# PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' VOICES ON ACTIVITIES FOSTERING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: FINDINGS FROM INDONESIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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#### **Abstract**

Plethora of studies have widely been conducted to investigate pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' professional identity construction during their learning trajectories of becoming a teacher. However, their voices on activities contributing to the construction of their professional identity remain underexplored. The aim of the present study was to address the gap by exploring pre-service EFL teachers' voices on activities they believed to contribute to their teacher professional identity construction. Employing a qualitative study, nine pre-service EFL teachers were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol were conducted to collect the data. Meanwhile, a thematic analysis was employed in the data analysis. The findings of the study revealed four activities that pre-service EFL teachers believed to bolster their professional identity construction; those were actual on-site teaching practices, internship, sharing sessions, and presentation practices. Additionally, the pre-service EFL teachers' voices on how these activities shaped their professional identity as aspiring English teachers were reported. Implications were offered highlighting how teacher education programs should design their programs and activities to foster stronger teacher professional identity construction among pre-service EFL teachers.

### Keywords – experiential learning, pre-service EFL/ESL teachers, teacher education, teacher professional identity

#### Introduction

Teacher professional identity is believed to be influential and foundational in the development of the quality of education. Shaping teacher professional identity requires not only pedagogical knowledge and skills but also teachers' understanding and commitment in playing their roles and taking responsibilities as teachers. Many studies demonstrated the contribution of a teacher professional strong identity, including changing teachers' instructional practices and engagement with students (Weran & Kuswandono, 2021), creating positive attitudes toward the teaching profession (Zhao & Zhang, 2017), and establishing a sense of belonging with teaching society (Cheng, 2021). Prior studies put more emphasis on teacher professional identity construction practicing teachers, while the dynamics of professional identity construction in its early development within teacher

education (TE) programs are imperative (Friesen & Besley, 2013) as teacher identity formation started early during the initial teacher education program (Cobb et al., 2018; Tsybulsky & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2019).

Teacher professional identity has been believed to develop during the journey of becoming a teacher through TE programs. Knowledge, experiences, and interactions that pre-service teachers (PSTs) are engaged into during their participation in the TE program may aspects become influential construction of their professional identity (Banegas, 2022; Cheng, 2021; Nickel & Zimmer, 2019). Prior studies revealed various activities that PSTs engaged in the TE program, such as teaching practicum (Teng, 2019; Yalcin Arslan & Ilin, 2018), reflections (Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Hahl & Mikulec, 2018; Köksal & Genç, 2019), mentoring (Chan, 2020; Izadinia, 2018),

and metaphors (G. Zhu et al., 2020; J. Zhu & Zhu, 2018). These activities could either facilitate or hinder the construction of a strong and positive teacher professional identity (Farrell, 2011). Hence, involving PSTs' voices regarding activities they perceive or experience which facilitate the construction of their professional identity during their journey of becoming a teacher in TE programs should be conducted.

Studies on teacher professional identity among PSTs, particularly in the context of language teacher English training programs, has gained much attention. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how specific activities offered in the TE programs have contributed to the shaping of PSTs identity. professional Thus, it worthwhile to explore activities within TE programs which facilitate the construction professional identity from perspectives of PSTs as the actors involved in the activities. Exploring this area is significant as perception is a crucial aspect of identity formation (Burke & Stets, 2009); thus, catering for PSTs' perceptions may facilitate their identity construction. Additionally, findings of such a study can provide practical recommendations for TE programs' curriculum development, particularly on how to design and embed activities that PSTs perceive to help them develop their professional identity as a teacher. Given this, the aim of the present study was to address the gap by exploring activities that pre-service EFL teachers (PSETs) perceive to provide significant contributions in shaping their professional identity as an English teacher.

## Methodology Design of the Study

The present study was conducted under a qualitative approach with interpretive paradigm. Studies under an interpretive paradigm put attention on the individuals,

with the aim "to understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.21). In the context of the study, it is subjective since the study aims to explore the voices or perceptions of each PSET on activities fostering professional identity construction which may vary from one to another. Their perceptions were interpreted to provide deeper understanding on teacher professional identity construction among PSETs during their learning in a TE program.

#### **Participants**

To obtain PSETs' voices on activities fostering the shaping of their professional identity during their enrolment in the TE program, nine PSETs enrolling in an English language teacher education program were purposefully selected and invited to take part in the study. The selection of the nine participants was based on three self-determined criteria: (1) their completion of the subject matter and pedagogical courses to ensure their exposure toward teaching and the teaching profession, (2) their participation in the internship offered by their TE program, and (3) voluntary basis justified by an informed consent provided by the participants prior to the data collection, indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

#### Data Collection

The data were collected using a semistructured interview guided with an interview protocol. The protocol addressed two main questions: (a) what activities do you believe to shape your professional identity as an aspiring teacher? (b) how do the activities shape your identity as a teacher? To avoid misunderstanding, the semi-structured interviews were conducted using Indonesian language as the shared first language of both the interviewer and the participants. The interviews were audiorecorded with the participants' consents.

To ensure confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were applied in the presentation of the findings. The pseudonyms of the male students were Andi, Zaki, and Miko, while those of the female ones were Pinta, Enzi, Gita, Gina, Anna, and Fani.

#### Data Analysis

To analyse the data, a thematic analysis for the qualitative data analysis proposed by Creswell & Creswell (2018) was applied. First, all data were transcribed and carefully read through to gain the participants' general ideas captured in the interviews. Next, coding was carried out. Coding is the process of arranging the data by enclosing sections of text or images in brackets and adding a word in the margins to represent each category (Rossman & Rallis, 2012 in Creswell & Creswell, 2018). At last, themes and descriptions representing the final findings of the study generated. were To maintain trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted by returning a coding result to the participants before reporting the findings to ensure that the interpretation of the findings resonates participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### **Findings and Discussions**

The study aimed to explore pre-service English teachers' voices on activities contributing to the shaping of their professional identity as a teacher. The interviews with nine participants revealed four activities within TE program that they perceived to facilitate the construction of teacher professional identity; those were presentation practices, sharing sessions with fellow PSETs, internship, and actual on-site teaching practices.

#### **Presentation Practices**

The findings from the interviews showed that presentation practices played a pivotal role in shaping PSETs' professional identity as a teacher. The interview excerpts

by Andi showed that presentation practices facilitated him to understand teachers' roles through the ability of conducting public speaking to explain concepts and materials to his peers. Andi's interview excerpt also demonstrated the course design that supported the development of a sense of selves as a teacher among PSETs through an assignment requiring him and his group mates to conduct presentation explaining a given topic.

Let's take an example in the class, Ms. I think it's important to offer activities which allow students to explain before others. If students have obtained such a stimulus and get used to speaking before others, I believe it will also be easier for them once they have become a teacher. I happened to experience such an activity in LLA course where my classmates and I were asked to present a topic in front of the class. So, we acted like we're the teacher explaining the topic to our classmates as our students. It was impressive. (Andi)

In a similar vein, the interview excerpt taken from Gina demonstrated that Gina obtained great opportunities of conducting presentation practices in most of courses offered in her TE program. Prompted to conduct presentations in those courses, Gina perceived these activities as a rehearsal or exercise for her to conduct public speaking to explain a certain topic or concept to their peers acting as her students. Most of courses in my institution required us to present before others. So, actually, this presentation is like an exercise for us to speak before others and to explain a certain topic in front of other students. (Gina)

The findings indicated that presentation practices could be a strategy to facilitate the construction of professional identity among PSETs. Through presentation practices, PSETs could experience an activity which resembles teaching where they are responsible to explain concepts to other

To some extent, conducting people. presentation practices will cultivate PSETs' knowledge and ability to deliver content materials. It supported Gracia et al. (2022) who highlighted that learning only took place when pre-service teachers are fully engaged in the process of meaning making and knowledge production. In the context of this study, the PSETs were engaged in a presentation activity where they could understand how it was like to be a teacher explaining concepts to other people, and how they should deliver contents to help others understand the content better. Prior studies (Macías Villegas et al., 2020; Simons et al., 2012) also emphasized the significance of engagement in activities enabling the process of relating theoretical pedagogical knowledge to experiential and practical knowledge to develop pre-service teachers' experiential knowledge and help them interpret who they are.

The findings of the interviews demonstrated that **PSETs** perceived presentation practices as an activity that could bolster the construction of their professional identity during their learning trajectories of becoming a teacher in the TE program. Through presentation practices, PSETs could practice their public speaking which is a crucial skill for teachers as well as their instructional skills as they are responsible of delivering contents and explaining concepts to other people when conducting presentation, resembling a teacher's responsibility in explaining concepts to students. Thus, by conducting presentation practices during their learning in a TE program, PSETs could cultivate their skills relevant to teachers' roles.

#### **Sharing Sessions**

The findings from the interviews revealed that the PSETs perceived sharing sessions among them as a potential activity that could shape their professional identity as an English teacher. As an instance, Gita explained the benefit of sharing sessions

among fellow PSETs in preparing their teaching.

We can have a sharing session with our fellow PSETs. We can share what we have done in preparing our teaching. They can also share their experiences. So, we can learn new things from each other. (Gita)

Besides facilitating them in preparing their teaching, the PSETs also believed that sharing sessions could be a method of evaluating their teaching, as explained by Pinta in the following sample interview excerpt.

I think it's important to have sharing sessions. For example, all pre-service teachers are gathered in one place and share their thoughts and experiences about observing or teaching students. They can share their best practices or challenges they face. I think from this sharing session, I can find my identity as a teacher and motivate myself to be a good teacher. (Pinta)

The interview findings demonstrated that sharing sessions among PSETs could serve as a pivotal activity which contributes to the shaping of PSETs' professional identity as an English teacher. Through sharing sessions, collaboration and collective reflective practices can be cultivated among PSETs and foster their professional identity development. The finding resonates prior studies which highlighted the significance of community of practices (CoP) and teacher collaboration as crucial factors in teacher professional identity development. The exchange of experiences was a crucial element in the formation of a professional identity (Cheng, 2021; Muchnik-Rozanov & Tsybulsky, 2019). A study by Trust and Horrocks (2017)emphasized the importance of community of practice (CoP) serving as a medium for teachers to exchange their experiences and to learn from each other, resulting development of their professional identity as teachers. In the context of Pinta and Gita's voices, sharing sessions could

represent informal community of practice encouraging collective learning facilitating reflective teaching. Additionally, Banerjee et al. (2017) asserted that teacher collaboration helps teachers develop their professional identity, enhance teachers' job satisfaction, and create effective learning environment for students. The finding implies the need to embed sharing sessions in TE curriculum to encourage collaboration among PSETs and to serve as an informal community of practice which bolster stronger professional identity among PSETs.

#### Internship

The interviews with the participants revealed that internship was perceived as an activity that could contribute to their professional identity construction as an English teacher. One participant, Enzi stated "The internship in this department really helped me learn how to be a teacher, Ma'am". Enzi highlighted that internship program offered by her TE program facilitated her trajectories of becoming an English teacher. Through her participation in the internship program, she could be exposed to an authentic school life and experiences which enriched her knowledge about the roles of a teacher. This finding was supported by Zaki's perceptions on the significance of the internship program he joined.

The internship program at this really department helped understand how it is to be a teacher. In the internship, we focus on learning how to be a teacher, including instructional strategies, classroom management, students' characteristics, so I think this internship program has become an effective medium to become professional teacher. (Zaki)

Zaki's interview excerpt emphasized that the internship program contributed to deeper understanding on various aspects of the teaching profession, including instructional strategies, classroom management, and students' characteristics. Thus, he believed that the internship program served as an effective medium which could facilitate him to become a professional teacher in the future. In another interview, Anna provided a more detailed explanation on the significance of an internship program.

I think, an activity that shapes my professionalism as a teacher is internship. In the internship, I observed how a teacher taught English to the students, how students responded to their teacher and their learning process, how teaching was conducted from the beginning to the end, what were the stages, such as greetings in the beginning, followed by explaining the concepts, doing exercises, and having evaluation, etc. I learned a lot from this activity. I managed to learn that what I learned at campus was not necessarily suitable to be applied in real classroom context. In this activity, I also directly observed the teaching and learning process, relating it with theories I have learned and the reality I saw in the classroom. In this internship activity, I was also required to develop teaching instruments, like lesson plans, from which I learned how to manage time to teach professionally. I also should prepare teaching materials and media. These practices in the internship became an exercise for me to learn how to be a professional teacher. (Anna)

According to Anna, an internship program allowed her to have a direct observation on the teaching and learning process at schools and helped her relate theoretical knowledge she obtained at campus with practical knowledge and realities at school settings. Further, Anna explained that an internship program enhanced her practical skills, such as lesson planning and preparing teaching instruments.

The findings of the interview showed that an internship program serves as a crucial activity in shaping the professional identity

among PSETs. These findings consistent with prior studies which highlighted the importance of engaging preservice teachers with authentic practical experiences to bolster their professional identity development. Beauchamp (2015)explained participating in a professional community makes a teacher susceptible to the identityforming influences of this group. Preservice or novice teachers whose identities are still nascent, may be expected to experience the impact of a community context and be mindful of how this setting may shape their identities. Previous studies (Flores, 2020; Simons et al., 2012) showed that practical experiences that pre-service teachers obtained through their participation in an internship program could facilitate the construction of professional identity among them through the possibility of linking and matching theories learned at campus and the reality of teaching at school contexts. In a similar vein, a prior study by Yuan and Lee (2016) also pointed out that an internship program could be a medium for reflective practices for pre-service teachers where they could identify their strengths and weaknesses as aspiring teachers and develop their instructional skills to create effective teaching.

The findings from the interviews showed that an internship program is crucial and perceived to facilitate the professional identity construction among Through their encounter with an authentic real school context, PSETs could improve their understanding on teaching and the teaching profession, relate theoretical knowledge with practical and actual school experiences, and build necessary skills to become a professional and effective teacher. It highlights the need to provide a meaningful and effective internship experience in TE curriculum, allowing **PSETs** to gain comprehensive understanding on various aspects of teaching and the teaching profession.

#### **Actual On-site Teaching Practices**

The findings of the interviews demonstrated the PSETs' beliefs on teaching practices as an activity that could help them shape their professional identity as a teacher. Sample interview excerpts from Anna, Gina, and Gita showed their beliefs and expectation on the significance of actual on-site teaching practices.

I wish to have an actual teaching practice. So, after learning and observing how to become a teacher, including learning how to develop teaching instruments, I wish to practice what I have learned through in-class teaching practices. It's like my own class. I use my own handmade teaching instruments to teach my students for several weeks. I wished to have such an experience earlier in my TE program including teaching in the primary and secondary schools, but it seems that in this department, the actual in-class teaching practice is designed in the sixth semester to teach high school students only. (Anna)

In the excerpt, Anna emphasized the importance of actual on-site teaching practices. Anna expressed the needs to have an opportunity to apply theories they have learned at campus and to develop actual teaching instruments and apply them in actual teaching through field teaching practices during their journey in the TE program. Anna also expressed expectations to have this opportunity earlier in her TE program. In a similar vein, Gina explained the benefits of direct teaching practices in her trajectories of becoming a teacher.

I think it's important to interact with students directly in their natural setting and to provide learning directly. I think as a pre-service teacher, we need to learn how to teach in real classrooms, explaining concepts and materials we designed in advance and teaching them in front of the class. So, I can also learn how to make my students understand

what we explain to them and how to make them engage in and love the learning. (Gina)

In her interview, Gina explained that she found it important to have an opportunity where she could interact with students in their natural setting (at schools). Through direct teaching practices, she believed that she could learn how to teach in an authentic classroom setting, explain concepts to her students, and observe students' engagement and understanding on her teaching.

I need to interact directly with students. I want to have experiences of teaching with various strategies. I will also remember all my students' names, because I love it when my teacher remembers my name as well. It can only happen at schools. (Gita)

Additionally, Gita highlighted the importance of direct interaction with students and direct experiences in applying various teaching strategies. She asserted that practical teaching experiences could only be obtained when PSETs have the opportunity to teach directly in authentic classroom setting.

The interview excerpts indicate that actual teaching practices at schools played a crucial role in shaping the professional identity among PSETs. When student teachers or pre-service teachers immersed in a teaching community, they create their identities as educators (Macías Villegas et al., 2020). A study by Kaymakamoğlu (2019) showed that direct teaching practices allowed pre-service teachers to apply theories they have obtained at campus in real classroom context and develop their practical skills in teaching. The findings of the present study which highlighted the importance of having direct interaction with students in authentic classroom setting through direct teaching practices are also consistent with a study by Izadinia (2016). In her study, Izadinia found that direct interaction with students enabled pre-service teachers to understand classroom dynamic and students' needs.

The findings implied that actual on-site teaching practices are a crucial activity in shaping PSETs' professional identity as a teacher. Through actual on-site teaching practices, PSETs could develop their understanding about teaching and the teaching profession, apply theories into practices, and develop skills they need to become a professional teacher in the future. Additionally, PSETs should be given the opportunity to have actual on-site teaching practices which enable them to apply their knowledge theoretical in authentic classroom settings. Given these findings, actual on-site teaching practices should be integrated in TE curriculum, ensuring that PSETs will get opportunities to conduct actual teaching in various school settings, to help them develop their instructional skills and bolster a stronger professional identity as a teacher.

#### Engaging in Experiential Learning: A Brief Recap of PSETs' Expectations on Activities Fostering Their Professional Identity Construction in a TE Program

The present study aimed at exploring PSETs' voices on activities fostering the professional identity construction among them within their journey of becoming a teacher in the TE program. The findings from the interviews revealed four activities they perceived to facilitate them in shaping their professional identity; those were presentation practices, sharing sessions with fellow PSETs, internship, authentic teaching practices at schools. These four activities emphasized on the opportunity of engaging in experiencebased activities as a part of their learning trajectories of becoming a teacher by gaining more knowledge and applying their understanding in practical context. These findings highlighting the practical and experience-based activities could be further analysed using Kolb and Kolb's (2017) Experiential Learning Theory. The theory explains that effective learning takes place four stages: concrete experience,

reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The four activities found in the present study reflected the four stages of Experiential Learning, suggesting the significance of firsthand experiences that PSETs should engage in to facilitate the construction of their professional identity as a teacher.

Internship and authentic teaching practices could serve as concrete experiences in classroom setting to PSETs. Meanwhile, sharing sessions with fellow PSETs offered an opportunity for them to reflect on their knowledge, understanding, experiences. Through sharing sessions, they could also identity their strengths and weaknesses as aspiring teachers. Underpinned by Experiential Learning theory, sharing sessions could serve as the stage of Reflective Observation. Another finding of the study, presentation practices allowed PSETs to develop their theoretical understanding and apply understanding to explain concepts to others. This could reflect the stage of abstract conceptualization under Experiential Learning theory. At last, internship and authentic teaching practices could serve as Active Experimentation under Experiential Learning Theory through which PSETs could try and apply theories and concepts they have learned in authentic situations at schools. Thus, the four activities found in the present study aligned with Kolb's Experiential Learning theory emphasized on the crucial aspects of learning including concrete experiences and reflective practices.

Prior studies also showed the significance activities experience-based of and reflective practices in shaping the professional identity among pre-service teachers. A study by Yuan and Lee (2016) pointed out that pre-service teacher education is regarded as a crucial phase in the formation of participants' professional identities, during which time they gain an understanding of what it means to be a teacher through hands-on instructions and reflective exercises in both academic coursework and teaching practicum. Additionally, prior studies (Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Hahl & Mikulec, 2018; Köksal & Genç, 2019; M. F. Teng, 2017; Yalcin Arslan & Ilin, 2018) found that practicum experiences and reflection become crucial aspects in the development of teacher professional identity. A study by Banerjee al. (2017) also emphasized importance of teacher collaboration and discussions among pre-service teachers as a way to enrich their knowledge and pedagogical skills. The findings indicate that PSETs should be engaged in experience-based activities which could serve as a medium to shape their professional identity as a teacher. Thus, an integration of various meaningful experience-based activities should included into TE programs' curricula to foster the construction of professional identity among PSETs during their participation in the TE program.

#### **Conclusions and Implications**

The present study aimed to explore PSETs' perceptions on the activities during their participation in TE program that fostered the construction of professional identity as a teacher. By interviewing nine PSETs, the findings revealed four activities that they believed to contribute to their professional identity construction. The activities were presentation practices, sharing sessions among PSETs, internship, and actual onteaching practices. Presentation practice allows PSETs to practice their speaking skills public as well instructional skills, particularly in delivering concepts and materials students, leading to the growth of their pedagogical skills relevant to their roles as a teacher in the future. Sharing sessions could serve as a pivotal activity which contributes to the shaping of PSETs' professional identity as an English teacher. Through sharing sessions, collaboration

and collective reflective practices can be cultivated among PSETs and foster their professional identity development. An internship program allowed PSETs to improve their understanding on teaching and the teaching profession, to relate theoretical knowledge with practical and actual school experiences, and to build necessary skills to become a professional and effective teacher. At last, through actual on-site teaching practices, PSETs could develop their understanding about teaching and the teaching profession, apply theories into practices, and develop skills they need to become a professional teacher in the future. The findings of the study aligned with Experiential Learning theory proposed by Kolb, where the four activities reflected the stages of Experiential learning cycle including concrete experience. reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active and experimentation.

The study offered implication for the development of TE curriculum and the policy that TE curriculum could take in relation to facilitate the construction of a stronger professional identity of PSETs during their learning trajectories in the TE program. Firstly, TE curriculum should integrate more meaningful experiencebased activities such as presentation, sharing sessions, internship, and actual onsite teaching practices in the school setting, since the study showed that these activities teacher professional identity fostered construction for PSETs. Secondly, PSETs should be given more opportunity to engage in activities during learning that could encourage discussions and reflective practices, such as through presentation practices and sharing sessions designed in a structured form such as through classroom learning or through seminars or workshops. Through their engagement with these activities, PSETs could share knowledge and experiences with their fellow PSETs. Additionally, TE programs should provide meaningful and authentic

school-setting experiences to their PSETs through internship and actual teaching practices. PSETs should be given an opportunity to engage in the school context where they could gain insights and experiences of becoming a teacher in real school setting. It could be achieved by providing internship and actual teaching practices for PSETs where they could learn from experienced teachers as well as conducting actual teaching practices to real students in the actual classroom setting. By so doing, it is expected that PSETs could bolster their professional identity as a teacher during their trajectories becoming a teacher in the TE program.

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