

Opening Bandura's Box of Experiences: Exploring GTAs' Sense of Plausibility about ESL Teaching

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Abstract

Most available resources on Graduate Teaching Assistants' (GTAs) classroom pedagogy often emphasise prescriptive accounts of their roles and responsibilities rather than underlying mechanisms which shape their teaching practices. Recent studies in GTA research have begun drawing on teacher education frameworks to better understand GTAs' teaching practices. Extending this line of inquiry, this paper aims to trace GTA's intuitive yet perceptual understanding of ESL teaching through N.S. Prabhu's construct of Teacher's Sense of Plausibility (TSOP).

It begins by discussing the recent literature, theoretical frameworks, and models that have been invested in exploring the nature and forces contributing to GTAs' pedagogical identity formation. Furthermore, the paper revisits the construct of the teacher's sense of plausibility, elaborates on its evolution, and presents a four-staged model of the same. The paper then reports a qualitative case study conducted with seven GTAs from the Indian context, which aimed at: a) getting insights into their TSOPs regarding teaching English as a second language, and b) finding out whether they think reflecting on their TSOPs is an effective reflective practice or not. The use of two writing prompts (a life history task and a TSOP discussion sheet for semi-structured interviews) to elicit data, upon content and thematic analysis (via inductive and deductive coding), revealed: a) GTAs TSOPs varied from traditional to creative forms of teaching, demonstrating potential links in their early career and educational experiences; b) While most GTAs valued TSOP as a reflective practice, they emphasised the need for contextually sensitive teacher training and institutional support to sustain its impact. The paper calls for a shift from prescriptive 'how to teach' approaches to reflective inquiries into 'what and how we teach', offering suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Teacher's sense of plausibility, Graduate teaching assistants, Teacher cognition, GTA Identity, ESL Pedagogy

1. Introduction

The trajectory of any studentship and teaching roles often triggers reflections on one's professional self, such as: Who am I made up of? Am I resembling the teacher I praised or resisted? Such reflections have been crucial in shaping and underpinning the existing research surrounding Graduate Teaching Assistants' (GTAs) professional identities. Current research has been in the direction of uncovering GTAs' struggles, frustrations over lack of clarity about their roles, facilitation, the training they get, and the fact that for some, teaching could be unsettling to begin with (Oluyide et al., 2025). They unarguably play an important role in any institution; however, their experiences remain underexplored. It is especially their professional identities in the classrooms that are still poorly understood or looked away from. On the other hand, contemporary teacher education research enforces the focus on the complexities, socially mediated nature of identity formation, shaped by life histories, personal beliefs, and perceptions alongside critical incidents or moments of teaching. This paper intends to utilise one such construct from teacher education, i.e., teacher's sense of plausibility, to map GTAs' intuitive yet perceptual understanding of ESL teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 GTAs' Pedagogical Identity Formation

The recent shifts in ongoing GTA research have been reflective of viewing GTAs as evolving educators with distinct professional identities, as compared to only recognising them for their instructional support. The ongoing research has shifted from macro-level examinations concerning their institutional roles to micro-level discoveries of their pedagogic beliefs, reflections, identity formation, and negotiations within and outside academia.

Zotos et al. (2020) report on how GTAs often view themselves as lab managers or tutors in their context as compared to simply being full-fledged instructors and realising their pedagogy is informed by prior experiences, institutional culture & factors, and teaching knowledge. Contrastingly, in contexts where teaching is considered secondary for GTAs, Goodwin et al. (2021) demonstrate how GTAs adopt distinct roles as student supporters, content deliverers, and research mentors, leading to inconsistent yet valuable Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CURE). Further, we also see reports around how GTAs negotiate their professional identities amidst institutional expectations by navigating personal teaching beliefs with pedagogical mandates (Robertson & Yazan, 2022). The GTAs are also viewed via teacher education lenses, utilising social learning theories such as Bale and Anderson (2022), demonstrating how they struggle to claim professional identity, perceived value of teaching, and interpersonal recognition. Similarly, in a physical education context, too, GTAs are reported to be feeling underprepared, struggling to balance their coursework and management of classrooms, highlighting

the importance and need of structured training and mentoring, clearer role definitions, and efforts for their professional development (Brock et al. 2023).

Recently, the relational and affective dimensions of GTA development have also been captured by the researchers, indicating how GTAs derive value and meaning from their roles. This happens not only via skills acquisition, knowledge upgrade, or career advancements but also through community belonging, personal connections, and personal growth (Westwood & Srivastava, 2025). It also brings clarity to how the affective experiences of GTAs interact with institutional or contextual factors to influence their identity formation and sense of self as teachers through complex processes concerning their personal beliefs, professional demands, institutional cultures, and decision-making.

All these research trends point to GTAs as complex yet reflective practitioners whose identities are co-constructed through negotiated experiences and cognitions. This, in turn, calls for integrative models that successfully bridge GTAs' cognitions, experiences, and institutional positioning.

2.2 Existing Theoretical Models of GTA Development

Existing key research works are representative of how different theoretical frameworks and models across disciplines could serve as a lens which to make GTAs' experiences as focal points of investigations. Kajfez & Matusovich (2020) aimed at establishing first-year GTAs' profiles based on identity and motivation. They combined Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Possible Selves Theory (PST), revealing three identity profiles of being strong, transitional, and weak. They also found that motivation constructs matter to GTAs' individuality but do not significantly contribute to their profiles. Mathers et al. (2021) suggest a three-stage teacher identity framework for GTA training, involving phases of Hatching (enabling GTAs to reflect on their teacher identity rather than student identity), Fledging (consolidating teaching experiences and opportunities for pedagogical discussions), and On the Wing (providing support to GTAs for becoming proactive).

Similarly, Gish-Liberman et al. (2023) explored IGTAs' (International Graduate Teaching Assistants) identity formation grounded in a framework comprising Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality with Wenger's (1998) Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP). Zhu & Alsup (2024) studied GTAs' identity formation and development by adopting a theoretical framework from Beijaard et al. (2004) in a US-based university. Using a narrative inquiry in their interview-based study, they emphasised knowing about GTAs identity formation through four markers: a) professional identity being an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences, b) professional identity implies both the person and the context, c) it consists of subidentities that more or less harmonize, and, d) agency is crucial for professional identity. Their findings suggest GTAs are struggling to make sense of course content due to a lack of systematic training and constructing their teacher identities through challenging processes of overcoming self-doubt, nervousness, and frustration to be comfortable, confident, and creative.

These theoretical investments in exploring GTAs' identity formation and development indicate two approaches that could be taken to explore the same. One

could be to build frameworks comprising existing theories, and the other could be to base existing theories on coming up with holistic, concrete, stage-based models.

2.3 Emergence & Evolution of Teacher’s Sense of Plausibility

The discipline of ELT, historically, has grown globally with the inception of different movements and borrowing(s) from various other disciplines for its evolution. The ‘communicational teaching movement (also called ‘The Bangalore Project’) led by the late N.S. Prabhu, from the 1980s, remains a significant one. Prabhu and his team pioneered three major developments: communicational teaching approach, task-based learning, and the teacher’s sense of plausibility (TSOP) (Maley, 2018). Prabhu (1987) defines TSOP in Second Language Pedagogy as “a varied perceptual yet intuitive understanding of how classroom teaching leads to desirable outcomes”. Teachers develop this understanding over time, while interacting with different psychological factors and stipulated procedures.” The first two developments saw an intense interest and work from the researchers, whereas it was the TSOP research which still remains scarce. It could be due to several reasons of it simply being an abstract psychological phenomenon and the unavailability to relevant psychological research to investigate the same. It may also be as Simon Borg in The TEFLology Podcast (2018) suggests, language teacher cognition initially being informed with cognitivists, viewing cognition from purely sciences perspectives in a limiting manner. The overarching emphasis on methodology and teaching in the discipline of ELT itself could also be a driving force behind less work around it. Another reason could be that of reliability and validity of potential operationalising it, a direction in which much of the recent work on it has started to take place. Table 1 below captures a brief evolution of this concept since its conception till today.

Table 1: Various definitions throughout the evolution of TSOP post 1987

<i>Name of the Expert</i>	<i>Definitions given</i>
Kumaravadivelu (2001)	Teacher generated theory of practice
Maley (2016)	Personal theory of teaching through continuous reflection
Maley (2018)	Best way which helps students by reflecting on their beliefs and experience.
Prabhu (2019a) & (2019b)	A conceptualisation of how language teaching takes place, hindered, or furthered by any form of teaching.
Mukundan et. al. (2020) & Mukundan (2024)	Knowledge that evolves out of personal experience.

Yang (2025)	It refers to teachers' perceptions about what defines effective teaching.
Mukundan et al. (2025)	It is a state of knowledge of teachers about teaching that develops out of experience.

Theoretically, the only framework which exists around TSOP is that of Maley (2019) being the revival figure suggesting a five-descriptor TSOP framework for experienced and accomplished educators in Mukundan et al. (2020), which encompasses indicators such as: 1) background or history of personal experiences does affect, 2) use of non-conventional methods remains common, 3) key personalities and their philosophies influence too, etc.

Other than these theoretical perspectives, the limited literature on praxis-oriented explorations of TSOP suggests its viewing to be more in terms of 'teacher perceptions', elicited via different teacher research tools. For example, Farjami et al. (2014) and Saeedi & Pahlavani (2018) utilised teacher & student perception questionnaires as well as attitudes and beliefs on classroom control (ABCC) inventory to explore the impact of TSOP on classroom practices and management. Further, Mukundan (2020) and Mukundan & Nimehchisalem (2025) through reflective writing tasks and teacher timeline enabled insights into expert teachers' TSOP (thinking of it as a state of knowledge) and thus, a five-descriptor framework. Kumar (2022), too, employed teacher perception questionnaires with a working model to reflect on what creates these perceptions and recently Yang (2025) investigated the development of TSOP among eight beginning EFL teachers by reflecting on their teaching practices through interviews, recorded teaching demonstrations, and written self-reflections.

Several observations can be drawn from its existing reportings from the TSOP research:

1. *Inconsistent definitions*: several definitions focus on differing elements being the driving force for their operationalisation, such as teacher generation, the best way of teaching, the conceptualisation of teaching, personal theory of teaching, and the knowledge evolved from experience. There has not been much consistent viewing of this construct, which could generate confusions and may require additional frameworks to confirm their reliability.

2. *Varying reports*: The minimal yet detailed descriptions of TSOP do exist. The issue that remains is that some work has emphasised more on defining it, some have focused on talking about its nature, while some have talked about its happening and impact as a phenomenon. It is to say that TSOP research suffers from crucial but scattered information around it, and not all works have necessarily been built on/ reported on the previous one.

3. *Operationalisation*: The varied definitions make it difficult to operationalise TSOP because even if one wants to call it ‘knowledge evolved from experience’, how do we measure this knowledge? Is it implicit or explicit, or both? Similarly, if we try capturing it as an ‘intuitive yet perceptual understanding’, one may need theoretical inputs from perception measures as well as intuition research.

However, all the experts should be appreciated for taking up such a task. The existing research still lacks a full-fledged model of TSOP, which can inform us: what it is (basing earlier research to substantiate), how it works, and how it could be utilised for teachers, in a cumulative fashion. Hence, it becomes necessary to re-examine, combine, and stick the pieces of existing research to come up with a concrete model of TSOP.

3. The Model of TSOP

A systematic inductive thematic analysis was considered to come up with a holistic model of this concept. It was done in three steps. Step one included arranging all kinds of information available on TSOP from twelve existing theoretical and practical reports (from Prabhu, 1987, to Mukundan, 2024). Step two included a data reduction phase of organising this information based on their focus, i.e., definition, operation, features, implications, and the research tools used to investigate it. Further, step three with a corroborative cycle of coding and highlighting the key terms used while discussing TSOP in these categories. Finally, the following themes emerged, with the hint of ‘intuition’ and ‘understanding’ being referred to the most, shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Analysis of existing TSOP research for informed operationalisation

Total no. of studies (n): 12					
Themes					
<i>Intuition</i>	<i>Perception</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Personal theory</i>	<i>Best judgement</i>	<i>Value and belief structure</i>
11+1+ 1+ 1+ 1+1	4+ 1	4+ 1+ 1+1	2+1	1	1
mentions = 16	mentions = 5	mentions = 7	mentions = 3	mentions = 1	mentions = 1

The analysis worked as a confirmation for it to be operationalised as an 'intuitive yet perceptual understanding of- what is effective teaching, what works and what does not, and how it happens in a classroom'. This was also in tune with Prabhu's (1987) first conception and could be tapped into with existing tools (writing task, teacher timeline, perception questionnaire), but with the addition of some means for including the intuitive aspect of this understanding. Since the existing tools only emphasise rationalistic yet conscious reasoning of the teachers. It could be done with the mood assessment and inclusion of any decision-making intuition model. In other words, another way of operationalising TSOP could be through a rationalistic tool combined with the one that gives some insights into intuitive thoughts as well. Further, the information categorised for this analysis also served as the formation of the TSOP model (with a focus on GTAs as teachers) reported below through Figure 1:

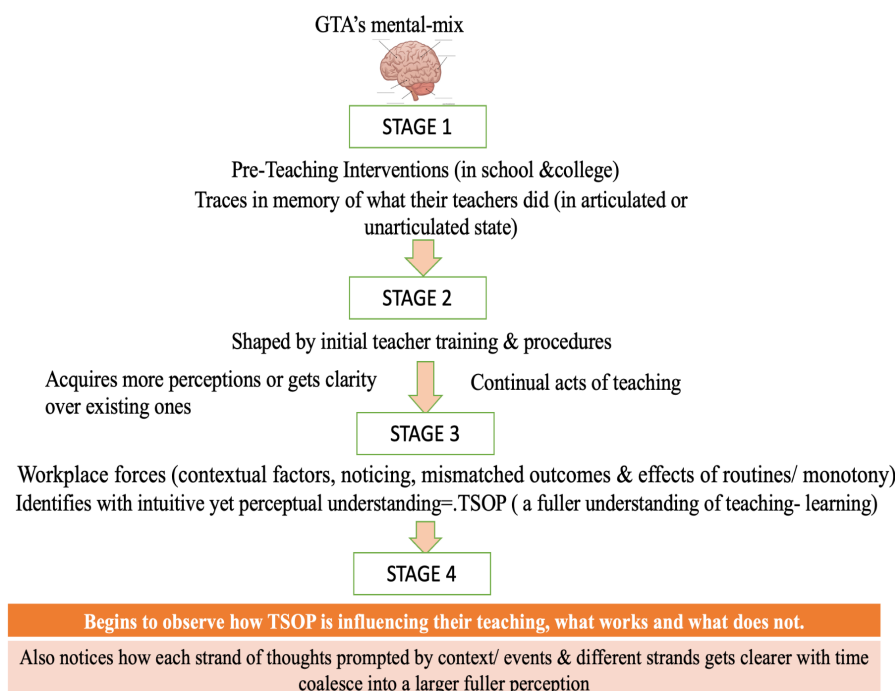


Figure 1: A four- stage model of GTA's Sense of Plausibility (based on a cumulative analysis of existing research on teacher's sense of plausibility)

The following stages of TSOP development can be understood in the following manner:

Stage one: Forming Impressions: The first stage intends to tap into information about the impressions that GTAs had regarding their school and early higher education. This is also the time when mental impressions about teaching are formed. For example, many of the GTAs may remember their own teachers and may or may not try to mimic them in different ways while they teach.

Stage two: Teaching Exposures: The second stage refers to the GTAs getting their first exposures to formal teacher training. The formalised instruction equips GTAs with not only the ins and outs of the teaching-learning process(es) but also enables them to fit the initially formed mental impressions into more meaning or form newer ones into the theory vs praxis of teacher education.

Stage 3: Job's Taking Over: The final stage encompasses what happens when GTAs start working. This is where the interplay of different psychological factors enables/disables GTAs to navigate forces within and outside of them. For example, a GTA may deal with burnout or have pressures of an upcoming deadline but has to conduct an engaging workshop while being in the shoes of a professional. Such instances eventually ask the GTAs to form an understanding of what kind of researcher and teacher they like and reflect on what their teaching looks like (i.e. TSOP). This is also the stage where GTAs notice, face unexpected outcomes, and experience the effects of routines on themselves.

Stage 4: Cascading Knowledges: A fourth stage where GTAs cascade the formed understanding (TSOP), upon having knowledge of themselves, contextual factors, students, teaching job, etc. They become aware of what works and what does not in their teaching. The overall TSOP formed gets channelised into their classrooms and beyond. The practices of continuous reflection will keep this understanding alive, or it may get fossilised or frozen due to the monotony (Prabhu, 1987).

It should also be noted that sub-processes under these stages, like continuous reflection, intuitive processes, observations, comparisons between old and new learnings, etc., do not happen in a linear fashion and are always overlapping each other. Thus, this arrangement of phases enables a concrete yet beginner-friendly mapping of the overall understanding (TSOP), common with most psychological constructs. For example, tests and tasks around measuring intuition, being one of the most debated psychological concepts, could also be debated. It is the informedness of these tests and tasks in relation to previous conceptualisations of intuition that ensures their reliability and validity. Similarly, this model reflects a synthesis of the existing minimal literature and suggests a potential tapping into TSOP through an approach of implementing intuition-based exercises as well as rationalistic measures such as narrative and life history approaches to research.

This model differs as well as complements the existing teacher cognition conceptualisations and models in several ways. On micro- levels, it compliments Shavelson's (1973) and Clark & Peterson's (1986) models of basic teaching skill and thought process. It also reflects how teaching acts are results of teacher decisions (both conscious and unconscious), highlighting teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions. Further, it also gives implicit insights into Woods' (1996) beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge (BAK) of teachers, along with recognising Borg's (2015) emphasis on exploring unobservable dimensions of teaching & learning and their relation to becoming, being & developing as a teacher. On the other hand, the present TSOP model follows an approach of these (and more) 'coming together of 'micro-cognitions'. It (re)conceptualises teacher cognition in relation to teacher identity formation, a potentially newer interest in teacher cognition (Borg in The TEFLology Podcast, 2018), suggesting holistic stages and a concrete picture of how teacher cognitions inform their professional & personal identity formations. Other than this, it also highlights the teachers' 'intuitive' moments, often absent in existing teaching teacher cognition models.

4. Bandura's Social Learning, TSOP, and GTAs

Additionally, the operation of these stages in the proposed model is also grounded in Albert Bandura's theory of social learning. As he explains, "most human behaviour is learned through observing through modeling; from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura, 1977). Stage 1 of early mental imprints in school and college experiences enables the teachers (GTAs in our case) to learn from direct experiences and practice the differential reinforcement via mediating processes between the stimulus from their teachers and the desired responses. It enables them to pick informative functions of reinforcement and enables them to reflect on their in-coming hypotheses about teaching and learning. Further, stage 2 enables them to model their behaviour by testing these hypotheses by attention to what works, retention of the same, reproducing the same in their teaching practicum, and feeling intrinsically or extrinsically motivated about the learned behaviours. Stage 3 of job's taking over becomes complex in the case of GTAs due to their multitasking all the time and vicariously reinforcing punishment and rewards to themselves in various forms and ways. These regulatory processes get heightened in stage 3 and 4, where GTAs experience merging, overpowering, and formations of their personal and professional selves (self-concepts). They form their own intuitive understandings about their own teaching, stimulus, and contextual forces around them and what is required and what is not of, by, and from them.

Therefore, integrating the proposed TSOP model with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1971) makes a distinctive yet analytical framework for understanding GTAs' cognitions and professional identity formation, along with the institutional mechanisms that surround it. It explicitly links the stages of 'becoming of a teacher' for GTAs with potential socio-cognitive processes which shape their professional (and personal) identity. This alignment is especially relevant to GTAs, whose learning is often dependent on guidance and modeling of senior teachers, peers, literary resources around them, and institutional norms, as compared to in-service teachers who typically draw on their expertise and classroom repertoires. The typical teachers mostly rely on their domain-specific knowledge, and do not get enough opportunities for continuous reflections as the GTAs get in their complex role amidst the pressures of submissions, teaching, publications, and academic socialisations. Teachers' intuitive understanding, too, is always at risk of getting fossilised in routines, whereas GTAs are more prone to face newer challenges even in their routine work. The agencies that GTAs have in their classrooms are also less as compared to teachers being mostly the sole decision-makers in their classrooms. In other words, teachers after their jobs take over, usually find themselves into a space of being self-responsible for their development; GTAs are largely governed not always by their own decisions, but prescribed duties, varieties of work assigned, and other training and institutional forces contributing to their development.

5. The Study

This qualitative study with a phenomenological research design aimed at exploring the usefulness of the construct of the teacher's sense of plausibility to know more about GTAs' identities, their evolution, and how they may or may not get poured into their teaching practices. The context was an Indian public university, involving GTAs who are managing their coursework and are also working as

teaching assistants, teaching in courses, under a University Grants Commission mandate. The mandate asks doctoral candidates to get experience as teaching assistants for a minimum of two semesters of teaching. It was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What TSOP do GTAs possess about ESL teaching? How does it get operationalised in their classrooms?

RQ2: Do GTAs think that reflecting on TSOP is an effective reflective practice or not?

5.1 The Participants

Seven GTAs working as teaching assistants were included in the study. They were invited to the implementation of tools after obtaining their consent via a consent form. Three male and four female participants were involved, and they possessed teaching experience ranging from a few months to up to two years. As shown in Table 3 below, all of them belonged to the same public Indian university and were working in two different campuses, one in the Northeast and the other in Southern India. Additionally, their present status was them being from the first to third semester in their Doctoral programmes in English literature and English language education disciplines, respectively.

Table 3: Participant Profile

Name of the TA/ Gender	Ph.D. Semester	Employment in Courses
TA1/ Female	2nd semester	Department of English literature
TA2/ Female	2nd semester	Department of English literature
TA3/ Male	3rd semester	School of English language education
TA4/ Female	2nd semester	School of English language education
TA5/ Female	1st semester	School of language sciences
TA6/ Male	3rd semester	School of English language education

TA7/ Female	1st semester	School of English language education
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These GTAs are involved in teaching courses in English literature and English language education disciplines, assisting their supervisors and other professors in the same. They are also involved in invigilations, creations of test-papers, organisation of talks and conferences along with giving presentations on a semester-end basis about their doctoral projects' progression.

5.2 Data Collection, Research Tools, and Data Analysis

The creation of data tools was done after surveying and evaluating the existing tools in the available TSOP research. Different approaches of narrative enquiry, teacher timeline, perception questionnaires, and writing tasks were found to be dominant. It was soon realised that these methods were serving only rationalistic explorations, when Prabhu, who initially conceptualised it, has repeatedly been defining it as being 'intuitive yet perceptive'. Hence, methods in intuition research (stimulated recall, discursive measures, and intuition models) were also studied to arrive at an informed development of the tools.

1. Writing Prompt: A writing prompt inspired by Maley's (2019) and Mukundan's (2024) use of a teacher timeline was created. Titled as 'My Life History of Teaching', it emphasised knowledge of key events, personalities, and literatures which have shaped the GTAs and their understandings of ESL teaching. The prompt also enables the revelation of the mental imprints they have had in the initial years of school and college experiences. It also tapped into the adjustments, if any, they had to make while transitioning post their teacher training exposures to the actual classrooms; in addition to contextual factors which were important as well as the suggestions they have to offer to other GTAs about ESL teaching.

2. TSOP Discussion Sheet & Semi-Structured Interviews: Another tool was required to tap into 'intuitive moments' or 'intuitive knowings of the GTAs. After the consultation with the existing literature on discovering and measuring intuition in educational settings, a TSOP discussion sheet was created. It had two exercises in the form of a mood assessment task and a task on the RPD (Recognition Primed Decision Making) intuition model. Atkinson & Claxton (2000) argues that tapping into the status of moods can make insights into 'affective ecologies' and thus, intuition visible. The receptive, relaxed, and low-arousal emotional states tend to enhance intuitive awareness, while the highly anxious, pressurised states or irritability tends to demonstrate the blocking or distortion of intuition. The mood assessment task encapsulated a 'Feel Wheel' (Oxford CBT, 2023) to name feelings and moods that GTAs might feel concerning their teaching. Kelin's (2003) Recognition Primed Model, as described below, also gives concrete steps for a researcher, GTA, and any practitioner to tap in their underlying cognitions behind intuition without any laboratory settings or neural tests (Kumar, 2024). It enables capturing of the day-to-

day random decisions which GTAs make regarding their teaching practices, which they may consciously always remember, realise, or interpret for their becoming as teachers.

The participant consent form was sent to the GTAs along with a brief invitation letter, and the implementation of the tools took place in a hybrid manner, i.e., online to some GTAs and to some in an offline mode. In the first phase, both the writing task for reflection as well as the TSOP discussion sheet (attached in the appendix 1) were shared with the GTAs over email. They were requested to do the reflective writing prompt in their free schedule and calmer settings to elicit deeper, natural responses with a focused mind. Further, they were also asked to tick on the mood assessment chart, i.e., the feel wheel, the feelings they felt before, during, and post their teaching sessions. The GTAs were asked to do so with at least three to five of their lessons/ classes, as per their preference and convenience. Additionally, they were also asked to list at least one quick decision they made while facilitating these classroom teaching sessions, stored for further discussion. GTAs were asked to share their responses via the email itself, and a few exceptions were made for those who could not write or find the time to do so. They were allowed to send in their responses via audio notes on WhatsApp. The author was available to them throughout the duration of almost two months over messages and calls for any clarifications, doubts, and support they needed.

The second phase of collecting data included the semi-structured interviews taken with the help of discursive conversations and stimulated recalls. The interviews emphasised on conversing about their feelings and the quick decisions and the potential roots and reasons behind them.

The qualitative data gathered from the seven GTAs were further analysed within an interpretivist-constructivist framework. Initially, it was collated, organised, and thematically analysed through an iterative and inductive cycle (an early analysis process) followed by an initial and focused coding. The coding was done manually to arrive at emerging subordinate themes. Further, another round of deductive coding was performed based on key characteristics of the four stages, and the emergent themes were correlated to arrive at superordinate themes. A senior GTA was later contacted for further triangulation of the data to ensure the validity and reliability of the generated themes with the assistance of the NVivo software. The GTA enabled the development of inductive codes through iterative reading of the responses. These codes were organised into NVivo nodes, which were later consolidated into higher-order themes.

6. Findings

RQ1: What TSOP do GTAs possess about ESL teaching? How does it get operationalised in their classrooms?

a) *The overall picture...*

The findings indicate GTAs' sense of plausibilities concerning ESL teaching to be developing on a continuum of- inheriting various teaching models to becoming

reflective practitioners and implementing contextually grounded pedagogies. Overall, they provide a thick description of the workings of this continuum via the TSOP model reported in this study. An overview of GTAs' TSOPs formation is reported in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Overview of GTAs' TSOPs

<i>Stage one: Forming Impressions</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of exposure to English ● Teachers used lecture method in school ● Tasks of school/UG/PG teachers ● Learning summaries and grammar helps ● Ideation of teaching personalities ● Menus, newspapers, sports commentary, cartoons, and comic books help in learning English ● Study materials are important to pass exams ● I was more interested in- sports, fashion, and theatre 		
<i>Stage two: Teaching Exposures</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good teaching gamifies and explains complex topics in a simple manner. ● Focus on using variety of tools ● Using worksheets and theoretical readings helps teach better ● Ensure learners gets meaning of readings ● Focus on critical thinking ● Give scope for collaborations ● Utilise learner surroundings 		
<i>Stage 3: Job's Taking Over</i>		
<i>Noticing</i>	<i>Unexpected Outcomes</i>	<i>Effects of Workplace/ Routines</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Varying cognition & learner motivation levels ● Dissonance between curricular changes ● Less time to plan ● More 'want' of creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It's hard to give individual attention ● Not much idea about cultures of the learners. ● Not knowing learners' previous educational experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loads of assignments & deadlines ● Navigating AI amidst courses ● Thesis and presentations ● Peer support presence
<p>Effective ESL Teaching comprises/ My TSOP of ESL Teaching is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being affordable and innovative for learners ● Play between known and unknown 		

- Focusing on meaning of concepts than numbers
- Motivates and enables learners to make their best efforts towards learning
- Enables learners to reimagine curricular components and contexts
- Should build strong backbone of thoughts and critical thinking/ independent researchers
- Use of multimodalities to facilitate learning
- Punctual implementation and assessment of classwork

Stage 4: Cascading Knowledges

- I use my notes and explain things on blackboard or smart board to explain literary texts
- I use a lot of movie trailers and reviews in my classes.
- I ask them to find similar literature around the text I am teaching.
- I allow learners to find topics and give presentations around different topics in ways they want
- I just facilitate the worksheets which teacher provides
- I call other GTAs as examiners sometimes.

The results from the inductive coding revealed several themes related to the larger themes of: a) inherited pedagogical models, b) contextual pressures and emotional well-being, and c) evolving professional agency. Early memories reflected strong mental imprints transmitted to them, such as teachers “just reading texts and summarising them”, “using newspapers and restaurant menus”, and even “including folklores and poster and poem-based tasks” as suggested by the GTA responses. These teaching actions were also key in forming their intuitive preferences concerning ESL teaching. As GTAs started teaching, their reflections illustrated an intuitive sense-making of this new role under classroom situations with their own real challenges. Their responses, such as “make more sense of what I was doing”, “I was keen on helping students to become curious and self-driven” represent learner-centered inclinations and modelling of behaviours which were reinforced well. Additionally, the different constraints, such as “shortage of time”, “workload stress”, “tracking your own growth”, “fatigue from research and teaching”, and “cognitive dissonance with diverse learner needs”, etc., inform us about not only the routine or contextual effects on them but also about their emotional well-being. These experiences also hint at the dire needs of greater professional agency, community building, researcher reflexivity, and mentoring.

b) Bandura’s coming together with TSOP...

The themes from the deductive coding dominantly reflected the collision of traditional vs experiential models of teaching. It also enabled a deeper understanding of the workings of Bandura’s theory and four-staged TSOP model. At the beginning stage 1, their conceptions of teaching largely get formed through observations of their own teachers and surroundings. Some GTAs’ educational histories are largely shaped by these school and college experiences, which emphasised grammar teaching, lecture-based methods, and were largely exam-driven. ESL teaching in

their contexts has largely been viewed as a one-way process, and GTAs as learners were corresponding with Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship of observation, observing pedagogical details in their lessons. This is also in sync with Bandura's insights about the differential reinforcement mediated by different kinds of stimulus around them in the form of their own teachers, resources available, and the pedagogical strategies surrounding them. On the other hand, the other GTAs also report recollection of their teachers using authentic materials and the presence of multimodal learning. Across cases, their foundational beliefs reflected both traditional and experiential influences being shaped by not only exposure to above mentioned stimulus but also through early vicarious reinforcement; they associated positive outcomes with certain teaching behaviours (for example, classroom interaction being engaging or better marks in exams), which also legitimised those practices in their mental make-up.

Further, while they were acting as keen and not-so-keen observers, they received teacher training interventions at different phases individually. Inputs from the stage 2 point at them encountering theoretical frameworks challenging their inherited assumptions. Several facets of teaching in the form of lesson planning, creation and adaptation of teaching materials, child psychology, and teacher behaviour were introduced to them at this stage. It also marks the beginning of a shift in their naive epistemologies to intentional pedagogic reasoning, mediated by different cognitions of sense-making. The continuous trial and error methods, both in learning the mechanics of teaching as well as testing their earlier developed hypothesis, mark this to be a transition stage from epistemological certainty to pedagogical inquiry. The formation of TSOP begins here with teaching as a negotiation with possible tensions of classroom realities (pedagogical reflexivity), gaining theoretical grounding, which becomes visible in the later stages.

The insights for the stage 3 focused on their workplace reflux, too, and denote several observations, unexpected outcomes, as well as the effects of routines on the GTAs. While some GTAs noticed dissonance between curriculum prescriptions and varying learner backgrounds and motivation levels, others craved for more freedom and creativity in their classrooms. Similarly, while a lack of awareness about learners' cultures and previous backgrounds served as unexpected outcomes for some, others struggled with giving individual attention and including digital literacy for them. Amidst managing their own assignments, thesis presentations, and seeking peer support, this stage proves to be more transformative than disillusioning in hindsight. Such processes also indicate the functioning of Bandura's reciprocal determinism, since they are not only getting triggered by their prior learning and experiences but are also informed by constant interaction between their personal beliefs, institutional norms, learner diversity, and classroom constraints. It has been essential for them to foster critical reflection, adaptive reasoning, and effective decision-making to produce an evolving understanding of their teaching. Evidently, the GTAs whose initial exposures were limited to traditional methods formed sense of plausibilities which emphasised meaning and goal-oriented teaching. For them, the ESL teaching should also be motivating and affordable. On the other hand, GTAs from creative yet innovative learning environments reflected critical thinking, imagination, inquiry, and motivation to be key features of their sense of plausibility about ESL teaching. They all view teaching as a process of constant negotiation with institutional and contextual constraints rather than merely being about reproducing knowledge.

Insights from stage 4, cascading knowledge represent action-based learnings of the GTAs and their ways to channelise these TSOPs both knowingly and unknowingly. The GTAs with the traditional pedagogic inclinations try to make learning simple for their students, mostly relying on traditional yet sustainable methods such as making the most of the blackboard or smartboard, whenever necessary. They also just keep their professional boundaries with students and work in the roles of facilitators by helping students with classroom tasks. GTAs with creative learning environments report working in the capacities of a guide, teacher, and mentor. They not only use innovative methods of using YouTube reels, movie trailers, and reviews, but also give freedom to students to explore concepts via presentations and classroom debates. Such behaviours are reflective of retention and reproduction of the earlier models they learnt, consistent with Bandura's formulation of modelling processes. The insights at this stage mirror the culmination of several elements of social learning theory in various forms of observational learning being refined through reflective cycles, contextual feedback, enabling agencies, and development of holistically performative, adaptive, and socio-culturally mediated pedagogic practices. These insights also mark the growth and development of the GTAs into becoming designers of their teaching-learning environments (Kalantiz & Cope, 2012). Unlike other stages, where they perceived theory and praxis as oppositional, they now integrate them dialectically, resulting in situated and performative TSOPs.

c) What did the numbers tell?

Further, to ensure the reliability the findings were triangulated with a senior GTA by adopting the NVivo analysis. Table 5 below presents the comparative matrix output of the codes emerged through inductive and deductive coding

Table 5: Distribution of code references as per GTA responses

TSOP Stage/ Inductive Theme	Professional Identity	Pedagogical Reasoning	Affective and Emotional Labour	Classroom Management	Student-Cent ric Orientation	Learning by Doing	Institutional Support	Total References
Stage 1	11	17	8	6	19	4	5	70
Stage 2	9	14	12	9	21	6	4	75
Stage 3	6	20	15	18	12	10	8	89
Stage 4	7	19	5	21	10	17	3	82
Total References	33	70	40	54	62	37	20	316

(Rows= TSOP Model Stages; Columns= Inductive Nodes, Numerical Values= Coding References)

The NVivo matrix output showed a clear developmental pattern across TSOP model stages. The early stages (Stage 1 & 2) demonstrated the highest concentration of references in the themes of student-centric orientation (including 19 and 21 references) and pedagogical reasoning (17 and 14 references). These values indicated that the GTAs initially anchored their reflections in how they were taught and what effective ESL teaching should look like. The theme of affective elements and emotional labour does appear but remains in the backgrounds during

these formative phases. In contrast, stage 3 reflects the highest among the overall references (89 references), with a relevant increase in the affective and emotional labour theme (15 references) and classroom management (18 references). This suggests the pressures, constraints, and the emergent dilemmas which GTAs confront during actual classroom teaching. By the last stage, stage 4, references get stabilised as GTAs consolidate their practices through the themes of learning by doing (17 references) and a more aware pedagogical reasoning (19 references), suggesting the paradigm shift of experiential knowledge resulting into intentional yet context sensitive pedagogy. The total references column conveys that pedagogical reasoning (70) and student centric orientation (62) are most emergent across the dataset, reinforcing their central positionality in GTAs professional identity development.

RQ2: Do GTAs think that reflecting on TSOP is an effective reflective practice or not?

The insights, from the GTAs, reported in the Table 6 below, about whether reflecting on TSOP is an effective practice or not revealed many important considerations, workings of ideas and experiences, and shifts they demand. One of the emerging themes from the data is acknowledging the importance of TSOP in fostering metacognitive awareness. GTA3 observed while reflecting on it, it enabled her to become aware of the interpersonal influences she has had on her teaching. Likewise, GTA7 emphasised the necessity of reflective tasks in becoming more aware of existing habits and the need for a space that allows examination of such core implicit elements of GTA's cognitions. GTA6, too, emphasised the need for professional validation as well as the lack of awareness in their context about the GTA research, its scope, and importance. Despite the perceived benefits of reflecting on their TSOPs and trajectories of their professional identities, they also highlighted practical barriers to sustaining such reflective practices. GTA 1 expressed skepticism about maintaining reflective practices due to high workload, whereas GTA 2 reported administrative responsibilities precluding them from reflecting in a continuous fashion. Such a response underscores the well-known recurring challenge of novice teachers (GTAs in our case) often finding themselves juggling between junctions of expected outcomes and immediate realities.

Table 6: Responses from GTAs concerning articulation of their TSOPs

GTAs	Excerpts from their responses
GTA1	I mean...of course it helps to do a lot of self-reflection...but I doubt these reflections could be sustained and worked upon with the amount of work we get.

GTA2	One of my professors gave me similar advice to sometimes note down things that bother me about teaching. Eventually I try to deliver what I am assigned to and take care of managing my work.
GTA3	I think it's an interesting way to become more self-aware. This TSOP task does allow me to value more things and people which has shaped my teaching journey.
GTA4	In my view, we need such tasks in a regular manner like in our training. There is no such GTA training in India that I have heard of. Including them in such training sessions would be more enjoyable.
GTA5	I wish our university had a formal system for GTAs where we could hold these sessions or even a community helps us to grow. Because...ultimately all of us are just teaching combining the ways our professors want us and what we know about teaching.
GTA6	Honestly...I did not even know this term like GTA exists and there is a whole area of research around people like us who teach. It feels so validated that there is some interest in this nearly unrecognised field and people.
GTA7	These tasks and discussions helped me immensely to also reflect on my habits and find some space to think about how I teach. I think different people like HODs, professors and scholars can work together to create more communication about these pedagogies and the work involved.

Another theme of calling for institutional and training support provides ways to integrate reflections, such as TSOP, as an essential part of their training needs. GTA 5 highlights the need and benefits of a community formation to discuss their ideas, strategies, and challenges to come up with potential solutions. GTA7 extends on this response by suggesting a coming together of all institutional forces to work in sync and contribute to each other's development. In the times of writing centres coming up in India, the scope of providing opportunities in a well-coordinated manner with professors, admins, and GTAs lies ahead with great scope. It is especially valuable in countries where GTA research is still in its nascent stage and is often not even thought about. The research surrounding GTAs, undergraduate and postgraduate mentoring remains still in its nascent stage in India and needs urgent attention. The GTA responses carry the overall need for 'localised knowing' of their practices and in doing so, fixing the several barriers they face first. The findings of this section implies that GTAs' identity, culture, workload, and backgrounds to name a few key factors, do impact their professional identities. They are continuously surrounded with workload, meetings, pressures to publish and present and even fulfil their institutional duties with minimal to no support. This, especially in this context, just remains the tip of the iceberg. Several future investigations with an emphasis on multilingualism, gender, regional politics, identity politics, caste and class

behaviours, and mental health support could provide many complex insights underlying GTAs' practices and identities.

7. Conclusion

This research paper reported a small-scale experiment of implementing the model of TSOP with seven GTAs. The underlying motivation to do so was inspired by the current trends of experimenting with teacher education frameworks in GTA research. Grounded in Bandura's theory of social learning, it reports on how GTAs form their TSOPs via social mediation of forces surrounding them. The framework of TSOP has been in its nascent stage and is rather 'marginalised' (Kumar, 2023), which also resonates with the nature of research around GTA in the present context of the Indian education system (and maybe many such countries).

Such testing was carried out by arriving at a four-staged theoretical model of TSOP and utilising two writing prompts consisting of a life history mapping task as well as a TSOP discussion sheet implemented through semi-structured interviews. The findings pointed out that GTAs possess a varied sense of plausibilities, formed by school and college memories, formalised training, mediation of contextual factors, and how they have been transmitting it in both traditional and creative pedagogic ways and means. Another major finding was how GTAs agreed with TSOP being an effective reflective tool for professional development, but they will face hurdles with a lack of systematic training and institutional constraints to reflect through it regularly. A major lesson learnt through this experimentation is also GTAs asking educational stakeholders for a bottom-up approach: emphasising 'how and what they teach' rather than simply prescribing stipulated procedures around how and what to teach. Such interventions can result in further experimentations, which could involve:

1. Contextualising GTA experiences for Broader Frameworks: Future research can emphasise expanding qualitative investigations of GTA cognitions and experiences for more localised insights, which can feed towards the development of a globalised framework for GTA identity formation. Localised explorations can emphasise discovering intuitions, identity formation, or any other observable and unobservable aspects of GTA's cognitions and negotiations, both inside and outside the classrooms.
2. Accessing Mentoring, Peer Support, and Professional Communities: The findings suggest the dire need of mentoring in the Indian context for the GTAs. More research could focus on investigating mentoring needs, the effects and affect of peer support, and how GTA community groups can collaborate and support each other even with cultural differences and different academic orientations. Additionally, interest could also be contributed to know more about emotional resilience, institutional practices, workload, and fatigue, as well as supervisors' impact on the GTAs.
3. (Re)conceptualising TSOP as a GTA Cognition Model: There remains significant scope to reframe or reconceptualise TSOP for GTAs. This proposed model could be

tried out further or reinterpreted and alternate models could be created to know more about GTAs' identities. It could also be replicated to study differences between expert and novice GTAs to improve their institutional and training experiences. Intersectional approaches considering variables of gender, marginalisation, socio-cultural backgrounds, digital literacy, and disciplinary differences could also be adopted to carry out further investigations.

4. Integrating Intuition Research into GTA Research: Finally, incorporating different intuition models such as the traffic light model, recognition primed model etc. could be tried out, with other tasks such as lesson plan analysis, classroom teaching demonstrations & discussions around them. These would enable more insights about GTAs' conscious and subconscious mechanisms, negotiations, anxieties, and fears when it comes to teaching.

Finally, as Borg (2023) says, “we cannot make adequate sense of teachers’ experiences of learning to teach without examining the unobservable mental dimension of this learning process”, the evolving GTA research should keep moving in directions where we could reflect on what all lies within.

Ethical Statement

This study adhered to all ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from all the participants prior to data collection. All the participants were informed about the study’s objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage was well conveyed and duly followed right through the process of data collection. Informed consent was obtained in writing, and participants’ anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout conducting this research. In summary, the following ethical considerations were declared to and agreed to, by the participants involved:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The information collected will not be shared with anyone except the author and their supervising team. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The collected data will be kept anonymous and be reported anonymously without revealing any personal information. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I have verified the supplied information and it does not possess any conflict of interest amongst the participant and the author. 	

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The process of data collection has followed all the required research ethics and the practitioner code of conduct. | |
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Appendix 1

TASK PROMPT- 1

My Life History of Teaching

Dear GTAs, this task requests you to write a short reflective essay summarising crucial experiences which you think have shaped your teaching. Please write a detailed description (however much possible) indicating your responses to the following questions:

- a) What do you think is the best method to teach/learn English?
- b) How were you as a learner in the school and college/ university? What helped you learn English best in those years?
- c) Who have been the key influences for you when it comes to teaching-learning English?
- d) Did any sort of literature shaped your thinking about ESL teaching in any way?
- e) Have you gotten any formal training in teaching? What have been major takeaways from it?
- f) Was your transition to classrooms in a teaching role smooth? What changed or did not change?
- g) What major factors affect you at your workplace while you navigate your doctoral journey?
- h) What advice or suggestions will you give to other GTAs regarding teaching English specifically?

*Please feel free to decide the length of your responses and ensure you write them in your free time.

*If you do not have the time/ mood to write, you can also record your responses in audio and share them with me over WhatsApp or email, whatever is feasible.

*Do reach out to me in case you need any help or clarifications.

THE TSOP DISCUSSION SHEET

This Discussion sheet is designed to tap into the operations of TSOP about ESL teaching.

A. *The Feel Wheel*

The feel wheel enables us teachers to tap into our feelings or mood before, during or post classes. Please read the given options carefully and select the descriptors that you often feel concerning your English classes.



Source: Oxford CBT (2023)

B. The RPD Model of Intuitive Decision Making (Klein, 2003)

