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My teacher identities and emotions: a self-reflexive account of the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the identities, identity work and emotions of an international accounting teacher working in the UK. An autoethnographic method is adopted to explore the self-reflexive account of the accounting teacher in a UK university during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022. Personal narratives are analysed in combination with emails, notes and the relevant literature, drawing insights from theoretical concepts of identity, identity work, and emotions. The findings indicate that the teacher experienced multiple identities and emotions through interactions with students and colleagues while teaching during the pandemic. This study captures and represents the teacher identity as a dynamic process with emotions as key elements in the process. The self-account illustrates a reflexive process through which a more enabling way of engaging with students can be developed.

Introduction

The main focus of this research is to use a self-reflexive account to investigate the identities, identity work and emotions experienced by an international accounting teacher in a UK university from 2020 to 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic. To do this, it considers the teacher's interactions with students through self-inspection, exploring the functions and positionings of different identities and their interrelationships. This requires analysis of how emotions contributed to and worked as an integral part of this process.

This research is important because it brings further visibility to the challenges teachers of accounting faced in their teaching during the pandemic, but from a uniquely subtle and personal perspective. This makes it possible to consider ways to develop more supportive teaching in a pandemic situation. This is relevant to accounting teachers because many encountered difficulties in the transition to an online or blended mode of teaching during the pandemic – a problem that occurred worldwide during the global pandemic.

To address the research question, I have extended the existing literature by providing a personal account that explores different identity positions, identity work processes and emotions through an adapting process. This paper adopts autoethnographic writing to

illustrate and represent moments of emotional narratives. Conceptual concepts surrounding the construct of identity, identity work and emotions are adopted to tease out the dynamic and shifting natures of identities and emotions.

Contribution

This research contributes to the existing accounting education literature in several ways. First, the use of a personal account for this research opens the door for especially nuanced analysis of the identities and the relevant identity work of an accounting teacher during a pandemic. The existing literature has only addressed the perception of accounting, the identity of the accountancy profession (Coetzee & Oberholzer, 2010; Pimentel & Boulianne, 2022; Wells, 2015, 2019) or the perception of accounting skills by students or teachers (Byrne & Willis, 2005; Love & Fry, 2006; Osgerby, 2013; Osgerby *et al.*, 2018; Oswick *et al.*, 1994). The understanding and exploration of a teacher's identities and the corresponding identity work at the individual level have been the objects of very limited explorations. This research offers a personal, reflexive perspective on the construction of multiple identities towards a preferred version of the self in the challenging period of a pandemic. Secondly, this research articulates emotions captured and represented through an autoethnographic account. Existing empirical research has addressed emotions or feelings from more technical or quantitative perspectives, in which subjective elements have not been fully revealed or explored (Lux *et al.*, 2023; Raccanello *et al.*, 2022; Tomej *et al.*, 2022). Thirdly, this research answers the call of Sangster *et al.* (2020) to look into the changes engendered by the pandemic crisis by providing reflexive accounts to explore the challenges and adaptations of an accounting teacher in the rapidly changing pandemic context.

This paper first outlines the key literature that explores the notions of identity, identity work, and emotions, and how relevant notions have been investigated in the education literature. Then, drawing on sociological literature, theoretical concepts of identity, identity work, emotions, and reflexivity are discussed. The context section demonstrates the impact of COVID-19 on education in broader terms and accounting education in the specific institutional context of this study. Subsequently, the methodology section justifies and describes the autoethnographic method. The analysis section delineates and synthesises the identity construction process in different periods and the interwoven role of emotions. This is followed by a discussion section that examines the key findings and conceptualisations. The conclusion section links back to the research question, reemphasizes this paper's contribution, discusses its limitations and suggests directions for future research.

Literature review

This section will first outline the sociological and psychological discussions of identity, identity work and emotions. This is followed by a summary of the pedagogic literature's engagement with these concepts, and the identification of the research gaps in which this paper is located.

Identity and identity work

The notion of identity or related concepts such as self has long been explored by psychologists (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Mead's psychological framework surrounding mind, self

and society sets the foundation for contemporary theories of self and identity (Stryker & Stryker, 2016). For Mead, the concept of self is not equivalent to the characteristics/attributes of an individual, but rather works as 'a product of social processes' (Stryker & Stryker, 2016, p. 35). Such a social process of self, Mead argues, is gradually developed through interactions and especially role taking with others (Mead, 1934). However, an individual's immediate response to specific others does not give rise to self. It can only arise through established behaviours that are associated with an 'organised community' or 'social group' – the generalised other (Mead, 1934, p. 154). It is worth noting that Mead never articulates a general notion of self being constituted by multiple identities, which are further explored by sociological research in the middle of the twentieth century (Burke & Stets, 2022; Stryker & Stryker, 2016).

This research takes a special interest in identity formation; thus, it would be beneficial to look at relevant theoretical explorations such as Erikson's theorisation of identity statuses. Erikson's theory is established on the premise of ego identity and revolves around the discussions of chronological psychological crisis (Schwartz et al., 2011). Erikson takes a position that highlights the reciprocal relationship between society and individual behaviour development. Of methodological significance here is that egos or identities cannot be observed but manifested and captured through human behaviour. Erikson proposes two criteria – exploration and commitment – for the presence of identity formation: Exploration indicates periods of re-thinking and experimenting with various roles and life plans, whereas commitment refers to a 'degree of personal investments' through the expression of actions or beliefs (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 34). Marcia classifies individuals into four categories called identity statuses. Those of high commitments are called identity achievement and foreclosure; the former has constructed identities which are more stable and perseverant, whereas the latter tends to confer identities from significant others and can be fragile (Marcia, 1966; Schwartz et al., 2011). The other two groups – moratoriums and diffusions – have low levels of commitments. Moratoriums grapple with alternative identities but are still striving to form an identity, while diffusions lack a coherent identity and can be easily swayed (Marcia, 1966; Schwartz et al., 2011). These early psychological writings set the foundation for later organisational or sociological explorations of the notions such as identity and self from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Identities and identity work processes have been extensively explored and debated in organisation and management studies (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2015). The main points of argument that are relevant here include whether identities are coherent or fragmented, stable or fluid (Brown, 2015). The notion of identity in this line of research shares certain similarities with Mead's framing due to its social inclinations. As Brown (2015) interprets it, identity is a reflexive meaning-creating process for individuals, which is shaped and sustained through social interactions. Along with the concept of identity, the notion of identity work, which focuses on the process of identity formation, has also been explored and investigated by researchers (see Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). For Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996), identity work entails individuals conducting a range of activities (create, present, and sustain) to be congruent with the notion of self. Similarly, for Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1164), identity work involves constantly engaging with dynamic context and struggles to create a sense of self and provide temporary answers to the question of 'who am I'. Watson's (2008) constructions of identity work indicate that individuals strive for a

consistent sense of self and struggle to come to terms with multiple social identities associated with different social environments.

The various definitions of identity work notwithstanding, human agency has been at the centre of the premise when it comes to identity formation processes. Also, identity work is more evident and meaningful in situations of conflict and tension in which self-doubt and feelings of confusion are more prevalent (Watson, 2008). These three aforementioned interpretations of identity work construe identities as fragmented to some degree but also unanimously suggest a more functional, coherent notion of self as the goal of identity formation. As Brown (2015) argues, identity work takes the stance that identities are workable, fluid rather than rigid, coherent with certain degrees of fragmentation. Empirically, Brown and Toyoki (2013) explore how the prisoners' discourses about their identities contribute to the internal legitimacy of the organisation. Their study uncovers two types of identity work; one contributes to internal legitimacy while the other contributes to context legitimacy. Further, Kreiner *et al.* (2006) explore the conflict between the professional identities and the personal identities of priests and the different identity work strategies employed in the pursuit of an optimal balance. Thus, despite identity conflict or struggles, identity work always strives to construct a congruent sense of self.

Zeroing in more closely on the context of the present research, pedagogic studies have drawn on the aforementioned notions to investigate teachers' identities. A search within the accounting education literature finds several studies (McPhail, 2001; Van Lankveld *et al.*, 2017) that identify and critique the negative or enabling factors that influence teacher identities and the related emotional implications. For instance, McPhail (2001) reveals the hegemonic operation of power within accounting education, which constrains the development of a more enabling and empowering practice. Similarly, when situated in a hierarchical, competitive working environment that lacks in trust, Van Lankveld *et al.* (2017) observe that teachers can experience feelings of isolation and stagnation in their career development, which prevents them from the realisation of possible future selves. It is also found that market mechanisms and the corresponding quality assessments and audits undermine self-value and reduce the degree of autonomy for teachers to explore self-realisation (Van Lankveld *et al.*, 2017). Ellington (2017) highlights an identity chasm between academics who position themselves as professionals and those who consider them as researchers. These two competing camps of identities (Ellington, 2017) resonate with the dichotomous division between the research and scholarship pathways in the UK's academic community (Smith & Walker, 2021). The existing power and institutional structures coupled with the permeating market value encroach on the autonomy of an academic, which frames teacher identities in an instrumental way, restrains opportunities for future identity formation, and reinforces the existing notions of hierarchy in academic pathways (Smith & Walker, 2021). Nonetheless, McPhail (2001) argues that a more enabling or empowering type of accounting education should promote an active role from the students' perspective. Van Lankveld *et al.* (2017) point out that a high level of satisfaction and a strong sense of commitment through teacher-student contact contributes to the development of teacher identities.

The rest of the literature identified in accounting education using the key word 'identity' does not directly address the identity or identity formation processes of teachers. The arguments revolve around the perceptions of accounting or specific accounting skills

from the viewpoints of teachers or students. Wells (2015, 2019) discover a persistent stereotyped perception of accounting from students. Researchers also contribute to the understandings of the transition of the collective accountancy profession's identity or specific perceptions of the accountancy profession from accounting students or teachers in other disciplines (see Byrne & Willis, 2005; Coetzee & Oberholzer, 2010; Pimentel & Boulianne, 2022). Abayadeera (2013) sheds light on the obstacles international teachers face working in a different cultural and social context. However, the notion of teacher identity has yet to be fully explored in relation to its formation process and the emotions involved.

Identity work and emotions

Rather than examining generic identity formation through identity work, a series of studies have investigated the involvement of emotions in identity work. Winkler (2018) provides a review to align the notion of emotion with identity work. Others empirically illustrate emotion as a discursive resource (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019) or an integral part of professional identity (Jones & Kessler, 2020). Following Alvesson and Willmott (2002), Brown (2015) and Watson (2008), identity work is a sense-making process that involves the constant forming and reforming of a consistent sense of self as themselves and as related to others (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019). The main emotions experienced during the process of identity work, as observed by empirical studies, revolve around feelings of anxiety and frustration (Winkler, 2018). Emotions are observed to play a functional role in triggering identity work or constitute the identity formation process – identity work – as an emotional process; emotional consequences also arise from successful or unsuccessful identity works (Winkler, 2018). Further, Ahuja *et al*. (2019) take the view that emotions are discursive resources for identity work. By using discursive resources such as emotional talks, Ahuja *et al*. (2019) observe that young architects have been able to construct particular versions of self, as part of a conscience identity work process. Jones and Kessler (2020) point out the interrelationships between professional and personal identities and the emotional implications when these two roles come into conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy, shame and powerlessness could be triggered by the increasingly split identities of being a professional and being themselves during the reform and policy shifts brought by the pandemic (Jones & Kessler, 2020). Thus, emotion is considered an integral part of the identity work process and could have various implications in different empirical settings.

Pedagogic research has examined the specific emotional aspects of teaching and learning practices, most recently during the pandemic period, highlighting the challenges and complexities encountered by teachers and students. Hortigüela-Alcala *et al*. (2022) find that in-class interactions in the pandemic setting were limited and forced. Raccanello *et al*. (2022) also highlight the negative impacts the pandemic had to students' emotions. Yau *et al*. (2022) point out the tension between teachers and students in classrooms where instances of false consensus exist. Lux *et al*. (2023) find that key elements, such as stress or anxiety, social interactions or instructor strategies are associated with the level of engagement of accounting students. Yong (2021) finds that international students tended to require higher levels of pastoral care during the pandemic period. Accounting education literature, however, has focused on the notion of emotional intelligence,

namely the ability to recognise the emotions of undergraduate students (Bay & McKeage, 2006), or to investigate the attitudes of employers and graduates towards encouraging this ability (Coady *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the direct exploration of emotions related to identity has yet to be further developed from accounting teachers' perspectives.

Overall, despite the discussion of the notion of identity and identity formation in broader psychological, sociological and education literature, the current explorations of the individual level of accounting teachers' identities are still limited. A dearth of accounting education literature has articulated the reflexive personal accounts of accounting educators or enhanced the understanding of self in relation to others within this specific context using proper methods. There have been empirical investigations exposing the structural or individual levels of challenges of accounting education in the pandemic setting, but the delineation or analysis of the self as teachers within a pandemic setting needs to be explored further. This research aims to contribute to the collective accounts of accounting educators, as illustrated in Sangster *et al.* (2020). It sheds light upon the subtle experiences of a teacher's identity and emotions as related to others and the environment.

Theoretical concepts

Given the widely adopted identity or identity work theory in management and organisational studies, this research draws on the notions of identity, identity work and emotions to explore the identity formations of the researcher. This section first outlines the theoretical constructs of identity and identity work by Alvesson (2010) and Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). This is followed by the role of emotions in the identity formation process, drawing on relevant literature.

Identity and identity work

For Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), identity is a conceptualised process emphasising the dynamic instances and constant struggles around the formation of the notion of self. During such a process of struggle, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165) define identity work as 'people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness'. In an organisational study of one individual manager, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) illustrate how the different managerial positions of a manager are observed in an institutional context; some are congruent with her sense of self and strengthened through the identity struggle process, whereas others are rejected. Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship between individuals' roles and their identities: roles can exert influence on identities and roles can also be modified, strengthened or marginalised during the identity work of individuals. It is also noted in Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) that a temporary view of self can be situated in a particular moment of constant identity work when certain identities dominate others. This study also points out that successful identity work increases coherence and helps in dealing with uncertainties and ambiguities. This also hints at the possible fragmentation of identities in the case of unsuccessful identity work. Alvesson (2010) further outlines seven images, locating individuals involved in identity construction along a spectrum. Of these seven images, self-doubters and strugglers are of relevance to this research setting due to

their similarly complex and uncertain contextual settings. These images are strategies individuals adopt when faced with uncertain and complex contexts. For self-doubters, Alvesson (2010) highlights feelings of insecurity as the key element of existence and social relations. Those who adopt the self-doubter image are constantly influenced by the 'irreducible ambiguity' in identity construction, and coping efforts can possibly even result in reinforcing the sense of insecurity (Alvesson, 2010, p. 198). Thus, the coexistence of multiple identities could inevitably strengthen ambiguity and insecurity. Those who adopt the struggler image will take a more active role in sustaining a positive and authentic sense of self. Conscious identity work that adopts the struggler image maintains at least a minimum amount of self-doubt, bravely facing up to contradictions and confusions and even sometimes undermining identities, but still aims to produce or sustain a consistent self-image (Alvesson, 2010). In the same vein, teacher identity has also been framed as exercised, perceived, and continuously reconstructed through ongoing teaching experiences (Walkington, 2005). Teacher identity is a dynamic, shifting process influenced by internal factors such as emotions (Zembylas, 2003) and external factors such as job or life experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Emotions and identity work

Though briefly touched upon in the earlier literature review, the main ways in which emotions are involved in identity work will be elaborated here. Firstly, emotions function as a discursive resource in identity work (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019; Zembylas, 2003). During the identity work process, especially when identities have been challenged, individuals draw on emotions to create and sustain preferred versions of self (Kuhn, 2009), and thus to negotiate between expected identities and lived experiences of work (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019). From the emotional talks of young professionals, Ahuja *et al.* (2019, p. 996) outline three different identity work strategies: idealising, reframing, and distancing. Idealising refers to 'celebrating the accomplishments' of idealised identity; reframing refers to identifying alternative idealised identity; and distancing entails questioning or critiquing idealised identity. Secondly, emotional experiences caused by drastic changes of workplace, career paths, or social relationships can trigger identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Winkler, 2018). For instance, negative feelings such as self-doubt, confusion or fear have been observed in 'identity-threatening situations' (Winkler, 2018, p. 122). Conversely, successful identity work, which results in a coherent sense of self, helps to diminish negative feelings or nurture positive emotions (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001; Winkler, 2018).

Reflexivity, identity work and emotion

One recurring notion in the definition of identity work as constructed by Alvesson (2010) is the notion of reflexivity. Zembylas (2003) illustrates that teachers' responses to their emotions in relation to the contexts is a process of reflexivity. For Archer (2010, p. 277), reflexivity can be a process which emphasises people's abilities to 'scrutinize, monitor, and modify acquired habits through the internal conversation'. Such a construct of reflexivity links closely with Alvesson's theorisation of identity work because reflexive internal conversation can bring about self-transformation when people strive to conform to idealised selves. Holmes (2010) contributes to the discussion of reflexivity from the point of

view of emotion. During the reflexive process, feelings about and connections to others are crucial in terms of our understanding of ourselves as well as our social worlds (Holmes, 2010). This overlaps with the argument that identity work is 'felt, embodied, and discursively constructed' (Zembylas, 2003; cited in Jones & Kessler, 2020, p. 4). Thus, taking a self-reflexive approach facilitates the analysing of the identity work process and the emotions involved through the theoretical lenses adopted.

Based on the theoretical framing of identity and identity work and the themes that emerged from the analysis, the Discussion section will classify the analysis into three periods: the initiation, the transition and the outlook. This is to better reflect the different features of these three periods during and after the pandemic, as these entail the forming, modification, and maintaining of different identities. Thus, the degree of complexities, differences in the type and function of identities, and the role of emotion as an integral part of this process can be linked better with the shifting context.

The context

This section begins by briefly outlining the impact of COVID-19 on education to map out the broader context of this research. This is followed by a delineation of the specific institutional context in which this self-account of teaching during the pandemic was developed.

The impact of COVID-19 on education

In terms of the impact of COVID-19 on accounting education, Sangster *et al.* (2020) provide comprehensive insights by drawing on a wide range of reflections and responses from the accounting education community worldwide. The topics identified in Sangster *et al.* (2020) highlight the challenges or insights that accounting educators shared within a risk period, involving the mode of teaching, students and staff support. Light has also been shed on emotional elements, especially on the inducing and reducing factors of stress (Sangster *et al.*, 2020).

Broad education literature has brought visibility to the impact of COVID-19 on students' and teachers' experiences during the pandemic in different contexts. Chaturvedi *et al.* (2021) highlight that negative impacts on sleeping habits, daily fitness routines, and social interactions during the lockdown periods greatly affected students' wellbeing. The rapid transition from face-to-face to remote teaching and exams has also been shown to have exacerbated the pressure on students (Azzali *et al.*, 2023). Frustrations have been felt by teachers struggling to make connections with students during online teaching (Ali *et al.*, 2021), and online sessions have triggered a form of invasion into private spaces (Macias *et al.*, 2021). These impacts covered by these studies are important and wide-ranging, but none has provided the personal, experiential data that can be offered by an autoethnographic account like this one.

Teaching during COVID-19 in my school

This research is set within a UK university that is triple-accredited and is one of the Russell Group universities. The targeted accounting programme is a long-established

accounting Post-graduate Taught (PGT) programme which offers both practical and theoretical knowledge of accounting and financial management. This PGT programme is open to students from a wide range of regions and countries. The researcher is an international academic who has worked in the UK for five years. In recent years, there has been a huge increase in international students joining this programme, most of whom come from China. Even with the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020 and the subsequent continuous impact on students' mobility at the international level, the number of international students registering for this programme continues to grow. A financial accounting course that the researcher co-ordinated is embedded in this PGT accounting programme. There were over 300 students in 2020 and over 350 in 2021. The student number was around 350 for the 2022–23 academic year.

For the accounting courses which the researcher co-ordinated, COVID-19 caused a huge impact in terms of the mode of delivery and content at different stages. When the pandemic surged in the UK in March 2020, the Business School acted swiftly and started to use emergent online teaching and learning via the Zoom platform, and the format of final degree exams was adapted to the online format. For the course in which the researcher was involved, there were not many content changes because the semester was almost at an end. The 2020–2021 academic year witnessed drastic changes which were required to accommodate the impact caused by the pandemic and to comply with the policy and regulations of public health. The two courses the researcher co-ordinated underwent changes in delivery format and content to facilitate online teaching and learning. A combination of both synchronous and asynchronous material and activities were created, such as quizzes, videos, and forum discussions, to facilitate students' engagement. Weekly online discussion sessions were conducted to address any specific academic issues or problems students might have. The online delivery of content was designed to allow active engagement and to facilitate critical reflection. Specific platforms such as Zoom, Echo360, Moodle, Mentimeter, and Microsoft Teams were adopted to further enhance students' abilities to access the course materials and interact with the teaching team and each other. The assessment methods were also redesigned to move away from high-stake assessments because of increasing uncertainties and risks during the pandemic. In the 2021–22 academic year, pure online teaching was replaced with a blended mode of delivery combining on-campus sessions and online interactive workshops or seminars. This method re-established the physical space for teaching and learning, which is very crucial in terms of interpersonal interactions, in the hope of improving engagement between the students and the teaching team.

The methodology

This research adopts a self-reflexive, autoethnographic account to explore the researcher's identity work and emotions through interactions with students and colleagues within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before elaborating on the methodology of this research, it is important to look at the ontological analytic of the concept of 'Dasein' in Heidegger's writing to justify the choosing of a proper method. For Heidegger, Dasein (German for 'existence') is the closest to us because we are it, meaning we are ourselves. This raises the question of how we can

approach Dasein when it is 'both as something accessible to us and as something to be understood and interpreted' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 36). In his subsequent arguments, Heidegger (1962) argues that we should choose a way of interpretation that can allow the entity to show itself and in itself. This also means the self needs to be shown as closest to the world of everyday activity (Sheehan, 1998).

In this sense, autoethnography is appropriate because it is a type of ethnographic writing in which the author adopts highly personalised accounts to reflect their own life experiences in order to explore the understanding of a culture or discipline (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnographic writing requires the positioning of the self within the context and a consideration of how personal experiences or perceptions have been influenced by historical, cultural, and social contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holt, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 1997). This research explores the identities and emotions of the researcher in a particular university during a certain period of global rupture. Autoethnographic writing will help bring out the self as related to the specific context. Thus, this genre of writing usually adopts first-person writing and can be presented in a multitude of forms such as dialogues, reflections of emotions, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by the context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reed-Danahay (1997) also emphasises that autoethnographic writers can have different focuses, such as the research process, the culture or the self. What is of significance here is the embodiment of the self in personal reflections to counter or challenge the prevailing mainstream view of silent authorship, which excludes the researchers' own voices in the representation of the research (Holt, 2003).

Ellis et al. (2010) explain the processes of autoethnographic writing. Researchers need to write retrospectively and selectively about epiphanies that are derived from being part of a particular culture or by possessing a particular identity within a cultural context (Ellis et al., 2010). For Ellis et al., such writings should not only provide descriptions but also use methodological tools or research literature to analyse such experiences. Therefore, personal experiences are used as ways to demonstrate facets of a particular culture so that both insiders and outsiders can understand it. Lupu (2021) uses reflections to explore her experience of being caught in the publishing game during COVID-19. She reveals challenges particular to academics in a specific pandemic situation, but such self-reflective writing can resonate with wider audiences. Thus, different researchers often contrast personal experiences in relation to existing research or the examination of cultural artefacts (Ellis et al., 2010). Thus, autoethnography is more of a philosophical construction than a mere methodology: one which focuses more on the self-other interactions and meaning-making, invites personal reflections and facilitates the exploration of personal importance within a specific context.

In terms of the production of autoethnographic accounts, Ellis et al. (2010) argue that writers often use thick, evocative, and aesthetic descriptions to reconstruct personal and interpersonal experiences and the emotions, feelings, stories, or happenings that occur within them. This is accomplished by observing and reflecting on the personal experiences that are contingent on the context evidenced by field notes, interviews, or artefacts. This also entails the later thick descriptions of patterns by showing and telling via a multitude of strategies (Ellis et al., 2010). Thus, for Ellis et al. (2010), autoethnographic writers aim to reach wider audiences who have not been included in the traditional research and hold the potential to engender changes for broader masses.

This research takes the construction of an autoethnographic study as a self-account of an accounting teacher within a particular UK university during the COVID pandemic. This self-account selectively presents the emotions and self-consciousness of the self as embedded in key moments of interactions or self-observations. As Ellis *et al.* (2010) suggest, the focus is on the self. However, such a self-reflection does not exist in isolation from the context; it is constructed and changed through constant interactions with different subject positions (e.g. the students) and is affected by the social and cultural context of the academic institutions within the pandemic setting. The reflection materials selected range from 2020, when COVID-19 hit the UK, to the ending of the latest teaching semester in 2022. Ellis *et al.* (2010) introduce a specific autoethnographic approach called layered accounts, which focuses on authors' experiences in relation to other data and abstract analysis. Thus, when constructing layered accounts, the author often refers to multiple sources, such as reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection, to reconstruct an 'emergent experience' to which the reader can relate (Ellis *et al.*, 2010). The identity conceived during such a process is also considered to be an emergent process, and evocative texts share the same significance as abstract analysis (Rambo, 2005; Ronai, 1995). Following this stream of layered accounts, this research collated a series of diaries, emails, notes and conversations with others to reconstruct the self in relation to others and as embedded within the pandemic situation from early 2020 to the time of writing. The researcher had a habit of maintaining diaries and notes on a weekly basis, especially during the pandemic period when there was social distancing. Weekly email exchanges were maintained between the researcher and the students during the teaching weeks. The researcher applied ethical approval for this research project and obtained approval from the College Ethics Committee. Thematic analysis has been adopted to draw out major concepts or terms from the emotional responses, the stream of consciousness, the content and focus of conversations in order to explore the formation of identities of the researcher and the interrelationships with others and the environment. These detailed terms or concepts are then categorised to formulate higher levels of categories that represent the different facets of identities in interrelationships (e.g. communities or conflict) and the broader scope of emotions (e.g. fear, insecurity, satisfaction) that can relate to wider audiences.

My self-reflexive account

This section is divided into three aspects of the identity work process due to the varying degrees of complexities of identities and emotions: the initiation period investigates the positioning of myself via interactions with students responding to the onset of the pandemic; the transition period explores the different identities formed, adjusted and maintained, and the emotions interwoven in this process while teaching during the pandemic; the outlook period reflects on the possible challenges in a post-COVID context. Before beginning the detailed analysis of these three aspects, I must first introduce a piece of my self-narration to set the foundation for the discussion.

Me

What makes me *me*? There is a saying that what defines us are the continuous choices we make. This is way too vague and abstract for me. Whenever I look back, my life is more of a

mosaic of picturesque shards of memories or perceptions flowing through time. I still remember the deep red sun looming over the horizon during my road trip to a client company, seemingly observing and scrutinising. It was near dusk, yet I was at the beginning of my career as an auditor. This was what we do as auditors, right? Observing, checking, and assuring. What else can we be? What else can I be? 'What can I become?' I thought as the car drove on. Years later, I decided to become a PhD student and then finally joined academia as an accounting teacher. 'What can I become?' I still pondered this question during my lectures. A lot of the time, I felt this interwoven web of visible gaze and invisible minds. Some were inquisitive and exciting. Some were uncertain or hesitant. I could also feel the currents that were formed by connective expressions and gestures, so strong that they could draw one in like currents. Being in the classroom neither felt like being at the centre of the play nor on the edge of a stage. One can feel connected. 'This might be what I can become,' I thought to myself. I can contribute to the plot, be part of many. (A piece of writing by me in July 2022)

This narrative captures a moment in the past life experience of mine which indicated an inner struggle – my dissatisfaction with my professional role and envisaging of possible future roles which are more aligned with my sense of self. Thus, earlier identity struggle (Alvesson, 2010) had promoted me to actively relinquish the more restraining professional identity and to explore a possible role (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010) that is more interrelated with others.

The initiation period

At this stage, the onset of COVID-19 threw me in a flux of drastic changes of role expectation and emotions, which urged me to formulate an identity to accommodate such changes and complexities.

The community member

It was towards the end of the online session, and I could see most students still had their cameras on, and I was still answering questions raised in the chat boxes. I felt at ease because only the usual questions were raised, and I figured I must have done a decent job so far. Then someone asked via the mic with the camera on and a concerned look on her face, 'Then … When are *you* going back home?' I responded, and the student looked even more worried. The concern in her voice was even tangible. She further commented, 'If you can't go home, then you definitely need to keep yourself safe!' There were other, similar comments popping up in the chat boxes. 'You are all very nice', I murmured, almost to myself. My vision blurred, but I still managed to reassure them that everything would be fine. Indeed, it has been years since I last went back. It was at that very moment that I did not even want to end the class or the conversation. Everything felt at home. A place I cannot go back to, but I still felt it at the time. (From my notes in March 2020)

As indicated in this self-narrative, feelings of insecurity and concern were shared by me and my students. The sharing of such emotions during the class via interactions with students created a positive sense of belonging which diminished negative feelings such as insecurity and anxiety. An identity as part of a community constituted by teacher and students situated in the classroom was formulated. This resonates with the struggler image indicated in Alvesson (2010): When faced with drastic changes of the external social environment and the shifting institutional demand for new teaching methods, I actively adopted an interrelated identity to contribute to the community, which was congruent with the earlier envisaged sense of self. Further, emotions such as insecurity and concern under the extreme

conditions of the pandemic worked as situated triggers (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019), which entailed essential identity work so I could be more closely aligned with a positive sense of self – a feeling of being included in the community contingent on the context.

My position as a member of the community was enforced through the positive reciprocal responses from the students. At the end of the online sessions, gratitude was expressed by students through plain notes of 'thank you', 'take care', or 'have a nice day', as well as a good many emojis (From my notes in 2021). Such friendly and supportive practice was maintained in every online session and especially during the Spring Festival periods. From several email communications between me and the students, the messages of best wishes given at the class level helped to 'alleviate the anxiety and fear during the COVID periods' (From my notes in March 2021), and the students said they were 'moved by these touching moments' (From my notes in February 2021). Thus, the formulating, maintaining, and sustaining of the community member identity facilitated me not only by extending care during the pandemic (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019) but also by legitimising (Brown & Toyoki, 2013) such engagement practice as a teaching routine. This temporary settling of identity was interwoven with the positive feeling of belonging, which further indicates that identity is an emotional process established on the premise of social relations and interactions (Winkler, 2018). It also reveals possibilities for the developing of collaboration between the teacher and the students based on empathy and small communities to promote a more enabling and supportive learning environment to adapt to a world of uncertainties (Tharapos, 2022; Tomej *et al.*, 2022).

Thus, in this period, evoked by the initial feeling of insecurity, active identity work allowed me to identify myself as a contributing and empathetic member of the community, which inevitably reduced my negative feelings and strengthened positive ones such as the feeling of belonging.

The transition period

With the further development of the pandemic, complexity and tension came along with a hybrid mode of online and on-campus teaching. Further identity work was triggered to accommodate the changing context and the mode of interactions with students. The transition stage can best be described as a period in which a multitude of identities or a mixture of my emotions were formed or transformed.

The listener, sympathiser and facilitator

Silence. Such awkward moments of silence were not uncommon during the online classes. Normally, if everything were conducted on campus, you would still get certain responses from the audience through their gestures or expressions. Now I was facing a complete wall of blackness with various names tags on display – but complete silence. The darkness of the screen was so thick and condensed that it seemed able to warp time and space. Every second of silence embedded within this darkness felt a century long. Out of this silence, I could also sense a degree of noisiness. The noisiness is the wild imagination of those minds behind the black screen of silence. It was more of a black wall of transcendental order of existence, and I was being observed and analysed with a thousand possible verdicts silently being pronounced beyond my senses or comprehension. I felt like I was being deprived of recognition yet, at the same time, being positioned at the centre of scrutiny. Any response could be the saviour of this moment. (From my notes in February 2021)

This narrative was extracted from my diary after an online workshop section. This thick depiction of my inner perception reflects a strong sense of objection and alienation. Such negative responses engendered a further feeling of loss, which triggered reactions of self-doubt and self-questioning (Jones & Kessler, 2020; Winkler, 2018). The temporary identity of being a community member that originated from the last period had been thrown into disarray, which demanded further strategies to accommodate the element of change. Jones and Kessler (2020) point out that a strategy of renegotiating or reconsidering the identity could be the response to such a change of demand. To be more specific, Alvesson (2010, p. 201) argues that coping mechanisms in the face of change entail an understanding of the context and refraining from 'denial' and 'rationalization', as well as regressively avoiding changes. The strategies I had undertaken in struggling to reshape my identity as a member of the community started with re-establishing rapport with students via informal communications.

Actively trying to re-establish rapport with students facilitated me to understand the possible causes for objection and alienation, which facilitated the reshaping of my identity from a member of the community to a listener and a sympathiser. Through informal conversations with students during office hours, I discovered that the 'black screen' functioned as a self-protective mechanism that maintained a safe distance between themselves and encroaching external scrutiny. As one student remarked, 'I never feel comfortable turning on my camera because it feels like everyone can see and even record what I do at any minute. If everyone turns on their cameras, I will too. However, if even one student chooses to turn off their camera, I will not turn mine on' (From my notes in 2022). Likewise, remaining silent also works as a protective mechanism from being judged in public, especially online. As one of the students commented, 'If I say anything wrong, I wouldn't know if this will be secretly captured by my classmates and disseminated' (From my notes in 2021). These remarks struck me immediately because I could also sense the same uneasiness and insecurity when being exposed to a camera. The fear of being exposed or scrutinised created possibilities for me to develop the listener identity around the ability to sympathise, which requires an active reflexive process (Ahuja et al., 2019; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) that works towards a sense of self that can relate to others through emotional resonance. It is worth noting that a material aspect such as technology amplified the emotional element of fear, which further induced active identity reconstruction to accommodate the fear triggered by such a technology. The limitations or restraining properties of technologies overlap with the empirical findings of Ali et al. (2021) and resonate with the issue of symbolic invasion into personal space (Macias et al., 2021). Overall, the identity work during online teaching resonates with the position raised by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) that identity construction is a process that is related to the social context within which it is situated.

With the implementation of the blended mode of teaching, on-campus sessions were implemented to increase student engagement levels. However, attempts to improve interactions with students also encountered resistance. An empirical investigation by Hortigüela-Alcala et al. (2022) shows that the students' interactions were forced and ineffective in a blended teaching environment. The following narrative illustrates the resistance I experienced during one on-campus session in 2021.

I looked from left to right, hoping to get any kind of response after a question was raised. Some were avoiding eye contact. Some suddenly decided to investigate their notepads. I made a small joke and again looked around the room with only twelve people sitting loosely around five large tables. I then prompted them to discuss it among themselves. Some started to look at each other but made no attempt to move or create any form of communication. Some swiftly exchanged glances without making further efforts to communicate. Some were still fixated on their notepads. There was low chatter in the far corner, but the voice quickly died down, and silence resumed. There were people present in the current moment, but all I could see were blue and white masks. There was an invisible wall whenever I tried to break the ice. This wall was not only present between them and me but also seemed to be present among themselves. I was looking towards small castles remotely situated, closed and unperturbed. (From my notes, October 2021)

This narrative illustrates students' reluctance to interact with the teachers and each other. It also expresses a sense of fear and loss due to the unsuccessful attempts at establishing connections from my side. As Jones and Kessler (2020) note, the capabilities of teachers to act within a particular context contributes to the realisation of their identities, which is in congruence with their sense of self. The resistance I experienced during this on-campus session restrained the capacity to actively enact the role to connect with students; thus, the negative impact of COVID on the formation of identities is consistent with Jones and Kessler (2020).

Drawing on my role as a listener, I adopted the same strategies in an attempt to uncover the underlying causes for such resistance. This overlaps with Alvesson's (2010) construct of a struggler who faces up to his/her fear when the idealised version of self cannot be realised due to practical restraint but still aims to work towards a positive end. It was discovered that this lack of willingness to communicate could be related to the lack of recognition of personal identities under the pandemic restrictions, such as masks and social distancing. A student reflected in one conversation, 'We would not even recognise each other during on-campus sessions because everyone had their masks on. If I had not known someone before joining the programme, I would not even want to talk to anyone because everyone just comes and goes to classrooms with masks on. No one really cares who you are' (From my notes in 2022). This can also be related to people's different perceptions of the risk of interpersonal interactions during the pandemic. A conversation with another student revealed that 'most of the time, I just stayed in my flat and I would only go out to buy necessities from the supermarket. I did not come to the UK to make friends anyway, so it does not bother me. I just want to finish the course and be safe' (From my notes in 2021). These excerpts from my notes manifest the varying individual interpretations and preferences around interpersonal interactions during the pandemic, which inevitably increased the difficulties of initiating and maintaining interactions.

The listener's identity allowed me to accept the un-idealised status of not being able to immediately realise my sense of self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) – one that is related to and accepted by others but also strives to devise strategies aiming for any positive possibilities (Alvesson, 2010). Further on, in subsequent on-campus sessions, I reduced the seemingly more structured format of group discussions but adopted jokes or small talk to encourage individual engagement in sharing one's views on particular points or cases. This reduced the scope of the symbolic and imposed form of interactions (Hortigüela-Alcala *et al.*, 2022) but added a more personal touch in improving engagements to which students willingly contributed. My identity in these settings was more of a

facilitator who helps coordinate different levels of contributions from the students. Thus, through consciously analysing and accepting the situation, my identity as a facilitator in the on-campus sessions had gradually been formed and maintained (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), resulting in a positive acceptance of a congruent sense of myself. During the reframing process, my earlier emotions of fear and dissatisfaction had been transferred into calm and confidence, which illustrates that identity work is an emotional process (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019; Winkler, 2018).

The carer

The multiple identities of being a listener, sympathiser and facilitator moved the process of identity working towards a more positive end. Emotion is one integral part of this process (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019; Winkler, 2018). Emotional talks also function as a discursive resource from which one can maintain a positive sense of self (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019). The following excerpt from my diary reflects an emotional moment between me and students, which reflects another dimension of the identities formed during the pandemic.

> 'I feel scared every day.' I looked at the camera, and my student re-emphasised this to me again. I had to reassure him again that everything would be all right. *We are still in the middle of lockdown. When will this end?* I asked myself while listening to further comment from the student. 'I do not dare to go out these days.' *Me as well. But I do not have a choice.* I reminded him that exercise might be good for his health. I could feel the anxiety and fear in his voice. There is nothing I can do but reassure him that we have taken the measures necessary. 'Your presence has made everyone feel assured,' he commented again. I immediately felt warmth in a far distant corner of my heart. It has also been occupied by anxiety due to uncertainties and turmoil. 'Thank you. This means a lot.' *Indeed. It means a lot to me. When all channels were literally shut, I felt stranded on an island for a long period now.* 'Every one of your presences also made me feel assured,' I responded. (From my notes in December 2021)

The student's words reflect a commonly felt concern over the pandemic, which resonates with other empirical research that highlights the negative impacts of the pandemic on students' emotions and wellbeing (Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2021; Raccanello *et al.*, 2022). My engagement with them helped to alleviate such fear and anxiety. In several emails from the students, they expressed that my supportive and approachable ways helped them feel 'secure' and 'relaxed' during difficult times of the pandemic (From my notes in 2021). Jones and Kessler (2020, p. 4) point out that the 'tendencies to care' by teachers remained during the pandemic period even though teachers themselves were also exposed to negative feelings through their efforts to exercise care. In my case, positive responses from students helped to strengthen the role of a carer, which was therapeutic for both parties. This exemplifies the argument of Winkler (2018) that emotional talks are not only a sense-making tool but an identity-constituting element which establishes oneself. The positive emotional reactions I obtained through the identity of a carer also helped legitimize and reinforce this desirable version of myself (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019; Brown & Toyoki, 2013).

The juggler

This section is separated from the identity work discussed above because it especially focuses on how I strived to balance my personal identity and occupation identity (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006), assisted by other relevant identities previously discussed.

> I could not remember how long I had been feeling this, being in a bottle. I was in the middle of an informal catch up with colleagues online. I was there, but at the same time, I was not there. They were talking about their families, lives, and their friends. I was also invited to talk about my life, and I appreciated their kind efforts. I started to think about my family but immediately felt empty of words. What could I talk about? I had not been home for five years. I had not seen my parents for five years – the feeling of being in a bottle strengthened. Everything felt blurry and distant as if I were looking through a bottle. There was my world, which included my class, my teaching, and my research, but without a family. The feeling closest to that of social contact was with my students. I looked at other worlds, and the feeling of being in a bottle remained. (From my notes in December 2021)

This excerpt from my diary reflects an overwhelming feeling when my interactions and relationships were dominated by professional relationships. It reveals the encroaching of my personal domain by the increasing demands from my professional identity, which overlaps with the concept of identity intrusion (Kreiner et al., 2006). The same conflict has been identified by Jones and Kessler (2020) when the increasing demands during the pandemic caused a conflict between the exercising of care for students and families. Nonetheless, the struggles of seeking a balance between these two identities as a juggler should not be investigated in isolation from other identities discussed before. The early experience of being a community member instigated a feeling of belonging and the later emotional resonance with students when being a listener served therapeutic functions. These active integration strategies (Kreiner et al., 2006) strived to shape and modify identities into ones that focus on interrelatedness, which continuously mitigate the sense of losing connections when being a juggler. This represents an active process of facing tensions, obstacles and work identities while moving towards a positive end (Alvesson, 2010).

Overall, my pandemic teaching experiences best exemplifies the shifting process of identity work in which identities (a community member) were questioned or diminished (a juggler) and new identities (a listener, sympathiser, facilitator and a carer) were formed, adjusted, and maintained. Both positive and negative emotions were interwoven into this identity construction process and played essential roles in triggering the forming and reshaping of certain identities and the strengthening and sustaining of these identities.

The outlook period

The observer

My self-reflexive account also sheds light on the issues surrounding the future career development of an accounting academic following a scholarship track.

> Everything is uncertain, yet everything is happening at the same time. I was still producing the materials for the courses in the new semester, yet I remembered that I had a paper waiting for revision in the back of my mind. There was also the nagging thought of whether or not this year's PDR objectives have been met. I also need to put effort into finishing the ever-accumulating amount of marking. I checked my email schedule and noticed there are supervision meetings with students in the following days. Everything is changing all the time. While I was working on the new course material, I still could not say whether there would be a need for further amendments due to the swift changes in the pandemic situation. I had no idea how many students would enrol or how I was

supposed to adjust the split between online and on-campus sessions accordingly. This will also affect the form and content of the assessment. With these thoughts, I continued the production of course materials. *Will this ever stop? Will I ever to able to accomplish the things I have planned?* It has been years, and I feel like I am chasing a never-stopping train or sailing toward an island that is constantly drifting away. *What will the future be like?* I have been walking inside this tunnel with a faint hint of light ahead. It looks tangible, but it is quite distant. It is tempting and calling, but also as surreal as a dream. *Will I ever get out of this? Perhaps there will be an end. Perhaps our lives will never ever be the same.* No one knows, and no one will. (From my notes in May 2022)

This excerpt from my notes comes from the post-COVID stage. As Alvesson (2010) argues, self-narrative has the capacity to link a person's past, present and future. My self-narrative was influenced by my experiences during the pandemic and raises a series of pragmatic questions around the uncertain post-pandemic era. That is why this narrative reflects a certain level of insecurity about the future, which also suggests a degree of continuity to my identity. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010, p. 13) highlight the significance of the 'crafting and provisional trial of immature' possible identities. This self-narrative functions as a provisional self being an observer who is still navigating the landscape ahead and mapping out possible obstacles and challenges. The insights obtained via this provisional identity will also work as a foundation for future identity construction.

Discussion

This section analyses the identity work in this empirical setting by elaborating on key dimensions. It also offers insights into the role of emotions in mobilising such a dynamic identity work process.

The identity work process

Identity in this research is manifested as a process, which is consistent with the previous theoretical discussions of Alvesson (2010) and Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). Identity work in this construct entails an acceptance of identity struggles while still striving to form, modify, maintain, or sustain identities to a consistent 'sense of self' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1164). The preferred version of self in this research was expressed in the self-narrative, in which I considered the idealised version of self (Alvesson, 2010) to be one that is interrelated and interlinked with others. This version of self has become the focal point that the subsequent identity work process aims to achieve. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that identity struggles bring about temporary settlement of identity/identities, where certain identities could be dominant over others depending on the context. I will further synthesise the identity work process into three periods based on the degrees of complexity in the context and the varied function and positioning of identity/identities. In the initiation period, a sudden shifting pandemic (Sangster *et al.*, 2020) demanded a forming of identity which could brace for the uncertainties and insecurity instigated. There was an integrated identity (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006) of both being a teacher and being a member of the community. This integration was in line with the preferred version of self and has brought temporary sedimentation of identity as a community member. The transition period witnessed a myriad of tension and conflict, mostly

revolving around the conflict between the idealised version of self and the 'lived experiences of work' (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019, p. 989) of being a teacher online, on-campus and in informal discussions with students. Different identities were formed or adjusted, playing different roles in this period of identity work process. Some roles positively contribute to the realisation or alignment with the preferred version of self (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019; Alvesson, 2010), whereas negative roles risk the fragmentation of identities or deteriorating identity struggles (Brown, 2015; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). Positive roles such as listener and sympathiser functioned as a way to accept and comprehend the increased complexities involved in the early stages of the blended mode of teaching; the forming of these two roles instigated the later birth of roles of facilitator to operationalise the settling of struggle to aim for a more positive end (Alvesson, 2010); roles like carer worked as a cohesive element which facilitated the mitigating of relatively negative roles such as the juggler and facilitated the sustaining of the other aforementioned positive roles. The observer role is provisional (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010) and bears the imprints of the earlier established roles. It thus maintained a certain level of doubt (Alvesson, 2010) or insecurity when envisaging future possibilities or challenges, which helps the formation of possible future identities that are needed to cope with new uncertainties or complexities.

Thus, even though different roles appear, co-exist or dimmish, they are connected through the dynamic identity work process. The realisation of an interrelated self (Alvesson, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) with others is the central premise of this process. Having discussed their functions, further synthesis can be made about their positioning and relationship. The role of a community member directly sprung from this central premise when facing a challenging context, which holds a close approximation with the idealised self. Later roles were extensions of or modified versions of this idealised role: the listener and sympathiser roles worked as the 'eyes' of this process to obtain situational knowledge; the facilitator worked as a functional element, depending on the identities of listener and sympathiser to accommodate the shifting context. The carer role complemented and helped to strengthen the positive roles while the only dissonant role – that of juggler – was consistently diminished or alleviated by the integration of other positive roles. The observer role drew insights from the earlier roles and represented a transitional position that speculates on the future and sets the foundation for possible future identities.

Emotions' role in the identity work process

Emotions constituted my identity work in two ways: as a triggering mechanism for the forming, modifying, or sustaining identities (Winkler, 2018); and as a discursive resource for me to affirm the preferred position of the self (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019; Zembylas, 2003). In the initiation period, negative emotions such as fear and anxiety functioned as actants that triggered the forming of the community member identity to cope with the challenging situation (Collinson, 2003; Winkler, 2018). During the transition period, the feeling of being rejected or alienated triggered (Winkler, 2018) the forming of the listener and sympathiser roles, upon which the facilitator identity was further developed. Further developed identities reciprocally helped to alleviate the emotional stress during identity struggles (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019). Positive emotions were induced by successful identity work

such as the facilitator and the carer, which functioned well during the pandemic teaching. This is consistent with Kärreman and Alvesson's (2001) argument that successful identity work reduces negative feelings. Positive emotions perceived through the carer role, such as feeling secure and connected, helped alleviate the identity conflict as a juggler, which enforced the functions of being a listener and a facilitator. This resonates with the arguments that emotion is a discursive resource that facilitates the formation and sustaining of preferred identities (Winkler, 2018; Zembylas, 2003). A significant part of my self-narrative is emotional talks which reinforced the identities that align closer to the idealised notion of self, such as the carer, the listener or the sympathiser. Just as Ahuja *et al.* (2019) argue, emotions allow the reproducing of discourses that constitute specific identity positions. Overall, identity work constructed in my self-narrative was an emotional process in which emotional identities were created to aim towards the desired version of self.

Conclusion

This section synthesises these findings to align with the research question from the following perspectives. Firstly, through the analysis of my self-account, multiple identities were formed or modified during the identity work process. Being connected to others is my desired version of self (Winkler, 2018), which works as a central premise that my work identities aim to achieve. During such a process, identities that are more aligned with the desired version of self (such as the listener, facilitator, and the carer) were developed and sustained. Identities such as the community member and the juggler were modified or diminished due to the shifting context. This reflects that the formation of identities is a shifting process in which the individual continuously strives to form a consistent sense of self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Secondly, emotions contributed to my identity work process in two ways: negative emotions (such as fear and insecurity) worked as a trigger to the formation and modification of identities to align with the shifting context, while positive emotions (such as satisfaction) obtained from successful identity work (Winkler, 2018) helped maintain identities to aim for a positive end (Alvesson, 2010). Overall, my self-account has brought forth the complexities, challenges, and uncertainties an international teacher experienced in the changing context of the pandemic. It has demonstrated that reflexive processes hold enabling potentials because, through self-inspection in the shifting context, a more connected and positive engagement is still possible between the teacher and students.

Overall, this research represents my identities, identity work process and emotions as a teacher, being related to students and the institutional environment within the pandemic context. It contributes to the existing literature by directly examining teachers' identities work process from a personal perspective. It contributes by focusing on the emotional aspects of identity construction, and thus differs from positivist empirical research and avoids making grand narratives. It contributes to the body of accounting education literature that looks into the challenges presented by the COVID pandemic by revealing strategies that can enable a more supportive teaching method in the context of changes and uncertainties.

While this research provides detailed reflexive processes of identity work and emotions through an autoethnographic account, it is not without its limitations. First, interpersonal contacts during the pandemic were restricted, and my autoethnographic

account was analysed in relation to other collated documents such as emails or notes or diaries to capture and represent the emotions in those lived experiences. It would be feasible for future research to conduct focus groups or participant observations in classrooms to capture teacher-student interactions from multiple perspectives to triangulate empirical data. Secondly, these understandings of teacher identity, identity work and emotions were situated within the pandemic period, and the challenges in the post-COVID context were only touched upon. Future research could further reflect or share experiences around handling uncertainties in post-COVID teaching. Thirdly, this research has focused on one self-account of a teacher in the pandemic setting, even though making universal claims is not the intention of this research. Future research could experiment with the autoethnographic method by juxtaposing two or multiple accounts to reflect different contexts.

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