

## TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING TWO FACETS OF EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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### **Abstract**

*In the transition from a student to a teacher, pre-service teachers must face various challenges to construct their identity as professional teachers. Teacher identity is a complex and challenging concept because the question of "who we are" evokes a vast array of complementary and contradictory responses. The focus of the study is to investigate the process of teachers' identity construction of two female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers who participated in the teaching training program by concerning two facets, namely student-teacher relation and values and professionalism. This research methodology is framed in qualitative research, in which the data is obtained through interviews. The study results revealed that in terms of the student-teacher relation and values, both pre-service teachers found difficulties in balancing their authority and solidarities when facing their students. Meanwhile, in terms of professionalism, the first pre-service teacher tends to put her identity first, while the second pre-service teacher tends to put her assigned identity first. These findings call for attention to future research to look in detail regarding the place of religious beliefs in ELT, specifically as they relate to the teacher's sense of spiritual identity. Some recommendations and directions for future practice and research are also discussed thoroughly.*

**Keywords:** *EFL Teachers, Teacher Identity Construction*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Pre-service teachers are obliged to shape their identities as teacher candidates. These identities are formed during their academic career, mainly through training in teaching and pedagogy (Ivanova & Mincne, 2016). Along with their academic studies, teaching practice plays a significant role in constructing pre-service teachers' identities. Since pre-service teachers get valuable real-world experience working in real schools by teaching practice, pre-service teachers obtain several advantages in terms of professional construction. According to Chan (2013), "through such practice, pre-service teachers are exposed to valuable opportunities to acquire professional knowledge, improve their teaching skills, and gain teaching competence." Based on the studies, pre-service teachers are provided with opportunities to gain professional knowledge, instructional abilities, and competency through participation in teaching practice.

Furthermore, in the transition from a student to a teacher, pre-service teachers must go through various challenges to construct their identity as a teacher. The construction of teacher identity is a dynamic and complex process in which individuals experience constant

struggle and change due to internal and external factors (Bloomfield, 2010; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Trent, 2013; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). Constructing identity as a pre-service teacher is often associated with professionalism. There is also a tension in ELT professionalism regarding the disjuncture between claimed identity and assigned identity. The construction of identity is supposed to include the position an individual has claimed and the identity assigned by external others to individuals, and negotiation of identities occurs when these two forces clash (Reeves, 2018). Teachers often find themselves striving to be professionals, but the perceptions of those around them do not reflect these aspirations.

However, according to Johnston (2008), the struggle to build an identity as a pre-service teacher is not only about professionalism, but there is also a more meaningful aspect to look at, namely the relationship between teachers and students. Johnston (2008) stated that "the teacher-student relationship is the foundation of moral interaction in language teaching." This aspect has a significant impact on building relationships between teachers and students since this aspect consists of the teacher's moral rights and responsibilities. In addition, it is supported by the fact that pre-service teachers have a reasonably close age range with students, so constructing identity-related to teacher-student relationships must be considered quite complicated and challenging.

Until recently, studies that investigated teachers' identity construction have been conducted in the contexts of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Sachs, 2001; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Timostuk & Ugaste, 2010; Chong, 2011; Trent, 2016; Nghia & Tai, 2017; Salinas & Ayala, 2018). Consequently, there is a lack of studies on teacher identity construction in two facets: student-teacher relation and values and professionalism. Therefore, the researcher attempts to explore two undergraduate English as a foreign language (EFL) female student-teachers' identity construction processes in the aspect of the student-teacher relation and values and professionalism in senior high school. The present study intends to answer the following question: How do two female EFL pre-service teachers construct their identity in terms of the student-teacher relation and values and professionalism throughout their undergraduate teacher training program?

## **B. METHOD**

This research focused on identifying English pre-service teachers' identities by employing a qualitative approach during their teaching practice. The researcher needed to gather in-depth data of the English pre-service teachers' experiences during their teaching practice to achieve this aim. As stated by Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2010), "qualitative inquiry seeks to understand and interpret human and social behavior as it is lived by participants in a particular social setting" (p. 420). This research will explore the experiences gained by English pre-service teachers during their teaching practice to find out their identity in terms of the student-teacher relation and values, and professionalism.

The participants of this study were two individuals who were selected by utilizing purposive sampling. They are from the second semester of the English master's education student program, namely Anya and Anisa (pseudonyms). They used to be English pre-service teachers in senior high school. At that time, they were the seventh-semester students

who had done their teaching practice in two different schools and different periods. Therefore, the researcher assumed them to have the qualities that the researcher needed. They were all females since they tended to cooperate and collaborate more than their male counterparts (Coates, 2015; Stockard, Van De Kragt, & Dodge, 1988). As there is also a risk of the distortion of meaning and interpretation during the analysis process, the participants were explicitly involved during the analysis process (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The findings and the analysis result were shown to the participants to ensure the data were correctly interpreted. The comments from the participants were included to enhance the trustworthiness of the results.

Anya is a 24-year-old Indonesian female student-teacher. She participated in a school placement during her seventh term in the English Education department in a university in Surakarta, Central Java. She taught tenth-grade high school students during her school placement from September 2018 to November 2018. In contrast, Anisa is a 23-year-old Indonesian female student-teacher who participated in a school placement during her seventh term in the English Education department in a university in Padang, West Sumatera. She taught tenth-grade high school students during her school placement from September 2019 to November 2019.

The instrument that the researcher implemented to respond to the research questions was a face-to-face interview via Zoom to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences during their teaching practice and identities. The data obtained from the interviews were the primary data of this research.

### **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### *Result*

The teacher training program has shaped two female pre-service teachers' identities in terms of two facets: the student-teacher relation and values and professionalism. The data analysis found that the two participants faced the same situation but differed in how they reacted. In this case, the researcher wanted to discuss this analysis by describing the participants' experiences. Therefore, this section has two parts; the first part reveals Anya's teacher identity construction, and the second part is Anisa's teacher identity construction.

#### *Anya's Teacher Identity Construction*

##### *The student-teacher relation*

Regarding the student-teacher relationship, Anya had concerns about balancing authority and solidarity. She wanted to be a firm teacher but not too strict, and she tried to establish a close relationship with her students without getting disrespected by them.

“During the school placement, there was a self-reflection session. When I did a self-reflection back then, I found a lot of weaknesses. [...] the school placement was my first time teaching a classroom with a lot of students. So, I did not feel confident at first [...] And then, I very often wondered how to be more firm toward the students, but not too strict with them. [...] So, [I can be] close to the students but [the closeness] doesn't make the students to be disrespectful.”

In this case, an example of her experience of establishing her authority as a teacher was shown when she taught grammar with examples using sentences in the class.

“Sometimes, the students would suddenly asked, questioning the teacher’s teaching. No, not what is being taught. What was it? [...] He [a student] criticized why the example given was like that, it did not seem to make sense. Then, I tried my best to answer with the reasons why I chose that example so that he would easily understand. However, there was not enough time to explain [...] it seemed that the student was not satisfied with my answer. [...] I felt discontent because my student was not satisfied with my answer.”

One of the students had different views regarding the example the teacher gave. They criticized something outside of the topic discussed. The pre-service teacher had tried to use her authority to direct the student back to the topic at hand. However, due to the limited time and the student’s refusal of the teacher’s answer, no common ground was found from the discussion. Furthermore, the pre-service teacher had experienced an imbalance between authority and solidarity.

“This [finding balance between solidarity and authority] was also one of my concerns during the school placement. There are times when the students were somewhat disrespectful [...] For example, there was, uh, the students just finished their exercises [during Physical Exercise lesson]. [...] When my [teaching] partner and I arrived on time, there was a student who complained that our arrival is very early; even though we entered right when the bell rang. At that time, I just gave a lenience, a choice, if they were still tired, they could rest for a few minutes because my [teaching] partner and I had to prepare before the lesson [...] there was a lenience for them to rest, but they should still study. [...] It’s okay to be lenient when it is not forced.”

At first, she showed leniency and friendliness to establish solidarity at the beginning of the semester by providing fun learning activities (e.g., reviewing lessons using Kahoot). However, at some point, Anya felt that a student had disrespected their teachers by being rude. Previously, the students were at the Physical Exercise class, and they were tired. One complained that the teachers arrived too early even though they entered the class right on time. Anya tried to establish her authority but still showed leniency by giving some time to rest before starting the lesson.

#### *Values and professionalism*

As a teacher, Anya strove to fulfill the institutional criteria of professionalism (assigned identity); however, she would put her teaching principles first (claimed identity).

“Professionalism has two sides in my opinion. Professionalism based on my own principles, and professionalism according to educational institution. [...] I agree to those professionalism values [from educational institution], but not all of them would be applicable in my opinion. A professional teacher should be able to adapt. We can’t always follow the syllabus down to a T. Sometimes, we also have to modify what was being taught with the students’ ability and needs, the available facilities, and so on.”

Anya reasoned that not every institutional principle would be applicable in every situation. She believed that teachers should consider the problem and the condition and adapt accordingly, primarily to provide for the student’s needs. It is also interesting to note that Anya had not experienced any significant internal conflict regarding her teacher identity during her school placement, as she expressed below:

“From my personal experience, there is no concrete example [of having an internal conflict between claimed identity and assigned identity]. In my opinion, as a teacher, I usually tend to [try to] fulfill others’ expectation. However, there would be a point where

there is a lack of or no appreciation, it would eventually decrease one's motivation to fulfill those expectations. So, hypothetically speaking, I might try to fulfill the expectations at first, but if the appreciation did not balance [the expectations], I might lose my spirit, if I were underappreciated."

As stated, Anya still did her best to fulfill external others' expectations; however, she mentioned that if, hypothetically, there was a lack of or even no appreciation for her hard work, her motivation to fulfill those expectations would wane. Concerning getting a work offer outside of her capabilities as an English teacher, Anya's answer was as follow:

"I might protest [laughs], because it [teaching Bahasa Indonesia] is already beyond my responsibilities [...], the teaching method would be different because the goals would be different. [...] So, the first thing that I am concerned with is my competencies as I am not a Bahasa Indonesia teacher. I would not dare to take Bahasa Indonesia teacher's job while we want the students to understand, to succeed in learning. [...] not because of the appreciation but because of my own competencies."

Anya expressed that she would tend to refuse jobs beyond her capabilities. For example, if she was offered a position to teach Bahasa Indonesia temporarily, she felt she lacked the appropriate competencies to teach that particular language. She had a principal to ensure that the students would succeed in their learning; therefore, she would refuse the offer because she felt inadequate as a Bahasa Indonesia teacher.

#### *Anisa's Teacher Identity Construction*

##### *The student-teacher relation*

Anisa once struggled with maintaining her authority as a pre-service teacher. This is evident in her retelling of the story when a student asked some questions in her class.

"I did my internship in a prestigious school in Padang, so the students' expectation toward the intern teachers was high. [...] Once, a student asked about the learning material that I had explained. The question was very interesting and unique, but I was not sure with my answer. Because I have a principle that teacher does not know everything [not an all-knowing being], I did not hesitate to redirect the question, are there any student who knows the answer, because I did not know and understand [the topic] related to the question yet. I also did not hesitate to discuss with my supervisor and to relearn [the topic] related to the question. This principle is what I used to close the gap related to students' expectation toward me."

Anisa recounted that a student unexpectedly disrupted the lesson during the learning and teaching process by asking several questions. Anisa hesitated to answer those questions because she felt that those were irrelevant to the subject she had been taught. This situation caused Anisa to feel anxious about her image as a pre-service teacher. As a reaction, she used her authority as a pre-service teacher by asking for assistance from her supervisor. Regarding solidarity, Anisa has had an experience in which she thought she was not respected as a pre-service teacher because one of the students failed to appreciate her role as a pre-service teacher. She recounted her experience as follow:

"I was quite close with the students and I also have a small stature so that the students often forgot that I was their teacher. They saw me as a big sister. I had no problem with that. However, there once [an event] that made me feel quite disrespected [as a teacher], [it] was when a student embraced my shoulders. My reaction was only silence and not

reprimanding them because I was not sure how to reprimand them; I did not want her to feel embarrassed in front of her friends. After that, I reported it to my supervisor, and my supervisor reprimanded the student. Other than that, some students also once forced me follow their Instagram. At that time, I just said yes. However, perhaps because they were too enthusiastic and thought I would not get angry, they took my phone that I placed on the table and opened my Instagram [account] then followed their own accounts [laughs] it was very funny but at the same time I felt disrespected. My reaction was to keep quiet and reported it to my supervisor.”

This is proven in a situation where one of the female students greets her by embracing her shoulder spontaneously. Anisa thought that her student had no intention of doing that because their relationship was getting closer. On another occasion, some students invaded her privacy by taking her phone to make her Instagram account follow the students’ accounts. Anisa expressed that she still felt a dilemma in balancing solidarity while being a pre-service teacher. It was hard for her to decide if she should continue to be pleasant and humble as she had been or become a strict teacher.

#### *Values and professionalism*

Besides authority and solidarity, Anisa also had difficulty balancing her values and professionalism, as she had expressed as follow:

“[...] A professional teacher should also work as ordered even if they have internal problems related to family, friends, and so on. I valued myself as a quite professional teacher because I was aware that I was very dependent on the school where I interned in because it was related to the assessment in my study. [...] Before the teaching practice, I was typically someone who was quite cold and keeping a good image. [...] However, my supervisor reprimanded me to change my cold self to a warmer and friendlier person. It was against my principles. however, I was aware could not do anything as I was only an intern teacher while my supervisor was a senior teacher with a lot of teaching experiences. I did not have any other choices than to force myself to be what my supervisor expected. [...] I felt tired to be what my supervisor expected, but I always remembered that I was only an intern and needed a good assessment from the school.”

Anisa recounts that while conducting her responsibilities as a pre-service teacher, she was required to fulfill the institution's expectations where it was not under her values or principles. She claims that she had no other choices as she deemed her supervisor was a senior with more experience than her, and she needed a good assessment from the school. Therefore, she strove to meet the supervisor's expectations even if they were against her values.

Moreover, she was also often assigned to do jobs not under her responsibilities. She recounts the event as follow:

"I once experienced the same thing where I have to do something beyond my responsibilities such as to be a substitute teacher from other subject or additional time for work. I was typically an obedient teacher with every orders in that school because I was aware that I had no power to refuse. I was only an intern and I did not want to cause trouble that would affect the assessment. At that time, I once went to school only to enter [teach] in the biology class because the teacher had a training program outside of town. My reaction and action was only to be obedient and tried my best to do my tasks even if they were not my responsibilities. It clashed with my life principle that I would only do things that I have to do. However, I thought that sometimes there were situations where I

needed to not follow my principle for my own safety."

Anisa recounts that she was once asked to teach in a science class to replace a teacher who could not attend in one case. Anisa thought it clashed with her values and principles, but she kept fulfilling that because she did not want to cause any difficulties that might affect her position as a pre-service teacher.

#### *Discussion*

A dilemma was the cause of the collision to decide between authority and solidarity and values and professionalism. As in the case of the first teacher, Anya, when it came to balancing authority and solidarity, the student complained about the schedule or the time to enter the class again after their previous activity (Physical Exercise class). As a teacher, of course, Anya followed the schedule to enter the class before teaching the student; nonetheless, due to her wanting to be seen as a good teacher for her student, she provided the student to have extra time to rest even though it was the time for them to start the new session.

Now, the thing was – since Anya might consider herself, still, as a pre-service teacher who had little teaching experience and had difficulties balancing her authority and solidarity, her feeling was mixed. Perhaps, because of her age gap, the student was disrespecting her by underestimating the time and her role as the pre-service teacher in the class. This case was also followed by Barcelos's (2001) findings which she claimed that "On the last day of class when I asked them to evaluate the course orally, a student said that I should have been stricter and more demanding and should have imposed more discipline. Another student commented: "You can't be like that with students (do whatever they want) because they will take advantage of the situation." (p. 88).

The researchers argued that it was not her fault for being kind, and besides, a large majority of teachers yearned to be seen as exemplary teachers by the students. The researcher understood that there was a reason Anya gave the student extra time to rest. That was because she did not want to ruin the bond that she had constructed with the student beforehand; nevertheless, because of that reason as well, as in line with Barcelos's case, the student took advantage of Anya's kindness as they knew that she might not be angry and as strict as the other teachers.

As for the value and Professionalism, Anya seemed to put her claimed identity more than her assigned identity. Surprisingly, she had no significant internal conflict like others. Nevertheless, her further elaboration was that if her hard work did not get any appreciation or lack of something similar, she might have her motivation diminished, resulting in making her not want to proceed with what she had to do in the first place as a teacher in that area of the field.

The researcher would argue that this thing is sort of similar to the experience of Joana (Johnston book), where she says, "*I think I could be; but I'm not, at school, because I don't have time to organize my classes in such a way that they would look like, as if, well, they are organized by a professional person; because I'm not working as much as I could perhaps to get the most of the book, and the time I have; well, and all other possibilities. But I'm not going to do more because first of all, I don't have time, and secondly, it's not paid enough to work more, I think; and then I'm not going to do something, as I said I'm not an altruist, and it's a cheat-off what we're doing, with the, well, the Ministry of*

*Education, and what's going on in this country, I mean the work you have and the money you get for it, I think it's a huge misunderstanding and I'm not going to put up with it. (Johnston, 1997, p. 705)''.*

In this case, the point itself was the same, and that was about not wanting to work if they did not earn some appreciation for their hard work. In addition, Anya would not accept the offer to replace another teacher whose subject was different from her principal, English. Based on the findings above, the researchers would argue that Anya's refusal towards the extra job was because she was incompetent in a field that she had not mastered. In contrast, in the case of Joana from the book of Johnston, she would refuse the extra job because of a lack of appreciation and salary that did not get raised, even if she accepts the additional employment in the first place.

For the second participant, Anisa, the researchers would argue that she was too soft towards her student. Perhaps, it was because she had an intense internal conflict between authority and solidarity and her initial moment of becoming a teacher. The researchers would argue that the way how Anisa handled the situation when the student began asking irrelevant questions towards her while being hesitated to use her authority to inform them that they were irrelevant had shown how low the power of her authority and solidarity was, making her as though she was the one who got controlled by the student in the class.

In Anisa's case, since she was just a pre-service teacher at that time, it was customary to say that every beginner would have lots of lacks because it was their first time. So, the researchers would argue that lack of experiences was one of the main issues, and the mind to encounter things like that was one of the things that the second participant had to practice. This could be proven by how she asked guidance from her supervisor about the event she had encountered with the student who asked irrelevant questions about her in the class.

In the second case of Anisa as a pre-service teacher who was still having a problem in balancing her authority and solidarity, the moment one of her students acted too friendly when they were greeting while embracing her shoulder, to the point where it eliminated the limitation gap between a teacher and a student, the researchers would argue that it was the time for her to speak up, using her authority to inform that the way how the student treated her was not right. Yet, she kept silent and let it go that way before asking for her supervisor's assistance again for the internal conflict that she had to face the issue. The researchers meant that a bond was necessary; however, if the event and the bond obliterated the student's respect for the teacher, that was when it was wrong and had to be fixed by her as a teacher at that time. The researchers would argue that it was because her age gap with the student was not that far, as well as the second participant's youthful appearance that made her look as if she was at around the student's age had made the student dared to do so towards her despite the different role between them in the class, and area of the school.

This thing is in line with Maria Barcelos (2001) from Johnston's book, who claimed that because of her slight appearance, the students often mistook her as another student. Her age, her young appearance, and the fact that she had once been a student at that university made her feel insecure about her authority as a teacher. This aspect is probably familiar to many new teachers in their workplaces. Nevertheless, she thought it was especially true for herself, first, because of the age difference between the other teachers and her, as she already mentioned, and second, because she was the only teacher who did not have a Master's yet.



These two aspects probably made her more self-conscious of her authority as a teacher in class and perhaps more susceptible to students' comments and criticisms (p. 85).

Regarding the values and professionalism in Anisa's case – she would still fulfill the request of teaching another subject outside of her area under the circumstances of not yearning to have any difficulties that might affect her position as a pre-service teacher. The researchers would argue that it was in line with Bea from Johnston's book that said, "So, I mean, if I don't do things to see myself as a professional, nobody else is going to. And it is essential, self-esteem-wise, or else you feel used, you know, and that will translate in the classroom. (B. Johnston, Mahan-Taylor, & Pawan, 2001).

In this case, the researcher would assume that Anisa noticed that she felt being used as it could be proved by how she realized that it was clashing with her values and principles as a teacher, yet still doing it because she was afraid if things happened severely, in case she rejected the offer. Also, based on her action and decision, it was contrary to Joana from Johnston's book who said that she would not do things outside of the agreement, especially if there were no appreciation nor extra salary that could make her want to do so (Johnston, 1997, p. 705).

Based on what had been elaborated above, the researcher would argue that both participants were having substantial issues in balancing their authority, solidarity, values, and professionalism as pre-service teachers to their students, which was also supported by the fact that it was their first time. It was what many young teachers would always encounter during their first time teaching things in a class.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

From the two participants' stories, the researcher found that Anya and Anisa faced a similar problem. They encountered difficulties balancing their authority and solidarities as pre-service teachers when facing their students. The challenges in balancing authority and solidarity was illustrated through experiences of both pre-service teachers during school placement.

The first pre-service teacher, Anya, expressed her concerns about how to be a firm but trying to become not too rigid as a teacher, wanting to have a close relationship with the students instead. On the other hand, the second teacher, Anisa, had experienced the difficulty of maintaining closeness with students without losing her authority as a teacher.

Moreover, the first teacher, Anya, prioritized claimed identity that she had even though she also tried to meet the expectations of the assigned identity. While the second teacher, Anisa, tended to rule out a claimed identity to meet the expectations of assigned identity.

This study has revealed both sides of the construction of teacher identity, but the researcher believes there is an equally important side, that is religion. Religious values come from outside the classroom, yet the beliefs and values of both teachers and students affect classroom interaction in fundamental ways, and religious identities that might go unchallenged outside the school can find themselves in confrontation within it. Therefore, it is essential for future research to look in detail regarding the place of religious beliefs in ELT, specifically as they relate to the teacher's sense of spiritual identity.

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