LLT Journal, e-ISSN 2579-9533, p-ISSN 1410-7201, Vol. 28, No. 1, April 2025, pp. 87-105

LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/LLT
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH REFLECTIVE MENTORING DURING TEACHING PRACTICUM

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https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v28i1.9601
received 22 August 2024; accepted 7 April 2025

Abstract
Mentoring in language teacher education has been widely acknowledged to foster pre-service teachers' reflective practice. While previous studies have focused on pre-service teachers' practical teaching skills, their cultivation of inner professional selves remains under-researched. For this reason, this study aims to examine how reflective mentoring catalyzes EFL pre-service teachers' professional identity construction during teaching practicum. A case study design was employed in this study. Two mentors (one male and one female) and four EFL pre-service teachers (two males and two females), who were purposefully selected, participated in this study. Data were collected through video-recording ten mentoring sessions and interviewing both the mentors and pre-service teachers. Thematic analysis was then employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that the reflective mentoring catalyzed the pre-service teachers' professional identity construction during teaching practicum by creating a systematic and supportive space for reflecting on temporal, theoretical, and practical experiences. The space arose from five factors in the mentoring, including systematic processes of reflection, non-judgmental and supportive mentors, interpersonal bonds and interconnectedness, past and present connections, and theory-practice continuums. Reflection particularly contributed to the identity construction since it allowed the pre-service teachers to examine their professional experiences and derive meaning for their professional identities. Based on the findings, this study suggests that mentoring during teaching practicum should encompass both the practical aspects of teaching and the inner professional selves of EFL pre-service teachers.

Keywords: EFL pre-service teacher, professional identity construction, reflective mentoring, teacher education

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Introduction

Mentoring in language teacher education has been widely recognized as a driving force for reflective practice, fostering reflectivity and transformation in teachers' professional development (cf. Ardi et al., 2025; Golder et al., 2020; Othman & Senom, 2020; Tutyandari et al., 2022; Wulandari & Purnamaningwulan, 2024). In the context of EFL pre-service teachers' (PSTs, henceforth) teaching practicum, the reflective dimension of mentoring focuses on the continuous examination of their teaching practices and professional experiences. As such, the mentor-PST relationships in reflective mentoring assist PSTs in interpreting, shaping, and critically scrutinizing their professional selves and practices, whose outcomes further enhance the quality of their professional development.

While the mentoring relationship is often viewed from the lens of mentors' feedback, how PSTs shape the relationship through their professional identity construction during mentoring and as a result of its reflective conversation remains a relatively-unexplored area. As Farrell et al. (2020) have raised a crucial issue on the discrepancy between teachers engaged in reflections and the reflection activity itself, with teachers' personal aspects being largely left out of the reflective process, EFL teacher education programs need to address PSTs' inner selves by understanding their personal and professional being and becoming, hence accentuating the idea of teacher-as-person. In this regard, addressing PSTs' professional identity construction during reflective mentoring helps them perceive and embody their professional roles during teaching practicum.

As the formation of teacher identity is negotiated and re-negotiated across time and place, impacted by teachers' previous experiences, shaped by the present situation, and evolved as teachers reflect on their professional activities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Buchanan, 2015; Flores, 2020; Sadeghi & Bahari, 2022), reflective mentoring serves as an avenue for PSTs to cultivate the essence of becoming teachers, especially in light of the tensions and challenges faced in teaching practicum. While mentoring has been recognized to facilitate the smooth transition of novice teachers from education programs to professional roles in ESL contexts (Othman & Senom, 2020), its role in catalyzing self-development of PSTs during teaching practicum in the EFL contexts offers a fresh perspective on professional identity construction. In the EFL contexts, English teachers commonly function as primary language models, making mentoring essential for helping PSTs enhance pedagogical skills, cultural and linguistic awareness, and adaptive teaching strategies. Hence, teaching practicum in the contexts presents unique challenges, as the definition of a proficient English teacher encompasses both linguistic and pedagogical expertise, even as PSTs are still in the process of mastering both English and pedagogy (Nue & Manara, 2022; Nunan, 2017; Richards, 2017, 2023). Moreover, teaching practicum often presents tensions, such as the gap between the frontstage behaviors PSTs observed as students and the backstage realities they experience in practice, which require prompt resolution. Unresolved tensions can lead to daunting experiences and early attrition from teaching.

Accordingly, the complexities of teaching practicum need to be addressed through reflective mentoring, which encourages PSTs to shape and contextualize their professional identity construction. In this sense, reflective mentoring guides PSTs to analyze their professional experiences and reconcile their theoretical knowledge with classroom realities. As a result, it could foster their professional

awareness and development within their unique teaching practicum contexts. This reflective endeavor facilitates them to understand their professional roles and responsibilities, explore their professional selves, and internalize core teaching values. To further investigate the dynamics of identity construction through reflective mentoring, this study examines how reflective mentoring catalyzes EFL PSTs' professional identity construction during teaching practicum.

Teacher identity construction

As teacher identity refers to how teachers perceive and describe themselves, and how they take their positions to perform and express themselves during their professional practices (Wu et al., 2011), it is influenced by both internal factors, such as self-concepts, personality, beliefs, commitment, and values (Gee, 2000; Hsieh, 2010), and external factors, such as school culture, social expectations, student characteristics, and technological changes (cf. Barkhuizen, 2017; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Since personal and external factors can change over time and place, the construction of teacher identity is dynamic and contextually situated, considering teachers' ongoing professional experiences (Pennington, 2015; Richards, 2023). Hence, self-identification within specific pedagogical contexts helps shape professional identities by encompassing associated roles and responsibilities (Ardi, Mukti et al., 2023; Posada-Ortiz, 2022).

The dynamic and contextual nature of teacher identity construction has made the relationship between imagined and practiced identities a central topic in language teacher education. Imagined identity refers to the ideal self as a professional, shaped by cultural background, learning experiences, language proficiency, and envisioned relationships with others (Norton, 2013; Xu, 2013). It emerges from teachers' perceptions of themselves and their potential interactions, serving as a constructive process for creating achievable images of professional selves and the world that can later inform practical identity. For PSTs, imagined identities are often built before they engage in actual teaching practices. Practiced identity develops through real-world teaching experiences, active participation, and social interactions within communities of practice, as these processes shape, expand, or diminish specific resources (Xu, 2013). The transition from imagined to practiced identity is a critical phase since the idealized vision formed in the pre-service stage often collides with classroom realities. As such, creating a supportive professional learning environment can facilitate the smooth transition from imagined to practiced identity and empower PSTs to develop their unique professional identity.

TESOL scholars have proposed frameworks to particularly figure out the configuration of second language teacher identity. Pennington (2015) has offered practice-centered and contextual frames, reflecting teachers' images based on the orientation of TESOL works and the different contextual facets of works, respectively. The practice centered frame encompasses instructional, disciplinary, professional, vocational, and economic aspects, while the contextual one comprises various scopes of works, such as global, local, and sociocultural dimensions. Moreover, Pennington and Richards (2016) underscore competencies that build TESOL teacher identity, covering foundational and advanced competencies related to language, disciplinary, context, self-knowledge, awareness, student-related identity, practiced and responsive teaching skills, theorizing from practice, and

membership in communities of practice and profession. Richards (2023) emphasizes that the configuration of teacher identity is closely related to the essence of teaching. Language teachers manifest their professional identities through commitment, self-esteem, agency, and self-efficacy. First, commitment refers to teachers' engagement in teaching, sense of calling, and personal investment to achieve excellence in teaching. Second, self-esteem deals with teachers' belief in their success and competence, which are valuable to others. Third, agency covers teachers' contribution to ownership of their teaching and professional development. Finally, self-efficacy encompasses how teachers view themselves as effective teachers with positive teaching experiences to help their students learn well.

Teachers' professional identity construction is influenced by past experience, teacher education, and language proficiency (Richards, 2023). Teachers' experience as learners, having undergone learning processes and observed their teachers delivering the lesson, shapes how teachers teach in the classroom. They may get inspired by their previous teachers and consider them good models or even avoid negative experiences that they encountered. Teachers' identities are also shaped by their teacher education, where they are trained to be teachers. The acquired knowledge, beliefs, teaching principles, and practices inform the understanding of their professional selves. As a distinctive attribute of second language teacher identity, language proficiency has been seen as a critical element in shaping the image of competent second language teachers. In this regard, as English is a global language owned by the world's different linguistic communities (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022; Rose et al., 2022; Wulyani et al., 2019), English teachers are encouraged to think about themselves as multilingual users of English (Richards, 2023).

Ubaidillah et al. (2024) have proposed a three-dimensional narrative framework for understanding language teacher identity by examining the interconnectedness of past, present, and future experiences. In this framework, teacher identity is viewed as a dynamic process shaped by various factors, including past learning experiences, current professional challenges and opportunities, and future aspirations. Past narratives demonstrate how experiences as EFL learners, both positive and negative, influence present teacher identity. Present narratives emphasize the role of current workplace conditions in shaping identity. Future narratives highlight how imagined identities and career goals address past challenges and guide current professional trajectories.

Teacher identity construction through reflective practice

As teacher identity is a complex construct that changes across time and place, the construction and shaping of teachers' professional identities can be facilitated through reflection (Pennington, 2015; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Richards, 2023). Identity-related reflection serves as a dialogic space in which teachers contemplate their professional experiences and make meanings of their professional selves by evaluating their actions, understandings, beliefs, feelings, and goals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Buchanan, 2015; Flores, 2020; Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Hayati et al., 2018; Körkkö, 2021; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Richards, 2023). As data and experiences help teachers to make meaning of their practice, the reflective practice should be data-led (Mann & Walsh, 2017). In doing so, teachers recall and collect their professional experiences or critical incidents in their

contexts, making them triggers to define their professional selves. The reflection can be personally or collaboratively carried out (Körkkö, 2021; Mann & Walsh, 2017). While personal reflection encourages teachers to take their time to consider their practices and make an intrapersonal dialog, the collaborative reflection, which is drawn from sociocultural theory, provides an interpersonal dialogic space for teachers to share the meaning-making of their professional selves with other colleagues or mentors, which results in the co-construction of meanings, the emergence of new understandings, and the development of professional identity (Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Turhan & Kirkgöz, 2023). With an awareness of their professional identity, language teachers will be able to consider themselves educators and understand the profession in which they are engaged. As a result, they will be more motivated to enhance their work and professionalism as teachers.

To direct and develop their language teacher identity, teachers can make reflective practice their habit. As reflective practice has substantive and practical benefits in teaching (Hung & Thuy, 2021), there are four significant benefits of reflective practice for teacher professional development, such as raising self-awareness, gaining experiences and renovating instruction, satisfying psychological needs, and developing teaching profession. Raising self-awareness, teachers can understand their weaknesses and strengths, and increase their teaching professionalism (Ferraro, 2000). From the experiences teachers gain, they will be able to reconstruct the old concepts and experiences to be more ready to face the present teaching situation. They will be more well-prepared if the same situation happens in the future. Even they can avoid sudden intuition or routine and may prefer reflective actions.

Studies revealed that reflective practice strongly contributes to forming teacher identity, which relates to the sense of self-regard, self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, task perception, commitment, future perspective, knowledge, beliefs, and values (Day et al., 2006). The orientations of reflective practice come from the issues of consciousness, life experience, commitment, self-assurance, and responsibility, enhancing novice teachers' identity construction (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Furthermore, Maclean and White (2007) found that reflective practice can help teachers develop their identity construction since it encourages them to evaluate their actions, understandings, beliefs, feelings, and goals, as well as to engage in social interactions with the experienced teachers.

Reflective practice can also be constituted through teachers' sharing experiences and connecting ideas about what has been done, why, and how to do it (Amalia et al., 2020; Ardi, Widyaningsih, & Widiati, 2023; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019). Such a collaborative reflection facilitates teachers to express their ideas and share their experiences with their colleagues and mentors. Through collaborative reflection, teachers undergo collaborative knowledge building where the individuals involved collaboratively in professional learning activities deal with reviewing past activities together and making an outcome based on their experiences (Prilla et al., 2020). Thus, the reflective practice helps teachers develop a stronger professional identity, which leads to their sense of agency in their professional practices.

In the realm of EFL teacher education, mentoring, as a manifestation of reflective practice, assists PSTs in cultivating their professionalism. The nature of reflection in mentoring encourages them to explore not only their professional

experiences but also their professional selves, which directs them to make sense of who they are and what they are for. In this process, PSTs construct a stronger sense of professional identity, which empowers their pedagogical actions.

Method

Research design and context

This study adopted a case study design, which examined reflective mentoring as a case or an entity within in the real-life context (Yin, 2018). To analyze the case, this study employed an analytical lens (cf. Thomas, 2021) that focused on EFL PSTs' professional identity construction through reflective practice, as elaborated in the previous section. The lens helped to understand how reflective mentoring influenced the development of EFL PSTs' professional identities, providing insights into the interplay between mentoring practices and identity construction. As such, the study captured the transformative processes that shaped PSTs' perceptions of themselves as EFL teachers during their teaching practicum.

This study took place in Hasta University (a pseudonym), an Indonesian private EFL teacher education institution. The institution organized a reflective mentoring program in the odd semester of the 2023/2024 academic year as a follow-up to the mentor training program held in 2022 by the Indonesian Directorate General of Teacher and Education Personnel. The training focused on enhancing skills to stimulate reflective conversations during mentoring. The mentoring program, which spanned six months from September 2023 to February 2024, was divided into two phases. The initial phase explored PSTs' experiences during a four-month campus-based teaching practicum, while the second phase centered on their teaching experiences in a two-month school-based practicum. The reflective mentoring sessions were primarily informed by the practical experiences of EFL PSTs, with discussion topics emerging directly from their teaching practices. The mentoring discussion then extended to how the PSTs made meaning of the experiences in cultivating their professional identity. Ten mentoring sessions were conducted in English, with each session lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours.

The participants of this study included two mentors (a teacher educator and a serving teacher), and four EFL PSTs. The mentors, pseudonymized as MA (male) and MB (female), had prior experiences in mentoring EFL PSTs and had participated in the mentor training program. The PSTs, pseudonymized as PST A (female), PST B (male), PST C (female), and PST D (male), all in their third year of study, became the primary focus of the reflective mentoring as they were in the trajectory of their teaching practicum. They were invited to take part in this study by completing and signing written consent forms. Prior to signing, they were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, that their names would be pseudonymized, and that the research project had been ethically exempted by the Research Ethics Committee at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia (No. 2.2.1/UN32.14.2.8/LT/2024).

Data collection and analysis

The data were collected through video-recording and interviews. The researchers recorded all 10 mentoring sessions and conducted semi-structured interviews with both the mentors and PSTs. During the recording, a non-participant observer technique was employed to minimize potential disruption to the mentoring

flow. The interviews with the mentors focused on exploring how the reflective mentoring influenced the PSTs' professional identity construction, while the interviews with the PSTs centered on understanding the impact of the reflective mentoring on their own professional identity development. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure the participants could express their feelings and ideas genuinely, without language barriers. The interview excerpts were then translated into English.

The mentoring session and interview recordings were transcribed word-for-word. To guarantee accuracy, the transcripts were meticulously reviewed several times. A member-checking approach was utilized, where participants were invited to confirm and validate the content of the transcripts (Candela, 2019). During this process, they were encouraged to provide feedback, propose deletions, or suggest clarifications for any sections that needed revision.

After confirming the accuracy of the transcripts, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading the transcripts multiple times. A thematic qualitative analysis was then conducted on the transcripts (cf. Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Open codes were generated based on the interpretation of utterances expressed by the mentors and PSTs, focusing on the PSTs' construction of professional identity. The example of coding process is in Table 1. These codes were subsequently grouped to align with the research objectives.

Table 1. Example of coding process

Code	Description	Excerpt
Systematic processes of reflection	Highlighting the structured reflection in the mentoring	I feel like stepping into experiences, looking closer and deeper into them, and eventually gaining a better understanding of myself. It helps me understand more about who I am right now and what I need to do. In this context, I am a pre-service English teacher undergoing teaching practice. (PST B, Interview)

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The reflective mentoring sessions catalyzed the PSTs' professional identity construction during teaching practicum by creating a systematic and supportive space for reflecting on temporal, theoretical, and practical experiences. This suggested that the systematic and supportive environment fostered by the mentoring facilitated the PSTs' teacher identity construction. This environment emerged from five factors, including systematic processes of reflection, non-judgmental and supportive mentors, interpersonal bonds and interconnectedness, past and present connections, and theory-practice continuums.

Systematic processes of reflection

The systematic process of reflection in the mentoring sessions catalyzed the PSTs' teacher identity construction by triggering the PSTs to dig deeper into their professional experiences, critically examine their experiences, and formulate actionable plans. Without such a structured process of reflection, the PSTs "would

have just practiced teaching, without the deep dive into its essence and further actions" (PST C, Interview).

The systematic reflection elevated the mentoring beyond surface-level discussions of teaching events and techniques. The process encouraged the PSTs to recall their professional experiences and examine them more thoroughly. The recalls of experiences served as the cornerstone of professional identity construction, as they represented the reproduction of what the PSTs experienced, in which they defined their roles within specific situations. Their identification with references and positions shaped how they constructed the meaning of their professional selves in specific contexts. Engaging in a more profound level of introspection, the PSTs identified themselves and found purpose in their experiences. One PST elucidated that "I feel like stepping into experiences, looking closer and deeper into them, and eventually gaining a better understanding of myself. It helps me understand more about who I am right now and what I need to do" (PST B, Interview). Indeed, self-identification was fundamental in teacher identity construction, through which the PSTs profoundly understood their professional roles and responsibilities.

To deepen understanding of the PSTs' professional roles and responsibilities, the mentors guided the PSTs in articulating their future aspirations. The mentors' thought-provoking questions about the teacher images that the PSTs aspired to embody guided them in this self-identification. One PST admitted that "Without such questions, I might not have had a specific image of the teacher I want to become. The thought-provoking questions made me think deeply about the type of teacher I aspire to be" (PST A, Interview). Hence, the mentoring fostered the PSTs' professional self-awareness and sense of professional direction.

The mentoring sessions encouraged the PSTs to articulate their aspirations and develop a clearer vision of their future teaching personas, hence resonating with the notion of imagined identity construction. As their aspirations and envisioned personas were manifested in their practicum, the PSTs enacted their practiced identity. However, they often experienced the discrepancy between their imagined identities and practiced ones, leading them to emotional and cognitive dissonance. The dissonance was addressed through the mentoring, where the mentors helped them reconcile with it. In subsequent mentoring sessions, the alignment between their aspirations and actions was further explored. In this regard, the iterative reflection in the mentoring enabled them to make more informed pedagogical decisions, contributing to a stronger sense of teacher identity.

Non-judgmental and supportive mentors

The mentors assisted the PSTs in the meaning-making and self-identification of professional identities. They positioned themselves as their companions, journeying with them during the teaching practicum. They maintained awareness that the PSTs remained the focal focus of the mentoring and demonstrated effective mentoring skills and principles by encouraging the PSTs to engage in self-directed meaning-making without relying on deductive instruction. MA noted that "I let them find out the most appropriate ways of teaching English. I did not give them any judgements but guided them to make meanings. They had reasons why they were doing what they were doing" (MA, Interview). Indeed, the non-judgmental mentors contributed to open communication, mutual respect, and trust among the

mentoring members. As such, the PSTs were willing to share their reflective accounts openly. Even though the mentors were aware that they were more experienced and knowledgeable, they did not insist that the PSTs should follow their professional paths. Instead, their role was to encourage and support them, directing them toward developing authentic professional identities.

The mentors' positive affirmation was instrumental in fostering the PSTs' professional identities. Their provision of encouragement and constructive feedback facilitated the enhancement of the PSTs' efficacy to explore their individual pedagogical practices. As a result, the PSTs gained a sense of value and support in their progression towards becoming English teachers, while simultaneously cultivating a favorable perception of the teaching profession. In addition to providing affirmation, the mentors offered insights to consider without imposing them, allowing the PSTs to shape their professional identities independently. This non-prescriptive guidance encouraged the PSTs to develop authentic professional identities. As a result, they felt empowered to make more informed decisions about their teaching practices, fostering a sense of ownership of their professionalism. PST C shared:

> *I expressed my desire to be a humorous teacher like Pak Nano* (a pseudonym). *MA responded, 'Becoming like him is challenging. Shyness makes jokes fall flat.' When I tried it, I felt embarrassed, confirming MA's point. I realized that being like Pak Nano is difficult; one must be completely all-out.* (PST C, Interview)

The mentor-PST interaction the in the mentoring was instrumental in the construction of the PSTs' authentic professional identity. In this context, the non-judgmental mentors contributed to establishing a reflective discourse within the mentoring, which later enhanced interpersonal bonds among the participants.

Interpersonal bonds and interconnectedness

The reflective activities in the reflective mentoring fostered a supportive atmosphere among the PSTs and mentors. While teaching practicum was fraught with emotional demands, the atmosphere encouraged the PSTs to share their emotional challenges and vulnerabilities without fear of judgment, as they were assured of receiving positive support from their mentors. Oftentimes, the mentors directed the PSTs to reframe their perceived failures as the resources for valuable learning. One of the mentors observed that "the mentoring helps them spot learning points, so they can make sense of those challenges quickly. It speeds things up and helps them figure out who they are and how they handle those challenges" (MA, Interview). Indeed, the mentoring facilitated the PSTs' rapid identification and analysis of learning points within challenging situations.

Sharing challenging experiences in the mentoring sessions further helped the PSTs to release stress associated with their practicum and to find meaning in their challenges. One of the PSTs admitted that "I could tell and reflect on any experiences, which helped me to release stress in my teaching practices and gain positive moods. I can build a positive view of English teacher on me again" (PST B, Interview). In this regard, the mentor-PST open communication and mutual support cultivated a more resilient professional identity. Moreover, the PSTs

interpreted and comprehended their peers' reflective narratives by relating them to their own reflections. Through attentive listening, they engaged in a deeper analysis beyond the verbal contents, synthesizing various elements of the narratives to extract meaning. This process of deriving meaning shaped their professional identity, as they also constructed their understanding of themselves as teachers. Thus, the construction of teacher identity was a dynamic and collaborative process, wherein individual reflections served as the source of inspiration for the others.

Past, present, and future connections

While the reflective mentoring repeatedly encouraged the PSTs to shape their teacher identities, their constructed professional self-concepts were influenced by their current teaching practicum, prior educational experiences, and their future aspirations. In the first mentoring sessions, the PSTs reflected on the type of teacher they aspired to become. Through reflecting on their current pedagogical practices, they identified their successes and vulnerabilities, which helped shape their professional self-concepts while also revealing discrepancies between their aspirations and realities. The mentors further shaped the teacher images the PSTs aspired to, and the ongoing reflection refined their professional identity.

As the PSTs' reflection on their teaching practices contributed to the professional identity construction, the reflection on the connection between their current teaching experiences and their past learning experiences as EFL students shaped their teacher identity. The connection made them aware of the positioning and reasoning behind their pedagogical decisions. PST A admitted that "I am more aware of my position of being an English teacher. I am now the one standing in front of the class and providing students tasks. I often wondered why my English teacher assigned tasks" (PST A, Interview). The mentoring also helped the PSTs navigate their dual identities as students and teachers during the practicum by fostering a critical examination of their roles in both capacities. As such, it contributed to a smoother and more informed transition from student to teacher. Ria vividly illustrated this identity construction, saying "I imagined having two windows. One was as a teacher in the school, while the other one was as a student. I opened the two windows and connected them in the mentoring" (PST C, Interview).

Recalling past experiences, the PSTs uncovered hidden influences from past teacher figures shaping their teaching perspectives. The positive teacher figures served as the sources of inspiration, with the PSTs often seeking to imitate the qualities they admired in their former teachers. Reflecting upon their negative experiences with past teachers, they were motivated to adopt alternative approaches. As such, the encounters with past teachers catalyzed the PSTs' aspirations to become exemplary teachers they had once desired, indicating the profound impact of role models on the PSTs' professional identity construction. In this regard, unearthing the underlying values from past encounters enabled them to recognize the funds of their professional identities. Furthermore, the iterative reflection in the mentoring enabled the PSTs to construct the images they aspired to embody in the future. It instigated their more refined understanding of professional identities because "through the reflection, I can increasingly observe my inner disposition and understand the tendencies within myself, which I will

continuously reflect upon so that I can become a quality English teacher" (PST A, Interview).

Accordingly, the past, present, and future narratives were interconnected to shape the PSTs' professional identities. Their past narratives served as the foundation for their understanding of English teaching. The present narratives, characterized by navigating vulnerabilities, accentuated the ongoing construction of their professional identities. Looking ahead, their narratives reflected aspirations for fulfilling roles as English teachers.

Theory-practice continuums

As the PSTs frequently mentioned experiences in their teacher education, they demonstrated their comprehension of language teaching theories acquired through formal coursework. The theoretical knowledge influenced their construction of imagined professional identity. One PST said:

> *Language teaching theories helped me understand what it means to be an English teacher in the EFL context. They gave me a clear idea of how to carry out English teaching. They shaped the EFL teacher I aspire to be, prioritizing meaningful interaction and practical language use*. (PST C, Interview)

While theoretical exposure helped the PSTs define the professional images they aspired to, reflecting on the connections between specific pedagogical practices and theoretical foundations fostered their contextual professional identities. For example, PST D admitted that despite his formal education advocating full English immersion for language acquisition, his practical experiences revealed the need of a flexible approach. He needed to adapt his language to suit diverse students, balancing English exposure with Indonesian translations to ensure comprehension, especially for students with low English proficiency. He said:

> *In my teacher education, I am always encouraged to use full English when teaching to provide students with exposure. However, upon entering the classroom, I found that some students still struggled with English. So, I need to adapt to it by using Indonesian translation to help them understand*. (PST D, Mentoring 10)

In the second interview, he acknowledged adjusting his initial full English strategy after realizing his vocational school students needed additional native language support. Accordingly, focusing on specific incidents, interactions, or challenges encountered during their practices enabled the PSTs to analyze and interpret the experiences in theoretically and contextually meaningful ways. This focus enabled them to develop a more contextualized and situated professional identity grounded in empirical experiences and informed by theories.

Discussion

The findings revealed that the reflective mentoring provided a structured and supportive space for reflection, and fostered the dynamic and multifaceted construction of professional identities. This suggests that the mentoring provided an ample chance for the PSTs to shape multifaceted and dynamic identities rather

than fixed and linear ones. The multifaceted and dynamic construction of identities aligns with the view that language teacher identity is fluid and contextually grounded in professional experiences (Pennington, 2015; Richards, 2023). Thus, the reflective nature of the mentoring, emphasizing the development of professional self-knowledge and teaching expertise, emerged as a pivotal aspect of the professional identity construction. Additionally, its dialogic nature further shaped the identity construction by helping the PSTs recognize their strengths, address their vulnerabilities, and devise strategies for continuous growth.

The focal point of this study is that the reflective and dialogic spaces of the mentoring helped the PSTs transform their self-perception from English students fulfilling academic requirements to teachers embracing professional roles. More significantly, they began to see themselves as capable of making informed pedagogical decisions and driving meaningful changes in their classrooms. The findings suggest that the PSTs recognized their roles as teachers during the practicum. Indeed, identifying professional roles within specific contexts contributes to constructing professional identity. Previous studies (Ardi, Mukti et al., 2023; Posada-Ortiz, 2022) have shown that self-identification during practicum helped PSTs understand both their own identities and the professional roles placed upon them. Hence, the reflective discursive nature of the mentoring supported the PSTs in the process of self-identification, which served as the foundation for professional identity construction.

The systematic and supportive processes of reflection in the mentoring were attributed to the PSTs' professional identity construction. The processes encouraged them to move beyond surface-level discussions, allowing them to derive meaningful insights from their experiences. This finding aligns with those of previous studies, which highlight reflection as a dialogic space where teachers critically examine their professional experiences and construct meaning about their professional selves by evaluating their actions, understandings, beliefs, feelings, and goals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Buchanan, 2015; Flores, 2020; Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Körkkö, 2021; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Richards, 2023). Moreover, this study offers clearer insights into how the iterative structured reflection in the mentoring helped the PSTs continuously identify their roles and purposes within specific pedagogical contexts, contributing to a more defined professional self-identification and fostering a clearer vision of their teaching personas.

The non-judgmental mentors acted as supportive companions during the process of reflection by fostering open communication, mutual respect, and trust within the mentoring. By providing encouragement and constructive feedback, and sharing their own experiences without being prescriptive, the mentors helped the PSTs to develop authentic professional identities and to find the balance between personal values and professional demands (Day et al., 2006). This guidance is closely linked to the mentors' prior experience and their formal training. Thus, the findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of mentor training in facilitating PSTs' professional development (e.g., Ambrosetti et al., 2014; Du Plessis & Dreyer, 2024; Ellis et al., 2020).

The non-judgmental and skillful mentors fostered the interpersonal bonds and interconnectedness within the supportive professional learning community where the PSTs shared their experiences, successes, and vulnerabilities without fear of judgment. This collaborative learning space allowed them to learn from each other,

reframe challenges as learning opportunities, and develop resilience. More importantly, the exchange of reflective narratives and the collective development of professionalism strengthened their individual and collective identities within the Indonesian context. The findings indicate that the collaborative reflective practice in the mentoring supported the professional identity construction by providing the PSTs with opportunities to externalize their developing identities, share them with peers, and receive feedback through dialogue, a conclusion corroborated by previous studies (e.g., Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Høyrup, 2004; Järvinen & Poikela, 2001; Prilla et al., 2020; van Braak et al., 2021).

The PSTs' professional identity construction became more profound as the mentoring encouraged them to reflect on their temporal, theoretical, and practical experiences. The PSTs developed their professional identities through the dynamic integration of temporal, theoretical, and practical experiences, which were interconnected in shaping their self-perception as teachers. The temporal experiences encompass the PSTs' past, present, and future connections on their teaching journeys. Reflecting on the connection between their past and present, from student to teacher encouraged the PSTs to gain more insights into their current pedagogical decisions and professional identities. This process helped them uncover hidden influences from the past teacher figures, both positive and negative, which had shaped their teaching perspectives and professional identities.

These apprenticeships of observation shaped their understanding of what it meant to be a good teacher, even before entering teacher education programs (Borg, 2004). Their current experiences during the practicum offered opportunities to confront the preconceived notions and negotiate their emerging identities in real-world classrooms. Previous studies (e.g., Ardi, Mukti et al., 2023; Botha, 2020; Nue & Manara, 2022) corroborate this finding, highlighting that the discrepancy between what PSTs observed as students in their previous education and what they experienced during teaching practicum shaped the construction of their teacher identity. Moreover, the PSTs' future perceptions motivated them to strive towards their desired professional selves, aligning with the concept of imagined identity (Norton, 2013; Xu, 2013). These imagined identities acted as goals, shaping their pedagogical choices and actions in their current practices.

This study highlights the interconnectedness of past, present, and future experiences in the construction of professional identities. Through systematic processes of reflection, the mentoring facilitated the connection between the PSTs' past, present, and future selves, enabling them to make meaning of the experiences and understand how they contributed to the construction of their professional identity. The findings resonate with those of Ubaidillah et al. (2024), who examined in-service teachers' identity construction and proposed a three-dimensional narrative framework for understanding the teacher identity construction, exploring the connections between past, present, and future narratives. Their study emphasizes the significant role of present workplace conditions, professional development, and relationships with colleagues in shaping the identity construction. Those aspects were not pertinent to this study due to the fact that the participants in the previous study were in-service teachers permanently employed in educational institutions, while those in this study were the PSTs temporarily placed in schools, focusing primarily on classroom interactions. However, both studies highlight the

connections between past, present, and future experiences as the quintessential aspect of professional identity construction.

Reflecting on the connection between theoretical and practical experiences further shaped the PSTs' professional identity construction. While the theoretical experiences, gained primarily through coursework in teacher education program, provided the PSTs with foundational understanding of educational principles and pedagogical frameworks, the practical and empirical experiences gave them insights into the realities of the classroom. In this regard, the theories contributed to the construction of imagined identity, reflecting their idealistic views of the teaching profession, while the practical experiences contributed to the development of practiced identity (Norton, 2013; Xu, 2013). This study found that the PSTs connected their pedagogical practices with theoretical knowledge, resulting in the development of more contextualized and situated professional identities grounded in practical experiences and informed by theories.

However, the PSTs often experienced the discrepancy between theory and practice, as well as between their imagined identity and practiced identity during the practicum. In this regard, the reflective mentoring functioned as the space for the PSTs to negotiate and construct their professional identities due to the discrepancy encountered in the practicum. As the PSTs confronted the cognitive and emotional dissonance between their imagined identities and the realities of teaching, they reflected critically on their beliefs and practices. As such, the cognitive and emotional dissonance was valued and addressed in the mentoring. The process of reconciling the dissonance is essential for developing resilient and authentic teacher identities, where the PSTs balanced personal their values with the professional demands (cf. Ardi, Sari et al., 2023; Day et al., 2006). The importance of cognitive and emotional dissonance in the construction of professional identities has also been highlighted by Agudo (2024) and Alsup (2018), who found that cognitive and emotional dissonance mediated the construction of PSTs' professional identities in practicum settings. This study offers a new perspective that providing ample opportunities for PSTs to express their cognitive and emotional dissonance during mentoring helped them construct their professional identity. Hence, the reflective mentoring mediates the reconciliation of the dissonance, leading to their deeper understanding and identification of professional selves.

Conclusion

The reflective mentoring catalyzed the PSTs' professional identity construction by providing a structured and supportive space for reflection, supported by systematic processes of reflection, non-judgmental and supportive mentors, interpersonal bonds and interconnectedness, past and present connections, and theory-practice continuums. The pathway underscored the fluid, multifaceted, and context-dependent nature of professional identity construction. The reflection particularly contributed to the process as it allowed the PSTs to examine their professional experiences and derive meaning for their professional identities. Moreover, the supportive non-judgmental mentors helped balance their personal values with professional demands in the identity construction, fostering the mutual learning, vulnerability sharing, and reframing of challenges, which ultimately strengthened their individual and collective teacher identities. The central point of

the identity construction is that the PSTs moved from viewing themselves as students to recognizing their roles as teachers capable of making informed decisions and driving meaningful changes. Hence, this study suggests that mentoring during teaching practicum should address PSTs' practical aspects of teaching and inner professional selves. Such dual-focused mentoring simultaneously advanced their pedagogical competencies and fostering professional identity formation.

While this study provides valuable insights into how the reflective mentoring fosters the PSTs' professional identity construction in teaching practicum, two limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study was conducted within a structured mentoring program involving formally-trained mentors. The training enabled the mentors to facilitate reflective practices throughout the mentoring sessions. To broaden the understanding of mentor training impacts, further research needs to examine diverse contexts featuring varying levels of mentor preparation, including untrained mentors, to investigate how mentoring training influences mentoring quality. Second, this study revealed that emotional and cognitive dissonances, when valued and effectively leveraged in the reflective mentoring, contributed to the PSTs' professional identity construction. However, the manifestations of the dissonances and their transformative pathways in identity formation were not fully captured in the current findings. As such, future studies are encouraged to examine the dynamics of dissonance and its metamorphosis throughout the identity construction process.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education (*Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan*) for funding this research.

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