# Reasons for Chinese EFL Teacher's Role Anxiety in Teacher Identity Formation: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher Metaphors

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**Abstract**
Along with the development of information technology and its increasing application in foreign language teaching, English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers encounter new challenges from students and society. In the dynamic process of teacher identity formation, EFL teachers are likely to experience anxiety in role shifts. This article studies the interactions between the internal and external perceptions of Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' role through a comparative analysis of teacher metaphors. Metaphors written by EFL teachers represent pro-internal perceptions, and those extracted from research articles stand for pro-external perceptions. Within China's socio-cultural context, the study aims to demonstrate the consistency and discrepancy between the internal and external perceptions of the EFL teacher's role. Two groups of metaphors were first compared based on the conceptual themes and then categorized into four types: Learner-oriented, Social Order, Social Reform, and Cultural Transmission according to the metaphor-categorization framework. The consistency and discrepancy in teacher perception revealed by comparing two groups of teacher metaphors shed light on the possible reasons for Chinese EFL teachers' role anxiety in identity formation.
*Keywords:* Chinese EFL teachers, comparative analysis, role anxiety, teacher identity, teacher metaphor

**Introduction**

Along with the internationalization of higher education, English as Foreign Language(EFL) teachers are no longer viewed as technicians who only acquire language-teaching tactics in pedagogical methodology courses and then apply them in their classrooms (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Beijaard et al., 2004). Instead, EFL teachers are recognized as active agents who should bring professional, sociocultural, and sociopolitical dimensions to classroom dynamics (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). The shift from the cultivation of English skills to a more sociocultural perspective, which stresses cross-cultural communication competence, has placed teacher identity at the center of language teaching and learning (Miller, 2009).

Meanwhile, the development in constructivist education theory, the emphasis on the link between language skills, cognition, and the enhanced accessibility of free language learning resources online have further shifted the outer environment for EFL teachers. Since the formation of professional identity is a reflective, interactive and ongoing dynamic process influenced by internal and external factors (Goodson & Cole,1984; Moore & Hofman,1988; Mishler, 2004), EFL teachers' identity formation is under the heavy influence of how the context conceptualizes who they are (Wright, 1987). The fast and significant shift in the external factors necessarily calls for the adjustment of EFL teacher's internal understanding of the teacher's role, leading to more uncertainties, pressure, tension, and anxiety among the teachers, which could exert a negative impact on their identity formation and development in return, even causing severe mental health issues (Aslrasouli & Vahid, 2014). However, the emphasis of most studies on teacher identity was on the individual side rather than on the context. Moreover, we paid even less attention to the influence of the context on the individual (Nese & Aslan, 2016). Many previous identity studies have called for more attention to the impact of the context on professional identity formation (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Goodson & Cole, 1984; Clandinin et. al., 1999). For example, Codron & Smith (1999) highlighted that policies that impose uniformity and conformity may threaten teachers' active and dynamic identity formation. Because the norms and values embodied in education in each particular society contribute to the structuring of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of teachers, thus it is necessary to study teacher identity formation within a particular social-cultural context.

**The Social-cultural Context in Chinese Universities**

Against globalization in education, the drastic role shift and the diversified responsibilities have generated more pressure for Chinese EFL teachers, who are experiencing a rise in role anxiety considering the high social expectation in many aspects. The explicit external reasons are threefold. First, the teaching burden of EFL teachers in China is increasing. Because English learning is compulsory for students of all majors in Chinese universities, EFL teachers have to teach larger classes for longer academic hours. The usual teaching time for EFL teachers in Chinese universities ranges from 350 academic hours to 450 hours. Due to enrollment expansion in recent years, the teaching workload is even heavier. Second, the increased pressure for academic research, mainly due to fierce competition in higher education on a global scale (Li, 2008); and third, the lack of professional-pedagogical training for many EFL teachers in Chinese universities. Apart from the above three external reasons, the continuous educational reform initiative by the educational policymakers rather than the front-line teaching faculty of universities also serves as a source for EFL teachers' role anxiety.

From a historical perspective, the social transformation, social stratum differentiation and

the diversification of lifestyles increased the difficulties for university teachers to find meaning in their job and complexity in their identity formation (Guo et.al., 2019). The previous explorations of teachers' role anxieties mainly focused on the mechanism of role anxiety emergence or emphasized the classification of anxiety, such as the anxiety of multiple-identity, the anxiety of knowledge disenchantment, as well as the anxiety caused by the popularity of self-learning (Liu, 2017; Yu, 2016; Wang & Wang, 2015). However, few studies have attempted to explore the reasons for anxieties by dissecting the dynamic identity formation process of a particular group of teachers by comparing the self-perception of EFL teachers and the perception of society.

**The Study of EFL Teacher's Identity Through Teacher Metaphor**

While the enhanced link between cognitive activities and language increased the complexity of language teaching, it also makes it possible to study teacher's self-perception by analyzing classroom discourse, and one of the popular routes is through investigating teacher metaphors (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016; Lynch and Fisher-Ari, 2017; Craig, 2018; Kartal, 2020). Ever since the redefinition of metaphor as a cognitive tool, metaphor has been widely applied in the studies of teacher's identity. Saban (2006) identified metaphor as an archetype of professional identity, a medium of reflection, and a tool for evaluation. Originating in embodied philosophy, the generation of metaphor is rooted in daily practice and experience. Teacher metaphors can be interpreted as the concept reflecting certain features of the interactions between internal/external factors, which is an epitome of the dynamics of teacher identity formation and has the potential of shaping one's professional identity construction. Although many scholars have studied teacher identity through metaphors in different educational stages in western countries (Erickson & Pinnegar, 2017; Martınez, Sauleda, & Huber, 2001), few studies have been carried out among teachers of Chinese universities. Besides, even fewer studies have attempted to reveal the contextual reasons for teacher's role anxiety by tapping into the perceptual discrepancy between teachers' internal self-identity and the pro-external identity rooted in the Chinese social-cultural context. Therefore, this paper aims to study the interactions between the external and internal perceptions of EFL teacher's role in Chinese universities by comparing the main teacher metaphors adopted by the EFL teachers and the social narrative, aiming to better understand the reasons for the rise of role anxiety among Chinese EFL teachers.

Compared with previous studies on teacher identity, the methods adopted in this research are more comprehensive. In this paper, the conceptualization of teacher's role is perceived as a continuum, with one extreme as the completely individualized/internal perception of teachers' role, and the other extreme as the role defined solely by contextual/external factors. The assumption here is that teachers' images extracted from relevant research articles are closer to the external perception while the teacher's role summarized from anonymous questionnaires answered by EFL teachers themselves is closer to internal perception, as shown in the following Figure 1.
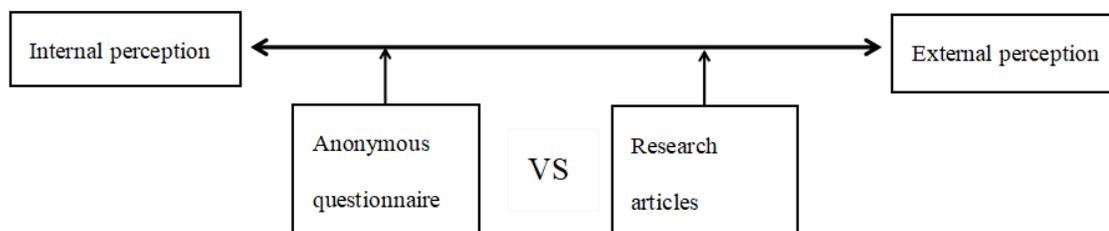


*Figure 1.* The illustration of the two adopted approaches for identifying teacher's role

Following these two approaches, teacher metaphor is used as a window for studying the influential factors and their interplay in the EFL teachers' identity formation process. In this paper, metaphor-eliciting sentences were used to collect teacher metaphors from EFL teachers of Chinese universities; and teacher metaphors of high frequency were extracted from relevant research articles using a corpus analysis tool, then the main themes of teacher metaphors collected from the two approaches were classified and compared according to a systemic categorization of metaphors from four perspectives: Learner-oriented, Social Order, Social Reform, Cultural Transmission (Oxford et. al., 1998). Through the structural comparison between the two groups of metaphors, this paper attempts to demonstrate the consistencies and discrepancies between the internal and external perceptions of EFL teachers' roles, which may reveal the possible reasons for the role anxiety of Chinese EFL teachers and provide some implications for anxiety alleviation.

**Research Questions**

The research seeks to find the reasons for the rise of Chinese EFL teacher's anxiety by analyzing the interactions between the social conceptualization of teacher's identity and EFL teacher's self-positioning. Two groups of teacher metaphors are used as the research material. Metaphors provided by Chiese EFL teachers are collected to represent the process-based pro-internal perception of teacher's role, and metapohrs found in published research articles in Chinese quality journals stand for the concept-based pro-external understanding of EFL teacher identity. Centring on the structural comparison of teacher metaphors between those given by EFL teachers and those extracted from research articles, the current research will mainly focus on the following research questions：

1. What similarities and differences can be observed in metaphors given by Chinese EFL teachers and metaphors found in research articles about teacher identity published in Chinese educational journals?

2. What is the relationship between the differences in teacher's role perception revealed through comparative metaphor analysis and the rise of role anxiety among Chinese EFL teachers?

3. What's the relationship between the high concentration on certain conceptual teacher metaphors and Chinese EFL teachers' role anxiety?

**Methods**

*Data collection*

Teacher metaphors for comparison were obtained through two approaches. Metaphors representing the pro-external perception of EFL teacher's role were selected in high quality Chinese educational journals. Altogether 40 articles are selected by searching keywords or phrases like 'teacher metaphor', 'teaching metaphor', and some common teaching/teacher metaphors like 'candle & teacher', 'engineer & teacher', and 'gardener & teacher' in an online journal database called Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The filtering parameter was limited to articles published after 2010 on topics relevant to university education or the identity of university teachers. And only articles published in high-quality journals included in Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI) were selected.

Then all 40 research articles were transferred into plain texts for analysis, and teacher metaphors of high-frequency were extracted with the help of Antconc 3.5.9. Then teacher metaphors were also gathered from EFL teachers through an anonymous online questionnaire. Participants of the survey were EFL teachers of a Sci-tech Chinese university. Overall, 51 college

EFL teachers completed the online questionnaire, in which they were asked to provide basic demographic information and were asked questions concerning pressure from teaching and research. Besides, questions about their understanding of certain teacher metaphors taken from research articles were also included. At the end of the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to fill in the metaphor eliciting sentence 'English teacher is like... and the students are like..., because...'.

To ensure reliability and encourage honesty, questionnaires & data were kept by the researcher only. Statements of the agreement to participate in the survey were obtained from all the teachers taking part in our research, and during the research process, the author maintained the confidentiality of the participants' personal information according to the negotiated protocol.

### Description of the participants

It can be seen from Table 1 that the majority of the teacher participants were female (84.3%), and most of them are experienced English teachers with more than 6 years of teaching (64.7%). Their workload is heavy, considering that almost half (41.2%) of the teachers teach more than 13 academic hours every week.

Table 1 . *Demographic Information of the Teacher Participants*

|  | Age | | Year of teaching | | | Teaching hours/per week | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | <=35 | >35 | <=3 | 3—5 | >=6 | <=8 | 9—12 | 13—16 |
| Male | 8-15.6% | 4-50% | 4-50% | 3(37.5%) | 1(12.5%) | 4(50%) | 1(12.5%) | 5(62.5%) | 2(25%) |
| Female | 43-84.3% | 19-44.2% | 24-55.8% |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 7(16.3%) | 7(16.3%) | 29(67.4%) | 5(14%) | 19(8%) | 19(10%) |
| Total | 51 | 23-45% | 28-54.9% | 10(19.6%) | 8(15.7%) | 33(64.7%) | 6(11.8%) | 24(47.1%) | 21(41.2%) |

Figure 1. demonstrates the comparison between pressure from teaching and research, it can be observed that most of the EFL teachers (33.3%) consider pressure from teaching is moderate, while more than half of the teachers (54.9%) feel high pressure from academic research; meanwhile, about 39.2% of the EFL teachers feel low/no pressure from teaching, while only 5.8% of teachers claim that they have low/ no pressure from research. Table 1 shows the heavy teaching workload of teachers and Figure 1 demonstrates that despite the heavy teaching load for EFL teachers, the main source of pressure is from research, more accurately, from publication.
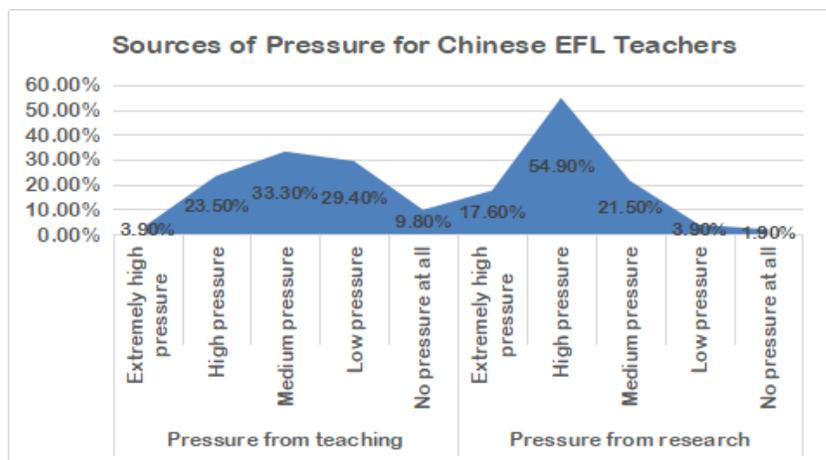


*Figure 2.* Source of Pressure Analysis of EFL Teachers in Chinese Universities

Information about EFL teachers' awareness of metaphor's influence on teacher identity was also collected through questions about their evaluation of metaphor's impact and their opinions about several representative metaphors, such as 'guide' and 'candle', as listed in the following Figure 2. It can be observed from Figure 2. that the majority of EFL teachers (90.2%) acknowledge the influence of metaphors on their perception of teacher's role, with more than half (59.7%) affirm the relatively close relation between metaphor and teacher identity. In terms of specific metaphors, the 'guide' metaphor enjoys higher recognition, with 43.1% of the teachers confirmed a moderate influence of the 'guide' metaphor on their conceptualization of the teacher's identity. The influence of the 'candle' metaphor is less appreciated by the participants, with about 48.9% voted for low or no influence. Despite the variance in teacher's perception of specific metaphors, it's justified to conclude that most EFL teachers in Chinese universities realize the influence of teacher metaphors on their understanding of their role as teachers, which further confirms the feasibility and significance of using teacher metaphor as a lens to identify the possible reasons for the rise of role anxiety.
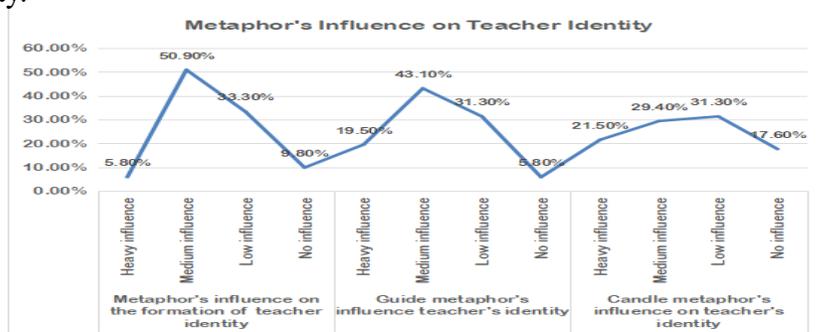


*Figure 3.* Metaphor's Influence on Teacher Identity Formation

## Results
### Teacher metaphors extracted from the research articles
Teacher Metaphors extracted from published research articles are listed in Table 2.
Table 2. *Main Conceptual Teacher Metaphors Summarized from Research Articles through Antconc*

| Metaphor | Total hits | g-b | % | Highlighted Features |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gardner** | 33 | 33 | 32 | Care, catering to student's needs |
| **Friend** | 14 | 14 | 13.6 | Communication; support |
| **Guide** | 12 | 12 | 11.7 | Guidance |
| **Facilitator** | 11 | 11 | 10.7 | Facilitate between different roles |
| **Parent** | 10 | 10 | 9.7 | Help and care |
| Engineer | 27 | 9 | 8.7 | Social responsibility; Design thinking; craftsman-ship |
| Dream Builder | 8 | 8 | 7.7 | Social responsibility |
| Willing oxen | 12 | 6 | 5.8 | Consciousness, hard-working |
| *Silkworm* | *22* | *-8* | | *hard-working, sacrifice* |
| *Candle* | *36* | *-7* | | *Sacrifice* |
| *Bucket of water* | *8* | *-6* | | *Expertise, knowledge* |

(Note: *g-b indicates the number of positive evaluations minus the number of negative evaluations of the metaphor*)

From Table 2. we can find that three teacher metaphors received more negative comments than positive ones in the research articles, they are *'silkworm', 'candle',* and a *'bucket of water'*. The first two teacher metaphors are rooted in the same well-known poem written by Li Shangyin, a poet from Tang Dynasty (618 BC - 907 BC) in ancient China. The original line of the poem is '*Silkworm keeps spinning until death, and the candle keeps burning until the last drop of the wax*', which was originally an ode to the loyalty between lovers. Later, the determination and willingness to sacrifice themselves for others were borrowed to depict the teacher's role in modern Chinese society. The most serious criticism of these two teacher metaphors is that both have deprived teachers of their rights to pursue their best interests; sacrifice and altruism became mandatory rather than voluntary for the teacher under the scenario framed by these two metaphors. As to '*a bucket of water*' metaphor, it is derived from the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS WATER, the narrative behind it is that to provide students with *a cup of water*, the teachers have to possess '*a bucket of water*'. The '*bucket*' metaphor received more criticism in the research article because the educational theory suggested by the metaphor is seemingly limited to knowledge transmission. Under the influence of constructivist educational theory, the metaphor is disfavored for its underestimation of students' initiative and agency. Apart from these three negative metaphors, the other frequent metaphors extracted from the articles mainly received positive comments.

**Teacher Metaphors extracted from questionnaires**

Table 3. presents the teacher metaphors gathered from EFL teachers through anonymous questionnaires. The number, percentage, as well as highlighted features of different metaphors are listed in the table.

Table 3. *Teacher Metaphors Collected from EFL Teachers through Anonymous Questionnaires*

| Teacher/student metaphor | No. of metaphors | Percentage | Highlighted Features |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Guide**/explorer;lighthouse/ship | 15 | 31.25% | Teacher's guidance and students' curiosity |
| Director/actor | 10 | 20.83% | Student's agency |
| **Friends** | 4 | 8.33% | Free communication |
| Gatekeeper/treasure hunter | 3 | 6.25% | Teacher's expertise |
| **Gardener**/plant | 2 | 4.16% | Teacher's caring |
| Key/lock | 2 | 4.16% | Teacher inspires students |
| Sunshine/grass | 2 | 4.16% | Teacher's critical role in learning |
| Facilitator | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher as a facilitator in a class |
| Cooperator | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher-student cooperation |
| Actor/audience | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher being attractive |
| Doctor/patient | 1 | 2.08% | Teachers correct students |
| Sun/sunflower | 1 | 2.08% | Students follow the teacher |
| Talent scout/talent | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher's ability in finding students' strength |
| Director/character | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher's power in shaping a student |
| Parents/child | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher' s duty in disciplining a student |
| Tour guide /tourist | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher's role as culture transmitter |

| Booster/rocket-ship | 1 | 2.08% | Teacher as an assistor |
|---|---|---|---|

Unlike the metaphors found in research articles (Table 2), metaphors collected from EFL teachers were more diversified and less concentrated on certain themes, which is in line with the author's assumption that teachers' ressponses through questionnaires are more individualized and situation-based, while those retrieved from research articles tend to be more conceptualized and abstract.

**Discussion**

**The contrastive analysis of frequent teacher metaphors from articles and questionnaires**

The five most commonly cited teacher metaphors in the research articles are *'gardener', friend', 'guide', 'facilitator',* and *'parent'*, the highlighted features of each metaphor can be seen in Table 2. To have a better understanding of the perceptual variance of the EFL teacher's identity, the distribution of these five metaphors in research articles is contrasted with their distribution in metaphors provided by the EFL teachers through the questionnaire. The results can be found in Figure 4.
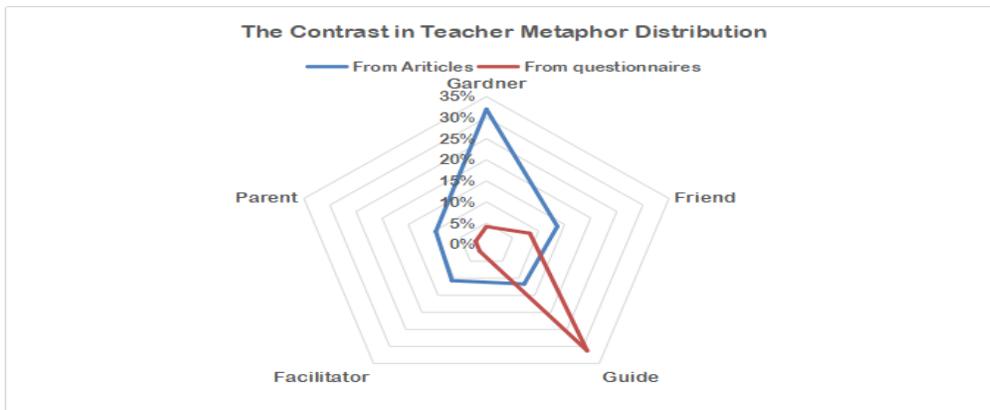


*Figure 4.* The Contrast of the Proportional Distribution of the Top 5 Metaphors

Figure 4. shows that the most emphasized teacher metaphor in research articles is *'teacher as a gardener'*, which emphasizes teacher's care, attention, and the provision of customized teaching contents to the students. In contrast, *the 'gardener'* metaphor accounts for less than 5% of metaphors given by EFL teachers. Meanwhile, what's in the leading position among metaphors collected from teachers is the *'guide'* metaphor, which stresses students' agency and initiative in learning, limiting the teacher's responsibilities to guidance and navigation. It's interesting to note that when the external perception expects teachers to *'take a good care of the students'*, teachers are expecting students to be more independent and take the initiative in learning, with teacher's job limited to navigation rather than *'sail the boat'* for them.

Among the top 5 metaphors, *'friend'* is the metaphor in which both sides share a more or less similar emphasis, indicating that free communication and a more equal status between teachers and their students are acknowledged both in the sociocultural context and in the internal perception. As to *'parent'* and *'facilitator'*, the percentage of these two metaphors from articles is also much higher than their proportion in metaphors from questionnaires. What's worth mentioning is that the feature highlighted by *the 'parent'* metaphor from the articles is *'care for*

*student'*, yet the *'parent'* metaphor provided by EFL teachers stresses *'discipline'* and *'regulation'*. As can be seen from Table 2. and Table 3, *the 'facilitator'* metaphor in research articles mostly adopts a panoramic view of EFL teacher's identity, emphasizing teacher's ability in facilitating between different roles; while to EFL teachers, the context for *'facilitator'* is more specific, limited to how a teacher facilitates teaching activities in a classroom.

**Structural comparison of teacher metaphors**

To have a comparative structural analysis of the metaphors concerning language teacher's roles, we use the categorization framework given by Oxford et. al. (1998) in their cross-cultural analysis of conceptual teacher metaphors. In this framework, teacher metaphors are classified into four types: Learner-centered, cultural transmission, social order, and social responsibility. The Learner-centered perspective stresses the teacher's role in nurturing the personal growth of each student in the classroom; the cultural transmission perspective emphasizes the duty of transferring to students the cultural heritage of the society, and here for EFL teachers, cross-cultural knowledge is also attributed to this category; the social order theme puts teachers in the role of a social engineer who taps into the potential of students to meet the needs of society; and the social reform perspective highlights a less hierarchical, more democratic relationship between teachers and students. The framework can provide us with a better understanding of the variance in the emphasis of the EFL teacher's role shown in Figure 4.
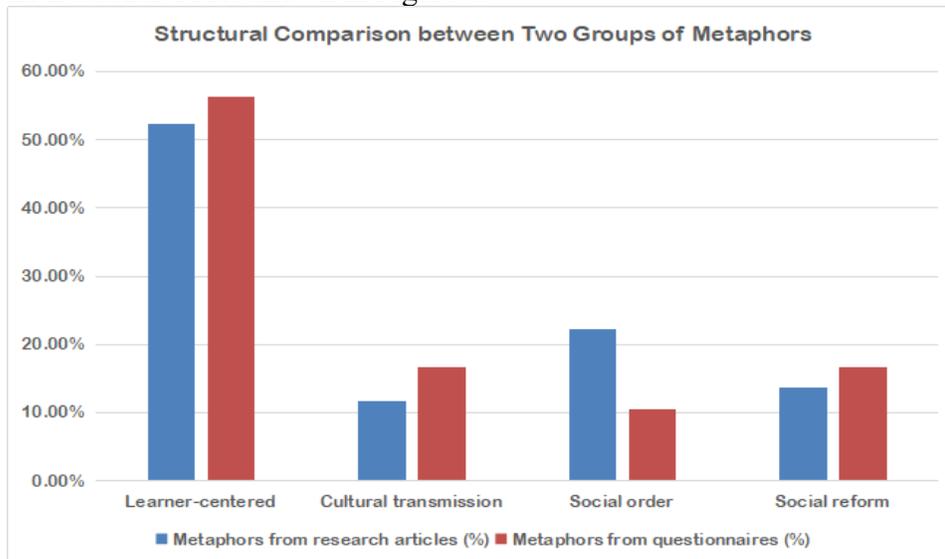


*Figure 5*. Structural Comparison between Two Groups of Metaphor

According to the characteristics of the four types of metaphors in the framework, we can classify the found metaphors of the two groups. Metaphors that highlight teachers' relations with the students were classified as the learner-centered type, and those stress teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching are classified as the cultural transmission type. Meanwhile, metaphors that pay attention to the relative status between teachers and students are classified as the social order type, while those lay emphasis on teachers' social responsibility is categorized as the social reform type of metaphor. It can be seen from Figure 5 that the proportion of metaphors in categories of learner-centred and social reform is similar among the two groups. The differences mainly lie in another two categories: cultural transmission and social order, of which the metaphors from EFL teachers placed more attention to the teacher's role as a cultural transmitter (16.65% vs 11.7%), while the

metaphors from research articles emphasised EFL teacher's responsibility in social building (22.2% vs 10.4). In other words, these metaphors from research articles attached more importance to the teacher's responsibility in cultivating the talents to the needs of society than the Chinese EFL teachers did.

Within the social order category, as displayed in the following Table 4, metaphors from our two sources differ in their interpretation of social order. Metaphors used in research articles stress EFL teachers' duty in social responsibility; specifically, teachers are expected to be conscientious and mould the students in a way that suits the demands of society both pragmatically and spiritually. However, metaphors within the social order category given by EFL teachers are limited to teacher-student interactions within a classroom, including specific metaphors like 'doctor/patient', 'parents/child', and 'sun/sunflower', which highlight the teacher's capacity in correcting, disciplining and influencing the students in teaching practice. By comparing the sample metaphors within the social order category from the two groups, we can observe that besides the overall proportional difference, they also differ in epistemological orientation. Metaphors from the research article such as 'engineer' and 'dream builder' were viewing or evaluating the teacher's role from a result-oriented perspective. Besides, articles' metaphors consider education results as 'products', and treat the quality of the 'products' as the determining factor for conceptualizing teacher identity. On the contrary, metaphors given by EFL teachers are process-oriented, which are closely associated with their daily teaching experience rather than the final goal of education.

Table 4. *Comparison of Social Order Metaphors from Questionnaires and Those from Research Articles*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Social order metaphors from questionnaires (10.4%)** | Doctor/patient | 2.08% | Teachers correct students |
| | Sun/sunflower | 2.08% | Students follow the teacher |
| | Talent scout/talent | 2.08% | Teacher's ability in finding students' strength |
| | Parents/child | 2.08% | Teacher's duty in disciplining a student |
| | Director/character | 2.08% | Teacher's power in shaping a student |
| **Social order metaphors from articles (22.2%)** | Engineer | 8.7% | Social responsibility; Design thinking; craftsman-ship |
| | Dream builder | 7.7% | Social responsibility；Patriotism |
| | Willing oxen | 5.8% | Conscientiousness, hard-working |

From the following Table 5, we can see that there is relatively more emphasis from EFL teachers on the teacher's role as the cultural transmitter; and the metaphors are more diversified, including metaphors like *'gatekeeper/treasure hunter', 'key/lock', 'sun/grass'* and '*tour guide*', highlighting teacher's critical role in education. In contrast, there is only one metaphor-'guide' from the research article, which can be classified into the cultural transmission category, demonstrating that the external perception of the EFL teacher's role is paying less attention to cultural transmission, which is the dominant responsibility of a teacher in traditional Chinese sociocultural context. Since anxiety is likely to occur during role change or role shift, such a dramatic change in the sociocultural perception of a teacher's role can qualify as one of the possible causes for the rise of EFL teacher role anxiety.

Table 5. *Comparison of Metaphors within Cultural Transmission Category*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cultural transmission (16.65%)- from Questionnaires** | 2.08% | Tour guide /tourist | Teacher's role as culture transmitter |
| | 6.25% | Gatekeeper/treasure hunter | Teacher's expertise |
| | 4.16% | Key/lock | Teacher inspires students |
| **Cultural transmission (11.7%)- From research articles** | 4.16% | Sunshine/grass | Teacher's critical role in learning |
| | 11.7% | Guidance | Guidance |

**The consistent high-concentration of learner-centered metaphors**

Apart from the rather significant variance in metaphors of the social order and cultural transmission categories, the distribution of metaphors among the other two categories is roughly consistent, with metaphors from questionnaires given by EFL teachers taking up a slightly higher percentage in each column. Within the two categories, learner-centered metaphors are the predominant metaphors from both groups. Closely related to collaborative learning and social constructivism theory (Vygotsky, 1978), learner-centredness was introduced into EFL teaching in China at the beginning of the 21st century (Feng, 2006; Zhang, 2008); and since then, learner-centred teaching has been actively advocated in EFL teaching of Chinese universities.

The fact that learner-centred metaphors have taken the dominant position in both groups indicates the common strong emphasis on students' participation in EFL teaching. The EFL teacher's ability in motivating students' learning agency has been stressed both from the pro-external perception of EFL teacher's role and from the pro-internal conceptualization. Two possible reasons are contributing to the consistent high concentration on learner-centred metaphors. First is that the spread of new educational theory in China usually adopts a top-down approach, teachers receive new theories from the authorities in a very efficient way. Second, one of the main criticisms for Chinese EFL teaching and learning is student's lack of competence in using English, the essence of learner-centred educational philosophy seems to be the perfect *'medicine'* by emphasizing *'learning by doing'* in English learning.

However, putting aside the suitability and effectiveness of learner-centred teaching, the consistently high proportion of learner-centred metaphors from both groups also reveals issues in Chinese EFL teachers' identity formation. Especially when it's almost impossible to reach a unanimous interpretation of learner-centredness among various stakeholders including teachers, teacher educators, policymakers and academics (Bremner, 2021), the consistent over-emphasis on learner-centredness may also result in a rise in teacher's role anxiety. Dillabough (1999) pointed out that efforts to realize uniformity and conformity threaten teachers' active location. Teachers must find their way of identity formation and development, and the process usually is long and complex (Mawhiney & Xu, 1997), which is inevitable due to the individual characteristics of teachers. When one category of the framework is consistently over-emphasized, the features advocated by this category would naturally attract more attention and exert more influence on EFL teachers, resulting in less visibility of other essential components in teacher identity formation. For example, cultural transmission is the predominant task of teachers in the traditional Chinese sociocultural context; however, as can be seen from Figure 4, teacher metaphors attributed to this category account for less than 20%. We can sense from the criticism of the 'bucket' metaphor that as long as teachers don't pay special attention to students' engagement, the teacher's role in transmitting knowledge and cultural heritage is usually subjected to critical examination. Under

this circumstance, the social and cultural threshold for teachers to bring public attention to a different focus is higher, and even if another category is highlighted, it's usually shadowed by the central focus.

Teacher identity is never a definite result of a certain process, and anxiety cannot be simply understood as an obstacle in identity formation. The pressure and anxiety in this dynamic process are unavoidable and also necessary. However, the process would be hampered when its dynamics were challenged by the reduction of structural diversity. In other words, when the social narrative about teachers is narrowed down to more fixed or specified images, the flexible space left for EFL teachers to negotiate and mediate their role as a teacher would become limited too. The process is almost paradoxical in some way, as harmony and conflict are both needed to keep teacher identity formation a dynamic process. Harmony between the internal and external perception of the teacher's role is beneficial to the alleviation of the pressure and anxiety in the process; meanwhile, the competition between various sub-identities is the main source of vitality for the teacher's personal growth. The balance between the degree of consistency and the amount of discrepancy between the internal and external perceptions of the EFL teacher's role is the key to maintaining a healthy and dynamic process for teacher identity formation and development.

**Conclusion**

The paper has compared the teacher metaphors collected through anonymous questionnaires from EFL teachers in a Chinese Sci-tech university and those extracted from educational research articles published in quality academic journals (CSSCI) in China. Teacher metaphors from articles are seen as the reflection of a pro-external perception of the EFL teacher's role, while metaphors from questionnaires are considered as the demonstration of a pro-internal understanding of the EFL teacher's role. Through a structural comparison between the two groups of teacher metaphors, the similarities and differences in metaphor distribution and the interpretation of specific metaphors within certain categories were presented. Moreover, possible reasons and effects of the consistency and discrepancy in EFL teacher's role perception were discussed, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role anxieties experienced by the EFL teachers in China.

From the comparison, the significant perceptive discrepancies in EFL teacher identity could be summarized into two main points. The results-oriented external perception of EFL teachers, which highlights teachers' responsibility in preparing suitable talents to meet the needs of society (Social Order), is contrasted with the process-oriented internal understanding of the EFL teacher's role, which lays more emphasis on the teacher-student relationship in the teaching process. Besides, the composition of teacher metaphors extracted from articles depicts a more generalized abstract image of EFL teachers, while the metaphors given by EFL teachers are more specific and diversified, which indicates different levels of generality in interpreting EFL teacher identity between internal and external conceptualizations.

Apart from the discrepancies, the high concentration of learner-centred metaphors among the two groups encourages the teacher to rethink the assumptions they have about the teacher's identity, reflect on the identity formation process, and identify the contextual influence in the process. The imbalanced distribution of teacher metaphors among the four categories may cause a rise in anxiety since it inevitably results in less visibility of other possible interpretations of the teacher's role. Besides, the high proportion of learner-centred metaphors also reflects the efficiency of the top-down approach in introducing and implementing a certain educational philosophy. But a unanimous efficient adoption of certain pedagogical approaches would naturally

require more self-adaption efforts from individual teachers. Especially considering the predominant role of the teacher as a cultural transmitter in the traditional sociocultural Chinese context, the shift to learner-centred teaching is rather dramatic; and the multiple interpretations of learner-centredness increase the complexity of the shift. Scaffolding is needed not just for students, but also for Chinese EFL teachers, especially when most of them lack teaching experience, and are in the dynamic process of identity formation. Therefore, despite the seemingly consistent results in all three categories between the two groups of metaphors, the imbalanced distribution of metaphors serves as the context for the rise of EFL teachers' role anxieties. The over-emphasis on learner-oriented teaching would undoubtedly facilitate EFL teachers' acceptance of this concept, but it reduces the visibility and restricts the independent development of other sub-identities at the same time. The diversity of EFL teachers' sub-identities could be compromised, increasing the chances of teachers' early attrition and burnout.

It can be concluded from the analysis that the main influencing factors of Chinese EFL teacher's rise in role anxiety include the discrepancies between EFL teacher's roles between the external and internal perceptions, and the imbalanced distribution of teacher metaphors among the four categories of the metaphor-categorization system, especially the consistent over-emphasis on being 'learner-centred in EFL teaching. The significance of this research is that by comparing the two groups of teacher metaphors both individually and structurally, the EFL teachers' awareness of their identity formation can be raised, and they are stimulated to give more thought to the reasons for the similarities and differences between their understanding of the teacher's role and the external conceptualization of this role. The benefits of a clearer understanding of the process and the reasons would help them develop a critical evaluation of various descriptions of EFL teachers, be more objective when it comes to self-evaluation, and be more confident when encountering setbacks in their personal development.

One suggestion for the external stakeholders concerning the ease of EFL teachers' anxiety is to enhance the engagement of front-line EFL teachers of Chinese universities in the enactment of educational policies as well as the promotion of certain educational philosophies, in this way the role-model metaphors promoted by the context would fit better into teacher's specific teaching process, rather than relying too much on the "end-products" of education. Besides, the delegation of more rights to EFL teachers in Chinese universities in choosing a suitable educational philosophy as well as pedagogical approaches stands a better chance of motivating teachers to be more creative in curriculum design. It's also recommended that educational policymakers and authorities could give EFL teachers an appropriate amount of time and space to reflect on their teaching independently, and delegate the power to choose the direction, approach and time for adjustment. Besides, a diversified understanding of the teacher's role should be encouraged; if each sub-identity enjoys the relatively same amount of attention rather than high concentration on one particular category, a more flexible context can be created, providing sustainable energy for continuous dynamic teacher identity development.

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