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UNDERSTANDING TRAINEE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES THROUGH VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: EVIDENCE FROM A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

Teacher wellbeing and resilience are important for educational quality, yet little is known about how Malaysian trainee teachers develop emotionally during their training. This study explores how trainee teachers experience emotional development through *perezhivanie*, felt sense, and felt shift using the Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy–Trauma-Informed Model (FOAT-TIM) developed by Laury Rappaport and grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. A qualitative case study was conducted with two final-year trainee teachers from a Teacher Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur. Data were generated across four FOAT-TIM phases and supported by artwork, observations, semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes, and participants' personal reflections. The data were analysed thematically using Vygotsky's concepts of *perezhivanie*, the Zone of Proximal Development, and the role of the More Knowledgeable Other. The findings indicate distinct emotional development experiences between the two participants. participant A *("the Preacher")* demonstrated resilience through faith-based symbols and stable meaning-making. In contrast, participant B *("the Remorseful")* initially expressed emotional vulnerability and socio-cultural shame but gradually reframed these experiences as gratitude and emerging hope through structured support. FOAT-TIM supported both participants in expressing, reflecting on, and reorganising emotional experiences through symbolic activity. This study contributes to teacher education by extending the application of *perezhivanie* in qualitative research, demonstrating FOAT-TIM as an art-based mediational approach, and identifying culturally meaningful symbolic resources such as faith, hope, and gratitude that support trainee teachers' resilience. The findings provide contextually grounded insights for strengthening teacher wellbeing within Malaysian teacher training settings.

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Keywords:

Perezhivanie; Sociocultural Theory; Qualitative Case Study; Teacher Education; Teacher Wellbeing

Introduction

In Malaysia, preservice teachers often describe their training as emotionally demanding, marked by high levels of stress and differing capacities to cope as they prepare to enter the teaching profession (Ngui & Lay, 2020; Mustapa & Poh, 2016). Similar concerns have been noted internationally, where teacher wellbeing and resilience are increasingly recognised as important issues across education systems. Previous research suggests that teachers' emotional wellbeing is closely connected to teaching quality, student learning, and teachers' decisions to remain in the profession (Day & Gu, 2014; Beltman et al., 2011). Contemporary teaching also involves responsibilities that extend beyond classroom instruction. Teachers are expected to mentor students, adapt to changing demands, and respond sensitively to diverse needs. These expectations place ongoing emotional and psychological pressure on teachers throughout their careers. When supportive relationships and institutional structures are limited, teachers are more vulnerable to stress, burnout, and eventual withdrawal from the profession (Kyriacou, 2011). For this reason, teacher wellbeing is now widely understood as a central concern in educational reform rather than a peripheral issue.

Trainee teachers are particularly exposed to these pressures. They enter the profession at a formative stage of professional identity development while simultaneously managing academic coursework, practicum requirements, institutional expectations, and personal growth (Hong, 2010). Research suggests that the transition from university-based preparation to school practicum is one of the most emotionally challenging phases of teacher education (Pillen et al., 2019). During practicum, trainee teachers encounter everyday classroom realities, such as managing student behaviour, addressing diverse learning needs, meeting assessment expectations, and adapting to school culture. These experiences often contrast with the more idealised understandings developed during training. For many trainee teachers, practicum becomes a critical period in which confidence is tested, self-understandings are negotiated, and early professional identities begin to take shape (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2019).

While national education policy in Malaysia recognises the importance of teacher professionalism, resilience, and wellbeing, trainee teachers' lived experiences during practicum continue to reveal ongoing emotional challenges. Malaysian trainee teachers frequently describe practicum as stressful, particularly in relation to workload and assessment demands (Mustapa & Poh, 2016; Gopal, 2010). Studies also suggest that resilience is not fixed but fluctuates across different stages of training (Ngui & Lay, 2020). More recent work indicates that increasing systemic demands and limited support structures continue to place pressure on teachers' wellbeing (Zulkifli et al., 2022). Burnout has emerged as a growing concern, with research highlighting both the protective role of resilience and the impact of workload on psychological wellbeing (Nur Izzati Mat Zin et al., 2023; Ani, 2024).

Taken together, these findings highlight the need for approaches that attend to how trainee teachers experience, interpret, and make sense of emotional challenges during professional preparation. In response, this study explores trainee teachers' emotional development within a

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Malaysian teacher training institute through a sociocultural lens, drawing on *perezhivanie* and the Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy-Trauma-Informed Model (FOAT-TIM) as mediational frameworks. By situating Malaysian trainee teachers' lived experiences alongside international discussions on emotional development and transformative learning in teacher education, this study contributes a culturally grounded perspective to broader international conversations on teacher wellbeing and professional development.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Lens

This study is guided by Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which views human development as emerging through social interaction and participation in everyday cultural activities (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels, 2016). From this perspective, learning and development are not understood as isolated or measurable outcomes, but as lived processes shaped through relationships, cultural tools, and shared practices. A central concept within this framework is *perezhivanie*. *Perezhivanie* refers to how individuals live through and interpret events by bringing together emotion and thinking as a single, inseparable experience. Rather than treating cognition and emotion as separate domains, this concept highlights how personal histories, cultural contexts, and emotional states shape the meanings people assign to particular situations. As a result, the same event may be experienced and understood differently by different individuals (Veresov, 2019; Fleer, 2016; Ferholt, 2020). In qualitative educational research, *perezhivanie* has increasingly been used to explore how emotional experience, meaning-making, and cultural context are intertwined in learners' lived worlds (González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2019). Despite growing international interest, however, the concept remains under-applied within Malaysian teacher education. In particular, there is limited qualitative research that uses *perezhivanie* to understand trainee teachers' emotional development from their own perspectives.

FOAT-TIM: A Mediational Scaffold

To support this sociocultural approach, the study draws on the Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy-Trauma-Informed Model (FOAT-TIM), developed by Laury Rappaport (2020), as a mediational framework. FOAT-TIM is grounded in Eugene Gendlin's (1981) concept of the felt sense, which refers to a bodily awareness of meaning that may be present before it can be expressed in words. The model also incorporates the idea of the felt shift, a moment of change or relief that occurs when new understanding begins to emerge. FOAT-TIM is guided by trauma-informed principles such as safety, choice, and empowerment (Hendricks, 2002; SAMHSA, 2014). Through simple creative activities, including drawing and symbolic art-making, participants are supported in expressing emotional experiences that may be difficult to articulate verbally. These creative processes allow feelings and meanings to become visible, open to reflection, and available for dialogue in a supportive manner. Although FOAT-TIM has been applied in various international clinical and community contexts (Lee, 2011; Lind et al., 2015; Li, 2022), its use within teacher education remains limited. This study therefore explores FOAT-TIM as a meaningful mediational approach for understanding how trainee teachers experience, reflect on, and reorganise emotional experiences during professional preparation. In this study, FOAT-TIM is used as an educational and reflective mediational approach rather than as a clinical or therapeutic intervention

Integrating Perezhivanie and FOAT-TIM

Bringing together Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* and Rappaport's FOAT-TIM provides a coherent qualitative framework for exploring trainee teachers' emotional development. From

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a sociocultural perspective, *perezhivanie* draws attention to how emotional experience and meaning-making are shaped through interaction with social and cultural environments. Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development further emphasises that development occurs through guided interaction and supportive mediation rather than in isolation. Within this study, FOAT-TIM functions as a structured, art-based mediational process that supports reflection and meaning-making through symbolic activity. Creative processes such as drawing allow emotional experiences to be externalised and revisited, creating space for reflection, dialogue, and reinterpretation. In this way, FOAT-TIM acts as a practical scaffold that supports trainee teachers in engaging with their emotional experiences in culturally responsive and ethically sensitive ways. Together, *perezhivanie* and FOAT-TIM offer a qualitative lens for examining how emotional experiences are lived, interpreted, and reorganised during teacher preparation. Building on previous work that highlights the role of emotionally meaningful and imaginative experiences in developmental change (Ferholt, 2020), the present study uses this integrated framework to explore how Malaysian trainee teachers experience emotional challenges and develop resilience during practicum and professional preparation.

Research Objectives

This study explores how trainee teachers in Teacher Training Institute experience emotional development through their participation in the Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy-Trauma Informed Model (FOAT-TIM). Guided by a sociocultural perspective, the study seeks to understand how emotional experiences are lived, expressed, and gradually transformed through art-based, mediated processes. In particular, it focuses on how *perezhivanie*, felt sense, and felt shift are experienced by trainee teachers during this process.
The objectives of the study are to:

1. Explore how trainee teachers' *perezhivanie* emerges and changes through their engagement with FOAT-TIM.
2. Explore how felt sense and felt shift are experienced as embodied signs of emotional and developmental change.
3. Understand how FOAT-TIM functions as a mediational process that supports trainee teachers' emotional development, resilience, and wellbeing.

Research Questions

Guided by these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do trainee teachers experience and make sense of *perezhivanie* through their participation in FOAT-TIM?
2. How are felt sense and felt shift experienced and described as part of trainee teachers' emotional development?
3. How does FOAT-TIM mediate trainee teachers' emotional experiences during their professional preparation in a Teacher Training Institute?

Literature Review

Trainee teachers continue to face significant emotional demands during their training, highlighting the need for a framework that explains how social and cultural contexts shape their development and resilience. Research on teacher resilience points to the importance of personal strengths, supportive relationships, and contextual factors that help teachers manage emotional challenges (Beltman et al., 2011). To make sense of these emotional demands as lived

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experiences rather than individual deficits, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory offers a useful perspective by viewing learning and development as processes shaped through social interaction and mediated experience. Recent international discussions on transformative learning and emotionally mediated development in teacher education also emphasise the importance of lived experience, embodiment, and meaning-making, providing a relevant international context for this study.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

The literature increasingly calls for theoretical approaches that integrate cognition, emotion, and culture when examining teacher development, particularly in contexts where wellbeing and resilience are under pressure. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory responds to this need by viewing development as a socially mediated process rather than an individual achievement (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, learning and emotional growth emerge through participation in shared activities, relationships, and culturally organised practices (Daniels, 2016). A key concept within this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the space in which learners develop through guidance and support from more knowledgeable others (Chaiklin, 2003). In teacher education, such support often takes the form of mentoring relationships, structured practicum feedback, and peer collaboration. Development within the ZPD highlights how growth occurs through interaction and scaffolding rather than through independent effort alone (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

In the Malaysian context, becoming a teacher involves more than acquiring subject knowledge. Trainee teachers must also navigate institutional cultures, develop professional identities, and manage emotional demands associated with practicum experiences (Abdul Rahim et al., 2009). This makes Vygotsky's framework particularly relevant for understanding the socio-emotional dimensions of teacher development. Vygotsky also emphasised the role of cultural tools such as language, symbols, narratives, and emotions in mediating development. In this study, FOAT-TIM is conceptualised as one such cultural-psychological tool that supports reflection on embodied experience and facilitates developmental change.

Perezhivanie

One of Vygotsky's most significant, yet less frequently applied, concepts is *perezhivanie*, which refers to the unity of emotion and cognition as lived experience (Vygotsky, 1935/1994). *Perezhivanie* captures how individuals experience, interpret, and respond to their environments by transforming external conditions such as institutional demands, cultural expectations, and social relationships into personally meaningful experiences (Veresov, 2019). In recent years, scholarly interest in *perezhivanie* has extended beyond childhood learning to include adult development. Researchers have highlighted its value for understanding identity formation, emotional meaning-making, and developmental change across the lifespan (González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2019; Rodríguez Arocho, 2023). Rather than viewing development as a series of sudden or dramatic shifts, perezhivanie draws attention to subtle, embodied moments through which feeling and understanding are gradually reorganised (Blunden, 2016). Within teacher education, *perezhivanie* offers a valuable lens for exploring how trainee teachers live through practicum-related stress, negotiate cultural expectations, and make sense of emerging professional identities. Although Malaysian studies have documented high levels of stress during practicum (Mustapa & Poh, 2016; Gopal, 2010), fewer have explored how these pressures are internally experienced or how they may contribute to either resilience or vulnerability. This study therefore applies *perezhivanie* to illuminate the emotional and

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developmental meanings that trainee teachers construct through their lived experiences. Similar applications of *perezhivanie* in international research further demonstrate its value for understanding emotional development as a culturally situated and potentially transformative process across educational contexts.

FOAT-TIM and Embodied Awareness

The Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy-Trauma-Informed Model (FOAT-TIM) builds on Eugene Gendlin's concept of focusing, which centres on the felt sense; a bodily awareness of meaning that may exist before it can be clearly articulated and the felt shift, a moment of change or relief that accompanies new understanding (Gendlin, 1981). Laury Rappaport integrated these ideas into art-based practice, creating a framework that accesses embodied knowing through creative expression (Rappaport, 2020). FOAT-TIM extends this approach by embedding trauma-informed principles such as safety, grounding, choice, and empowerment (Hendricks, 2002; SAMHSA, 2014).

In practice, FOAT-TIM combines art-making with guided focusing and reflective dialogue. Through symbolic expression, participants are able to externalise experiences that may be difficult to express verbally. These symbolic forms can then be revisited, reflected upon, and reinterpreted, supporting emotional processing and meaning-making. Internationally, FOAT and FOAT-TIM have been applied across clinical, community, and educational contexts, demonstrating their flexibility in working with complex emotional experiences (Lee, 2011; Lind et al., 2015; Li, 2022). Although FOAT-TIM has not yet been widely applied in Malaysian teacher education, its principles align closely with local concerns related to workload, stress, and emotional regulation (Amzat et al., 2021; Ani, 2024). Its structured yet adaptable design allows FOAT-TIM to function as an educational and reflective mediational approach rather than a clinical intervention, making it suitable for use within teacher training contexts.

Summary

Overall, the literature highlights a clear need for greater attention to emotional experience within teacher education, while also revealing gaps in how emotional development is currently understood and explored. Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* offers a valuable lens for exploring the close integration of emotion and cognition in trainee teachers' lived experiences. At the same time, FOAT-TIM provides a trauma-informed, art-based approach for accessing embodied awareness and supporting emotional resilience. By bringing these two frameworks together within Malaysian Teacher Training Institutes, this study responds to pressing local concerns while situating trainee teachers' experiences in dialogue with international discussions on emotionally mediated and transformative learning. In doing so, it contributes a culturally grounded Malaysian perspective to broader global conversations on teacher wellbeing and professional development.

Methodology

To address the study's aims and research questions, a qualitative methodological approach was adopted. The following section outlines the research design that guided the selection of cases, data generation, and analytical strategy.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to explore trainee teachers' lived emotional experiences during their participation in the Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy–

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Trauma-Informed Model (FOAT-TIM). A case study approach was chosen to allow close examination of how perezhivanie, felt sense, and felt shift emerged and developed over time within authentic teacher training contexts (Yin, 2014). A qualitative design was appropriate because perezhivanie integrates emotion, cognition, and sociocultural context as lived experience, dimensions that are embodied and symbolic and therefore not amenable to quantitative measurement (Veresov, 2019). The use of multiple cases enabled in-depth exploration of individual developmental pathways while also supporting comparison across cases to identify shared patterns and meaningful contrasts. The reporting of qualitative procedures follows established standards for case study research and was informed by recognised qualitative reporting frameworks, including relevant principles from the COREQ checklist where applicable.

Figure 1 presents the methodological framework integrating Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory with the FOAT-TIM facilitation process within the Teacher Training Institute (TTI). This framework ensured coherence between the study's aims, research questions, intervention structure, and analytic focus. Within this framework, FOAT-TIM functioned as a structured, art-based mediational process through which emotional experiences were expressed, reflected upon, and interpreted.

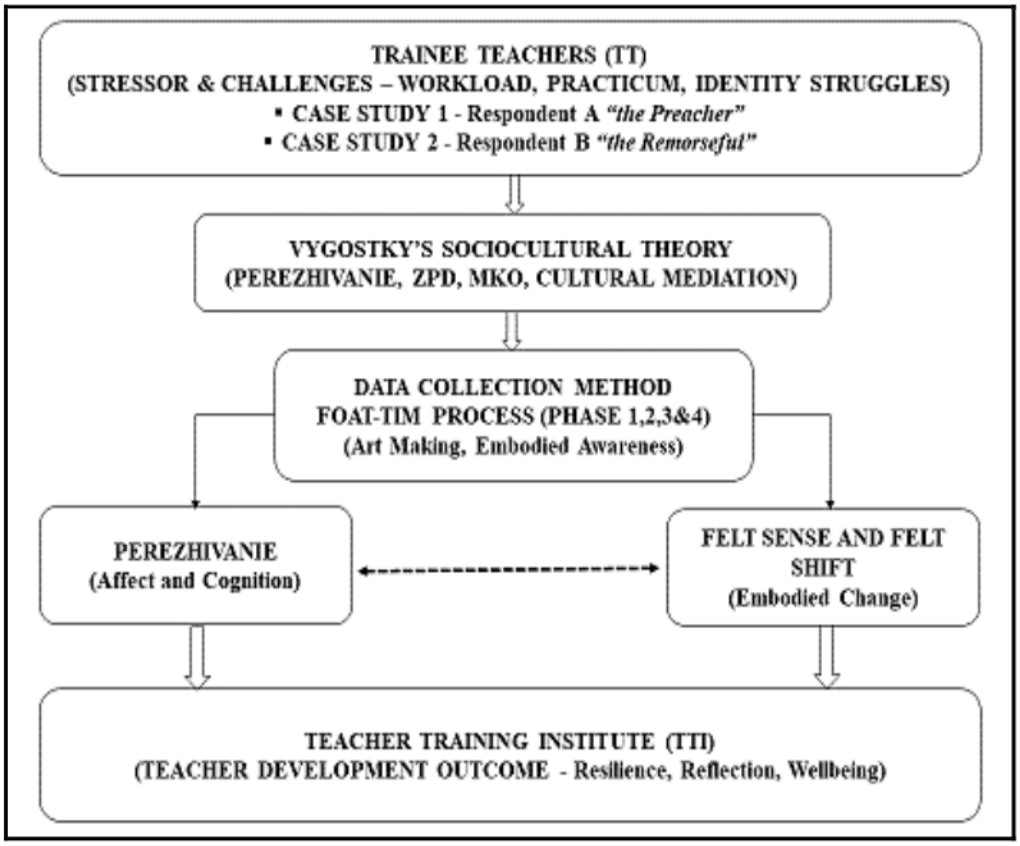


Figure 1: Research Methodology Framework of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and FOAT-TIM Facilitation at Teacher Training Institute.

Source: Research data.

Note. This schematic illustrates how trainee teachers' stressors such as workload, practicum demands, and identity challenges were mediated through the four FOAT-TIM phases and associated artwork themes: *Body Mapping*, *My Protector*, *My Issues*, and *Moving Forward*. Within a sociocultural framework, FOAT-TIM functioned both

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as a container that supported emotional safety and as a catalyst for symbolic transformation. Developmental outcomes included increased resilience, emotional growth, and strengthened professional identity, understood through *perezhivanie,* the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and the role of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

Participants

Two final-year male trainee teachers from a Teacher Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur were purposively selected for this study. Both participants were 22 years old, in their final year of training, and preparing to graduate in 2024. Participation was voluntary. participant A, referred to as "*the Preacher"*, was articulate and reflective, and often made sense of his experiences through spiritual and ethical perspectives. participant B, referred to as "*the Remorseful"*, was quieter and more introspective, and frequently expressed feelings of remorse and uncertainty related to identity and professional development.

The small sample size is consistent with qualitative research that prioritises depth, richness, and information power over numerical representativeness (Malterud et al., 2023; Vasileiou et al., 2018). This approach enabled close attention to each participant's emotional experiences and developmental trajectory within the FOAT-TIM process.

Sample Size Justification

The inclusion of two cases is appropriate for interpretive qualitative research, where the focus is on depth of understanding rather than numerical representativeness. A multiple case study design strengthens analysis by enabling comparison across cases, either through identifying shared patterns or contrasting developmental trajectories (Yin, 2014). In this study, the two participants demonstrated distinct emotional pathways, offering complementary insights into how FOAT-TIM mediated perezhivanie during teacher preparation. Qualitative case research prioritises rich, idiographic understanding of lived experience over large samples (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The intensive nature of the FOAT-TIM process, which involved extended sessions, art-based exploration, reflective dialogue, and bilingual transcription, necessitated a small and information-rich sample. This approach allowed sustained engagement with symbolic, embodied, and meaning-making processes central to the study. Accordingly, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable but to offer theoretically transferable insights relevant to similar teacher education contexts.

Instruments

The Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy-Trauma Informed Model (FOAT-TIM) (Rappaport, 2020) was adapted from its original three-phase structure into a four-phase framework to retain its core principles while responding to the developmental and cultural context of Malaysian trainee teachers. The adaptation placed emphasis on embodied awareness, symbolic expression, and culturally meaningful imagery.

a) Phase 1: Introduction to Felt Sense and Felt Shift. *Artwork theme: Body Mapping.* Established baseline bodily awareness, identified areas of tension and initiated engagement with felt sense.
b) Phase 2: Establishing Safety and Cultivating Resilience. *Artwork theme: My Protector*. Supported creation of protective imagery and affirmation of symbolic resources (e.g., faith, spirituality, cultural strengths).

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c) Phase 3: Processing Trauma and Accessing the Body's Wisdom. *Artwork theme: My Issues*. Facilitated externalisation of unresolved struggles, symbolic transformation of stressors and cultivation of resilience through culturally meaningful metaphors.
d) Phase 4: Integration and Forward-Living Direction. *Artwork theme: Moving Forward*. Consolidated developmental shifts and oriented participants toward hopeful, future-directed professional growth.

Intervention Procedure

The intervention was carried out individually with each participant across the four phases of FOAT-TIM. Each session lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and involved a combination of art-making, guided focusing, and reflective dialogue. This structure allowed participants to express emotional experiences through symbolic images and to reflect on their meanings in a supportive setting. Trauma-informed practices were embedded throughout the process to prioritise participants' emotional safety and autonomy. These included grounding activities, flexible pacing, and the option to pause or discontinue activities at any time (Rappaport, 2020; SAMHSA, 2014). Within this study, the adapted FOAT-TIM was used as a culturally responsive mediational approach to support emotional development within the Teacher Training Institute context, rather than as a clinical or therapeutic intervention.

Data Collection And Analysis

Data were generated from multiple sources to enable methodological triangulation for both participant A *("the Preacher")* and participant B *("the Remorseful")*. These sources included artworks produced during each FOAT-TIM phase and photographed with participants' consent, semi-structured interviews conducted after each session to explore reflections on the artworks and emotional processes, weekly reflective journals documenting insights, struggles, and felt shifts, and observation notes capturing body language, tone, and engagement. Together, these data sources captured the symbolic, embodied, and verbal dimensions of each participant's *perezhivanie.*

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. An abductive approach was employed, combining inductive coding of visual and verbal data from each case with deductive interpretation informed by Vygotskian concepts (*perezhivanie,* ZPD, MKO) and FOAT-TIM principles (felt sense, felt shift). Coding progressed from descriptive features (e.g., colour use, image forms) to symbolic meanings (e.g., protection, fragility) and interpretive themes such as resilience, shame, and transformation. Within-case analysis was first conducted for participant A and participant B, followed by cross-case comparison to identify shared patterns and contrasting developmental trajectories. Credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through member checking and supervisory debriefing.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and the Ministry of Education Malaysia. As the research involved art-based activities and exploration of emotional experiences, professional competence and ethical sensitivity were essential. The researcher is formally trained in Art Therapy at La Trobe University, Melbourne, and attended Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy training with Laury Rappaport in 2016 in Santa Rosa, USA.

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All procedures followed trauma-informed practice principles and complied with the American Art Therapy Association (AATA, 2013) Standards of Ethics. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage. Cultural sensitivity was respected by allowing faith-based and sociocultural symbols to emerge naturally during the sessions. Clear boundaries, grounding strategies, and referral pathways were established to protect participants' wellbeing. Written consent was also obtained for the use of selected artworks in publications and open-access dissemination.

Findings And Results

The findings are presented in relation to the study's research questions, beginning with two individual case narratives followed by a cross-case comparison. The analysis examines how trainee teachers' *perezhivanie*, felt sense, and felt shift unfolded across the four FOAT-TIM phases. The results are organised to show both within-case developmental processes for participant A *("the Preacher")* and participant B *("the Remorseful"),* as well as shared and contrasting patterns that emerged across the two cases.

Case Study 1: Participant A "The Preacher"

participant A entered the FOAT-TIM sessions with a strong sense of responsibility and a reflective stance toward his professional role. Across the sessions, his artworks consistently featured symbolic imagery that supported resilience and reinforced his emerging teacher identity.

In the *Body Mapping* phase, participant A used layered ripples of blue, green, yellow, and red radiating from the chest and head. These colours symbolised vitality, inner energy, and the close connection between feeling and thinking. During the *My Protector* phase, he created a cave-like shield enclosing a glowing heart. This image represented emotional protection, inner strength, and his ability to remain grounded when facing pressure.

In the *My Issues* phase, participant A externalised his challenges as heavy, constricting forms pressing against his body. At the same time, these burdens were balanced by light radiating outward from the centre, symbolising personal resources, faith, and supportive relationships. In the final *Moving Forward* phase, his artwork depicted a radiant sun rising over mountains, reflecting clarity, optimism, and confidence about his future as a teacher.

participant A's *perezhivanie* was marked by resilience and symbolic mastery. Across the FOAT-TIM phases, his artworks showed repeated movements between tension and release, where responsibility was reframed as purpose and pressure was transformed into motivation. These symbolic shifts suggest a stable developmental trajectory supported by meaning-making and emotional regulation.

Figure 2 presents participant A's artwork from Phase Three (*My Issues*), illustrating how struggle and support were held together within his lived experience.

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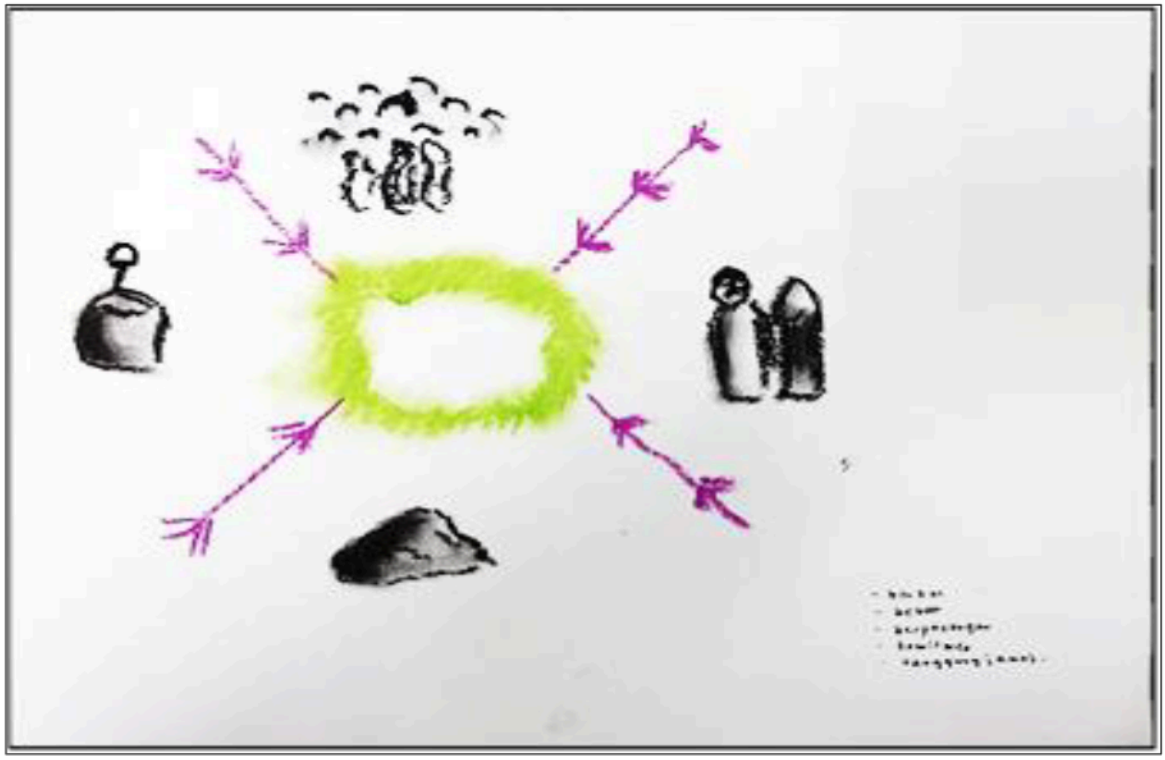


Figure 2: Case Study One, Participant A *("the Preacher"),* FOAT-TIM Phase Three, Artwork Theme *My Issues*.

Source: Research data.
Note. participant A represented his struggles as heavy burdens pressing on the body, counterbalanced by light radiating from the heart. This imagery reflects his perezhivanie as resilience, where responsibility is reframed into purpose through faith and relational support.

Case Study 2: Participant B "The Remorseful"

Participant B entered the FOAT-TIM sessions with feelings of fragility, shame, and low self-worth. His early artworks expressed emotional heaviness and fragmentation, which gradually shifted toward symbols of reframing and renewal across the four phases.

In the Body Mapping phase, participant B shaded his silhouette with dark tones around the chest, back, and head. These areas conveyed guilt, burden, and bodily trembling, while drops of water symbolised tears and emotional release. During the My Protector phase, he created colourful organic forms in blue, purple, yellow, and red. Although these images appeared delicate, they represented an emerging sense of protection and continuity, suggesting vulnerability held alongside inner strength.

In the My Issues phase, participant B depicted his struggles as storm clouds and heavy stones, symbolising regret and emotional weight. Over time, these images were accompanied by symbols of sunrise, leaves, and light, indicating growth, renewal, and the beginning of resilience. In the final Moving Forward phase, his artwork showed colourful threads wrapping around his body. These threads represented broken yet connected memories, woven into a form of resilience and offered to himself as sources of gratitude and hope.

Participant B's perezhivanie reflected a gradual movement from vulnerability toward self-compassion. His felt shifts were subtle but meaningful, marked by a slow easing of heaviness

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and shame and the emergence of tentative hope. These changes were supported by the trauma-informed structure of FOAT-TIM, which allowed emotional experiences to be approached gently and at his own pace.

Figure 3 presents participant B's artwork from Phase Three (My Issues), illustrating this process of symbolic transformation.



Figure 3: Case Study Two, participant B *("the Remorseful")*, FOAT-TIM Phase Three, Artwork Theme *My Issues*.

Source: Research data.

Note. participant B represented guilt and regret through storm clouds and stones, later introducing imagery of sunrise and leaves to symbolise growth and renewal. This progression reflects his perezhivanie shifting from fragility toward tentative hope through trauma-informed scaffolding.

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of perezhivanie as it emerged through the FOAT-TIM process for participant A and participant B.

Table 1: Comparative Coding of Perezhivanie in FOAT-TIM with Transcript Excerpts.

FOAT-TIM Phase	participant A *"the Preacher"*	participant B *"the Remorseful"*	Interpretation of *Perezhivanie*
Phase 1: Artwork theme, Body Mapping	**Visuals:** Bold green and gold radiating from chest and head. **Excerpt:** "I feel energy here [points to chest and head], like strength inside me."	**Visuals:** Dark shading on chest and head; water drops. **Excerpt:** "My chest feels heavy… it trembles, like it is shaking inside."	"A" grounded in vitality and strength; "B" embodied fragility and emotional burden.
Phase 2: Artwork	**Visuals:** Shield with central heart.	**Visuals:** Threads and organic forms wrapping	Both externalised protective anchors: "A"

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theme, My Protector	**Excerpt:** "This shield protects me… it reminds me to stay strong."	body. **Excerpt:** "These colourful lines are like memories… even if broken, they keep me safe."	framed strength as protection, "B" saw safety in continuity of memory.
Phase 3: Artwork theme, My Issues	**Visuals:** Chains as burden, countered by aura of light. **Excerpt:** "Sometimes I feel tied down… but prayer and people around me help me carry it."	**Visuals:** Storm clouds and stones, later reframed with sunrise and leaves. **Excerpt:** "It feels heavy like a rock… but when I see light, I can breathe again."	"A" reframed stress as responsibility; "B" gradually transformed regret into hope through imagery of light and growth.
Phase 4: Artwork theme, Moving Forward	**Visuals:** Radiant sun rising over mountains. **Excerpt:** "The sun gives me direction… I can see my journey ahead."	**Visuals:** Open path with greenery; white figure with light. **Excerpt:** "This path shows I can move forward… I am thankful, even for the pain."	Both depicted resilience and clarity: "A" through confidence and responsibility, "B" through gratitude and renewal.

Source: Research Data.

Note. Transcript excerpts illustrate how participants articulated the meaning of their symbolic imagery during FOAT-TIM sessions. Coding was conducted at three levels: descriptive (observable visual features), symbolic (interpreted meanings), and interpretive (links to developmental themes). This layered analysis highlights the embodied and cognitive dimensions of *perezhivanie* in both cases.

Cross-Case Synthesis

The cross-case synthesis was conducted to identify both convergent and divergent patterns in how perezhivanie, felt sense, and felt shift were experienced across the two cases. The two cases revealed contrasting yet complementary developmental pathways. participant A demonstrated faith-anchored resilience, reframing responsibility into confidence and symbolic mastery. In contrast, participant B showed a slower and more tentative path, moving from fragility and shame toward gratitude and emerging hope. Across both cases, FOAT-TIM functioned as a structured and emotionally safe container that held vulnerability while supporting symbolic expression and reflection. At the same time, it acted as a catalyst for change by facilitating embodied awareness and meaning-making.

In both cases, perezhivanie was evident in the dynamic interaction of emotion, cognition, and cultural meaning, expressed through bodily sensations and symbolic imagery. Although the pace and form of change differed, both participants demonstrated felt sense and felt shift as indicators of emotional reorganisation. Table 2 summarises the shared patterns and key contrasts across the two cases.

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Table 2: Cross-Case Themes of *Perezhivanie*, Felt Sense and Felt Shift.

Thematic Dimension	participant A *"the Preacher"*	participant B *"the Remorseful"*	Cross-Case Synthesis
Perezhivanie (Integration of affect & cognition)	Stress reframed as moral responsibility; identity strengthened through symbolic mastery.	Stress embodied as fragility and shame, gradually reframed into gratitude and acceptance.	*Perezhivanie* shaped developmental outcomes: resilience for "A", tentative growth for "B"
Felt Sense (Embodied awareness)	Awareness located in chest and head; expressed as vitality, warmth and clarity.	Embodied as heaviness, trembling, and heat; initially overwhelming.	Both accessed embodied meaning but "A" interpreted it as strength while "B" experienced it as burden.
Felt Shift (Transformative moment)	Immediate reframing of pressure into direction and hope; consistent forward trajectory.	Gradual release through imagery of water, light, and greenery; slower progression toward renewal.	Both achieved symbolic transformation, though with differing pace and stability.
Symbolic Anchors	Shield, light, mountains, rising sun.	Threads, water, sunrise, greenery, gratitude.	Anchors varied in form but converged on shared themes of protection, renewal and hope.
Trajectory of Development	Consistently resilient, integrating challenges into responsibility and confidence.	From fragility and regret toward resilience, mediated by scaffolding and gratitude.	FOAT-TIM enabled divergent yet converging trajectories of resilience in trainee teacher development.

Source: Research Data.

Note. This table synthesises thematic patterns across both cases, highlighting similarities and differences in emotional development. participant A demonstrated resilience grounded in responsibility and symbolic mastery, while participant B showed gradual movement from vulnerability toward renewal. In both cases, FOAT-TIM mediated symbolic transformation and supported resilience-building.

The findings presented above directly address the study's research questions by showing how *perezhivanie,* felt sense, and felt shift unfolded across the FOAT-TIM process and contributed to trainee teachers' resilience. Having established the individual case narratives and cross-case synthesis, the next section discusses these findings in relation to the broader literature, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and FOAT-TIM. Particular attention is given to alignment with national priorities, including the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025, which emphasises teacher wellbeing and resilience in the Malaysian context.

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Discussion

The findings from the two case studies are interpreted in relation to the study's research questions to clarify how each question was addressed through qualitative analysis. For the first objective, *perezhivanie* proved useful for understanding how trainee teachers made sense of practicum stress, institutional demands, and cultural expectations in ways that shaped their developmental responses. In participant A's case, these experiences were interpreted as responsibilities that strengthened resilience. For participant B, similar pressures were initially experienced as emotional vulnerability, which later became a starting point for personal growth. This pattern reflects Veresov's (2019) view of *perezhivanie* as the process through which external conditions take on individual meaning and developmental value.

In relation to the second research question, felt sense and felt shift were observed as signs of emotional change that unfolded over time rather than as fixed outcomes. participant A experienced relatively steady moments of emotional clarity, expressed through images of light and upward movement, suggesting a growing sense of coherence. participant B's experience unfolded more gradually and was articulated through images such as water, threads, and plants, reflecting slower and more tentative emotional re-organisation. These differences are consistent with sociocultural perspectives that view emotional development as uneven and shaped by lived experience rather than as a process of simple emotional regulation (Ferholt, 2020). Similar patterns of reflective emotional change have also been observed in studies of transformative learning that rely on participants' self-reported meaning-making processes, although framed through different theoretical lenses (Lavidas et al., 2022; Papadakis et al., 2024).

For the third research question, FOAT-TIM functioned as a mediational process that enabled participants to engage with emotionally sensitive material within a structured and supportive framework. The four phases: Body Mapping, My Protector, My Issues, and Moving Forward helped participants externalise inner experiences, reflect on personal meanings, and form symbolic anchors that supported emotional stability. This finding aligns with Rappaport's (2020) description of FOAT-TIM as a bridge between embodied feeling and symbolic expression, and extends its use beyond therapeutic settings into teacher education.

These findings are not intended to represent trainee teachers in general. Rather, they offer close, analytic insight into how emotional mediation may operate within particular training contexts. In line with Yin's (2018) concept of analytic generalisation, the value of these cases lies in revealing developmental processes rather than producing general claims. By applying *perezhivanie* to the experiences of trainee teachers, this study addresses a gap in Malaysian research, where emotional development in teacher education is often discussed in practical terms but less frequently examined through sociocultural theory. This focus complements broader international discussions on transformative learning while offering a culturally situated, developmental interpretation of emotional change (Papadakis et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study examined how trainee teachers in a Teachers Training Institute (TTI) experienced *perezhivanie*, felt sense, and felt shift through an adapted Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy–Trauma-Informed Model (FOAT-TIM). Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, the findings showed how practicum stress and identity challenges were experienced either as

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sources of resilience or as initial emotional vulnerability, with symbolic resources such as hope, gratitude, and responsibility supporting developmental change.

The study contributes in three ways. Theoretically, it extends Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* into the relatively under-researched area of young adult teacher education in Malaysia, highlighting how emotion, thinking, and cultural meaning are closely connected in professional identity development. Methodologically, it demonstrates the usefulness of FOAT-TIM as both an intervention and an analytic lens, showing how embodied experiences such as felt sense and felt shift can be examined through art-based qualitative methods. Practically, it draws attention to culturally meaningful symbolic resources especially faith, hope, and gratitude that may support emotional resilience during teacher training.

The implications of the study are conceptually aligned with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013), which emphasises teacher wellbeing, resilience, and professionalism. Rather than offering a model for large-scale implementation, this research provides a context-specific illustration of how trauma-informed, art-based scaffolding may support trainee teachers' emotional development within institutional settings. Although the study is limited to two cases, it offers detailed insights that can inform future research involving larger samples, longer timeframes, or different teacher education contexts. Future studies may also examine group-based uses of FOAT-TIM or explore how symbolic anchors continue to shape teachers' emotional lives as they enter the profession.

In sum, bringing together sociocultural theory and art-based therapeutic practice offers a meaningful way to understand and support emotional development in teacher education. By foregrounding lived experience, symbolic meaning, and mediated emotional change, this approach helps trainee teachers not only manage professional demands but also find personal meaning and emotional direction as they enter the teaching profession.

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