

# Middle School English Teachers' Cultural Identity in Minority Area: A Case Study of Trilingual Teachers of Ethnic Mongol Schools in China

Rong Xiang<sup>1</sup>, Sheriguleng Bao<sup>2</sup>, Yufang Hou<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Foreign Languages, Hohhot Minzu College, Hohhot, China

<sup>2</sup>Mongolian Experimental Junior High School of Horqin Left Back Banner, Tongliao, China

<sup>3</sup>Mongolian School of Dongsheng District, Ordos, China

Email: jessy883@163.com, 840109795@qq.com, 597987780@qq.com

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## Abstract

Cultural identity is increasingly seen as a relevant outcome of language learning or teaching beyond intercultural communicative competence. In the process of learning and using languages of Mongolian (mother tongue), Chinese and English, trilingual teachers in ethnic areas in China have unique cultural identity. Taking junior high school trilingual teachers in Inner Mongolia as an example, a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews were conducted based on the two central questions: how cultural identity is constructed and what factors contribute to its differentiation. The results show that the cultural identity of trilingual teachers is characterized by dynamism, development and complexity. The cultural identity of trilingual teachers in ethnic areas is reflected in novice teachers' stronger dual and multicultural identity compared to experienced teachers. Furthermore, teachers' linguistic practices and professional experience significantly shape trilingual teachers' cultural identity formation. These findings offer valuable implications for professional development of trilingual educators in China's ethnic minority regions and cultural identity training for L2 teachers globally.

## Keywords

Trilingual Teachers, Cultural Identity, Influencing Factors, Ethnic Mongols, China

## 1. Introduction

As a lingua franca, English has become a primary means of communication for thousands of people worldwide. English language learning is not only driven by individual interests, but also considered the “Aladdin’s lamp” (Kachru, 1986: p. 1), impelling every nation to move towards linguistic access to knowledge and economic success (Ping, 2005). Likewise, this trend of English globalization is a tremendous motivation for people from different countries to learn English. For example, in 2001, China’s Ministry of Education issued a document stating that English subjects could be offered from the third grade of primary school (Ministry of Education, 2001), leading to the widespread adoption of English education in primary schools. However, the popularisation of English education in ethnic minority areas of China occurred relatively late. For instance, in Inner Mongolia, English was first introduced as an experimental course among seven Mongol senior high schools (grades 10 to 12) in 1992 (Su, 2005: p. 114). Since 2001, English has been popularised among all ethnic Mongol senior high schools, and in a few urban ethnic Mongol junior high and elementary schools (69). English courses have been offered from the third grade of primary school, and universities have established professional training programs for trilingual teachers, including the creation of independent classes for ethnic Mongol students majoring in English language education.

Cakir (2006) postulates that second language acquisition naturally facilitates adoption of a secondary culture, ultimately crystallizing into a distinct cultural identity. Consequently, trilingual teachers in ethnic areas—defined here as English teachers proficient in Mongolian (L1), Chinese (L2), and English (L3)—develop corresponding secondary cultural identities through sustained multilingual practice. This process aligns with Brown’s (2002: pp. 185-186) assertion that language fundamentally mediates cognitive frameworks, value systems, and identity formation, necessitating critical examination of foreign languages’ impact on cultural identity. Moreover, as Zabetipour and Baghi (2015) emphasize, foreign language teachers inevitably embed their personal cultural frameworks—including lived experiences, belief systems, and worldviews—into pedagogical spaces, thereby actively shaping students’ cultural consciousness.

Building on Johnson’s (1992) assertion that teacher identity fundamentally shapes pedagogical effectiveness, this study investigates the cultural identity of trilingual teachers in ethnic Mongol junior high schools (Inner Mongolia, China) and examines how language learning/teaching factors underlie their differentiated cultural identities. The research ultimately aims to offer actionable insights for designing culturally responsive professional development pathways for trilingual educators.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Culture and Cultural Identity

According to Williams (2016: p. 147), the word ‘culture’ is one of the most difficult

words to define in English. Nevertheless, social scientists have attempted to define it. The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology explains culture from the perspectives of humanities, anthropology and sociology. In the definition of humanities, culture refers to intellectual and artistic activities. In other words, culture is regarded as the highest moral and aesthetic achievement of civilization. In the anthropological definition, culture is regarded as a comprehensive activity that distinguishes different groups of people in the world. In sociology, culture is the symbolic and conceptual element of any social behavior, social relationship, and historical event (Turner, 2006: p. 111). Additionally, Knutson (2006) pointed out that culture includes multiple aspects, such as language, daily life, social mechanisms, political institutions, economic development, literature and art. Similarly, scholars in China divide culture into three levels: surface, middle and deep. The surface level refers to all material and spiritual products that can be felt, such as architectural culture, tea culture, wine culture, clothing culture, etc. The middle level refers to institutional culture, such as various institutional norms, customs, etiquette, behavior, etc. The deep level generally refers to the perceptual notions, such as thinking, values, etc. (Chen, 2008: p. 19).

Regarding cultural identity, Sagers (1999: pp. 90-91) points out that the cultural identity of a particular ethnic group and nation is only partially determined by that nation's identity because the concept of cultural identity is broader than that of national identity. Scholars in China also put forward their own views on cultural identity. For example, Cui (2004) believes that cultural identity is the confirmation of the common culture among people or between individuals and groups. Using the same cultural symbols, following the same cultural concepts, and adhering to the common thinking patterns and behavioral norms are the basis for cultural identity. Zheng (1992: p. 8) regards cultural identity as the inclination and recognition of human beings towards a certain culture.

Based on the above definitions and descriptions of culture and cultural identity, cultural identity in this article refers to the tendency and recognition of trilingual teachers towards their own ethnic culture and Western culture. Cultural connotation follows the different cultural aspects proposed by Knutson, including language, daily life, social mechanisms and political institutions, economic development, literature and art.

## 2.2. The Cultural Identity of Foreign Language Teachers

The intrinsic interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity has prompted significant scholarly investigation into relationships between language acquisition and cultural attitudes. Lambert's (1973) seminal study of Anglo-Canadians demonstrated that attitudes toward French language and culture substantially influence target language acquisition outcomes. Crucially, language teachers constitute primary mediators of cultural identity formation, as learners emulate pedagogical models during identity construction. Consequently, foreign language teachers serve as crucial agents in shaping students' cultural identities—a dynamic that has positioned

teacher cultural identity research at the forefront of contemporary language education scholarship.

### 1) *The characteristics of foreign language teachers' cultural identity*

Research on foreign language teachers' cultural identity predominantly examines identity typologies. [Atay and Ece's \(2009\)](#) investigation of Turkish preservice English teachers in Islamic contexts revealed how they negotiate foreign language acquisition and identity transformation. Findings demonstrated that these teachers maintain layered identities—prioritizing Turkish national identity and Muslim religious identity—while viewing second language cultural learning as enhancing intercultural awareness and tolerance. Similarly, [Fichtner and Chapman \(2011\)](#) documented that foreign language teachers adopt rationally distanced approaches toward cultural relations, demonstrating tolerance without cultural assimilation and acknowledging cultural plurality without ideological conversion.

Parallel scholarly attention has emerged in China's academic discourse. [Wu and Wurenbilige's \(2012\)](#) case study of Mongolian English teachers established the multi-dimensional nature of trilingual teacher identity. [Lu's \(2016\)](#) survey of 130 university English teachers in Chengdu found: 1) Predominant bicultural identification, 2) Advanced cross-cultural knowledge, 3) Demonstrated cultural transmission capacity, alongside identified needs for enhanced intercultural training. Complementing this, [Kui's \(2013\)](#) narrative inquiry into Bai English teachers in Yunnan revealed consistent belief in minority cultural preservation responsibilities despite behavioral variations in practice.

### 2) *The influencing factors of foreign language teachers' cultural identity*

As teachers accumulate pedagogical experience, their beliefs and knowledge become experientially mediated constructs. These evolving personal frameworks—integrating professional experience, cultural positioning, and individual disposition—fundamentally inform classroom praxis ([White et al., 2005: p. 2](#)). Consequently, scholars increasingly examine experiential factors shaping foreign language teachers' cultural identity, with several studies specifically investigating correlations between teaching tenure and local cultural identification. For example, [Pishghadam and Sadeghi \(2011\)](#) found that Iranian English teachers lacked a sense of belonging to the local culture, although no significant relationship existed between their teaching experience and this sense of belonging. Similarly, [Zabetipour and Baghi \(2015\)](#) investigated the relationship between the teaching experience of English teachers in the Iranian social and cultural context and the Iranian local cultural identity. The results showed that the number of years teaching English was not significantly related to their local cultural identity, which indicated that the teaching experiences did not affect their local cultural identity. However, existing literature is not entirely devoid of relevant insights. [Kui \(2013\)](#) conducted research that revealed that the strength of “ethnic Bai” identity among English teachers in Yunnan Minority Universities varied according to their years of teaching experience. Similarly, [Wu and Wurenbilige \(2012\)](#) found that multiple factors, including language learning experiences, family language environments, and social life con-

texts, exerted an influence on the cultural identity formation of university-level trilingual teachers.

In summary, existing research has predominantly examined cultural identity among foreign language teachers, correlations between teaching experience and *local* cultural identity, and educators' cross-cultural awareness. However, empirical investigations into the relationship between language teaching/learning factors and foreign language teachers' cultural identity remain scarce. Furthermore, most studies focus on college-level English instructors, with limited attention to secondary school contexts—particularly trilingual teachers in China's ethnic regions. To address these gaps, this case study investigates trilingual teachers at ethnic Mongol junior high schools in Inner Mongolia, employing mixed-methods (quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews) to examine:

- 1) What is the cultural identity of trilingual teachers in ethnic Mongol junior high schools in Inner Mongolia?
- 2) What possible language teaching and learning factors underlie cultural identity differences?

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

Using convenience sampling, 49 second-grade English teachers (8 male, 41 female) were selected from 10 ethnic Mongol junior high schools in T city, Inner Mongolia, China. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Teaching experience ranged from 3 to 17 years, with novice teachers (1 - 5 years) and skilled teachers (>6 years) classified according to Zabetipour and Baghi's framework. All participants were ethnic Mongols who spoke Mongolian and Chinese in daily communication.

#### 3.2. Research Tools

In this study, we used questionnaires and interviews to investigate the cultural identity of trilingual teachers in ethnic areas.

**Table 1.** Reliability and validity of the adapted 10-item scales.

Analytical indicator	Value	Statistical interpretation
Cronbach's $\alpha$ coefficient	0.72	Falling between 0.7 - 0.8, indicating good internal consistency of the scale ( $\alpha \geq 0.6$ is acceptable for exploratory research)
KMO measure	0.68	$\geq 0.6$ , indicating the data is suitable for factor analysis (slightly lower but acceptable for small samples)
Valid sample size	49	

Questionnaire items were adapted from [Chen's \(2008: pp. 33-35\)](#) cultural identity instrument for college students. The finalized questionnaire comprised two sections: 1) Ethnic Mongol cultural identity (10 items); 2) Western cultural iden-

tity (10 items). Utilizing a five-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disapprove/disagree/dislike to 5 = Totally agree/accept/like), respondents completed the survey within 15 - 20 minutes. Possible scores ranged from 10 to 50 points per cultural domain, with higher scores indicating stronger identification. The reliability and validity of the adapted 10-item cultural identity scales are as follows (see **Table 1**).

Based on **Chen's (2008: p. 23)** operationalization of cultural identity, we established the following scoring thresholds for each cultural domain (maximum 50 points):

Negative attitude:  $\leq 20$  points ( $\leq 40\%$  of maximum score);

Neutral attitude: 21 - 30 points;

Positive attitude:  $> 30$  points ( $> 60\%$  of maximum score).

Interviews were semi-structured, which covered topics such as social and cultural background, language learning experience, teaching experience and cultural beliefs (see **Table 2**).

**Table 2.** Outline for semi-structured interview.

Dimension	Questions
Cultural background	What language environment did you grow up in?
Language learning experience	When did you start learning Mongolian, Chinese and English language respectively?
Teaching experience	How do you think teaching experience is related to cultural identity?
Cultural beliefs	What is your attitude towards the corresponding cultures when you learn and use Mongolian, Chinese and English?

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants online, and they completed them during their spare time. In total, 51 questionnaires were distributed, and 49 valid responses were collected. Following the survey, three participants were chosen based on their total scores, which ranged from low to high, indicating as participants A, B and C. All three participants provided their consent to participate in the interviews.

All interviews were conducted individually online in Mandarin, with each session lasting approximately one hour. This language choice was intentional for three reasons: 1) Participant A, educated in Mandarin-medium schools, preferred expressing herself in Mandarin; 2) Participants B and C, though educated in ethnic Mongol schools, requested Mandarin interviews prior to data collection; 3) Mandarin facilitated efficient online transcription.

During interviews, Participants B and C occasionally supplemented Mandarin expressions with Mongolian or English when necessary. With participants' consent,

all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Trilingual teachers' language proficiency levels were assessed via self-reported scores on the Mongolian proficiency test, the Putonghua proficiency test, and the College English Test (CET-4/CET-6). Data analysis employed SPSS-22.0 for descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and independent samples t-tests.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Cultural Identity of Trilingual Teachers in Ethnic Mongol Junior High Schools

The cultural identity of trilingual teachers in ethnic areas is generally positive (see **Table 3** and **Table 4**). However, the scores for the trilingual teachers' ethnic Mongol culture and Western culture display a significant difference in their score distribution. Specifically, the mean score for the trilingual teachers' ethnic Mongol culture is significantly higher than that of Western culture, as shown in **Table 5**.

**Table 3.** Mongolian cultural identity.

Attitude	Score	Participant <i>N</i>	Percentage
Negative	≤20	0	0%
Neutral	20 < - ≤30	1	2%
Positive	>30	48	98%

**Table 4.** Western cultural identity.

Attitude	Score	Participant <i>N</i>	Percentage
Negative	≤20	0	0%
Neutral	20 < - ≤30	4	8%
Positive	>30	45	92%

**Table 5.** Paired sample t-test statistics.

	Mean	HS	LS	T	Sig
Ethnic Mongol culture	44.84	49	30	10.772	0.000
Western culture	37.18	44	24		

Note: Key: HS = Highest score; LS = Lowest score; Sig = Significance.

As indicated in **Table 3**, 47 of 48 participants exhibited positive attitudes toward their ethnic culture. Interview data revealed that trilingual teachers' cultural identity is primarily shaped by language learning experiences and living environments. Participant A exemplifies this pattern: Raised in an urban Han-majority neighborhood, she received Mandarin-medium education where all classmates were Han Chinese and daily communication occurred primarily in Chinese. She noted, "*Although I consider myself Mongolian, I know very little about the culture of my ethnic*

*group. As a result, my emotional connection to my culture may be weaker. I believe that the degree to which one understands a culture can affect their cultural attitude. After all, it is challenging to have a positive attitude towards things we don't understand*".

In contrast, Participant C—who demonstrates strong affiliation with Mongol culture—was immersed in Mongolian linguistic and cultural environments throughout development. Raised in an ethnically homogeneous Mongol village, Participant C received exclusively Mongolian-medium education from primary through tertiary levels. This educational trajectory entailed: Exclusive peer interaction with ethnic Mongols; Mongolian as the primary language of daily communication.

Participant C explained, "*Although we started learning Chinese in the third grade of primary school, it was only a subject taught at school and we never spoke Chinese in our daily communication. English was the first foreign language I encountered after I began attending university. Despite learning both Chinese and English, I always identified myself as a Mongolian*".

Participant accounts reveal distinct cultural identity patterns: those with neutral attitudes demonstrate ambivalent cultural identification, whereas positively inclined participants exhibit strong ethnic cultural affiliation.

Regarding Western cultural attitudes, while composite scores were less pronounced than for ethnic culture, 44 of 48 participants expressed positive orientation toward Western culture, with only 4 maintaining neutral stances (Table 4). Semi-structured interviews identified language learning experiences as a primary influence. Participant B exemplifies this pattern: After graduating from a late-1990s secondary normal school focused on mathematics pedagogy, he received no formal English instruction. Driven by institutional needs, he later became an English teacher following several months of training exclusively addressing pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary—devoid of cultural content. Participant B noted, "*My understanding of Western culture mainly comes from the textbooks I teach now. I think it is only surface-level knowledge, but I do not exclude Western culture*".

In contrast, Participant C—an English major with systematic training in both English language and Western culture—demonstrated distinctively informed perspectives toward Western cultural elements. She expressed, "*I especially enjoy watching British and American movies and listening to English songs. I believe this interest is influenced by my English major! As an English teacher, I love my profession and the English language. It has opened the door to a whole new world for me. Sometimes my friends ask me why I am still living in China since I like Western culture so much. I believe these are two separate things. Although I appreciate Western culture, I have not abandoned my ethnic Mongol heritage and culture. I identify as a Chinese and have a deep love for my hometown and its customs. It's not like liking one culture means abandoning another culture, I think, both can be appreciated and loved simultaneously*".

These contrasting cases reveal distinct cultural positioning: Participant B demon-

strates ambivalent Western cultural identification—neither strongly embracing nor rejecting it—while Participant C, like most participants, exhibits integrated biculturalism with positive orientations toward both Western and ethnic Mongol cultures.

Furthermore, trilingual teachers' bicultural identities display dynamic developmental trajectories. Follow-up interview data consistently revealed evolving cultural identification across language learning and usage stages, reflecting an iterative construction process. As Participant C articulated, "*I received instruction in Mongolian language through elementary to senior high school. Chinese was simply a subject in school, while Mongolian was the language of communication in everyday life. At that time, I couldn't reflect on who I was, nor did I have a strong sense of belonging to ethnic Mongol culture. But my sense of being Mongolian gradually emerged when I entered university. Maybe it had to do with my exposure to the English language and culture and the fact that I started making ethnic Han friends? Later, as an English teacher, when it came to English language and culture in my teaching, I often compared and contrasted my own culture with others. This made me feel more connected to my Mongolian identity. Of course, I do not feel excluded from other cultures. For me, it's like exploring a new territory, which is very exciting and wonderful*".

In summary, most trilingual teachers demonstrate bicultural identity characteristics, exhibiting positive orientations toward both their ethnic culture and Western culture. This cultural identity manifests as a dynamic developmental trajectory, evolving through lived experience.

## 4.2. Factors Influencing Cultural Identity of Trilingual Teachers

### 4.2.1. Language Use

The above analysis indicates that the varied experiences in language learning and usage among trilingual teachers in ethnic areas may influence their cultural identity formation. To further investigate relationships between trilingual teachers' language use and cultural identity, this study employed correlation analysis, examining how proficiency in Mongolian, Chinese, and English influences cultural identification. Language proficiency was operationalized through standardized test scores: Mongolian language examination, Mandarin proficiency assessment, College English Test (CET-4/CET-6).

Analysis revealed significant positive correlations: Between Chinese/English proficiency and Western cultural recognition ( $r^* = 0.453$ ,  $p^* = 0.001$ ); Between Mongolian proficiency and ethnic Mongol cultural identity ( $r^* = 0.640$ ,  $p^* < 0.001$ ). This indicates that: 1) Higher Chinese and English proficiency predicts stronger identification with Western culture; 2) Advanced Mongolian proficiency corresponds to intensified ethnic Mongol cultural affiliation.

### 4.2.2. Teaching Experience

To examine the potential influence of teaching experience on the cultural identity of trilingual teachers, we conducted both correlational analysis and an independ-

ent-samples t-test. The analysis showed no significant correlation between the participants' cultural identity and teaching experience ( $*r^* = -0.075$ ,  $*p^* = 0.609$ ). However, the independent samples t-test indicated that there was a difference between novice and skilled teachers in terms of their ethnic Mongol cultural identity, but it was not significant ( $*t^* = 0.336$ ,  $*p^* = 0.739$ ). In contrast, a significant negative correlation was found between the participants' Western cultural identity and their teaching experience ( $*r^* = -0.777$ ,  $*p^* < 0.001$ ). This suggests that the longer the teaching experience, the more negative the attitude towards Western culture, indicating that teaching experience can influence trilingual teachers' attitude towards Western culture. Similarly, the independent samples t-test found a significant difference between novice and skilled teachers in terms of their Western cultural identity ( $*t^* = 5.502$ ,  $*p^* < 0.001$ ).

Follow-up interviews revealed two primary explanatory factors:

#### 1) Divergent Language Training Backgrounds

Skilled teachers—typically non-English majors—received only expedited training (weeks/months) during China's ethnic-area English teacher shortages. Consequently, they lacked systematic English language-culture education, whereas novice teachers received comprehensive instruction. This disparity accounts for novice teachers' stronger affinity toward Western culture.

#### 2) Socio-Environmental Constraints

Participants reported minimal Western cultural exposure due to: a) Geographically remote teaching locations; b) Culturally insular community environments; c) Progressive attenuation of Western cultural interest post-graduation.

Crucially, all participants consistently self-identified as ethnic Mongols regardless of teaching experience, confirming the stability of ethnic cultural identity irrespective of ELT tenure.

To summarize, increased proficiency in Chinese and English predicts stronger identification with Western culture for trilingual teachers in ethnic regions, while enhanced Mongolian proficiency strengthens their Mongol ethnic identity. Novice and experienced teachers differ significantly in their Western cultural identity. Furthermore, Mongolian cultural identity shows no association with teaching tenure.

## 5. Discussion

First, corroborating Wu and Wurenbilige's (2012) research, this study establishes that trilingual teachers' cultural identity constitutes a dynamic evolutionary process. Moreover, most exhibit emergent bicultural/multicultural characteristics that develop progressively over time. Phinney's (1993: pp. 61-79) tripartite framework elucidates this trajectory:

#### Stage 1: Unexamined Cultural Identity

Analogous to "a fish unaware of water", individuals unconsciously accept their native culture. Most participants, raised in ethnically Mongol environments with Mongolian-medium K-12 education, had minimal exposure to foreign languages

or cultures. Cultural identity thus remained latent.

#### Stage 2: Cultural Identity Search

University immersion in broader sociocultural contexts triggered intercultural engagement and reflexive questioning of selfhood (“Who am I?”).

#### Stage 3: Cultural Identity Achievement

Upon entering the profession, teachers developed tolerant identification with English language/culture while maintaining core Mongol identity. This bicultural integration—characterized by Adler’s (1998: pp. 389-405) “multicultural person” attributes—mitigates stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination through authentic cultural acceptance.

Second, this study reveals that trilingual teachers’ Chinese and English proficiency significantly shapes their Western cultural attitudes—a novel finding absent in prior literature with substantial implications for teacher development programs. Given established links between teachers’ Western cultural identity and student achievement (Caprara et al., 2006), strategically enhancing language proficiency could strengthen cultural identification and subsequently improve pedagogical outcomes.

Third, significant divergence emerges in Western cultural identity between novice and experienced teachers. While existing research predominantly examines teaching experience in relation to local cultural identity, this study establishes its critical role in Western cultural identification, with novice teachers demonstrating markedly more positive orientations than their experienced counterparts. These insights offer actionable pathways for enhancing Western cultural identity across career stages through targeted in-service training.

Finally, trilingual teachers’ ethnic Mongol cultural identity remains remarkably stable regardless of English teaching experience, corroborating Pishghadam and Sadeghi (2011) and Zabetipour and Baghi (2015). While second language acquisition facilitates secondary cultural identification, it neither necessitates nor precipitates abandonment of primary ethnic identity. As Participant C emphasized: “*We embrace Western culture while remaining fundamentally Mongol*”. This intrinsic stability alleviates concerns about cultural hegemony in multilingual pedagogy.

Furthermore, these findings resonate strongly with recent scholarship on teacher identity in multilingual settings, which has increasingly emphasized the dynamic and complex nature of teacher identities. For instance, Foley et al. (2021) explored how student teachers in multilingual classrooms in England understood their responsibilities and developed their professional identities. They found that student teachers navigated a complex landscape of linguistic and cultural differences, much like the trilingual teachers in our study. Our finding that trilingual teachers’ cultural identity is a dynamic and evolving process aligns with this body of research. Just as student teachers in multilingual classrooms face opportunities and challenges that shape their identities, trilingual teachers also go through distinct stages of cultural identity development, from unexamined cultural identity to cultural identity

achievement.

Another relevant study by Veliz et al. (2025) delved into language teachers' multilingual identities in Australia. They pointed out that teachers' multilingual identities are influenced by various factors, including personal, social, and educational contexts. Similarly, in our research, the Chinese and English language proficiency of trilingual teachers, as well as their teaching experience, were found to impact their Western cultural identity. This indicates that, in different multilingual educational settings around the world, similar factors play crucial roles in shaping teacher identities. By connecting our findings to these recent studies, we contribute to the growing literature on teacher identity in multilingual settings, highlighting the commonalities and unique aspects of trilingual teachers' identity formation.

## 6. Implications and Conclusion

Cultivating bicultural/multicultural competence represents a central aim in developing cross-cultural communicative capacity and constitutes a critical objective in foreign language pedagogy and broader educational frameworks. Investigating foreign language teachers' cultural identity enables comprehensive assessment of their humanistic qualities beyond linguistic proficiency and their pedagogical implications. Consequently, this research offers actionable pathways for: 1) professional development of trilingual teachers in China's ethnic regions, and 2) enhanced training paradigms for foreign language educators globally.

### 6.1. Implications

#### 6.1.1. Cultivating Multicultural Talents to Meet the Core Literacy Needs of the 21st Century

At the macro level, as globalization accelerates, educational systems worldwide increasingly prioritize cultivating intercultural communicative competence for multicultural societies. UNESCO (2015: p. 8) emphasizes that quality education must develop not only knowledge and skills but also the affective competencies—emotional resilience, adaptive attitudes, and value systems—that are required to navigate evolving sociocultural challenges. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2005: p. 5) similarly identifies communicative proficiency across diverse groups as essential, while China's core literacy framework explicitly integrates cultural awareness and communicative aptitude as foundational to modern citizenship (Cai, 2019). These competencies fundamentally enable effective social participation through autonomous action and meaningful interaction.

At the micro-level instructional perspective, within subject-specific pedagogy, foreign language education constitutes a critical form of multicultural education (Kubota, 2010: p. 99). As Byram (2014: p. 177) contends, its essential purpose is to develop globally competent citizens equipped with cross-cultural communicative proficiency and critical cultural awareness. Consequently, fostering multilin-

gual and multicultural capacities represents a paramount 21st-century educational objective, positioning foreign language instruction as central to developing globally engaged communicators.

### **6.1.2. Enhancing Teacher Education and Training to Meet the Professional Development Needs of Trilingual Teachers in Ethnic Areas**

Teachers serve as pivotal agents in implementing core literacy education, wherein their linguistic behaviors, pedagogical actions, and cognitive frameworks directly shape student development. When teachers' own literacy competencies fall short of talent cultivation objectives, their capacity to foster qualified cross-cultural communicators becomes compromised. Traditional teacher development programs have disproportionately emphasized technical competencies—language acquisition, pedagogical techniques, and methodological training—while underprioritizing critical dimensions of cultural positioning and intercultural literacy. Given demonstrable links between foreign language teachers' cultural identity and students' academic achievement in intercultural contexts, teacher education must systematically integrate: 1) critical cultural consciousness, 2) intercultural competence frameworks, and 3) identity-aware pedagogical practices to cultivate foreign language educators as transformative multicultural practitioners.

Furthermore, significant gaps persist in professional development for in-service trilingual teachers. Participants reported progressive diminishment of Western cultural affinity correlated with teaching tenure—a trend attributable to geographic isolation limiting cultural exposure, institutional neglect of ongoing training, and underdeveloped professional learning infrastructure.

This cultural attitude attenuation potentially undermines student motivation in English acquisition. Educational authorities must therefore: 1) expand high-quality, accessible professional development programs, 2) implement context-responsive training for ethnic minority English teachers, and 3) establish sustainable support systems for remote educators to address systemic inequities in ethnic minority regions and revitalize trilingual teachers' professional trajectories.

## **6.2. Conclusion**

In summary, this study advances understanding of cultural identity development among trilingual teachers in China's ethnic minority regions, offering significant implications for language teacher education and future research. Nevertheless, several limitations warrant acknowledgment: 1) Sample Scope Constraints. Findings derive from 49 participants across 10 ethnic Mongol junior high schools in T City, Inner Mongolia, utilizing self-reported language proficiency measures. Consequently, generalizability remains constrained. Future investigations should incorporate standardized language assessments and expand sampling across diverse geographic and institutional contexts. 2) Methodological Design. The cross-sectional approach categorizing teachers by experience years provides only synchronic perspectives. Longitudinal tracking of trilingual teachers' identity evolution would yield richer de-

velopmental insights. 3) Interpretive Boundaries. While language proficiency and teaching experience demonstrate statistical correlations with cultural identity, these factors are non-determinative. Causal inferences should be cautiously interpreted.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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