

Examining pre-service teachers' professional identity ahead of teaching practicum

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There has been extensive research on pre-service teachers' professional identity; however, there remains a gap on its examination prior to teaching practicum engagement. Considering its significance in succeeding and providing meaningful actual teaching experiences through a practicum program, the present study aimed to address the gap by examining the professional identity of pre-service teachers before they engaged in teaching practicum. Under a mixed methods design, data were collected using a questionnaire distributed to ninety third-year pre-service EFL teachers (PSETs) in Indonesia (N=90), nine of whom (n=9) were interviewed. The results showed a moderate level of professional identity shaped ahead of practicum. It suggested a developing process of professional identity construction among pre-service teachers and needs for improvement, particularly regarding their self-efficacy in teaching, their commitment to teaching, and their perceptions toward the teaching profession. Positively, the pre-service teachers demonstrated strong values of teacher professional orientation and good understanding of teachers' roles. Implications were discussed, emphasising the steps English language teacher education programs should take to strengthen PSETs' professional identity.

Introduction

The growth of English language education requires qualified teachers with strong teacher professional identity. Teachers with strong professional identity exhibit confidence, commitment toward teaching, and professional development. Conversely, inadequate construction of teacher professional identity may adversely influence their commitment to teaching (Ke Lomi & Mbato, 2020). While extensive studies on in-service teachers' professional identity construction have been conducted (Gu et al., 2022; Lap et al., 2022; Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas, 2022; Weran & Kuswandono, 2021; Yi & Meng, 2022), it is imperative to investigate teacher professional identity construction and development among pre-service teachers' trajectory toward becoming a teacher. It is believed that the knowledge and practical exposures pre-service teachers gained during teacher education programs significantly contribute to their professional identity construction (Friesen & Besley, 2013; Prabjandee, 2019; Zhu, Rice, et al., 2020).

Research into the professional identity construction among pre-service teachers underscores its prominent role in the development of their identities and competencies. Prior studies have explored the teacher professional identity construction of pre-service teachers in English language teacher education programs in different contexts (Macías Villegas et al., 2020 in Colombian context; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019 in Canadian context; Pérez-Gracia et al., 2022 in Spanish context; Teng, 2019; Yi & Meng, 2022 in Chinese context). Additionally, prior studies have explored pre-service teachers' professional

identity construction during teaching practicum experiences (Becker et al., 2019; Friesen & Besley, 2013; Prabjandee, 2019; Teng, 2019; van Huizen et al., 2005; Zhu, Mena, et al., 2020). Within an Indonesian context, Mulyani et al. (2022) and Nue and Manara (2022) qualitatively explored PSETs' professional identity construction during teacher education programs. Previous research has emphasised the significance of examining pre-service teachers' professional identity construction within teacher education programs. However, a research gap remains, as most studies have concentrated on identity construction after the teaching practicum, with limited focus on identity formation prior to its commencement.

This study addresses the research gap by investigating the professional identity construction of PSETs without prior teaching experience. Unlike previous studies that focused on post-practicum identity formation through qualitative methods, this research was conducted before the on-site practicum, enabling the assessment of PSETs' professional identity prior to classroom teaching. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study provides deeper insights into the extent of PSETs' identity formation and identifies areas for improvement to enhance teaching practices and strengthen professional identity. In light of this background, our study was conducted to answer two main research questions:

1. What is the extent of pre-service English teachers' professional identity construction prior to their engagement in a teaching practicum?
2. How do pre-service English teachers perceive and assess their professional identity as teachers prior to their engagement in a teaching practicum?

Identity theory

Identity theory serves as a prominent theoretical framework to better understand the interplay between identity and society. Central to this theory is the notion that every individual possesses an identity, i.e. a set of meanings which defines and characterises him or her as a unique person in the society (Burke & Stets, 2009). Further, Burke and Stets explained that perception is central to identity construction process, and the identity an individual holds may influence their thoughts, behaviours, feelings, and emotions. Drawing upon the nature of identity theory, pre-service English teachers are likely to develop a set of meaning and perceptions that define themselves as prospective teachers as a result of their encounter with society (their family, their previous learning experiences, their teacher education journey, etc.). These meanings and perceptions shape their identity and influence their perceptions, feelings, and behaviours towards their instructional practices and the teaching profession.

Teacher professional identity in pre-service teacher education

Teacher professional identity plays a pivotal role in shaping professionalism as a teacher. It encompasses an individual's ability to reflect upon their professional acts (Yuan et al., 2019) and evolves through continuous engagement with new experiences interpreted to

create new perceptions (Cheng, 2021; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019). Pre-service teachers' identity and perceptions of the teaching profession are shaped by both theoretical courses and field-based practices. In this study, the professional identity of pre-service English teachers is defined as a set of meaning and perceptions they have on how to understand, how to become, and how to act in relation to the teaching profession.

Prominent scholars on teacher professional identity in teacher education have proposed frameworks to better understand teacher professional identity among prospective teachers. Lamote and Engels (2010) proposed professional and task orientation, self-efficacy, and commitment to teaching. Friesen and Besley (2013) proposed self-categorization as a teacher, confidence in becoming a teacher, and participation as a teacher. Similarly, in a recent study, Wong and Liu (2022) proposed teacher self-efficacy, commitment to teaching, and professional orientation. Despite terminological variations, these scholars underscored common dimensions of teacher professional identity among pre-service teachers: (1) pre-service teachers' judgment on their own ability to conduct teaching; (2) their commitment to teaching; and (3) the values and beliefs that pre-service teachers perceived as important regarding the teaching profession. Our study adopted Wong and Liu's (2022) framework to investigate PSETs' professional identity.

Method

Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-method design involving simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative method was employed to measure the extent of the PSETs' professional identity, while the qualitative method was utilized to explore how the PSETs conceptualised and evaluated their professional identity ahead of teaching practicum.

Context

The study was conducted within an undergraduate English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) program in Indonesia, where English remains a foreign language (Sakhiyya et al, 2018). This four-year program provided PSETs, with both theoretical courses in English language and pedagogy, as well as practical teaching experience through a teaching practicum course offered in the sixth semester. This three-month unpaid practicum, conducted in a non-block scheme, allowed the PSETs to teach high school students while attending other on-campus courses. Instead of being present at the school full-time, the PSETs coordinated their teaching schedules with their supervising lecturer and mentor teacher, balancing on-campus learning with practicum activities. The PSETs typically commuted to their assigned schools and were not required to live away from home during the practicum period. The teaching practicum included mentoring on the development of teaching instruments and materials to prepare their teaching sessions, followed by three to six teaching sessions, depending on the school's English lesson schedules. Throughout the practicum, each PSET was assisted by a supervising lecturer from the university. Additionally, partner schools provided support through access to teaching resources and

collaboration with other school staff members, although the primary guidance was from the mentor teacher.

Participants

The quantitative study involved ninety PSETs (N=90) with 25 males (27.8%) and 65 females (72.2%) aged between 19 to 21 years. At the time of the study, the participants were in the fall semester of their third year ELTE program and had not yet commenced formal on-site teaching practices. The qualitative study involved nine PSETs (six females and three males). Pseudonyms were applied to ensure confidentiality. The participants were purposively selected based on their active enrolment in previous terms, complete participations in the practicum program at primary and middle schools, ability in articulating opinions, and willingness to participate in the study. Prospective participants were recruited based on recommendations of supervising lecturers and some PSETs' familiarity with individuals meeting the criteria.

Table 1: Background information for the interviewees (n=9)

Pseudonym	Gender	Reasons for taking the ELTE program
PSET-1	Female	Love of English, initial career orientation of becoming a teacher
PSET-2	Female	Love of English, initial career orientation of becoming a teacher
PSET-3	Female	Love of English, family influence
PSET-4	Female	Love of English
PSET-5	Female	Love of English, love of teaching, family influence
PSET-6	Female	Love of children, alignment with the results of psychometric test
PSET-7	Male	Love of English, family influence
PSET-8	Male	Love of English
PSET-9	Male	Love of English

Instruments

Two different types of instruments were utilised in the study. Quantitative data were collected using a modified version of Wong and Liu's (2022) *Teacher Professional Identity Scale* (TPIS), specifically developed to measure professional identity of student teachers. This instrument comprises eighteen items under three dimensions: teacher self-efficacy (9 items), commitment to teaching (4 items), and professional orientation (5 items) with 5-point Likert scale responses. To adapt with our study context, the TPIS was translated into Indonesian by a professional translator, with adjustment of some contextual words. The adapted instrument underwent expert validation involving two external experts in teacher identity and one expert in teacher professional development. Revisions were made upon the validators' feedback without any omission on the items. The finalised version of the modified TPIS was piloted to 21 PSETs. The finalised instrument underwent validity and reliability tests, resulting that the instrument was valid (sig.< 0.05; KMO measure of sampling adequacy = .502, sig.= .000) and reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .906).

For qualitative data collection, an interview protocol was developed. To explore the participants' professional identity, questions encompassing their background, their

perceptions and beliefs about teacher and teaching, and their reflections on their professional identity were included in the protocol. The initial draft of the interview protocol underwent a review by three experts, whose feedback guided the protocol refinement. The finalised interview protocol was employed for data collection.

Data collection

The data of this study were concurrently collected. The quantitative phase was administered amidst the fall semester, ensuring the participants had not yet commenced their actual teaching practices. The questionnaires were distributed online through Google Forms during the in-class sessions with the presence of the first author. Ninety-one responses were initially obtained with one response excluded in the analysis due to its ineligibility in meeting the criteria of the research. Hence, ninety (N=90) responses were finally collected and proceeded to the quantitative analysis. Subsequently, the qualitative data collection phase was initiated by recruiting participants and obtaining their informed consents to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol, were conducted one-on-one by the first author. The interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in Indonesian language as the shared first language of both the interviewer and the interviewees.

Data analyses

The quantitative data were analysed descriptively by presenting means and standard deviations. Sturges' formula was used to determine the class interval of the mean scores, (Sturges, 1926), through which interpretation of the extent of teacher professional identity was determined. According to Sturges' formula (Daniel & Cross, 2018), class interval can be determined using the formula ($w = R/k$) whereby w represents the interval width, R represents the range of observation in the data set, and k represents the number of the class interval. Following this formula, the interval of teacher professional identity level was obtained ($w = 1.33$), with final categories of interpretation as follows.

Table 2: Interpretation of the mean score

Range of mean score	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.33	Weak teacher professional identity
2.34 – 3.66	Moderate teacher professional identity
3.67 – 5.00	Strong teacher professional identity

The qualitative data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedures. The analysis commenced by transcribing the audio interviews into printed forms. Then, the transcripts underwent ongoing reading and reviews to gain familiarity. Initial codes were generated, followed by categorisation of the codes into broader themes. A review on the alignment of the generated themes and the associated codes was conducted to ensure coherence, followed by the refinement of the themes resulting in finalised names of the themes. The finalised themes were documented and reported as the study findings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, member

checking was conducted by providing the participants with the interview transcripts to review before proceeding to the data analysis. This process allowed the participants to review their contributions, make necessary amendments, and provide clarification, if necessary, thus ensuring the alignment between the participants' perspectives and experiences and the findings of the study. From the member checking process, one participant, PSET-4, provided additional views on her professional identity, while the other participants validated the transcript without any additional comments.

Results

The extent of the pre-service EFL teachers' professional identity

The TPIS questionnaire revealed a moderate level of teacher professional identity among the PSETs ahead of teaching practicum, with a mean score of 3.652 (Table 3), indicating a certain degree of beliefs, commitment, and understanding regarding the teaching profession and the roles of teachers. However, the moderate level also implied that the PSETs were still in the developing stage of embracing their identity as a teacher, suggesting areas of development within their journey of becoming a teacher.

Table 3: Measured professional identity of the PSETs (N=90)

Questionnaire items	Mean (M)	Std. dev. (SD)
Teacher professional identity	3.652	.4558
Teacher self efficacy	3.314	.5549
Commitment to teaching	4.349	.7234
Professional orientation	3.652	.4858

The extent of the pre-service EFL teachers' self efficacy

The analysis of teacher self-efficacy among PSETs revealed a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.414 (Table 4). This suggests that while PSETs have developed a belief in their teaching abilities, they also recognised areas for improvement. Sub-category analysis showed similar moderate levels in instructional strategies (M=3.293), classroom management (M=3.389), and student engagement (M=3.559), indicating that PSETs perceived their skills as neither exceptionally skilled nor insufficient, suggesting confidence in teaching, yet leaving room for growth.

The extent of the pre-service EFL teachers' commitment to teaching

The commitment to teaching domain also showed a moderate mean score of 3.314 (Table 5). It reflected a developing interest and investment in teaching, although some uncertainty and reluctance persisted. Notably, while PSETs strongly believed in the nobility of the teaching profession (M=4.400), there was also a considerable inclination towards pursuing alternative careers (M=2.300, reversed scoring). This ambivalence suggested that PSETs valued the societal contributions of teaching but struggled with internal conflicts between idealism and the practical realities of the profession. The moderate scores for enjoyment of the teaching role (M=3.233) and professional

satisfaction (M=3.322) further illustrated a balance of positive and negative attitudes toward the teaching profession.

Table 4. Measured PSETs' teacher self efficacy (N=90)

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
Teacher self efficacy	3.414	.5549
<i>Efficacy for instructional strategies</i>	<i>3.293</i>	<i>.6116</i>
1. Explaining complex concepts	3.200	.6902
2. Implementing effective teaching strategies	3.422	.7929
3. Formulating stimulating critical thinking inquiries	3.256	.8014
<i>Efficacy for classroom management</i>	<i>3.389</i>	<i>.6783</i>
4. Handling student misbehaviours	3.344	.9500
5. Controlling disruptive behaviours in the classroom	3.389	.8572
6. Developing effective classroom management procedures	3.433	.7352
<i>Efficacy for student engagement</i>	<i>3.559</i>	<i>.6663</i>
7. Cultivating student appreciation for learning	3.622	.7581
8. Motivating unmotivated learners	3.522	.8510
9. Building confidence of underperforming students	3.533	.7374

Table 5: Measured PSETs' commitment to teaching (N=90)

Questionnaire items	Mean	SD
Commitment to teaching	3.314	.7234
10. Teaching as a noble profession	4.400	.8585
11. Intention to switch from teaching to another profession (reversed score)	2.300	1.043
12. Enjoyment in the role of a teacher	3.233	.9605
13. Professional satisfaction in teaching	3.322	.9579

The extent of the pre-service EFL teachers' professional orientation

The domain of professional orientation revealed a strong level with the mean score of 4.349 (Table 6), suggesting strong beliefs on the importance of taking good roles and responsibility and the commitment to professional development within the teaching profession. All the items within the professional orientation domain demonstrated a strong level, suggesting robust values regarding ongoing teacher professional development (M=4.278), professional image as a teacher (M=4.567), collaboration (M=4.133), integration of new educational development (M=4.211), and societal contribution through teaching (M=4.556). Interestingly, despite their inexperience of actual teaching, the PSETs have established strong values of professional orientation associated with teachers, reflecting their emerging identity as teachers.

Table 6: Measured PSETs' professional orientation (N=90)

Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD
Professional orientation	4.349	.4858
14. Importance of ongoing professional development for teachers	4.278	.8350
15. Significance of projecting a professional image for teachers	4.567	.5816
16. Collaboration with peers	4.133	.8238
17. Integration of new educational development into teaching	4.211	.6447
18. Responsiveness of teachers to contributing to the society	4.556	.6888

PSETs' conceptualisation of teacher professional identity

The concept of teacher professional identity posits that teachers construct and reconstruct self-perceptions and beliefs regarding their roles as teachers. Despite the absence of actual on-site teaching practices, the trajectories of the PSETs during their teacher education may have shaped their professional identity as aspiring teachers. This section presents the PSETs' perspectives on themselves as aspiring teachers and the teaching profession.

Complex sense of selves as a teacher

During interviews, the PSETs were prompted to articulate their self-perceptions as a teacher. The findings demonstrated complex and varied views, ranging from friendliness and firmness, as well as self-doubt and fear of lacking.

Friendliness and firmness as a teacher

The participants expressed their view that they might belong to friendly teachers. This view was shaped by their expectation that a friendly teacher would create a supportive learning environment for students.

PSET-6: I will make myself as a friendly teacher. I want to make my students feel comfortable learning with me. They have no hesitation to ask questions, to comment on my teaching, to share their thoughts. I want to be that kind of teacher.

PSET-8: I am a more friendly type of teacher with good approach to student. When they [students] are in the class, they should be serious. Outside the class, they are more easy-going.

These excerpts suggest that the PSETs' views on themselves were influenced by their aspirations to foster a positive and supportive learning environment for their students and to encourage student participation in learning. Nevertheless, they also expressed their expectation to balance positive rapport with students and the responsibilities in learning.

Incompetency as a teacher

The PSETs expressed self-doubt about their abilities in managing classroom and handling students' behaviour. It was also found that there was a fear of lacking subject knowledge or struggling to deliver effective English lessons.

PSET-4: I am always nervous to speak before others, so as a pre-service teacher, I can define myself as an unready teacher. I am not good at public speaking. I am also impatient, so I may not be able to handle students well.

PSET-2: I find it challenging to speak before others and to explain things, so I am not sure.

The excerpts highlighted self-doubt and lack of confidence that PSETs experienced regarding their competencies as a teacher. As an instance, PSET-4 described herself as an unprepared teacher due to her lack of ability in public speaking and impatience in dealing with students. Similarly, PSET-2 struggled with public speaking and explaining to others. With her awareness on the importance of explaining concepts as a teacher, she perceived herself as an incompetent teacher. These findings indicated the needs for support and training to improve their skills as a future teacher, as these views may hinder their growth as an effective teacher.

Perceptions of English teaching as a profession

The PSETs were prompted to articulate their perceptions regarding the teaching profession. The responses were dichotomous. As examples, PSET-4 and PSET-9 believed that being a teacher was important and it was considered as a noble profession.

PSET-4: I believe that profession as an English teacher is important, as nowadays people are required to have good command of English. There are many digital applications to assist English learning out there; however, a teacher's role is still crucial as interpersonal communication is needed in English learning.

PSET-9: I see teaching as a noble profession.

The excerpts suggest that the PSETs perceived teaching as a noble profession considering its significance in today's prominent role of English. Despite the availability of digital tools for language learning, the PSETs recognised the role of interpersonal communication that could not be replaced by those tools, offering sustainability for this profession.

Besides positive views regarding the teaching profession, the PSETs also expressed negative views. Negative words such as "challenging", "less appreciated", and "better than being unemployed", were found in the interviews.

PSET-6: Teaching is challenging. A teacher needs to have long preparation and evaluation on their teaching. The responsibility is almost similar to parents.

PSET-3: People in the society tend to underestimate teachers as a profession. They look down on them as the salary teachers get is relatively low.

PSET-9: Some teachers feels that it's better to become teachers than being unemployed.

The PSETs expressed negative views regarding teaching English as a profession. Teachers' efforts in teaching English sometimes did not correspond with financial rewards they received. Additionally, the negative perceptions were influenced by the

responsibilities as English teachers which extended not only to improving English ability but also to imparting soft skills to students. One sentiment about teaching was expressed by PSET-9 who viewed teaching as preferable to being unemployed, suggesting that becoming a teacher was regarded as an alternative rather than a priority.

Multifaceted roles of an English teacher

The interviews revealed the PSETs' perceptions on multifaceted roles of English teachers. The roles they expressed were coded into two main roles: instructional role, and inspirational role.

Instructional role

Most of the participants demonstrated their understanding on the roles of an English teacher in relation to teachers' responsibilities in teaching and facilitating English learning to students.

PSET-6: A teacher should prepare her teaching, like preparing suitable materials, learning media, learning techniques by considering various aspects of students' conditions which may influence learning. Then, she implements what she has planned. At last, she conducts evaluation and reflection.

PSET-8: A teacher should provide students with knowledge and practical experiences, not only assigning tasks while they're away doing something else. When a teacher comes to class, teaches students in person, and provides two-way interaction and feedback to students, it will be meaningful for students' learning.

The interview excerpts demonstrate the PSETs' perceptions of an English teacher's instructional roles. PSET-6 highlighted the importance of considering various aspects in preparing learning to achieve learning objectives effectively and stressed the need for teacher reflection. PSET-8 expressed his critical thoughts on teacher absenteeism during class hours. He emphasised the significance of teachers' presence during class hours to facilitate learning through direct two-way interaction and to provide feedback, creating a meaningful learning for students. Despite their lack of formal on-site teaching experiences, the PSETs possessed a comprehensive understanding of teachers' complex instructional roles including preparing suitable learning, conducting effective teaching, creating interactive learning environment, and conducting evaluation and reflection. This understanding can be a provision for the PSETs to conduct teaching practices.

Inspirational role

Besides instructional roles, the interviews also revealed the PSETs' beliefs in the inspirational role of a teacher.

PSET-6: A teacher should be able to become a role model for students, providing good examples for them. They can learn how to communicate, how to think, and so forth.

PSET-4: An educator should be aware on their responsibility on the do's and don'ts. Teachers should behave, as students will imitate them.

The interview excerpts revealed that the PSETs held shared beliefs in the inspirational roles of teachers. As an example, PSET-6 emphasised on the need for teachers to become a role model for their students. Similarly, PSET-4 highlighted the significance of teachers' decent behaviours and speech, as their students would imitate them. The findings indicated the PSETs' good understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of a teacher, which were not limited solely to in-class instruction, but also to serving as an inspiration for their students.

PSETs' self-evaluation on their professional identity

Through the interviews, PSETs self-evaluated their professional identity within three domains: teacher self-efficacy, commitment to teaching, and professional orientation.

Teacher self-efficacy

In relation to teacher self-efficacy, the PSETs were prompted to pre-assess their own ability to conduct English teaching. Although the PSETs had not yet conducted actual teaching practices at schools, they may have shaped their own identity as a teacher regarding their own perceived ability in teaching English, conceptually named as teacher self-efficacy. Initially, the PSETs were prompted to assess their own English mastery.

PSET-9: In the context of comprehending and using English personally, I think I am already good enough. I have good understanding in grammar, vocabulary, and English structures.

PSET-4: I have good command of English. However, I am not sure whether I can teach English well or not. English is complicated and I am not good at simplifying it [making it understandable for students].

These interview excerpts illustrate that the PSETs believed in their good English proficiency. However, they perceived themselves as being incompetent and having insufficient competencies for fulfilling responsibilities as a teacher.

PSET-8: I still need to learn a lot how to teach, how to prepare lesson plans and teaching media, how to assess students. I am not ready yet to do that.

PSET-1: I am not sure whether I can engage students as I don't have any experiences in teaching students directly.

PSET-2: Typically, I am an impatient person. I am afraid that I cannot handle myself when dealing with students. I think I will also give up easily dealing with misbehaved students.

The sample interview excerpts suggest that the PSETs had confidence in their own ability in English. However, they expressed lack of confidence and uncertainty regarding their ability to teach it effectively. They identified several areas for improvement, including instruction, classroom management, and student engagement, before embarking on their teaching practicum. Lack of teaching experiences, as well as lack of abilities in managing

emotions and classroom situations were reported to become contributing factors to this low self-efficacy.

Commitment to teaching

The findings revealed a discrepancy between the PSETs' initial motivations, and their perceived reality about the teaching profession. Initially, the PSETs expressed the emergence of intrinsic motivations, possibly serving as a strong driving force toward becoming teachers.

PSET-2: In the future, I want to be a teacher.

PSET-5: I love children, and I'd love to teach them. I am also inspired by my former teachers to be a teacher like them.

PSET-4: I love sharing knowledge with others. When I was in secondary school, my friends asked me to teach them English because many of them did not learn English previously.

The PSETs expressed intrinsic motivation to pursue English teaching, stemming from their aspirations, willingness to share knowledge, and positive English learning experiences. This intrinsic motivation may serve as a foundation shaping their commitment to teaching. However, contradictory findings emerged regarding their commitment in pursuing the teaching profession. Almost all of the PSETs expressed doubts and uncertainties about pursuing a career as English teachers due to various considerations.

PSET-9: I am not sure with my competencies as a teacher.

PSET-1: I think being a teacher is challenging. The responsibility is big. I also have to pursue a teacher professional program to become a professional teacher.

PSET-7: Being a teacher is not on my top list. I have another aspiration. I want to run my own food and beverage business.

PSET-2: I want to be a teacher, but not in Indonesia. I want to teach overseas because teachers overseas are more respected and appreciated than in Indonesia.

The interview excerpts indicated that the PSETs possessed doubts and uncertainty over taking a career as an English teacher, caused by their doubts on teaching skills, complexity of requirements to become a teacher, different career interests, and lack of appreciation of the profession. The findings indicated that the PSETs were still in the process of shaping their identity as a professional teacher.

Professional orientation

The interview showed that the PSETs had positive views on professional orientation. The interviews found that they valued the essential roles of personal and professional growth as prospective teachers. In the area of personal growth, the PSETs reported the importance of self-reflection and continuous learning in their trajectories of becoming a

teacher. As an instance, PSET-6 expressed her commitment to do self-reflection later for her teaching.

PSET-6: I think later before and after teaching, I will take notes on important aspects of my teaching. Then, for teaching evaluation and reflection, I will review what I have done and ask for my students' feedback as well.

Continuous learning was also reported to foster personal growth as a prospective teacher.

PSET-7: I will use the opportunity during this teacher education to achieve knowledge and experiences to becoming a teacher. I think programs in this faculty facilitate me to become a professional teacher.

PSET-6: To improve my knowledge, I often read books and watch videos related to psychology of learning. I will also learn all pedagogy-related courses.

PSET-1: I think it is important for teachers to pursue higher education, like master program in the long run.

These excerpts revealed that PSETs perceived continuous learning as essential for professional teacher development. They expressed commitment to learning from diverse resources during their teacher education program and emphasised the significance of pursuing higher education.

Besides personal growth, the PSETs also recognised the significance of professional growth in achieving their goal of becoming professional teachers. They advocated for commitment to teaching and collaboration as key strategies for professional development. As an example, PSET-1 highlighted the importance of teaching preparation that a teacher should have prior to teaching, reflecting her commitment in teaching.

PSET-1: A professional teacher should prepare her teaching well and put her students' needs as her priority.

The PSETs also emphasised the importance of projecting professional images such as managing emotion, having good personality, having the ability to separate personal and professional matters, and being a role model for their students.

PSET-7: A professional teacher is able to separate personal and professional matters. If he has a personal matter, he will solve it first and will not bring it into the classroom.

To achieve professional growth, the PSETs also emphasised the importance of collaboration.

PSET-4: We can give feedback among teachers or among our fellow pre-service teachers. We can also observe other teachers to see how they interact with students.

The interview excerpts indicated that the PSETs possessed strong professional orientation as pre-service teachers, despite their lack of actual on-site teaching experiences. They

valued the importance of engaging in various activities that contributed to their personal and professional growth as aspiring teachers.

Discussion and implications

The results of our study shed light on the construction of the PSETs' teacher professional identity prior to their engagement in teaching practicum. Although they were not yet engaged in actual teaching practices, the study suggests that their professional identities had been shaped to the moderate extent and may serve as a foundational belief regarding the teaching profession, yet it still requires further development. Their professional identities may have been shaped through their encounters in teacher education. Prior studies have also highlighted the significant impacts of teacher education programs in shaping pre-service teachers' professional identity (Banegas et al., 2022; Cheng, 2021; Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas, 2022) and their views of teaching and learning (Nickel & Zimmer, 2019).

The moderate level of teacher self-efficacy reflects balanced beliefs in the PSETs' abilities in executing their roles as teachers, and in recognising areas for improvement including instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. It urges a need for improving the PSETs' confidence in their teaching capabilities, since individuals' perceptions on their knowledge and abilities are influential in building a stronger identity as a teacher (Lap et al., 2022). The interview findings also revealed the PSETs' good English proficiency, but they expressed uncertainty in teaching the language. It implies an incomplete construction of their identity as English language teachers, as language proficiency and teaching competencies are intertwined (Yi & Meng, 2022). These qualitative findings resonate the quantitative results, suggesting the needs for support and mentorship to bolster PSETs' confidence and abilities in teaching English, prior to commencing teaching practicum. In a recent study, Sun and Zhang (2023) highlighted the importance of mental and emotional support from mentors in the professional development of novice teachers. Similarly, pre-service teachers require this support as they begin their journey toward becoming teachers and forming their professional identity (Nugroho et al., 2020). Such supports and mentorship could enhance PSETs' teacher self-efficacy and readiness to conduct actual on-site teaching.

The moderate level of commitment to teaching among the PSETs suggests both investment toward teaching, and its challenges. The contradictory result of the PSETs' strong beliefs on the nobility of the profession and the high possibility of going into a non-teaching profession suggest a complex interplay between their idealism, and realities they encounter which influence their commitment and identity construction. This contradiction was also found in the qualitative findings. While the PSETs showed initial intrinsic motivation as a teacher, they also expressed ambivalence in committing to the English teaching profession. These results suggest a need for comprehensive information to be provided to PSETs to help bolster their understanding and shape positive attitudes toward the teaching profession. Positive attitudes toward the teaching profession shapes a stronger sense of professional identities (Zhao & Zhang, 2017).

An interesting result was found in relation to the professional orientation of the PSETs. While the other dimensions of teacher professional identity underscored a balanced mix of foundational establishment and needs for improvement, the dimension of professional orientation of the PSETs was strong, indicating PSETs' strong beliefs about the importance of professional responsibility, sustainable development, and societal contribution as teachers. Corroborating the quantitative results, the qualitative findings suggest that the PSETs valued the importance of personal and professional growth as teachers. These results imply a good initial provision for a stronger teacher professional construction of PSETs prior to their engagement in actual teaching through teaching practicum, as they have shaped strong awareness of professional values and responsibilities associated with the teaching profession. This strong professional orientation may equip them to adapt more readily to the realities of a particular teaching environment (Qiu et al., 2021). Consequently, this initial strong professional orientation is expected to facilitate them to achieve a successful first actual teaching experience.

The findings also revealed the PSETs' complex sense of selves as a teacher. On one hand, they aimed to be friendly yet firm teachers, emphasising teacher-student attachment, while maintaining authoritative roles in the classroom and reflecting their understanding on the importance of maintaining a good rapport and discipline that creates a conducive learning atmosphere. On the other hand, they also perceived themselves as being an incompetent teacher, implying uncertainties about their competencies as a teacher. This finding confirmed prior studies (Rahmi, 2024; Zhu, Rice, et al., 2020) which also found that PSETs viewed themselves as incompetent teachers. It is worthy to note that teacher identity construction requires an awareness of who we are and how others see us (Macías Villegas et al., 2020). It suggests that PSETs' positive views on themselves contribute to their identity construction, while their negative views on themselves, e.g. as an incompetent teacher, may hinder their identity construction. Additionally, perceptions are central to identity construction (Burke & Stets, 2009; Weran & Kuswandono, 2021); thus, it is crucial for pre-service teachers to build a positive sense of themselves as teachers.

Interestingly, our study revealed that the PSETs achieved good understanding of the multifaceted roles of a teacher. They could articulate diverse roles for a teacher, including the instructional and inspirational roles. The PSETs had good understanding that teachers are responsible for facilitating learning through instructional practices, as well as serving as inspirational figures who become role models for their students. It highlights their understanding that a teacher is not only responsible for students' academic achievement but also is influential in students' character building. These findings resonate those of Ünalı et al. (2024) who reported PSETs' understanding on the diverse roles of teachers, including conducting instruction and becoming a role model for their students. These findings suggest that the PSETs have shaped a certain degree of identity as a teacher, although they are not yet exposed to the realities of actual in-class teaching.

The results of our study have several implications for teacher education in relation to their responsibilities in fostering teacher professional identity construction among pre-service English teachers. As we indicate needs for improvement on PSETs' efficacy in teaching prior to their engagement in actual teaching practices, teacher education programs should

equip PSETs with necessary supports and mentorship prior to the teaching practicum, to enhance their confidence and skills in conducting teaching, and to improve their readiness in engaging in their coming actual on-site teaching practices. Collaboration between supervising lecturers and mentor teachers providing guidance for pre-service teachers is essential in teaching practices (Prakash et al., 2024; Torres-Rocha, 2023). The results also suggest that the PSETs are in an evolving process of shaping their professional identity. Thus, it is important for teacher education programs to facilitate the development of a stronger professional identity by providing more opportunities for identity exploration through the meaningful integration of theoretical knowledge on the teaching profession and firsthand teaching experiences.

The systematic review by Cong-Lem (2021) indicated that opportunities to create new teaching materials or engage in innovative practices can cultivate teacher agency, which is crucial for shaping professional identity. Furthermore, the result of commitment to teaching which showed ambivalence in taking a teaching profession among PSETs, underscores a threat to the sustainability of teacher availability in the future. When pre-service teachers show less commitment in becoming teachers, there may be shortage of teachers. To anticipate it, teacher education programs should equip PSETs with the realities and necessary information to assist them in coping with challenges and uncertainties of the teaching profession. By providing PSETs with mentorship, a balanced mix of theoretical and practical aspects, and sufficient realistic information and expectation, it is expected that PSETs can continue evolving their teacher professional identity into a stronger one and shape a more robust sense of themselves as teachers.

Conclusions and limitations of the study

Our study has shed light on the construction of teacher professional identity among pre-service EFL teachers prior to their actual on-site teaching practices through a teaching practicum program. The findings revealed PSETs' good conceptualisation of teacher professional identity through good articulation on their roles as a teacher. The PSETs demonstrated strong values of professional orientation, yet ambivalent commitment to teaching and uncertain teacher self-efficacy, suggesting needs for more guidance and training prior to commencing the teaching practicum program to foster their instructional skills and readiness to teach. The study offers valuable insights into the complex aspects of professional identity construction that PSETs may undergo prior to their actual in-class teaching experiences, that teacher education programs can consider to develop better programs to produce more competent and committed English language teachers in the future.

The study is limited to a specific cohort of pre-service EFL teachers and by a reliance on self-assessment to measure teacher professional identity; thus, generalisation of the findings may not be applied to all pre-service EFL teachers. Future research should employ longitudinal methods to better understand the long-term development of PSETs' professional identity, and its roles in constructing teacher resilience and retention in the teaching profession. Understanding these aspects is crucial as a review of numerous

studies by Cheng et al. (2023) has reported concerning levels of teacher turnover worldwide, ranging from 10% to 33%, affecting both novice and experienced teachers. Recent studies also demonstrated that resilient teachers are better prepared to manage heavy workloads and challenging classroom situations, which are linked to their professional identity and commitment (Li, 2023; Heng & Chu, 2023), and improved teaching practices (Pozo-Rico et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2023). Additionally, studies to explore mentorship prior to the implementation of teaching practicum can be conducted to investigate its contribution in shaping pre-service teachers' identity and readiness of teaching.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) Indonesia.

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Appendix 1: Modified Teacher Professional Identity Scale (English translated version)

Dear Participants,

We are conducting research to explore the professional identity of students in the English Education Study Program before the implementation of the teaching practicum. In this regard, we kindly request your participation in this research. There will be no consequences for participating in this study. Your identity will remain confidential, and the data obtained will be used solely for research purposes.

It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of three sections: (A) Consent; (B) Participant data; and (C) Teacher professional identity. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions in each section.

If you have any questions, you may contact ikawahyuni_11@students.unnes.ac.id.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The researcher team

Ika W. Lestari, Rudi Hartono, Januarius Mujiyanto, Zulfa Sakhiyya

A. Consent

I have read and understood the terms mentioned above. Therefore, (please select one):

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

B. Participant and teaching practicum data

Name :
 Gender : Male / Female
 Student ID Number :
 WhatsApp Number :

C. Teacher professional identity

(Sample items in an English translated version)

No.	Item	5	4	3	2	1
For items no. 1-9, use the following response options: 5 (very good); 4 (good); 3 (fairly good); 2 (not good); 1 (not good at all)						
1.	How well can you explain difficult concepts so that your students can understand them?					
2.	How well can you apply the best teaching strategies to meet your students' learning needs?					
For items no. 10-18, use the following response options: 5 (strongly agree); 4 (agree); 3 (neutral); 2 (disagree); 1 (strongly disagree)						
10.	Teaching is a noble profession.					
14.	Continuous professional development is important for teachers.					

Appendix 2: The interview protocol (English translated version)

Good morning!

I am currently conducting research on the professional identity of pre-service English teachers. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as a participant in this study.

I would like to request your permission to record all of your responses during the interview to assist me later in transcribing the interview. I will anonymize your real name and any other personal information that arises during the interview in the transcript. I will use the recording solely for the purposes of this research project. Do you consent to the recording? (Yes/No)

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. You are free to decline to answer any questions if you feel uncomfortable. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

If you have no questions, can we start the interview now? (Start recording)

List of questions:

1. How do you perceive the teaching profession and the profession of an English teacher? Why do you think so?
2. How would you describe yourself as a prospective English teacher?
3. How do you define a teacher? What are their duties and responsibilities? Why do you hold that view?

4. How would you describe your abilities as a prospective teacher?
5. How do you assess your proficiency in English as the subject-matter knowledge you teach to students? Why do you think so?
6. How do you assess your own abilities related to your instructional strategies? Why do you think so?
7. How do you assess your own abilities related to classroom management? Why do you think so?
8. How do you assess your ability to engage your students during lessons? Why do you think so?
9. What is your current commitment to teaching?
10. Are you interested in becoming a teacher in the future? Why do you think so?
11. How do you view the value of professionalism in a teacher?
12. In your opinion, what makes a teacher professional? Why do you think so?
13. How do you assess your own level of professionalism as a prospective English teacher? Why do you assess yourself that way?

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Please cite as: Lestari, I. W., Hartono, R., Mujiyanto, J. & Sakhiyya, Z. (2024).

Examining pre-service teachers' professional identity ahead of teaching practicum. *Issues in Educational Research*, 34(4), 1388-1409. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier34/lestari.pdf>