

# **THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH**

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## **Abstract**

Teacher education is widely believed to play a pivotal role in shaping the professional identity of pre-service teachers. Although plethora of prior studies have been conducted to explore this area, a gap was identified in relation to the scarcity of studies conducted to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers on how social interaction contributes to their professional identity construction prior to actual on-site teaching practices. Investigating this area is imperative, since the shaped professional identity, at any extent, may influence their teaching practices and professional identity construction. The present study was conducted to address the gap by exploring the roles of social interaction in shaping professional identity of pre-service English teachers prior to their engagement in on-site teaching practices. Nine pre-service English teachers enrolling into English language teacher education program were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Data were collected through one-on-one semi structured interview, conducted prior to the participants' enrolment in a teaching practicum program. Thematic and interpretive analysis were used in the data analysis. The findings revealed that social interactions through observations and discussions contributed to initial professional identity construction of the pre-service teachers. Different actors within and beyond the teacher education context were reported to play distinct roles in shaping professional identity of pre-service English teachers. The implications were discussed to create more meaningful social interaction that can facilitate stronger professional identity construction of pre-service teachers amid their teacher education.

**Keywords – pre-service teacher, social constructivism, social interaction, teacher identity, teacher professional identity**

## **Introduction**

Teacher education plays a pivotal role in shaping the teacher professional identity of pre-service teachers (PSTs). It also serves as an essential arena for constructing identities (Cobb et al., 2018; Tsybulsky & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019) and negotiating past and future experiences (Banegas, 2022). During their learning of becoming a teacher in teacher education programs, PSTs are equipped with knowledge and skills to become a competent teacher. Of important aspects of teacher professional identity construction is PSTs' sense of selves as a teacher and their understanding of their roles as a teacher (Macías Villegas et al., 2020). Prior studies have revealed

teacher professional identity construction among PSTs through practical experiences they engaged into during their enrolment in teacher education programs, such as teaching practicum (Choi & Park, 2022; Deng et al., 2018; Köksal & Genç, 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Despite their valuable insights, it is also imperative to investigate PSTs' professional identity construction prior to their encounter with real school context, since many believed that PSTs' professional identity is constructed in their early encounter within teacher education (Cheng, 2021; Cobb et al., 2018; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019; Tsybulsky & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019), indicating that PSTs may

have shaped identity prior to their actual encounter with school contexts. However, studies focusing on this aspect are still limited.

Besides PSTs' academic trajectories, their social interaction occurred in teacher education is believed to contribute to the construction of PSTs' professional identity as a teacher. Language teacher identity may develop within the context of teacher preparation program through social interaction and community involvement (Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas, 2022). Prior studies highlighted that PSTs' interactions with different groups of individuals, such as teacher educators, school mentors, and peers (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2014) as well as students and teaching staff members at schools (Köksal & Genç, 2019) could facilitate the construction of professional identity during PSTs' trajectories of becoming a teacher. Social interaction that PSTs have when they are faced with a new learning environment (Teng, 2019; Yuan et al., 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2014) and the prior experiences they have in learning (Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas, 2022) are likely to develop their sense of selves as a teacher. Thus, it can be implied that PSTs who are not yet engaged into actual school-based learning environment as prospective teachers may involve into different interactions from those with actual school-based experiences, bringing different influences and leading to different construction of professional identities.

Despite the significance of social interaction in shaping PSTs' professional identity, research on this area in the context of English language education is underexplored, particularly from the perspectives of pre-service English teachers (PSETs) and ahead of their direct encounter with actual teaching practices in the school context. Previous studies have not extensively explored how social interaction occurring during English

language teacher education program contributes to the shaping of professional identity among PSETs and their understanding on the roles and responsibilities as a future English teacher, despite their lack of actual teaching practice experiences. Exploring this area could shed light on PSETs' unique perceptions and experiences which contribute to the construction of their professional identity as a teacher and provide valuable insights to better prepare PSETs with their actual teaching.

Given the rationale, the present study aimed to address the gap by exploring the roles of individuals in social interaction that PSETs engaged in during their teacher education programs and the forms of social interaction that PSETs perceived to contribute to their professional identity construction as an aspiring English teacher, despite their lack of actual teaching practices. The study is expected to shed light on the development of English language teacher education program, particularly on how social interaction during teacher education program can be cultivated ahead of their direct encounter with on-site teaching practices at schools to bolster the construction of a stronger teacher professional identity among PSETs.

### ***Social Constructivism and (Pre-Service) Teacher Professional Identity Construction***

The present study was underpinned by the theory of Social Constructivism rooted from Piaget and Vygotsky's Constructivism. Social Constructivism emphasizes the active role of individuals in constructing their own knowledge through engagement in experiences and social interaction within relevant groups (Adams, 2007; Gasper in Young & Collin, 2004). Underpinned by this theory, the study holds the assumption that language teacher identity development might occur within the context of teacher education programs,

where social interactions and community involvement play a pivotal role (Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas, 2022). The language teacher identity is formed and reformed via interaction with others in a professional setting (Beauchamp, 2015; Tsybulsky & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019) and defined by one's perceptions of one's cognitive knowledge, self-awareness, voice, faith, and relationships with coworkers, students, and parents (Lap et al., 2022). Thus, it is noteworthy to explore various individuals facilitating the knowledge constructions regarding the teaching profession and how the individuals support PSTs' professional identity construction.

## **Methodology**

### ***Context and Participants***

This qualitative study was conducted at an English language teacher training program at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. As stated in its curriculum, one of the graduate profiles of the teacher education program is to generate future English teachers. The program was designed to prepare future English teachers by equipping them with subject-matter courses in the first year to facilitate students' proficiency in English, pedagogy-related courses in the second year to enhance students' instructional knowledge and skills, research-based courses in the third year, as well as elective courses. Besides theoretical courses, students enrolling in this program are also equipped with practice-based courses such as microteaching and teaching practicum programs.

The study involved nine pre-service EFL teachers (PSETs) who were in their fifth semester. All participants had passed the subject-matter and pedagogy-based courses, yet they had not engaged in actual on-site teaching practices. These participants were purposefully selected based on their academic performance, good ability to articulate their thoughts and

experiences, and willingness to participate in the study. Teacher educators and a few PSETs' recommendations were obtained and used as a basis for the selection of prospective participants. The participant selection process resulted in nine PSETs who met the criteria and who were interviewed. The participants consisted of three male PSETs (Mike, Aaron, Zayden - pseudonyms) and six female PSETs (Ella, Gloria, Georgia, Amanda, Pamela, Violet - pseudonyms).

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The data of the present study were collected using semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol. The interview protocol was initially designed by the first authors, and the initial draft was discussed with all authors. The agreed initial draft was then reviewed by three external experts on teacher identity and teacher professional development. Their feedback was used to revise the initial draft resulting in the finalization of the interview protocol. The interviews were conducted one-on-one using the finalized interview protocol. Prior to the interview, informed consent was obtained from all the participants, ensuring that they were willing to participate, and that research ethics were fulfilled. The interviews were audio recorded and were conducted using Indonesian language to avoid misunderstanding, since it is the shared first language of both the interviewer and the interviewees.

Thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the data following several steps. At first, the audio-recorded interviews were transformed into interview transcripts. Then, the transcripts were read thoroughly and repeatedly to gain the general ideas articulated by the participants. Moving on to the coding process, codes were generated in each transcript. Afterwards, similar codes across transcripts were classified into broader themes. The themes and codes categorized under them were rechecked and refined,

resulting in the finalized themes. These finalized themes were reported as the findings of the present study. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the interview transcripts were sent back to all participants prior to the coding process. The participants were prompted to recheck the transcript to ensure that all their thoughts and experiences were well articulated and documented in the transcripts. The member checking process resulted in eight participants agreeing the transcript, and one participant (Georgia) providing additional comments on her transcript.

### **Findings and Discussions**

The study aimed to explore the roles of individuals and the form of interaction which contributed to PSETs' professional identity construction prior to their direct encounter with on-site teaching practice experiences. It was evident from the interviews that social interaction occurred within and beyond teacher education programs and was significant in shaping PSETs' teacher professional identity. Within teacher education context, PSETs' interactions with peers/fellow PSETs, students, student's parents/guardians, and experienced educators provided valuable insights to bolster their knowledge and sense of selves as a teacher, shaping their identities as a language teacher. The identity construction was also facilitated by PSETs' interaction beyond the teacher education context, through their interaction with family members. These findings confirmed Liu and Li (2023) who asserted that teacher professional identity is shaped inside and outside the classroom.

### ***Family Influences***

The interview found that the PSETs valued the significance of social interaction with their family members in shaping their professional identity as a teacher. As instances, Aaron, Violet, and Mike stated that their interaction with family,

particularly parents, helped them understand the teaching profession better.

*Violet: "My interaction with my parents and my family helped me shape my identity as a teacher. They gave me advice on what to do as a teacher and reminded me to be a good role model."*

*Mike: "My mother is a teacher. I learn a lot from her how to interact with students and what students need nowadays. Her students loved her creative teaching, so I look up to her when I become a teacher."*

*Zayden: "My interaction with my father and my brother inspired me to be a friendly type of teacher. They are P.E teachers, and they often took me to an out-class activities, like swimming or playing volleyball, with their students. I saw myself that they were close with their students. I observed and evaluated their teaching and took notes on important points on what I should do when I become a teacher."*

Violet, Mike, and Zayden, whose parents are teachers, explicitly stated that they learned to be a teacher from their parents' experiences. It indicates a transfer of knowledge and values from parents as teachers to their children as aspiring ones. This finding is in accordance with prior studies. Flores (2020) in their study also found that familial experiences and interactions, particularly from relatives taking profession as a teacher, contributed to the development of teacher professional identity among PSTs. They helped them provide updated information regarding the teaching profession, and this information fostered their awareness on the recent and actual changes in teaching and the work as a teacher. Other prior studies also found that family environment became a foundation for PSTs' beliefs regarding teaching philosophy and construction of teacher identity (Bukor, 2015) and acted as the source person who encouraged PSTs to pursue teacher education and as source of knowledge of teaching (Gholami et al., 2021).

Another finding regarding family influence also showed an extended familial relationship that shaped PSETs' professional identity, as stated by Aaron.

*Aaron: "I learned a lot about how to become a teacher from my family. There are kids in my family, and I learn how to manage kids when managing them. It helps me learn to be patient, so I know how to manage children later when I become a teacher. It trains me to be a teacher."*

This excerpt showed the role of relatives in shaping PSETs' professional identity. Aaron, who had nephews/nieces, mentioned how he learned to become patient when dealing with them. This experience becomes a valuable provision to manage his students in the future. This finding corroborates with other studies. Prabjandee (2019) found that schooling experiences and family shaped PSTs' identities as a teacher. Cheng (2021) also found that PSTs' familial experiences could influence their educational experiences and relationship during their journey in a teacher education program.

The finding of the interview demonstrated that the influence and support from family members or relatives could be a significant aspect which shapes PSETs' professional identity amid the transformative period they undergo from learners to teachers. Interaction that PSETs are involved into with their family/relatives through observations and discussions enables them to gain more insights on teaching and becoming a teacher.

### **Peer Collaboration**

The findings of the interviews revealed that social interaction PSETs had with fellow pre-service teachers/peers played a role in shaping PSETs' professional identity. The sample interview excerpts from Amanda, Gloria, and Ella showed that their interaction with their peers helped them evaluate and improve their teaching.

*Amanda: "I think my fellow PSETs can help me evaluate my teaching, because they also teach English. They can show my weaknesses in teaching from which I can reflect. Of course I should let them know first how I taught, so they know how it went and can give me feedback to improve my teaching."*

*Gloria: "My interaction with my fellow PSETs. We can have a sharing session on our teaching. From this, we can learn from each other."*

*Ella: "Observing my fellow PSETs especially those who have taught, like becoming a tutor. From them I know, oh, becoming a teacher is like that."*

Amanda emphasized the importance of evaluation from her fellow PSETs. She held a belief that her fellow PSETs who also shared the English teaching skills could provide feedback for her teaching, from which she could reflect and improve her teaching. This finding corroborates with Kaymakamoğlu (2019) who also found that peer evaluation and peer observation are important aspects in teacher professional development. Peers' constructive feedback helps teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses, and plan strategies to improve teaching.

Besides providing feedback, peer collaboration could encourage sharing of knowledge and experiences. Gloria stated that she learned from her fellow PSETs through sharing sessions with them from which she obtained new ideas on effective strategies in teaching English. Additionally, Ella also highlighted the importance of observation toward fellow PSETs. By observing them, Ella could learn effective teaching strategies they used in teaching. Understanding the roles of a teacher is an indicator of the construction of teacher professional identity. Thus, it was evident from the interviews that PSETs' peer collaboration with fellow PSETs bolstered their professional identity. The findings resonate prior studies stating that PSTs' professional identity could be developed

by learning by doing with peers (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2014). Additionally, supports and guidance that PSTs received from their peers facilitated them to achieve professional success and teacher professional identity construction (Hahl & Mikulec, 2018; Tsybulsky & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019).

The interview findings highlighted the significant role of peers or fellow PSETs in shaping the professional identity of PSETs prior to their direct encounter with actual teaching practices. Peer observations and peer discussions allow PSETs to learn from each other and exchange ideas, share experiences, and receive constructive feedback. The engagement that PSETs have with their peers could also build a sense of community as aspiring teachers and develop their professional identity as an English teacher.

#### ***Direct Interactions with Students***

The finding showed that PSETs' social interaction with students plays a significant role in shaping their professional identity as a teacher. Zayden, Pamela, Violet, and Georgia explained that their interaction with students helped them understand students' needs and expectations. This understanding was used to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching.

*Zayden: "I asked some students how it felt to be taught by Mr. X. They said they loved it. From the students' point of view, I know what kind of teaching and what type of teacher they prefer. Later when I become a teacher, I can consider their preference, so they will love my teaching."*

*Pamela: "I feel like a teacher when I interact with my students and I get compliments from them, related to my teaching. I love it when my students appreciate me, for example Miss, I like your game. It helps me find my identity as a teacher and it boosts my motivation to teach."*

*Violet: "I helped my lecturers with their community service at an elementary school. I assisted them when they were teaching. I was given a chance to teach as well. It gave me a big picture on how to be a teacher in the future."*

*Georgia: "As pre-service teachers, we need to learn how to teach. When we interact directly with students, we know how students behave in real life. So, we know how to teach them."*

The excerpt implied that Zayden emphasized the importance of understanding students' perspectives toward learning. He shared his experiences of asking students' feedback towards their teachers' teaching and used the information to improve his own teaching. This finding aligns with Hahl & Mikulec (2018) who found that PSTs' teacher identity was shaped by PSTs' rapport with students, students' feedback, and understanding of students' needs. Meanwhile, Violet and Pamela highlighted the importance of direct teaching experiences and the role of students' appreciation towards her teaching. Teaching students directly and gaining appreciation from students regarding their teaching helped them shape their identity as a teacher. Cobb et al. (2018) found that PSTs perceived that social interaction with children or students helped them build a sense of selves as a teacher. Students' acceptance and validation of PSTs' roles as a teacher fosters sense of belonging in the community and sense of identities as a teacher. Additionally, Georgia implied the role of observing students in shaping her professional identity. She stated that by interacting with students, she could understand how they behaved in real life, and this understanding helped her develop more effective teaching. This finding resonates Köksal & Genç (2019) who asserted that interacting with both the pupils and the teaching staff at schools could help PSTs establish a sense of their own professional identity during this process. They underwent a change in their

self-perception, shifting from seeing themselves as students to seeing themselves as teachers.

The findings of the interviews demonstrated that the PSETs had experience of observing students when they were learning in a natural setting (at school). Although the PSETs did not teach them directly, the PSETs made use of the opportunity they had to understand students' characteristics and preferences as well as possible strategies in teaching them. Moreover, the interaction with students allows PSETs to develop instructional strategies, gain practical teaching experiences, and establish rapport with students, which are significant in shaping their professional identity as aspiring teachers.

### ***Parental Involvement***

The interviews indicate that social interaction with students' parents or guardians also plays a significant role in shaping PSETs' professional identity. Two PSETs, Zayden and Gloria, stated that interaction with students' parents helped them understand students' background and learning needs which eventually helped them develop their teaching.

*Zayden: "We don't know our students' background, so we need to seek information from parents. They are the primary source who knows students' learning at home. Parents may have different ways of teaching and managing their children, so I need to talk to them, to get both sides of students' learning, at home and in class."*

*Gloria: "I think it's important to talk to parents to inform them of their children's learning progress. If we let them know, parents will also know what to do to help their children learn better, maybe by taking private courses or things like that."*

Based on the excerpt, Zayden emphasized the importance of understanding students' background as it also influenced their learning. He argued that parents were the

main source of how students learned at home, so he believed that communicating with parents could help him obtain the big picture about his students' ability and needs. This finding corroborates that of Epstein et al. (2018) which highlighted the importance of parental involvement in child's academic achievement. Tang (2020) also found that parental involvement could be done to gain understanding on parents' perspectives and goals on their children's learning. Additionally, teachers' familiarity with parents' expectations and children's needs could bolster teachers' confidence.

Conversely, Gloria put parents as the object who should receive information regarding their children's learning progress and achievement. Instead of taking information from them as what Zayden believed, Gloria argued that as a teacher, she needed to provide information for students' parents on the learning progress their children have achieved. By informing them, parents could help their children improve their learning at home. It indicated that Gloria played her role as a teacher by taking the responsibility to inform parents. Chu (2021) found that PSTs' interaction with a wider group of members in the school community contributed to shape PSTs' teacher identity. The acceptance and recognition that parents/guardians show to PSTs as a teacher could foster a sense of belonging among PSTs.

The findings showed that PSETs valued the vital role of social interaction they should engage in with students' parents or guardians. They consider it as not only helping them shape their teacher professional identity but also allowing them to understand students' background and learning needs. By so doing, they could develop instructional strategies more effectively and provide valuable information for parents or guardians to facilitate their children's learning achievement. This finding also implies the

significance of teaching beyond the classroom through the establishment of partnership between teachers and parents to support students' learning.

### ***Mentoring from Experienced Educators***

The findings showed that the PSETs perceived the pivotal role of social interactions with experienced educators, such as teacher educators, mentor teachers, and former teachers, in shaping their professional identity as aspiring English teachers. The interaction was formed through discussions, consultations, and observations with experienced educators from whom they learned how to become a professional teacher.

*Ella: "Interaction with teacher educator or mentor teachers is important. By observing them, or interacting with them, seeing how they interact with their students. By doing that, it can help me to be a professional teacher."*

*Pamela: "I often consult with my tutor about my English proficiency. His name is Mr. Mirwan. He assessed my English. Once I happened to teach a private course and I explained to him my teaching. He gave me feedback, and from the feedback I evaluated my teaching and my English."*

*Aaron: "I frequently visited my former high school and had a conversation with my former teachers. I asked them how to manage students. They taught me and shared their experiences. I realized that nowadays students' needs are different."*

*Amanda: "I learnt a lot about the teaching profession when I had discussions with my mentor teacher. They explained to us about teacher professionalism, like how to prepare our teaching, how they behave at school, how they deal with our questions. I also observed her when she was teaching, and I learned a lot from her teaching."*

*Amanda: "My teacher educator once invited us to have a meeting. She gathered us and taught us about time*

*management. She also explained to us how to be professional. It taught me to be professional as well as a teacher."*

From the excerpts, it was found that Ella and Pamela highlighted the importance of observations and consultations with experienced educators to understand and improve their teaching. Prior studies also showed the role of guidance from experienced teachers in contributing to professional development (Hahl & Mikulec, 2018; Walters et al., 2020a; Yuan & Lee, 2014). PSTs observed their lecturers or mentor teachers to compare and contrast them and helped them learn from these observations (Yalcin Arslan & Ilin, 2018).

Additionally, Aaron and Amanda reported that discussing with mentor teachers and former teachers could help them improve their teaching and bolster their professionalism as teachers. They could learn how to deal with students and how to plan their teaching effectively. These findings resonate prior studies which showed that engaging with mentors in collaborative projects could develop teacher professional identity among PSTs (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2014).

The findings revealed that social interaction with experienced educators is perceived to contribute to the teacher professional identity construction among PSETs. Interaction PSETs engaged into with teacher educators, mentor teachers, and former teachers through observations and discussions offer mentorship and guidance for them. These interactions offer opportunities for PSETs to learn from professionals, receive constructive feedback, and obtain insights in effective teaching practices, which are influential in shaping their professional identity.

### ***'Observations and Discussions': Primary Forms in Social Interaction to Shape PSETs' Professional Identity Prior to***



***their Direct Encounter with Actual On-site Teaching Practices***

It was evident from the interviews that the PSETs found social interaction with other individuals within and beyond teacher education programs shaped their teacher professional identity. The findings revealed two primary forms of interaction believed to shape the PSETs' professional identity: (a) observations, and (b) discussions. Through these forms, the PSETs could gain insights and develop a sense of selves as a teacher. These findings are in line with Crandall (2000) who pointed out that observations and discussions are forms of practical experiences offered within language teacher education program. Additionally, the findings align with Social Constructivism Theory, as the PSETs' engagement and active roles in interaction with a group of teachers and prospective teachers allowed them to construct their knowledge and experiences (Adams, 2007; Gasper in Young & Collin, 2004), leading to their construction of identity as a teacher. It indicates that PSETs should not only be exposed to theoretical concepts of becoming a teacher but also need direct interaction with relevant groups of people to obtain actual pictures and experiences on how to become a teacher.

Observations were reported to involve family, fellow pre-service teachers (peers), and experienced educators (teacher educators, mentor teachers, former teachers). By observing their family who were also teachers, Mike and Zayden learned how to interact and to build good rapport with students. The PSETs could also train how to deal with students' behaviors by observing children in their family environment as reported by Aaron. Observing teacher educators and mentor teachers was also reported to improve the PSETs' understanding on how to interact with students. In addition, observing peers or fellow pre-service teachers helped them obtain teaching ideas and improve their

teaching. The observations that the PSETs conducted eventually constructed their views and beliefs about teaching, which are essential in shaping teacher professional identity (Nickel & Zimmer, 2019).

Besides observations, discussions with a wider group of individuals were reported as essential in shaping PSETs' professional identity. PSETs' discussions with their family members/relatives allowed them to receive advice on how to become a teacher. The PSETs' decisions to take teacher education were also influenced by their family's suggestions. The PSETs also gained feedback and evaluation through the discussions they engaged in with fellow PSETs and experienced teachers. It was congruent with Kaymakamoğlu (2019) who also found that constructive feedback helped teachers identify their strength and weaknesses, and planned strategies to improve teaching. The findings also demonstrated the pivotal roles of experienced educators and students' parents or guardians in shaping PSETs' professional identity. Through the discussions with them, the PSETs could obtain updated information on students' characteristics as well as students' background and home learning experiences, and report on students' progress and achievement. Prior studies also showed the role of guidance from experienced educators in contributing to professional development (Hahl & Mikulec, 2018; Walters et al., 2020; Yuan & Lee, 2016). Additionally, Chu (2021) argued that the acceptance and recognition that parents/guardians showed to PSTs as a teacher could foster a sense of belonging among PSTs. Discussions with experienced teachers and students were also reported to be essential in PSETs' trajectories. The PSETs could learn how to behave and act as a teacher from the point of view of both teachers and students. Köksal and Genç (2019) stated that interacting with both the pupils and the

teaching staff at schools could help PSTs establish a sense of their own professional identity during this process.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The study aimed to explore the contribution of social interactions in shaping PSETs' professional identity prior to their participation in actual teaching practices at school context. The findings revealed that PSETs' social interaction played a pivotal role in shaping their professional identity, as it provides insights on how to be an English teacher through active engagement with other individuals. It was evident from the study that interaction occurred within and beyond teacher education context, involving family/relatives, experienced educators, fellow PSTs/peers, students, and students' parents/guardians. Additionally, observations and discussions were reported to become the common forms of social interaction which contributed to shaping PSETs' professional identity during their journey of becoming a teacher. Observations allowed PSETs to portray actual practices as teachers, while discussions enabled PSETs to reflect on their constructed knowledge through others' feedback and evaluations and to keep updated with changes in teaching and the teaching profession. The study demonstrated that PSETs' professional identity may not only be shaped by formal education through teacher education programs but also be fostered by social interactions within and beyond teacher education programs, implying the needs to take into account a wider scope of social interaction to shape PSETs' professional identity.

The findings offered some implications towards teacher education programs, particularly regarding PSETs' professional identity construction. Given the findings which emphasized the roles of interaction within and beyond teacher education

context through observations and discussions with diverse groups of individuals, teacher education programs should pay more attention on various aspects within teacher education programs which can bolster PSETs' professional identity construction. Firstly, teacher education curriculum should be developed to cater for parental/familial involvement and collaborative learning. As evident in the study, familial involvement is an influential aspect in PSETs' trajectories of becoming a teacher. Teacher education program could design sharing sessions involving PSETs' parents/guardians to provide information and training for them to support their children's professional identity formation. Teacher education curriculum could also be designed to integrate familial background and experiences and PSETs' learning. In addition, collaborative learning should be encouraged in teacher education programs. PSETs could be encouraged to share their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts on teaching and to learn from each other. Secondly, the involvement of experienced educators, such as teacher educators and mentor teachers, should be improved through active and sustainable engagement with PSETs by providing constructive feedback, guidance and mentoring, observations, and collaborative projects involving PSETs. Intensive and personal mentoring through observations and discussions with experienced educators could equip PSETs with concrete knowledge and experiences regarding teaching before they embark into actual teaching practices at schools. The insights from intensive observations and discussions could help PSETs strengthen their professional identity within themselves.

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