important context for these processes because its institutions span upper-secondary, vocational, undergraduate, and graduate

education and are distributed throughout the country. Within this system, English language teachers are frequently expected to teach the language associated with international mobility, advise candidates, administer proficiency examinations, welcome visitors, support the implementation of international agreements, and contribute to curriculum internationalization. These expectations can broaden the political and pedagogical scope of their work, but they can also naturalize the assumption that expertise in English language teaching automatically equips teachers to design or lead internationalization initiatives.

The prevailing account of internationalization presents it as the intentional integration of international, intercultural, and global dimensions into education for the benefit of learners, staff, and society (DE WIT *et al.*, 2015). Critical scholarship, however, has shown that the process is neither neutral nor equally accessible. It may reproduce market rationalities, unequal mobility, hierarchies that privilege knowledge from the Global North, native-speaker norms, and the privileged status of English (KUBOTA, 2009; JORDÃO; MARTINEZ, 2015; ROCHA; MACIEL, 2017). In Brazil and elsewhere in the Global South, the question is therefore not simply whether institutions should internationalize, but whose knowledge, languages, interests, and experiences shape the process. English language teachers occupy a contradictory position in this landscape: their expertise may be institutionally valued even as they are reduced to providers of language services or implementers of policies designed without their participation.

This contradiction makes teacher education central to the internationalization debate. Transmission-oriented professional development commonly treats teachers as recipients of ready-made concepts and techniques, assumes that participation will lead directly to changes in practice, and pays insufficient attention to teachers' situated knowledge and working conditions (IMBERNÓN, 2010; HAYES, 2019). Critical-collaborative approaches, by contrast, create conditions in which teachers can examine their practices, challenge institutional arrangements, and produce knowledge with their peers (BURNS, 1999; MAGALHÃES; FIDALGO, 2010). The aim is not simply to add content about internationalization to an existing course, but to investigate whether collaborative inquiry can enable teachers to reposition themselves in relation to classroom practice, professional identity, language hierarchies, institutional responsibility, and agency.

Against this background, this article asks: How did three English language teachers collaboratively construct meanings of teacher (trans)formation during an online course on the internationalization of education? It examines the meanings constructed across six collective reflective sessions and explains how they connect the pedagogical, professional, institutional, linguistic, and political dimensions of teacher development. We use the expression *teacher*

(trans)formation to retain the productive ambiguity of the Portuguese *formação docente*. In Portuguese, *formação* encompasses teacher education, professional development, and identity formation, while placing *trans* in parentheses foregrounds the possibility of transformation. The formulation thus resists a linear before-and-after model and denotes an ongoing process through which teachers reinterpret their experiences, identities, and possibilities for action.

The study reported here offers a focused and substantially reworked analysis based on Chapter 6 of Pereira's doctoral thesis, supervised by Silva and defended at the University of Brasília in 2024 (PEREIRA, 2024). It makes three contributions. Empirically, it centers the voices of English language teachers working at three institutions in three regions of Brazil. Analytically, it reorganizes six meaning domains identified in the thesis into three interdependent movements: epistemic-pedagogical, relational-institutional, and linguistic-political reorientation. Methodologically, it treats transformation as a co-constructed and contested interpretation rather than as an outcome that can be inferred automatically from course participation. This distinction is important because the data consist of participants' discourse, accounts of practice, and projections of future action; they do not include longitudinal observations of behavioral change.

The discussion proceeds in five sections. The first develops teacher (trans)formation as critical and collaborative praxis. The second situates English language teacher education within critical internationalization. The third describes the study, the course, the participants, and the interpretive procedures. The fourth presents and discusses the three reorientations. The fifth considers the implications and limitations, and the conclusion returns to the research question.

1. Teacher (trans)formation as critical and collaborative praxis

This section develops the theoretical understanding of teacher (trans)formation that guides the analysis. It first contrasts transmission-oriented models of continuing teacher education with perspectives that view professional learning as situated, experiential, and structurally conditioned. It then examines critical-collaborative action research as a space for negotiating teacher-researcher identity and agency, drawing on Critical Applied Linguistics to connect professional learning with power, inequality, and social justice. Together, these concepts frame (trans)formation as a relational, contested, and unfinished process rather than as a linear outcome of course participation.

1.1 Beyond transmission in continuing teacher education

Continuing teacher education has long been marked by terminological instability. In Brazilian educational discourse, it has been described using terms such as recycling, training, improvement, capacity building, continuing education, and permanent education. These terms are not interchangeable because they embody different understandings of teachers and knowledge. Labels associated with recycling or training may reduce professional learning to remedying deficits or mechanically acquiring techniques, whereas continuing or permanent education can foreground learning as a lifelong, situated, and deliberate process oriented toward change (MARIN, 1995; CASTRO; AMORIM, 2015).

Transmission models became institutionalized through standardized courses in which knowledge and skills were designed by others and delivered to teachers. Such models tend to exclude teachers from decision-making and presume a straightforward transfer from course content to changes in classroom practice (IMBERNÓN, 2010). That presumption is particularly problematic when internationalization is the focus. Concepts, policies, and pedagogies developed in other institutional or national settings cannot be applied automatically to the Federal Network. Teachers work in different regions and across different educational levels, campuses, and communities; the meanings and consequences of internationalization vary accordingly.

An alternative approach begins with the school or institution as a site of professional learning, recognizes experiential knowledge, and understands development as a process of critical reflection and the continuous reconstruction of personal and professional identities through interaction with others (CANDAU, 1996). This perspective does not place responsibility for educational change solely on individual teachers. Teachers' initiative matters, but workload, recognition, institutional time, resources, and decision-making structures shape whether inquiry and collaboration can be sustained. Professional learning is therefore both subjective and structural.

The expression *teacher (trans)formation* helps make this duality visible. Transformation is not a discrete outcome that follows formation. It is an ongoing, unsettled process through which teachers examine what has been normalized, connect theory with lived practice, reconstruct meanings, and envision or pursue alternative courses of action. Experience is central to this process because each experience changes how a person encounters subsequent situations; reflection can alter both the meaning attributed to an earlier experience and the position from which it is narrated (MICCOLI, 2010). Yet reflection alone is insufficient if it remains detached

from power and material conditions. A critical perspective asks how unequal relations have come to be seen as ordinary and what forms of individual and collective action might challenge them (PENNYCOOK, 2001; KUBOTA; MILLER, 2017).

1.2 Critical-collaborative action research, identity, and agency

Critical-collaborative action research offers an epistemological and methodological response to transmission. Rather than separating those who theorize from those who implement, it involves teachers and academic researchers in the shared investigation of situated problems. In its emancipatory orientation, action research examines routines, precedents, and bureaucratic constraints that impede more democratic forms of practice (CARR; KEMMIS, 1986; BURNS, 2005). It also recognizes that professional knowledge is produced through the interpretation of practice, not only imported into it.

Collaboration in this sense does not mean harmonious agreement or a simple division of tasks. It is a language-mediated process in which participants can voice their perspectives, question one another's interpretations, request clarification, relate theoretical concepts to concrete cases, and assume responsibility for the consequences of the meanings they construct (MAGALHÃES; FIDALGO, 2010). Contradiction and discomfort are therefore not failures of collaboration; they can serve as resources for examining the assumptions that sustain practice. Nevertheless, equal participation is an ethical aspiration rather than a condition guaranteed by labeling a project collaborative. Differences in institutional status, research experience, influence over facilitation, and ownership of the final text persist and must be addressed reflexively.

For language teachers, action research can support the investigation of classroom problems, curricular innovation, reflective professional development, the construction of practical theories, and the negotiation of teacher-researcher identity (BURNS, 2009; EDWARDS; BURNS, 2016a, 2016b). Teacher identity is neither an essence nor a stable attribute; it is produced through discursive positioning, experience, institutional recognition, and access to possibilities for action (KAYI-AYDAR, 2019b). The identity of *teacher-researcher* is especially relevant because it challenges the divide between academic producers of knowledge and school-based consumers of prescriptions. This identity does not require every teacher to replicate academic research practices. Rather, it denotes an inquiry stance from which teachers can formulate questions, generate evidence, interpret their work, and circulate locally grounded knowledge.

Identity is inseparable from agency. Language teacher agency can be understood as the contextually situated capacity to make intentional choices and act, shaped by past experience, current conditions, and projected futures (KAYI-AYDAR, 2019a; TAO; GAO, 2021). Agency is not a personal possession that some teachers have and others lack. It is achieved through relationships among identity, emotion, knowledge, material resources, institutional structures, and available discourses. A course may therefore broaden the terms through which teachers understand themselves and imagine possible action, even as institutional constraints continue to restrict what they can enact. For this reason, discursive repositioning provides evidence of meaning-making and projected agency, but it should not automatically be equated with enduring change in practice.

Critical Applied Linguistics provides the broader orientation for this inquiry. It connects language-related questions to inequality, access, ideology, identity, and resistance while maintaining an ongoing skepticism toward normative assumptions in the field (PENNYCOOK, 2001). In teacher education, this orientation treats language as social practice and asks how pedagogical decisions participate in broader relations of power. It also links critique to praxis: reflection, action, and transformation directed toward greater social justice (FREIRE, 2013; KUBOTA; MILLER, 2017). In the present study, criticality was not treated as a predetermined trait to be measured. Instead, it was examined in moments when participants destabilized familiar interpretations, recognized alternative forms of knowledge, and articulated stances toward possible courses of action (MONTE MÓR, 2015).

2. English language teacher education within critical internationalization

This section situates the study within debates on critical internationalization and English language teacher education. It first examines how dominant approaches to internationalization intersect with linguistic hierarchies and the global positioning of English. It then considers the ambivalent role assigned to English language teachers and argues that professional learning for internationalization must be understood as an institutional, collaborative, and context-sensitive responsibility. Together, these discussions provide the conceptual basis for interpreting the linguistic-political and relational-institutional reorientations examined in Section 4.

2.1 Critical internationalization and the positioning of English

Internationalization is frequently defined as an intentional process that integrates international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the purposes and functions of education

and seeks benefits for all students, staff, and society (DE WIT *et al.*, 2015). The normative emphasis on intentionality and inclusion is useful, but definitions alone cannot ensure equitable practice. Internationalization is embedded in globalization, institutional competition, colonial histories, and uneven access to languages, mobility, and knowledge. A critical perspective therefore asks what kinds of internationalization are desirable in a given context, who participates in defining them, and what relationships they reproduce or transform (ABBA; STRECK, 2019).

English is central to this problem. The language can broaden access to intercultural interaction, scholarship, and mobility, but it can also operate as a gatekeeping mechanism and reinforce the continuing authority of Anglophone institutions. When English is treated as the natural language of internationalization, other languages and local repertoires become less visible, native-speaker norms acquire regulatory force, and communicative diversity is reduced to standardized measures of proficiency (KUBOTA, 2009; JORDÃO; MARTINEZ, 2015). Translingual perspectives challenge this bounded, hierarchical view of language by focusing on how people mobilize their full semiotic repertoires across cultural and linguistic differences (CANAGARAJAH, 2013; PEREIRA; SILVA; GUIMARÃES, 2020).

2.2 English language teachers and institutional responsibility

The professional position of English language teachers is consequently ambivalent. Institutions may expect them to lead internationalization because they teach a globally dominant language, even when their initial teacher education did not address internationalization policy, intercultural curriculum design, mobility management, or critical language policy. This expectation may recognize their expertise, but it can also generate unrecognized and uncompensated work while concentrating institutional responsibility in a small group. McTaggart and Curró (2009) argue that teachers should not be treated merely as implementers of curriculum internationalization; they should help shape it over time. Leask (2015) similarly places teachers' curricular decisions at the center of internationalization, but those decisions require disciplinary dialogue, institutional support, and attention to context.

Critical teacher education must therefore do more than teach techniques for adding global topics to lessons. It should enable teachers to analyze the political uses of English, examine whose cultures and forms of knowledge are represented, connect global questions to local histories, and design intercultural work that does not romanticize contact. Internationalization as local practice begins with the experiences and priorities of situated groups and resists the automatic reproduction of externally sanctioned models (ROCHA;

MACIEL, 2017). From this perspective, English can serve as a resource for participation while its hegemonic position remains open to critique.

Professional learning for internationalization is also an institutional issue. If teachers and international-relations staff encounter new demands only when a funding call is issued, a visitor arrives, or a project begins, professional learning becomes a form of crisis response rather than a sustained process. Continuing education needs to be systematic, collaborative, and connected to teaching, research, extension, and management. It should also distribute responsibility beyond language teachers. The course examined in this article was designed to create such a reflective space, although its duration and institutional reach were limited.

3. Methodological design

This section describes the methodological design through which the meanings analyzed in this article were generated and interpreted. It first situates the study within the Federal Network and presents the participants, then describes the online course and the collective reflective sessions that constitute the empirical corpus, and finally explains the interpretive procedures, researcher positionality, and ethical safeguards. This sequence makes explicit how the institutional context, collaborative research design, and reflexive analytical process inform the findings.

3.1 Context and participants

This qualitative, interpretive study was conducted within the Federal Network of Vocational, Scientific, and Technological Education. The Network comprises public institutions with administrative and pedagogical autonomy and a mission that connects education, research, extension, and regional development. Its campuses differ considerably in location, size, program offerings, staffing, and access to international opportunities. These differences make it inappropriate to treat the Network as a homogeneous context for internationalization.

Participants were recruited through online professional networks using an approach similar to virtual snowball sampling, and participation was voluntary. Three tenured English language teachers completed the course and remained involved throughout the study. They worked at a Federal Institute in the North, a Federal Institute in the Center-West, and a federal technological institution in the Southeast. Participants selected their own pseudonyms. All three had prior experience with educational internationalization, and two had prior experience with

action research. Their profiles are summarized below; institutional names and locations are withheld to reduce the risk of re-identification.

Pseudonym	Age in 2022	Academic qualification	Years in the Federal Network	Experience relevant to the study
Celina	57	PhD	12	International professional development and prior action research
Harry	29	Master's degree	7	International professional development and international-relations management
Patrick	42	Master's degree	8	International professional development, prior action research, and campus internationalization projects

Table 1. Participant profile at the time of data generation.
Source: adapted from PEREIRA (2024).

The small, self-selected group was not intended to represent English language teachers across the Federal Network. Its analytical value lies in the depth of sustained interaction among teachers whose prior internationalization experiences enabled them to examine institutional processes from several positions: classroom teacher, researcher, project organizer, and international-relations manager. At the same time, these experiences distinguish them from teachers without prior access to internationalization opportunities and must be considered when interpreting their engagement.

3.2 The course and the reflective sessions

The first author designed and facilitated the 30-hour online course *Continuing Education for English Language Teachers in Internationalization and Language Policy* from July to November 2022. The curriculum was refined in light of participants' questionnaire responses and suggestions. It combined synchronous meetings, theoretical readings, reflective writing, discussion forums, institutional policy analysis, and lesson-planning activities. Four learning cycles structured the course.

Cycle	Main focus	Collective reflective sessions	Illustrative activities
1	Critical-collaborative action research	CRS1, 19 July 2022	Prior understandings of action research; discussion of inquiry and reflective journals
2	Internationalization in continuing education for English language teachers	CRS2, 30 August 2022	Professional-development policies; review of international programs; identification of local demands

Cycle	Main focus	Collective reflective sessions	Illustrative activities
3	Internationalization of education: concepts and practices	CRS3, 11 October 2022; CRS4, 13 October 2022	Internationalization as local and critical practice; institutional initiatives; teacher narratives
4	Curriculum internationalization and English language teacher agency	CRS5, 15 November 2022; CRS6, 16 November 2022	Intercultural curriculum design; teacher agency; discussion of lesson proposals

Table 2. Structure of the online course and collective reflective sessions.

Source: adapted from PEREIRA (2024).

The six collective reflective sessions (CRS1-CRS6) form the empirical corpus of this article. They were held via videoconference, audio- and video-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed. An online questionnaire provided contextual information, but its responses were not coded as part of the results reported here. Three individual reflective sessions were also conducted at the end of the broader doctoral study; they are excluded from this article because both Chapter 6 and the present analysis focus exclusively on collective meaning-making.

The course was guided by Silvestre's (2008) model of critical-collaborative action research for language teacher education. In practice, however, only the first two broad stages were completed: clarifying and studying the principles of action research, followed by collaborative study of the thematic units selected for the course. Participants discussed and designed possible courses of action, but the project did not proceed through repeated cycles of classroom intervention, systematic observation, collective evaluation, and replanning. Workload and scheduling constraints were central to this limitation. We therefore characterize the study as a partial implementation of a critical-collaborative action-research cycle and distinguish the discursive construction of (trans)formation from demonstrated change in practice.

3.3 Interpretive procedures and reflexivity

Analysis proceeded iteratively alongside data generation, as is common in action research (BURNS, 1999). First, the transcripts were read repeatedly to identify passages in which participants described what they had learned, reconsidered prior interpretations, discussed tensions, positioned themselves professionally, or projected possible courses of action. Second, provisional codes were compared across participants and sessions. Critical-collaborative action research, continuing language teacher education, and internationalization served as the main theoretical lenses and provided sensitizing concepts, but the coding also

attended to contradiction, ambivalence, and the institutional arrangements that constrained what participants could say or do. Third, related codes were clustered into six meaning domains: re-signification of classroom practice; peer collaboration; teacher-researcher identity; repositioning English; continuing education for internationalization; and teacher agency. Fourth, these domains were reinterpreted for the present article as three interdependent reorientations. Analytical decisions were refined through doctoral supervision; the second author contributed to conceptual discussions, supervision, and critical review rather than participating in independent double-coding.

The analysis is interpretive rather than frequency-based. The excerpts were selected because they illuminate how meanings were negotiated, not because they are statistically representative of all contributions to the sessions. All excerpts were originally spoken in Brazilian Portuguese and translated into English. Bracketed ellipses indicate omissions, and clarifications appear in square brackets. Pseudonyms and session dates identify the data source.

Reflexivity is particularly important because the first author was simultaneously the course designer and facilitator, an English language teacher in the Federal Network, a former international-relations coordinator, and a participant in the same SETEC-CAPES/NOVA international professional-development program as the three collaborators. This shared history fostered trust and provided a rich set of common reference points, but it also shaped the questions, alignments, and interpretations that emerged during the sessions. Participants' statements cannot be treated as responses generated independently of the facilitation process. The results emerged through dialogic interaction, in which the facilitator's prompts, experiences, and choice of theoretical texts influenced what could be discussed. We account for this condition by treating meanings as co-constructed, identifying institutional and biographical constraints, and avoiding causal claims that the course alone produced transformation.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee for Human and Social Sciences at the University of Brasília (CAAE 55670522.6.0000.5540; Opinion no. 5,281,884). Participants provided written informed consent to participate and to be recorded; they also selected the pseudonyms used in the research.

3.4 Use of generative artificial intelligence

A generative artificial intelligence model developed by OpenAI was used to facilitate argument organization, preliminary drafting, language editing, and the extraction of passages from anonymized materials. The AI tool did not act as an author, nor was it relied upon to validate our findings. We, the authors, exclusively determined the research corpus, formulated

the analytical categories, selected the relevant excerpts, made all methodological and theoretical decisions, and rigorously verified all interpretations. No identifiable data was processed by the AI, and we take complete responsibility for the manuscript.

4. Meanings of teacher (trans)formation

The six meaning domains identified in the collective reflective sessions did not operate as isolated outcomes. Instead, they formed three movements across different scales of professional life. The epistemic-pedagogical movement connected inquiry into classroom practice with teacher-researcher identity. The relational-institutional movement connected collaboration with the need for systematic professional learning. The linguistic-political movement connected the decentering of English with teacher agency in internationalization. Table 3 presents this analytical synthesis before examining each movement in detail.

Reorientation	Meaning domain	Primary scale	Discursive evidence of (trans)formation	Persistent tension
Epistemic-pedagogical	Re-signification of classroom practice	Classroom	Reconsidering planning, participation, learner focus, and reflective tools	Reported or projected practice was not observed longitudinally
Epistemic-pedagogical	Teacher-researcher identity	Professional self	Claiming inquiry as part of teaching and connecting local problems to research	Research time and institutional recognition remained limited
Relational-institutional	Peer collaboration	Collegial relations	Naming isolation and proposing shared meetings, materials, and inquiry	Workload and fragmented institutional routines constrained participation
Relational-institutional	Continuing education for internationalization	Institution	Recognizing conceptual and practical preparation as necessary across roles	Learning often occurred through emergency response or individual effort
Linguistic-political	Repositioning English	Language policy	Questioning English-only assumptions and legitimizing Spanish and other repertoires	Proficiency requirements and institutional practices continued to privilege English
Linguistic-political	Teacher agency	Curriculum and policy	Claiming intentional authorship of intercultural projects and curriculum work linking local and global concerns	Agency risked becoming an individualized responsibility without structural support

Table 3. Three reorientations and six meaning domains of teacher (trans)formation.
Source: authors' analysis based on the collective reflective sessions.

The synthesis in Table 3 should be read as a relational map rather than as a sequence of discrete stages. Each reorientation brings two meaning domains into analytical proximity while remaining intertwined with the other movements: inquiry into classroom practice depends on collegial and institutional conditions, just as the questioning of linguistic hierarchies expands the scope of teacher agency. The tensions in the final column also qualify the evidence by distinguishing discursive repositioning from sustained changes in practice or institutional arrangements. The following subsections therefore examine each movement separately for analytical clarity while tracing the connections, overlaps, and constraints through which teacher (trans)formation was co-constructed.

4.1 Epistemic-pedagogical reorientation: practice and teacher-researcher identity

The first movement involved a shift in how participants interpreted classroom practice. They did not approach action research as complete novices: Celina and Patrick had previous research experience, and all three held graduate degrees. Nevertheless, the course created a space in which familiar practices could be opened to renewed questioning. Celina described this process during the second session:

I, for one, have found it interesting to rethink some of my practices in light of our synchronous meetings, the readings, and the questions you pose in the activities. This has led me to rethink my classroom practice to some extent. [...] Sometimes we become accustomed to the day-to-day routine of the classroom. Revisiting action research has also prompted me to rethink my daily lesson planning. As far as possible, I try to make my lessons more participatory and more focused on students. (CELINA, CRS2, 30 Aug. 2022)

The repeated use of *rethink* is significant because Celina did not present transformation as the discovery of an unfamiliar technique. Instead, she described an interruption of routine: action research brought lesson planning back into view as an object of inquiry. The movement was from tacit familiarity toward deliberate inquiry. Her earlier experience of using reflective journals with students was also re-signified as a means of listening to learners and examining learning rather than merely recording classroom activity. In this sense, the course enabled a reflexive encounter with knowledge she already possessed.

This finding complicates deficit-based accounts of professional development. Celina did not need to be given the “right” participatory method. Her account suggests that theoretically informed dialogue helped her reactivate and reorganize experiential knowledge. This is consistent with the principle that professional learning should recognize teachers’ knowledge and use actual practice as the point of departure for critical reflection (CANDAU, 1996; MICCOLI, 2010). It also shows why the effects of a course cannot be neatly separated from

teachers' biographies. The meaning constructed in CRS2 emerged from the interplay among prior experience with action research, current classroom routines, course readings, and the facilitator's questions.

The re-signification of practice was connected to teacher-researcher identity. Patrick recalled that his earlier academic education had been shaped by collaboration between university researchers and public-school teachers:

My development as both a researcher and a teacher took place within this collaborative space between researchers and teachers, with teachers also acting as observers, researchers, and research participants. [...] Three topics are very important to me as a teacher: English language teaching in public schools as a means of social transformation, students' identities as they learn another language and engage with another culture, and internationalization. I would like to explore these three topics in my doctoral research. (PATRICK, CRS5, 15 Nov. 2022)

Patrick positioned inquiry as integral to teaching rather than as an external academic demand. His plans for doctoral research connected English language education, identity, social transformation, and internationalization to his experience as a Black gay teacher in public education. The teacher-researcher identity was therefore not a generic professional label. It offered a position from which local questions could become legitimate objects of inquiry and personal biography could inform, rather than be erased from, research.

Action research can reduce the symbolic distance between academic research and classroom practice by recognizing teachers as producers of practical knowledge (BURNS, 2009). Yet the sessions also showed how difficult this identity is to sustain. Research requires time, methodological support, recognition, and communities in which findings can be discussed. If teacher-researcher identity is celebrated without those conditions, it can become yet another demand placed on teachers whose workloads are already intensified. The data suggest that this identity was strengthened, but they do not support the claim that participants acquired a new identity solely through the course. For Celina and Patrick, the identity was reactivated and articulated; for the group, it became a shared language through which teaching could be understood as inquiry.

Epistemic-pedagogical reorientation thus consisted of two related shifts: routine practice became an object of deliberate interpretation, and teaching was reframed as a knowledge-producing activity. These shifts were discursive and prospective. Celina reported attempts to make her lessons more participatory, and Patrick outlined plans for future research, but the study did not follow participants into subsequent classroom practice or research projects. The evidence points to a shift in interpretation and positioning, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for enduring transformation.

4.2 Relational-institutional reorientation: collaboration and systematic professional learning

The second movement shifted the focus of professional development from individual teachers to collegial and institutional relationships. A recurring tension was the contrast between the collaborative environment participants valued in the course and the isolation they experienced at work. Celina described limited interaction even though several English language teachers worked on her campus and recalled being the only person to respond when the coordinator for the language area requested textbook suggestions. Her frustration gave concrete meaning to the phrase “everyone for themselves,” which she and the facilitator used to characterize continuing education in the Network.

When the discussion turned to alternatives, Celina proposed periodic meetings among language teachers to examine educational policy and classroom practice. She explained why collaboration mattered:

Once you talk to someone about what you do and listen to what they do, you begin to make connections, and you learn a great deal by listening to one another. [...] Someone else can help me with what I do not know, and I can help them with what they do not know. [...] We can develop practices that reflect the character of the institution—the character of the place where we work. (CELINA, CRS3, 11 Oct. 2022)

The phrase “the character of the place where we work” captures an important meaning of collaboration. Collaboration was not framed simply as emotional support or efficient resource sharing, but as a condition for developing context-responsive practices and resisting the wholesale importation of universal solutions. This understanding is consistent with critical collaboration as the shared evaluation and reorganization of practice through language (MAGALHÃES; FIDALGO, 2010). It also relocates expertise: knowledge is produced through encounters among teachers whose understandings of the institution are partial and distinct.

At the same time, the data resist romanticizing collaboration. Celina repeatedly identified lack of time as her main difficulty in completing the course readings. She taught, planned, assessed, attended to household responsibilities, and undertook paid academic editing. Participants’ workloads also prevented completion of all stages of the action-research model. These constraints underscore that non-participation should not be interpreted simply as a lack of interest or professional commitment. Teachers may value inquiry while lacking formally allocated time within their workloads, incentives, or local support (HAYES, 2019; IMBERNÓN, 2010). Collaboration requires an organizational architecture, not goodwill alone.

The same relational logic appeared in discussions of professional learning for internationalization. Harry occupied a management position in international relations, yet explicitly rejected the assumption that being an English language teacher had prepared him for that work:

As an English teacher, my initial teacher education did not introduce me to the concepts of internationalization of education or internationalization of higher education. You develop this knowledge through continuing education, whether through self-directed study—for example, by reading books and articles—formal courses like this one, or graduate education. [...] Even foreign-language teachers do not yet fully understand the culture of internationalization, let alone staff trained in other fields. [...] I either act or study so that I can act, and things usually come our way when the “fire” is already burning. (HARRY, CRS4, 13 Oct. 2022)

Harry’s account exposes two connected problems. First, expertise in English and expertise in internationalization are not equivalent. Second, institutional learning was reactive: staff learned while responding to urgent demands. The metaphor of extinguishing a fire conveys a temporal pattern in which policies and projects are introduced before those responsible for them have opportunities to study, deliberate, and plan. Under these conditions, self-directed learning becomes necessary, but it cannot substitute for systematic, institutionally supported professional development.

Harry also described a call for international extension proposals that received no applications because staff did not know how to conceptualize an international project. As a manager, he responded by providing examples involving languages, virtual partnerships, teaching materials, and academic events. The episode shows that funding alone does not lead to participation. People need conceptual resources, examples, partners, and time to translate an abstract institutional goal into a locally meaningful project. It also demonstrates that internationalization cannot remain confined to an international office or language unit. If it is to influence teaching, research, and extension, professional learning must involve staff from across the institution and connect institutional policy with their existing practices.

The relational-institutional reorientation therefore comprised both a critique and a proposal. Participants identified isolation, fragmented routines, and crisis-driven learning while envisioning peer meetings, communities of inquiry, and systematic preparation as alternatives. The transformation at stake did not reside solely within each teacher. It involved reimagining the institution as responsible for creating the time and structures needed to produce professional knowledge collectively. Without that shift, calls for teacher agency may intensify individual responsibility while preserving the very arrangements being criticized.

4.3 Linguistic-political reorientation: decentering English and claiming agency

The third movement concerned the political status of English in internationalization and the authority teachers claimed to shape curricula and institutional action. A text on internationalization as local practice unsettled Celina's earlier association between internationalization and English. She reflected:

When we think about internationalization, we think about English. We think of it as a lingua franca, supposedly the language of international communication for everyone, but that is not quite the case. We need to rethink this Western perspective. Why only English? Since we are in Latin America, why not Spanish? [...] I am an English teacher, but English is not the only language in the world. (CELINA, CRS3, 11 Oct. 2022)

This was not a rejection of English or of her professional identity, but a repositioning of both. Celina used her authority as an English language teacher to question the exceptional status assigned to the language she taught. She connected the issue to Latin America's linguistic geography and to experiences in African contexts where a university's working language did not encompass the full range of local linguistic practices. Here, criticality emerged through a disruption of an established interpretive frame: internationalization ceased to be self-evidently Anglophone.

The discussion became more concrete when Celina described a cooperation project among Latin American institutions that nevertheless required B2 proficiency in English. This requirement illustrated how English can remain the default even when Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking institutions collaborate within the region. Standardized proficiency requirements may be institutionally defensible for particular activities, but their unexamined use can exclude students and reproduce the authority of external reference frameworks. A translingual orientation does not deny the practical value of English; it asks whether communicative resources are being evaluated in relation to actual interactions and whether multiple languages can play a meaningful role in internationalization (CANAGARAJAH, 2013; JORDÃO; MARTINEZ, 2015).

Decentering English also changed how participants imagined the role of English language teachers. If English is no longer treated as a neutral technical prerequisite, its teachers cannot be reduced to preparing candidates or certifying proficiency. Their work includes analyzing language policy, identifying exclusionary practices, and helping communities negotiate linguistic choices. This political role is consistent with Critical Applied Linguistics, which treats language-related decisions as implicated in identity, ideology, and access (PENNYCOOK, 2001; RAJAGOPALAN, 2003).

Participants also constructed agency through explicit professional positioning. Harry stated:

As an English teacher, I am an internationalist. I am an agent of internationalization on my campus and in my classroom, helping my students develop a global outlook and fostering their global citizenship. (HARRY, CRS4, 13 Oct. 2022)

The repeated first-person forms made Harry's statement a forceful act of identity work. He claimed authority both in the classroom and across the campus rather than waiting for an external office to define his role. His experience as an international-relations manager clearly supported this position. The statement nevertheless remained marked by a global-citizenship discourse that can become celebratory unless it is connected to unequal mobility, language hierarchies, and local accountability. In the context of the session, its critical potential came from Harry's simultaneous recognition that staff needed preparation and that responsibility for internationalization could not automatically be delegated to English language teachers.

Patrick's account located agency in intentional curriculum-making. When asked whether he used opportunities within the curriculum to introduce international dimensions, he replied: "What I do is not intuitive; it is intentional. I approach it systematically" (PATRICK, CRS5, 15 Nov. 2022). He described collaborative cultural projects, activities related to hosting exchange students, sharing project outcomes locally, and efforts to connect global and local concerns. His emphasis on intentionality distinguished agency from occasional celebrations. He did not simply add an imported cultural product to the curriculum; he described students participating in locally grounded ways by welcoming visitors, sharing food, exploring the city together, and relating cultural differences to their own community.

These practices still require critical scrutiny. Activities organized around celebrations such as Halloween can reproduce simplified representations of national cultures if difference is treated as spectacle. Patrick's account, however, emphasized adaptation, reciprocal participation, and engagement between local and global contexts rather than imitation. The course discussion helped make the politics of these choices explicit. The relevant transformation did not lie in inventing all these practices during the course—many had occurred earlier—but in reinterpreting them as intentional curriculum internationalization and as evidence of teacher authorship.

Agency in these data was therefore iterative, practical, and projective. Participants drew on prior international experiences and teaching projects, interpreted current institutional demands, and articulated future possibilities. This temporal quality is consistent with views of agency as an achievement shaped by past, present, and future rather than as an internal capacity

(TAO; GAO, 2021). The sessions helped create a discursive space in which teachers could claim authorship, but the same data caution against turning agency into heroic individualism. Critical agency depends on collective support, institutional recognition, resources, and a redistribution of responsibility.

4.4 (Trans)formation as multiscalar, relational, and unfinished

Taken together, the findings answer the research question by showing that meanings of teacher (trans)formation were constructed through movements across multiple scales. At the classroom level, participants reconsidered planning, learner participation, and intercultural curriculum design. At the professional level, they strengthened or reactivated teacher-researcher identities. At the collegial level, they identified isolation and envisioned collaborative inquiry. At the institutional level, they treated preparation for internationalization as an organizational responsibility. At the language-policy level, they questioned English-only assumptions. At the political level, they claimed the authority to design rather than merely implement internationalization.

These scales were mutually constitutive. Classroom re-signification could be sustained only when connected to collaboration; collaboration required institutional time; institutional internationalization required linguistic critique; and teacher agency required identities through which teachers could recognize themselves as authors and researchers. The six domains should therefore not be interpreted as a checklist of course outcomes. They describe a relational configuration in which a shift in one domain raised questions and opened possibilities in others.

The data also show that (trans)formation remained unfinished. Participants sometimes reproduced the same discourses they criticized—for example, by associating internationalization with global citizenship or assigning English language teachers a privileged leadership role. Their accounts contained both critique and attachment, constraint and projection. This ambivalence is analytically productive because transformation does not replace an old identity or belief with a coherent new one. Rather, it involves unstable repositioning within institutional and ideological conditions that remain active.

Finally, the co-constructed nature of the sessions matters. The facilitator selected readings, proposed categories, and asked questions explicitly oriented toward critique and agency. Participants drew on those resources while contributing experiences that extended beyond the course design. The resulting meanings belong neither to the facilitator nor to individual teachers alone; they were produced through interaction. Critical-collaborative teacher (trans)formation is therefore not an intervention applied to teachers, but a dialogic space

whose possibilities and limits are shaped by all participants and by the institutional context beyond the sessions.

5. Implications and limitations

The findings have implications for teacher education, institutional internationalization, and research. In continuing teacher education, short courses should not be evaluated solely in terms of the amount of content delivered or participants' immediate expressions of satisfaction. More informative questions concern whether teachers can bring local problems into the curriculum, interrogate the concepts presented, relate them to their own experiences, and develop collective possibilities for inquiry. Course design should make room for participants' accounts and contradictions rather than treating them as mere illustrations of theory.

For institutions in the Federal Network, the data point to the need for formally allocated time for professional learning within teachers' workloads, recognition of teacher inquiry, and sustained professional communities that span campuses and disciplinary areas. Preparation for internationalization should involve language teachers, content-area teachers, international-relations staff, pedagogical support teams, managers, and students. It should take place before calls for proposals are issued or projects begin, rather than only during implementation. Institutions should also recognize English language teachers' contributions as specialized labor: participation in testing, translation, mobility support, and curriculum design requires workload allocation and should not be taken for granted as an extension of language competence.

For language policy and curriculum, critical internationalization requires multilingual choices. English can provide meaningful access without becoming the only legitimate pathway. Institutions should examine why a particular proficiency level or language is required, what communicative purpose it serves, which students it excludes, and whether Spanish, Portuguese, sign languages, Indigenous languages, or translingual practices can serve the same purpose. Teacher education can provide the conceptual and pedagogical tools needed to ask these questions, but decisions must be made collectively at the institutional level.

The study also has several limitations. First, the group comprised only three volunteers, all of whom had prior internationalization experience and held graduate degrees; two also had prior experience with action research. Their engagement and interpretive repertoires cannot be generalized to teachers across the Federal Network. Second, the project completed only part of the action-research model. Although participants analyzed their experiences and designed possible courses of action, the study did not follow complete cycles of classroom intervention and collective evaluation. Third, the results are based on discourse produced in facilitated online

sessions. They document re-signification, identity work, and projected or reported agency, but do not establish lasting behavioral or institutional change. Fourth, the first author's shared professional history and role as facilitator shaped the data and may have encouraged alignment with critical internationalization. Fifth, the combination of a small professional field and detailed biographies creates a residual risk of recognition despite the use of pseudonyms; institutional identifiers were therefore minimized in this article.

Future research should follow teachers through complete action-research cycles, combine reflective sessions with classroom and institutional observation, and examine whether meanings constructed during professional learning are sustained, revised, or abandoned over time. It should also include teachers without prior mobility or internationalization experience and investigate how students, technical staff, managers, and international partners negotiate these processes. Such work would help distinguish among discursive possibilities, enacted practices, and institutional transformation.

Conclusion

This article analyzed how three English language teachers collaboratively constructed meanings of teacher (trans)formation during an online course on the internationalization of education. Six domains identified in the doctoral study were reorganized into three movements. Epistemic-pedagogical reorientation connected the re-signification of classroom practice with teacher-researcher identity. Relational-institutional reorientation connected peer collaboration with the need for systematic professional learning. Linguistic-political reorientation connected the decentering of English with the strengthening of teacher agency.

The central finding is that teacher (trans)formation was not constructed as an accumulation of methods or information. Instead, it emerged as a multiscalar, relational process that brought routines, identities, institutional arrangements, and language hierarchies into question. Teachers moved discursively from positions associated with adaptation and implementation toward positions of inquiry, authorship, and intervention. This movement was neither complete nor autonomous. It depended on prior experience, collaborative dialogue, theoretical mediation, and the prospect of institutional support, while workloads and existing policies continued to limit enactment.

Critical-collaborative action research can create valuable conditions for this movement because it treats teachers' experience as knowledge and creates space for contradictions to be discussed. A course alone, however, cannot carry the institutional burden of transformation. If internationalization is to contribute to inclusion and social justice, institutions must provide

time, recognition, a multilingual orientation, and shared decision-making. English language teachers should participate not as providers of language services or passive policy implementers, but as researchers, critics, curriculum authors, and co-producers of locally accountable internationalization.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Research protocol and preregistration

The authors reviewed the reporting guidelines indexed by the EQUATOR Network and found none specifically applicable to this qualitative, critical-collaborative action-research study. Neither the study nor its analysis plan was preregistered in an independent institutional repository.

Data availability statement

The de-identified excerpts needed to support the interpretations are included in this article. Full video recordings and transcripts cannot be made publicly available because participants did not consent to unrestricted public dissemination and contextual details could compromise their anonymity. Researchers may request access to an additional de-identified subset from the corresponding author. Access is subject to a justified scholarly purpose, applicable research ethics approval, protection of participants' identities, and a data-use agreement.

Ethics statement

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee for Human and Social Sciences at the University of Brasília, Brazil (CAAE 55670522.6.0000.5540; Opinion no. 5,281,884). All participants were adults, were informed about the study, provided written informed consent, agreed to be recorded, and selected the pseudonyms used in the research.

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