

Developing TESOL teacher intercultural identity: An intercultural communication competence approach

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This article conceptually examines TESOL teacher intercultural identity development in the Australian multicultural context. Using intercultural communication competence theory, the author discusses how TESOL teacher intercultural identity is developed and transformed in action and across languages and cultures. The in-progress formation of TESOL teacher intercultural identity is discussed from three perspectives. First, TESOL teachers must have second language knowledge and demonstrate ability to manage intercultural verbal communicative skills and styles. Second, they need to have more than one set of body languages and demonstrate ability to manage intercultural nonverbal communicative style and sensitivity. Third, they are engaged in social co-construction of intercultural identity through teacher–stakeholder interaction, having positive impact on themselves and on their students, particularly those with a refugee background. The author also proposes three strategies for TESOL teacher intercultural identity development and points out the future research on its potential contributing and/or interfering factors.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Teachers of English to speakers of other languages are playing such an important role in teaching English as a second or additional language (ESL/EAL) to a high-profile population of learners of all ages in English-dominant countries that their intercultural identity development is worth

discussing. Publications focus mostly on how international students studying in the United States (S. Kim, 2014) and China (Tian & Lowe, 2014) have developed their intercultural identity. However, despite some research on teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Erickson & Pin-negar, 2017; Nichols, Schutz, Rodgers, & Bilica, 2016; Schutz, Cross, Hong, & Osbon, 2007), language teacher identity (Menard-Warwick, Heredia-Herrera, & Palmer, 2013; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), and intercultural identities of transnational ESL teachers (Menard-Warwick, 2008), there is insufficient research focus on how TESOL teachers develop and strengthen their intercultural identity while engaged in intercultural interaction with culturally diverse stakeholders. In addition, intercultural communication competence must be redefined, considering the importance of intercultural nonverbal communication and its absence from intercultural communication competence in the current literature.

This article aims to conceptually examine the perspectives in which TESOL teachers develop and strengthen an intercultural identity that is essential to foster a supportive learning environment and help build teacher–student rapport for successful intercultural communication, thus making both teaching and learning effective. I first review the theoretical framework that underpins the discussion, then examine three key dimensions where TESOL teachers develop their intercultural identity and propose three strategies of TESOL teacher intercultural identity development. I conclude with thoughts on the direction of future research.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To map out the theoretical framework used in this conceptual discussion, I review the current literature about intercultural identity, teacher intercultural identity development, and intercultural communication competence.

2.1 | From Identity to Intercultural Identity

I start with the definitions of *identity* before moving on to those of *intercultural identity*. According to Curtin (2010), identities are defined as “social and cultural products of communicative practices that emerge in highly situated, interactional microcontexts” (p. 278). What a person says (i.e., verbal communication) and does (i.e., nonverbal communication) mirror their identity, which is interpreted with reference to situations and contexts. V. Chen (2011) states the following:

Identity is inexorably bound up with what we do, how we make sense of what we do, and how we make choices of what we do. Just like we depart from home to encounter the outside world, identity is a specific point of orientation from which we experience and participate in communication. It has to do with how we enter a conversation and how we silence ourselves and others. (p. 489)

Identity is not static but dynamic and may vary from one context to another. It is socially and culturally constructed based on the immediate sociocultural environment in which a person has lived for a period of time. Identity is consciously modified and contextually renewed. Leve (2011) points out that

identity is a powerful organizing presence in social life today—a social fact, or so it would, at least, seem. Whether measured by the amount of energy individuals expend

claiming, cultivating, expressing, or bemoaning the lack of it or by the amount of attention devoted to it by institutions that profess to address or are said to reflect popular interests and issues, it is clear that being, in the sense of belonging—to ethnic, national, religious, racial, indigenous, sexual, or any of a range of otherwise affectively charged, socially recognizable corporate groups—is among the most compelling of contemporary concerns. (p. 513)

As each individual or group identity is associated with the construct or image representing accepted behaviors expected in a specific profession, teacher identity is composed of how a teacher is expected to behave in teaching practices in a given cultural context. Pennington (2015) maintains that TESOL teacher identity is defined as what a TESOL teacher is expected to practice with reference to cognitive, socioaffective, and linguistic principles (cf. Brown, 2015). Pennington states his model of TESOL teacher identity as follows:

Each of the different practice-centred and contextual frames can be considered to represent different facets of teacher identity in TESOL which together make up a composite identity of TESOL educator and define how an individual who works in the TESOL field conceptualizes and performs “being a teacher.” (p. 72)

In today’s “globalized village,” it is essential for TESOL teachers to develop intercultural identity. The central point focuses on identity dynamically developed and constructed in the intercultural context or environment. Y. Y. Kim (1996, p. 348) refers to intercultural identity as “an identity that conjoins and integrates, rather than separates and divides” what people of different ethnic backgrounds think of as characteristic of their culture. Based on the above discussion, I define *intercultural identity* as an individual’s display of belonging to, and sharing with speakers of, diverse language and cultural backgrounds in an adaptive form of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication.

In the intercultural communication context, people tend to disclose their intercultural identity in four categories described by Cox (2004, p. 216): “home favored, host favored, integrated, and disintegrated.” In Cox’s analysis, persons who adopt the integrated pattern experience the least difficulty in intercultural communication; although they maintain close home cultural connections, they are also willing to interact with people of other cultural backgrounds and can adapt themselves to diverse cultures in the host country. This is the case not only with international students studying in English-dominant countries (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004) but also with speakers of other languages living and working in China (Tian & Lowe, 2014; Zimmermann, Holman, & Sparrow, 2003). Identity can also be examined as *interculturalities* in multicultural societies. Reframing identities as interculturalities, Nair-Venugopal (2009, p. 76) studies multimodal identity construction in Malaysia and takes “personhood as social identity” and “nationhood as national identity” in this multicultural country. Language in multimodal forms plays an essential role in helping construct such identities in intercultural communication among Malaysian speakers.

Intercultural identity is multidimensional. It involves ethnicity, race, color, class, and gender, with some of these dimensions more salient than others and varying with each individual (Y.-W. Chen, 2014). Gu (2008) describes how a few female students from rural areas of Mainland China majoring in bioscience and learning ESL in Hong Kong transform themselves in response to a different sociocultural environment and construct their new identities by interacting with native English speakers in two major settings: a “mainstream urban-discourse community” in the academic department where they study and the English-speaking Christian community where they socialize with native English speakers (p. 57). Here the community participation and intercultural discourse

play an important role in transforming participants' identity because they help to create an environment that quells the potential confusion and resistance that Chinese speakers experience and allow intercultural communication and understanding. In all these perspectives, intercultural identity is formed as an in-progress, dynamic, and renewed formation of outcomes from the learners' development of intercultural communicative competence.

2.2 | Teacher Identity Development

Teacher identity is seen as “an overarching construct including beliefs, goals and standards” related to the teaching profession (Schutz, et al., 2007, p. 226). Teacher identity development can be looked at using different theories. Varghese et al. (2005) report on three case studies of how different theories (i.e., social identity theory, situated learning, and the image–text concept) are used to interpret language teacher identity. Having analyzed the empirical data, they conclude that each theory has its pros and cons. Language teachers with different ranges of knowledge base and interest focus on different ranges of topics. Menard-Warwick et al. (2013) find that the ESL teachers in their study develop their identity through intercultural learning and are more locally oriented than peers who are more globally oriented, depending on professional development and learning experience.

Teacher intercultural identity is flexible and changeable, and may vary with specific context of communication. Y.-W. Chen (2014) describes her intercultural communication classroom experience of being viewed as an immigrant Asian in the eyes of her U.S. students and as an international intellectual faculty member by her colleagues at a U.S. university, where she feels her identity of “Asian-ness and foreignness emerged as most salient, contested, and fluid as intertwined with course materials that I had chosen” (p. 14). This identity flexibility is required to accommodate the varied student learning needs in the second language classroom. To some extent, this is related to the socio-cultural-pragmatic competence required of language teachers in effectively managing intercultural communication and intercultural relationships.

2.3 | Intercultural Communication Competence

In our increasingly globalized world, people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact with one another more frequently than ever before. Intercultural understanding takes quite a while to happen because people have such different cultural identities that miscommunication and misunderstanding make them physically isolated or mentally confused, thus affecting their personal life, work performance, and mental health every day. This is caused, among other reasons, by lack of intercultural communication competence, which plays an essential role in making genuine communication and mutual understanding possible. This competence is worth attention and exploration as a theoretical framework underpinning intercultural identity.

The conceptual construct of intercultural communication competence originated from practical research on Peace Corps volunteers in the 1950s and 1960s (Wiseman, 2003). However, the term *intercultural communication competence* was broadened following the work of Chomsky (1965) on competence versus performance and of Hymes (1972) on communicative competence (both cited in Witte & Harden, 2011, pp. 3–5), as well as Byram's (1997) focus on the intercultural communication dimension in language teaching. Whereas some researchers use the term *intercultural communication competence*, others use *intercultural communicative competence*, but the two are considered to refer to the same concept. For example, Byram uses *intercultural communicative competence* to label “the qualities required of the sojourner” (p. 3), refers to it as “an individual's

ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries” (p. 7), and highlights its significance for foreign and second language teaching pedagogy. *Intercultural communication competence* is used by Wiseman (2003), and he agrees that it “involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (p. 192). It follows that intercultural communication competence is considered to have linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, and sociocultural components. Furthermore, Wiseman maintains that nonverbal communication, though not included in his definition, is important in human communication, pointing out that there are nonverbal communication differences across cultures that may cause frustration, anxiety, and misunderstanding.

The definitions of intercultural communication competence mentioned above focus on the verbal ability, in various forms, of second language speakers to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, but seem to downplay or ignore the role of nonverbal communication. However, Mehrabian (1981) claims that more than 90% of human communication is nonverbal and less than 10% is derived from spoken words. This should not be surprising when one considers the multiple dimensions of nonverbal communication (McNeill, 2005), including paralinguistics¹ (e.g., speech volume, speech rate, speech pitch), kinesics (e.g., head dress, facial expressions, eye contact, hand and finger gestures, body movement, posture), proxemics (e.g., space and distance between people; Yang, 2015c), and many other phenomena (e.g., clothing, shoes, personality, body odor; Sorokowska, 2013), including health and body odor (Zuniga, Stevenson, Mahmut, & Stephen, 2017).

In this article, I redefine *intercultural communication competence*, considering both its verbal and nonverbal aspects in intercultural settings. My definition’s inclusion of nonverbal communication competence and its discussion in the article bridges a gap in the current literature on TESOL teacher intercultural identity development. Intercultural communication competence is defined here to refer to a second- or foreign-language-speaking individual’s verbal (linguistic, socio-cultural-pragmatic, and discourse competence) and nonverbal exchange capabilities (paralinguistic, kinesic, and proxemic competence) appropriately applied to a setting in which one interacts with people coming from different language and cultural backgrounds (see Figure 1).

Intercultural communication competence is closely related to intercultural identity, and it is their ability to employ both verbal and nonverbal communication competence that makes them successful and adaptable to different cultures. Although Witte and Harden (2011), who study intercultural competence, are not concerned with communication, Byram (cited in Jackson, 2014, p. 39) has made a clear distinction between intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence. He claims that intercultural competence “refers to the ability to interact appropriately in one’s language with people who have a different cultural background,” whereas intercultural

¹The study of paralinguistics spans linguistic and nonlinguistic boundaries. According to Schuller et al. (2013, p. 5), paralinguistics means “alongside linguistics” and has “a broad and a narrow meaning”—the broad meaning includes linguistic and vocal factors, whereas the narrow meaning includes nonlinguistic and nonverbal factors. Some paralinguistic phenomena, such as coughs and laughter, are not linguistic events (Schuller et al., 2013) because they involve vocal factors without words. Pauses and silences, which do not have vocal factors, are also paralinguistic phenomena. However, there is a semantic distinction between *vocal* (“relating to, or using the voice”) and *verbal* (“relating to, or using words”). Taking on paralinguistics as his topic of discussion, Townsend (1985) classified “emotional tone, . . . voice pitch, . . . national or regional accent, . . . tonic accent” as nonverbal aspect of speech. “Understanding man’s [*sic*] expressive potential requires the concurrent study of both linguistic and non-linguistic modes of behaviour” (Crystal, 1974, p. 164). Sharing this point, I insist in this article that intercultural communication competence integrates verbal and nonverbal factors with intercultural communication competence. It is concluded that speech volume and speech pitch are related vocal factors rather than verbal cues, and they are considered within the range of their narrow meaning. It is in this integration that I discuss how TESOL teacher intercultural identity is developed.

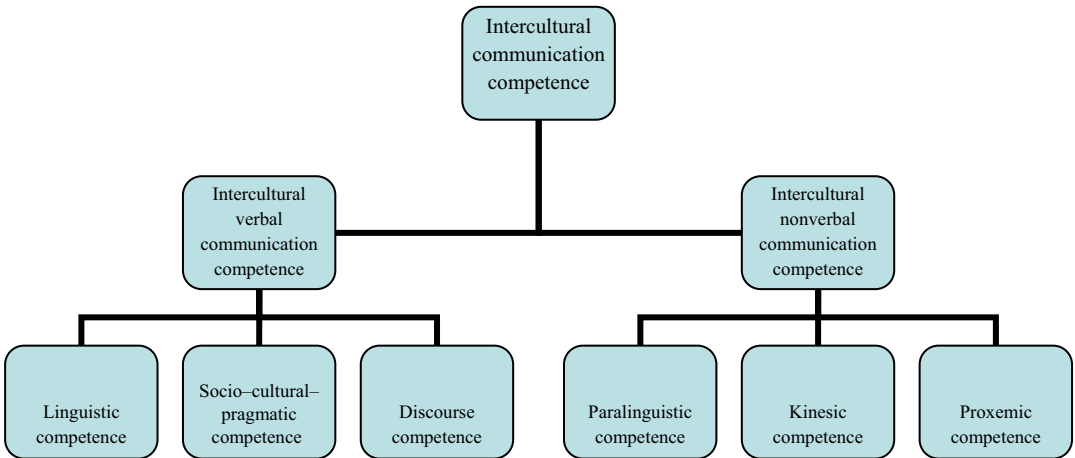


FIGURE 1 Dual components of intercultural communication competence

communication competence refers to a second language speakers' ability to negotiate and understand the linguistic differences, cultural values, and social practices of people from different cultural backgrounds (Jackson, 2014, p. 39). In this article, the term *intercultural communication competence* is used to discuss TESOL teacher intercultural identity construction and transformation through intercultural interaction. It should be noted that, for the purposes of this article, TESOL teachers include in-service teachers and preservice teachers.

3 | TESOL TEACHER INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: A DYNAMIC PROCESS IN ACTION

Given that most TESOL teachers are able to speak more than one language, they are ready to develop intercultural identity but need to meet the challenges ahead. People from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds participate in intercultural communication in a way that makes their cultural identity too complex to categorize into specific cultural groups (Holliday, 2010). It is such cultural diversity that makes the world's cultural heritage rich and keeps intercultural communicators interested in exploring its far-reaching dimensions. However, because they are working with a variety of stakeholders, especially students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds on a daily basis, TESOL teachers must develop an intercultural identity.

Working in Australia, I focus on the following perspectives to understand how TESOL teachers develop their intercultural identity in that milieu: intercultural verbal communication competence, intercultural nonverbal communication competence, and co-construction of intercultural identity. I give particular emphasis to the dynamic process of developing TESOL teacher intercultural identity (see Figure 2). Three points emerge from the intercultural communication process in which TESOL teachers are engaged. First, TESOL teacher intercultural verbal communication competence refers to their capacity to demonstrate working knowledge about the differences between their home language and culture and that of others, their oral/written communication skills, and their attitude towards intercultural interaction with others. Second, TESOL teacher intercultural nonverbal communication competence refers to working knowledge of the nonverbal communication differences between one culture and another, nonverbal communication skills, and attitude towards intercultural nonverbal communication with others. Third, TESOL teacher intercultural

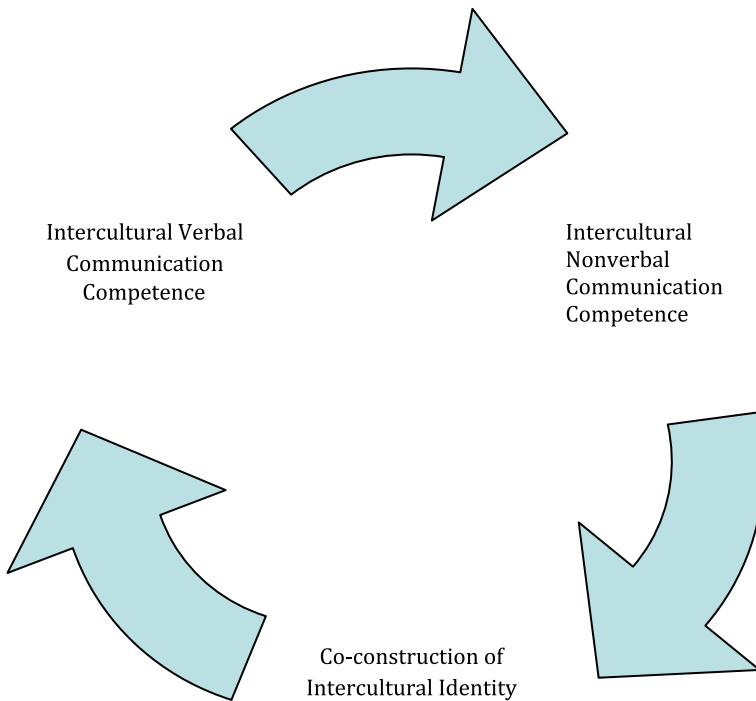


FIGURE 2 TESOL teacher intercultural identity in the making

identity is co-constructed through working with different groups of stakeholders (e.g., colleagues, communities, students) of diverse cultural backgrounds to facilitate and maximize their authentic intercultural communication experience. TESOL teacher intercultural identity development is dynamic and ongoing, and undergoes renewal as it advances. I discuss each of these three perspectives further next.

3.1 | Intercultural Verbal Communication Competence

TESOL teacher intercultural identity is characterized by the intercultural verbal communication competence that develops in the process of pursuing and delivering second or foreign language education. Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) highlights the significant role of intercultural communication in English language teacher education by looking at the potential gaps between the teachers' prior linguistic, cultural, and education backgrounds and current classroom expectations and environments, and how these gaps can be narrowed to benefit student learning. Teachers' knowledge about their students' home languages and cultural norms forms part of their intercultural identity, helping them communicate effectively and build solidarity and rapport with the cultural others. Turner (2010) argues that focusing on language and cultural differences in academic contexts can keep teachers and their students aware of the importance of intercultural communication. This not only facilitates academic achievement but also develops intercultural identity, helping teachers view different languages and cultures objectively and show understanding. For example, such awareness provides TESOL teachers with greater ability to explain language and cultural differences clearly to their students and help them learn to use intercultural knowledge and "put themselves in other people's shoes." Having culturally appropriate small talk and showing care for both

domestic students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as international students are just two of those socioaffective intercultural communication strategies.

TESOL teachers in Australia have opportunities to take advantage of Australian government funding (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017a). In October 2012, the Australian government released the *Australia in the Asian Century* white paper (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2012) to plan the country's future through engaging with Asia. To further help Australians become Asia-literate through learning Asian languages and immersing in Asian cultures, the government launched the New Colombo Plan in 2013 (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2013), which entails a scholarship program and a mobility program and offers business engagement opportunities, encouraging eligible applicants to gain go-and-see experience in other countries. Some participate in funded study abroad programs, and others undertake academic or professional development programs overseas, particularly in Asian countries. Many Australian TESOL teachers are currently teaching English in China and Japan, where they learn Chinese and Japanese language skills as well as immerse themselves in the destination cultures. Although they may feel culture shock upon arrival, they come to understand the language and cultural differences and value cultural diversity because their experiential learning helps enrich their knowledge of the target languages and cultures in context.

TESOL teacher intercultural identity is explicitly disclosed in various forms. When it is displayed in spoken and written language, or both, a theoretical concept of "identity-in-discourse" (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 39) comes into play and can best explain how some TESOL teachers, particularly bilingual ones, provide learning support to newly arrived migrants and refugees in learning English as a second language. Having the same cultural background and speaking the same first language (L1) facilitates learners' immediate learning needs (Murray & Wigglesworth, 2005). Students tend to trust and rely on teachers with the same cultural identity, which can help ease culture shock and difficulty with cross-cultural adaptation (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Yang, 2015a). Research shows that intercultural contact is one of the three key factors (the other two being racism and media) that adversely affect refugees' settlement in Australia (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015). These adverse effects can be greatly eased when TESOL teachers show intercultural empathy, understanding, and willingness to assist. TESOL teacher intercultural identity development as seen in their intercultural verbal communication competence can help them manage their intercultural encounters and scaffold their intercultural communication skills and understanding, thus developing positive attitudes towards diverse cultural values and social practices.

3.2 | Intercultural Nonverbal Communicative Competence

Compared with intercultural verbal communication, intercultural nonverbal communication competence has received less attention, even though it plays a more salient and significant role in human communication. Its importance lies in the fact that nonverbal communication is multidimensional; human thought is conveyed via gestures of various kinds, such as iconic gesture, metaphoric gesture, deictic gesture, and beat (McNeill, 2005). Furthermore, intercultural nonverbal communication can be used as additional resources because gestures are used as a strategy to make communication effective (Beattie & Shovelton, 2001; Kendon, 2001). For example, while TESOL teachers are speaking in class, their appropriate voice volume and speech rate can facilitate student learning (Crookes, 2003); their purpose-built iconic gestures and expressive facial expressions engage their students and help them understand the learning content. Teacher immediacy, such as culturally appropriate physical distance and interpersonal space, tends to maximize teacher–student affiliation and bonding, thus enhancing students' learning experience (Yang, 2015a). The three major

dimensions mentioned above are termed *paralinguistics*, *kinesics* (body language from head to toe), and *proxemics* in nonverbal communication research.

TESOL teachers develop intercultural nonverbal communication competence as part of their intercultural identity, which is essential in dynamic and successful intercultural communication. This intercultural identity component is implicitly presented in their intercultural nonverbal communication patterns and behaviors, or “identity-in-practice” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 39). Familiar with the “hidden” cultural context, teachers use the potential power of nonverbal communication, introduce its “x-factor” into their teaching activities, and make student learning interesting and engaging (White & Gardner, 2012). It is certain that intercultural nonverbal communication competence (e.g., paralinguistic, kinesic, and proxemic competence) sends a wordless but powerful message and projects a genuine and undisguised image of the intercultural interactants. Because intercultural nonverbal communication can often fail incompetent intercultural interactants, TESOL teachers need relevant specialized training or in-culture immersion to meet challenges in this area.

3.3 | Co-Construction of TESOL Teacher Intercultural Identity

TESOL teacher intercultural identity is more likely to be co-constructed and better developed in a multicultural education setting, where they work with their colleagues, communities, and students of diverse cultural backgrounds and foster mutual intercultural understanding. Because new teachers need to have more in-context teaching experience, mentorship programs are available for them to work with experienced mentors. TESOL teachers can also choose to collaborate with peers on a research project (Dobber, Akkerman, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2012; Schmid & Hegelheimer, 2014).

Furthermore, TESOL teacher intercultural identity is partly fostered through engaging with culturally diverse communities. Preservice TESOL teachers can undertake service learning, participate in home tutoring, and assist local community members and recently arrived refugees who need to improve their English communication skills (Yang, 2015a). As a Chinese pedagogical saying goes, “teaching benefits teachers and students alike” (教学相长). While working with culturally diverse communities, TESOL teachers are pleased to see their expertise and intercultural bonding help adult learners complete the Adult Migrant English Program² course (Burns, 1996) and the Skills for Education and Employment³ program, improve their English literacy and numeracy to join or return to the workforce, and change their lives for the better. They not only teach others to improve their English communication skills, but also draw new knowledge and cultural notes from their students, revealing how people from different cultures communicate and stimulating them to work out appropriate ways to respond verbally or nonverbally. Multiculturalism has taken root in seven states and the Australian Capital Territory; multicultural policies are now in place to unite the multicultural nation and keep it cohesive and inclusive (Koleth, 2010). The annual Harmony Day in Australia is

²The Adult Migrant English Program is an everyday and functional English language course of four levels designed for newly arrived migrants: pre-SWE (Spoken and Written English), CSWE I (Certificate I in Spoken and Written English), CSWE II, and CSWE III. The program provides 510 hours of study in order to settle in Australia. It is also called the Settlement English Language Program. The Australian government’s Department of Education and Training provides the program funding to the successful tenders. Currently, Navitas English and MTC are two major English language course providers that have been contracted to deliver the program.

³Skills for Education and Employment is a government initiative to help Australian job seekers (Australian citizens and long-term Australian permanent residents) “address language, literacy and numeracy barriers with the expectation that such improvements will enable them to obtain sustainable employment and/or undertake further education and training” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017b). Navitas English, MTC, Mission Australia, and TAFE are currently contracted to deliver the program.

an important community event for community members to celebrate diverse cultures living together harmoniously (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2016). Research shows there is a positive relationship between multiculturalism and Harmony Day (Pedersen, Paradies, & Barn-don, 2015). This multicultural ideology and positive multicultural action work together to build Australian national identity and construct part of TESOL teacher intercultural identity as well.

TESOL teacher intercultural identity is developed through intercultural communication and adaptation between teachers and students in the classroom for better teaching and learning outcomes. Intercultural understanding is particularly necessary because the education system, teaching pedagogy, and learning practices vary from culture to culture. Zhou and Todman (2008) find that, although Chinese international students studying postgraduate courses at two U.K. universities and teachers from the same universities need to increase mutual intercultural awareness and interaction, the latter have greater opportunity to develop personally and professionally and understand intercultural teaching and learning practices. Amid occasional miscommunication and misunderstanding and through intercultural negotiation, both parties increase their intercultural awareness and sensitivity. In a similar vein, Zhao and Bourne (2012) conclude from their study of two-way intercultural adaptation (in aspects such as collaborative classroom discourse, appropriate pedagogical culture, and assessment systems) between British teachers and Chinese international students doing an MBA program in a U.K. university that intercultural awareness enhances students' learning experience. The British teachers' intercultural engagement and dialogue with their students not only increases teacher–student interaction but also helps build intercultural rapport. When teachers and students trust each other with a positive attitude and common ground, they are well on the way to developing intercultural communication competence and further co-construct their intercultural identity. This intercultural education philosophy has reciprocal benefits for enhancing TESOL teachers' intercultural identity in discourse and practice, promoting early intercultural education and allowing them to become open to civil and intercultural education, become interested in community engagement, and approach cultural differences positively (Nestian Sandu, 2015).

Given the large number of international students studying in Australia, intercultural awareness of these high-profile students on the part of their teachers and professional school staff helps the two sides approach each other positively, enables access to the university community, and achieves intercultural understanding (Malczewska-Webb, 2014; Yates & Wahid, 2013). Such awareness helps Australian university academic and professional staff members see the challenges in intercultural nonverbal communication, undertake relevant workplace training, and work more effectively with international students (Yang, 2015c). It could be inferred from Malczewska-Webb's (2014) research that TESOL teacher intercultural identity development would be hard to achieve if international students studying in English-dominant countries have insufficient intercultural contact or communication, formally or informally, with their teachers or the locals. Thus, there is a need to propose a few strategies for TESOL teachers to develop their intercultural identity and intercultural communication competence.

4 | STRATEGIES FOR TESOL TEACHER INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

To facilitate TESOL teacher intercultural identity development, I propose three constructive strategies: learning an additional language, undertaking cultural immersion, and promoting multicultural education in and outside of classroom settings. First, it is pedagogically and interpersonally beneficial for TESOL teachers to learn an additional language or improve their additional language literacy. As

more and more students (primary, secondary, and postsecondary) come from diverse cultural backgrounds, knowledge of an additional language helps TESOL teachers foster intercultural responsiveness while they interact verbally and nonverbally with culturally diverse students in classroom practice (Yang, 2017). TESOL teachers' additional language knowledge and skills play a role in building teacher–student rapport when they are able to implement linguistic principles through using an additional language in assisting individual students with their learning needs (Brown, 2015; Harmer, 2015). Living in “globalized villages” where work is fast-paced, TESOL teachers need to become more self-directed and conscious of recent developments in language education as they use one language in teaching while learning another (Carrol, Conklin, & Gyllstad, 2016; Murray & Wigglesworth, 2005) and as they work to meet the new challenge to further develop their intercultural identity. Even if they have less experience with students of diverse cultural backgrounds in their earlier career, TESOL teachers should be encouraged by their workplaces and supported by their mentors to participate in online intercultural exchanges using modern technologies (Hockly, 2015) and to undertake professional development activities such as joining the Languages and Cultures Network of Australian Universities and presenting at its biennial conference/colloquium on language teaching and cultural understanding. Second language skills help learners enhance their cognitive skills, which in turn benefit their communicative skills. In English-dominant countries, TESOL teachers are aware that many people (e.g., colleagues, relatives, friends, neighbors) come from diverse cultural backgrounds and speak a different language. Appropriate second language literacy readily helps scaffold interpersonal relationships and connects with others, which can make a person's after-work life enjoyable and loneliness-free. Even if TESOL teachers are working in a target language environment for employment purposes and may experience some cultural shock (Jackson, 2014), they recognize the benefit of being able to speak the language and interact with the local people, thus finding it manageable to minimize intercultural anxiety and adaptation issues. Although TESOL teachers experience intercultural communication ups and downs, they become psychologically mature, emotionally stable, and interculturally confident enough to mingle with others.

Second, immersion in another culture and other relevant engagement can work to develop TESOL teacher intercultural identity and intercultural communication competence and make a positive impact on students' well-being and academic performance. TESOL teachers can undertake funded professional development and experience culture immersion in a target culture, fundamentally improving their intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication competences and developing their intercultural empathy. When they work in a target culture as one form of culture immersion in context, they are likely to adapt themselves with less difficulty and start to feel the ways their intercultural communication competence and intercultural identity development make their professional career more competitive in an international environment. When they return and work with international students studying in Australian universities, they understand that the students may need to meet various challenges (e.g., emotional, academic, and sociocultural adaptation), particularly when they live in a new cultural environment for the first time. Returning teachers thus quickly become aware of their students' emotional needs and show intercultural understanding, approaching their students with willingness to assist in a caring manner (Walton, Priest, & Paradies, 2013). In its demonstration of intercultural awareness, teacher immediacy works to bridge the psychological distance, encourages collaborative teacher–student interaction (Yu, 2011), and helps reduce student learning anxiety (Kelly, Rice, Wyatt, Ducking, & Denton, 2015).

Research shows that intercultural communication competence and awareness can make TESOL teachers more competent and confident working in multicultural education settings (McCalman, 2014). It is recognized that intercultural identity development and intercultural education can be integrated into teacher education programs so that the future TESOL teachers are well prepared for

intercultural interaction and effective teaching in other cultural settings (Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009). Other relevant engagement activities that could be considered include doing translation projects with an intercultural communication focus (Yang, 2011, 2015b) and attending intercultural awareness training (Murray & Christison, 2011). Only when TESOL teachers are empathetic and culturally aware of (individual) student learning needs and learning styles and practice socioaffective principles is it possible for TESOL teachers and students to willingly communicate heart to heart. Once the student face issues are acknowledged and addressed, students have a better chance to learn effectively and happily (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014; Robinson, Harris, & Burton, 2015). The positive outcomes will not only enhance TESOL teachers' capacity to engage in successful intercultural communication with their students in and outside of the classroom, but also help build an interculturally welcoming campus environment for existing and incoming international cohorts. Students will discover themselves emerging with intercultural identity in an interculturally facilitating academic or social campus life (Urban & Orbe, 2007).

Finally, TESOL teachers can engage themselves in promoting intercultural education in various settings so as to enhance their intercultural identity development and intercultural communication competence. TESOL teachers work at the front line and play an essential role in making decisions about what and how their students learn in the classroom. TESOL teachers can help make intercultural education happen through the use of culturally appropriate teaching and learning materials, including images and YouTube videos on everyday intercultural practices (e.g., identifying positive and negative stereotypes, verbal and nonverbal discrimination behaviors; Tupas, 2014). Formal and informal student-centred learning activities, particularly experiential learning, can be organized to achieve learners' individual, academic, and sociocultural development (Jackson, 2011). Such an effective and interactive mode of experiential learning provides TESOL teachers and students with an opportunity to work collaboratively outside the classroom setting (e.g., participating in multicultural community events such as Harmony Day to celebrate cultural diversity in Australia). With a progressive teaching philosophy as a positive approach to cultural diversity in mind, TESOL teachers deploy their knowledge about intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication, intercultural skills, and attitude to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and value different cultural practices in multicultural communities. Even if TESOL teachers teach English as a second or foreign language by profession, it is important that they share the philosophy that all languages and cultures have equal rights to be respected. Teachers guide their students to critically analyze various differences between their first language and second language in context and approach various cultural differences positively, viewing each language and culture as a unique heritage. Australian TESOL education providers, particularly TESOL teachers, are accountable for the creation of socialization opportunities to help address the key issues (e.g., insufficient English communicative competence, poor problem-solving skills) international students face (Zevallos, 2012). Taken as a whole, TESOL teachers are working as intercultural communicators, practitioners, and ambassadors for millions of ESL/EAL learners. Challenging as their work is, their intercultural communication competence and intercultural identity development are particularly meaningful because they help advance intercultural education.

5 | CONCLUSION

This article focuses on a conceptual discussion of how TESOL teachers can develop intercultural identity from the perspective of intercultural communication competence in multicultural Australia. As teachers come into contact with high-profile international students studying in multicultural

Australia, the intercultural identity of TESOL teachers is characterized by intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication competence. The co-construction by teachers and students of intercultural identity in discourse and practice is an energetic spark that signifies a welcome gesture to the prospective students wishing to study in English-dominant countries. TESOL teacher intercultural identity is a must in intercultural interaction with students, colleagues, and communities of diverse cultural backgrounds. The strategies proposed in response to the conceptual discussion promote personal and professional benefits for TESOL teachers, positive pedagogical outcomes of ESL/EAL students, and an important role in promoting intercultural education.

It is understood that TESOL teacher intercultural identity development is dynamic and may experience ups and downs in the transformative process. Future research on TESOL teacher intercultural identity development should elucidate the construction complexities in response to changing and varied environments. Similar to many *U* curves (one cycle of ups and downs in intercultural communication) or *W* curves (several cycles of ups and downs in intercultural communication) in intercultural adaptation experienced by the newly arrived people in a host culture (Jackson, 2014), TESOL teachers may travel a bumpy path in the course of intercultural identity development. Some will have achieved a high level of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication competences; others will be expected to develop or improve these competences. It is also possible that some TESOL teachers have reached a high level of intercultural verbal communication competence but still need to improve their intercultural nonverbal communication competence or vice versa. These complexities are brought about in many ways: institutional factors, such as government policies and funding for universities and schools; the degree of teachers' commitment to intercultural communication and/or interest in professional development; students' cultural diversity (low in some countries and high in others) and willingness to communicate with their peers and others from diverse cultural backgrounds. There is a varied extent to which each of these factors contributes to, or interferes with, TESOL teacher intercultural identity development and this is worthy of further study.

6 | THE AUTHOR

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