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Article Name	Identity (Re)construction of Turkish pre-service language teachers during the practicum

Author Contribution Statement

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Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, implementation, data analysis, translation, and writing

Abstract

Teacher identity has been prioritized in current research related to teacher education in order to understand teaching and learning context. This case study investigates identity (re)construction of three pre-service English teachers during the practicum. Drawing on sociocultural theory, how pre-service teachers constructed their identities and enacted their agencies in the field school was examined based on the narratives of the participants. Data collection tools included reflective papers and semi-structured interviews with the participants. Analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following themes related to identity formation of pre-service teachers during the practicum: their imagined selves (Wenger, 1998), the practicum as shaping their identity, and directions for future selves as a result of practicum experience. It was found that previous experiences of the participants as language learners and interaction with the parties including mentor teacher and students in the field school had both positive and negative impacts on identity formation of pre-service teachers. Findings of the study is expected to contribute to the relevant literature, and suggestions are presented for further studies.

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Research Article**Identity (Re)Construction of Turkish Pre-service Language Teachers during the Practicum***Fatma KAYA¹ **Abstract**

Teacher identity has been prioritized in current research related to teacher education in order to understand teaching and learning context. This case study investigates identity (re)construction of three pre-service English teachers during the practicum. Drawing on sociocultural theory, how pre-service teachers constructed their identities and enacted their agencies in the field school was examined based on the narratives of the participants. Data collection tools included reflective papers and semi-structured interviews with the participants. Analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following themes related to identity formation of pre-service teachers during the practicum: their imagined selves (Wenger, 1998), the practicum as shaping their identity, and directions for future selves as a result of practicum experience. It was found that previous experiences of the participants as language learners and interaction with the parties including mentor teacher and students in the field school had both positive and negative impacts on identity formation of pre-service teachers. Findings of the study is expected to contribute to the relevant literature, and suggestions are presented for further studies.

Keywords: ELT (English Language Teaching), teacher identity, language teacher education programme, the practicum

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher identity refers to teachers' considerations about themselves with regard to their personalities and reflection of their personalities on their teaching processes (Buchanan, 2015; Bukor, 2015; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). The relevant field emphasizes that pre-service teachers' previous experiences and their perceptions with regard to teaching and learning have an effect on their identity formation (Edwards & Edwards, 2017). It is possible to see different frameworks related to teacher identity; however, the emphasis on how identity is constructed with regard to contextualized social process has gained much ground in the relevant field (Miller, 2009). It is dynamic; changing and evolving depending on the social context (İbid, 2009).

Pre-service teacher education programs and the professional experience at the school have a crucial role in shaping pre-service teachers' identities (Izadinia, 2013; Rodrigues, Pietri, Sanchez & Kuchah, 2018). Among these, teaching practicum plays a vital role for pre-service teachers since it does not only provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to see how far it is possible to teach based on the training they received but also provides them with a context where teacher identity is shaped and reshaped (Trent, 2010). It is possible to see various definitions to elaborate on teacher identity. This study followed Norton's (2013, p.45) definition of identity described as: "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future." Although a good number of studies

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were conducted in order to identify how pre-service or in-service language teachers construct their identities during their training or professional life in various contexts, a limited number of studies with regard to language teacher identity were carried out in Turkish context to the researcher's knowledge (Erdem, 2020; Keskin & Zaimoğlu, 2021; Tokoz-Goktepe & Kunt, 2021). Considering the importance of the issue of teacher identity as figuring out teacher identity means elucidating how students learn and how teachers teach (Varghese et al., 2005), this study aims to reveal how three pre-service English teachers with different motives constructed their identities during teaching practicum relying on their narratives as "they are important to attend to because they reveal sites of tension rooted in the personal, experiential and concrete". (Rodriguez & Polat, 2012, p.364), through attempting to answer the following research question:

- How does the practicum shape the identity development of pre-service teachers?

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Teacher Identity: Sociocultural Approach

As stated above, teacher identity has gained great attention from the researchers in the last few decades (Prabjandee, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2018; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013; Trent, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2015). Furthermore, some studies focused on the relationship between teacher identity and agency, emotions, and teachers as researchers (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Wolff & De Costa, 2017; Taylor, 2017; Yuan & Lee, 2016). Sociocultural approach has been among the basic frameworks for majority of the studies related to teacher identity (Martinez-de-la-Hidalga & Villardon-Gallego, 2019). Sociocultural approach has prioritized that teachers are in fact learners, learning how to teach and language teacher identity formation is at the heart of this learning period (Sang, 2020). During this learning process, teachers' behaviors and actions are formed and undergo continuous changes through contact with many factors including teacher-learner, learner-learner interactions, cultural dimensions of the training they received, and the uniqueness of the classes they are teaching (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). The identity development or change does not only happen during the teacher education program; it tends to alter during the teaching career since continuous contact with school and outer community has a potential influence on teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). According to Norton (2006), it is difficult to discriminate between social and cultural identities as they develop in relation to each other; therefore, she suggests that social practices including experiences in one's house, learning and teaching environment, and cultural practices including experiences with a specific community have a mutual role in the formation of sociocultural practices. In this study, sociocultural theory was adopted to understand and search teacher identity which was conceptualized as a dynamic process likely to evolve depending on many factors such as time, place, and interactions with other stakeholders (ibid, 2006).

Teacher identity includes both personal and professional identity, which emphasizes identity formation with regard to professional development of the teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The role of self-identity in professional identity formation should not be underestimated because teachers' beliefs and practices which they call as ideal may contradict with the imposed educational practices which tend to change through the time.

Adopting and enacting professional identity is a challenging process on the part of the teachers and pre-service teachers since it requires keen participation including great effort and hard work for teacher and teacher candidates to assume a specific professional identity (Prabjandee, 2019). Professional identity is closely related to agency in that adopting a professional identity requires teacher agency (Prabjandee, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2016). According to Priestley, Edwards, Priestley & Miller (2012, p.197) "agency can be understood in an ecological way, that is, strongly connected to the contextual conditions within which it is achieved and not as merely a capacity or possession of the individual. Agency is achieved in particular (transactional) situations."

1.1.2. Narrative Inquiry

Although researchers agree that teacher identity is difficult to explain as many factors are at play including teacher's actions, interactions, beliefs in the formation and evolvement of teacher identity, they go on presenting elaborated descriptions related to the issue. The need for simplified and clear descriptions still exists. Narrative approach to understanding teacher identity is reasonable since it applies to long-term and contextual nature of identity development (Edwards & Edwards, 2017). Identity formation and reformation occur through narratives of teachers and pre-service teachers (Yuan & Lee, 2016). According to Sfard and Prusak (2005, p.14), identity refers to "a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person. These stories, even if individually told, are products of a collective storytelling." Teachers have a chance to reflect on and recognize their actions and beliefs as individuals through narratives of themselves and the discourse they are involved in (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The close link between the self and the society makes it essential for the teachers to assign new understandings to their stories (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Teacher agency has also a crucial role in making sense of the experiences and the stories generated relying on the experiences (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). These stories "are not only chosen and managed by their tellers alone, but are also expressions of cultural values, norms, and structures passed on by the tellers" (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004, p.123). While narratives based on the experiences help the construction of teacher identity, stories based on their prior experiences help them make sense of the current educational context they are exposed to (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013).

2. METHOD

Case study design was chosen for the study in order to reach to a detailed understanding related to how pre-service teachers constructed their identity, and whether/how they enacted their agency during the practicum (Creswell, 2012; Duff, 2014).

2.1. Context and Participants

This study was conducted at a public university in Turkey where becoming a teacher requires earning a four-year bachelor degree provided by any faculty of education. In order to graduate, candidates are obliged to attend teaching practicum during the last year of the teacher training programme. During the practicum, pre-service teachers are expected to observe mentor teacher, prepare lesson plan and teach in addition to completing related assignments asked by the supervisor from the faculty. Teaching practicum lasts for 12 weeks for each semester.

The participants of the study included 3 pre-service teachers (cases) attending an ELT (English Language Teaching) department at a state university located in the eastern part of Turkey. The participants were selected by convenience sampling. The pre-service teachers who completed the assignments by the supervisors and attended the meetings with the supervisor regularly took part in the study. The study was conducted during when the participants, Bahar, Esra and Hülya (they are pseudonyms) attended 12-week teaching practicum in the last year of their training process. The first participant Bahar is a pre-service teacher who is enthusiastic to teach English. She is a successful pre-service teacher appreciated by the academics in the department because of her academic success, and actively took part in several activities and workshops related to professional development of language teachers. The second participant Esra has also enthusiasm for teaching English as she likes English. The third participant Hülya does not want to be an English teacher; she was planning to attend a translation program in a renowned university. However, she had to attend English Language Teaching department because of her university exam score as her score was below the required score for the translation programme in one of the top universities. This is not uncommon in Turkish context: not all the pre-service teachers attend teacher training programmes because they like teaching or want to teach. In fact, there are many other factors affecting students' preferences including university entrance score, job opportunities, preferences of the parents (Erdem, 2020).

The researcher was familiar with the participants as they attended two classes of the researcher when they were sophomores. Although ten pre-service teachers were invited to participate in the study and all of them volunteered to participate, the three participants introduced above were chosen for the study since they represent three different pre-service teacher profiles; an enthusiastic, self-confident and motivated pre-service teacher (Bahar), an enthusiastic but diffident pre-service teacher who has concerns about her teaching (Esra), and a pre-service teacher who is not planning to be a teacher, but still wants to earn the bachelor degree (Hülya). She believes that she can realize her dreams easier when she gets her bachelor degree since it is a kind of certificate proving that she has a certain level of English, according to her.

2.2. Data Collection

As stated above, narratives of the pre-service teachers are likely to give us clear understanding of their identity formation. Therefore, reflection paper and semi-structured interviews which require the participants to elaborate on their answers based on their experiences and beliefs were chosen as data collection tools.

The study was conducted during when pre-service teachers participated in the teaching practicum which lasted for 12 weeks. The participants were asked to write reflective papers three times during the semester. It was in the form of prompted reflection: the participants were asked to reflect on their experiences during the practicum through answering several questions posed by the researcher. These questions were about what they learnt in the practicum, problems they encountered and perceptions related to their teaching. The questions were partly adapted from Yuan and Lee (2016), and they were directly related to participants' experiences during the practicum. The questions were revised based on the opinions of two colleagues. Meetings were arranged with the participants regularly (once in a week) in order to talk about their teaching practices and experiences in the field school, and the researcher took notes during these meetings. They were used as supplementary data. After the practicum (at the end of the semester), the participants were interviewed in order to learn about their educational background, their overall impression related to teaching practicum, to address issues related to their teaching, and to get more detailed answers related to the several issues which was mentioned in the reflective papers. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour, and the interview data was transcribed by the researcher. All these procedures were conducted in L1 of the pre-service teachers (Turkish), and translated into English by the researcher. Ethical Approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the university where the study was conducted.

2.3. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the qualitative data, both the reflective papers and interview transcripts were carefully read by the researcher several times. During these recursive readings, codes were identified. The researcher traced identity formation of pre-service teachers when they interacted with the practicum school, mentor teacher and students in addition to the teacher education programme they attended as they all affect development of teacher identity according to sociocultural theory (Freedman & Appleman, 2008). Bearing in mind that teacher identity is a complicated issue entailing prior and current practices, exposures, interactions, reactions, and beliefs of pre-service teachers (Edwards & Edwards, 2017), this study aimed to identify how beliefs and practices of three pre-service teachers guided the development of their teacher identity through the narratives of the participants. Narrative method was chosen because it relies on a mutual making meaning in which the researcher and the participant are in meaningful interaction with each other (Hatsch & Wisniewski, 1995). Through the narratives of the participants, stories and emergent themes were combined in order to create a meaningful whole for each participant (Polkingthorne, 1996). The coding procedure including open and axial coding was adopted in the study (Saldana, 2009). The same procedure was applied for the narratives of each participant separately. As result of several readings of the qualitative data, initial codes were identified by the researcher (open coding). Prior experiences as language learners, rapport

with students, taking responsibility, confronting with the realities, exerting agency, satisfaction were among the codes identified by the researchers as shown in table 1. Then, categories were created thorough finding the connections between initial codes (axial coding). The following three categories were identified as a result of axial coding: their imagined selves (Wenger, 1998), the practicum as shaping their identity, and directions for future selves as a result of practicum experience. After analysis of each case, cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) was conducted in order to identify similarities and differences between the cases. In order to maintain the reliability of the analysis, an experienced colleague was asked to analyze the same data following the same procedure described above, and similar results were reported by her.

Table1: Coding table

Open Codes	Axial Codes
Prior experiences	
Teacher of Communicative Language Teaching	
Rapport with students	Their imagined selves
An understanding and caring teacher	
Integration of culture into language teaching	
Balanced authority	
Taking responsibility	
Practicum as a valuable experience	
Confronting with the realities	
Struggle for bridging the gap between realities and their expectations as future teachers	
Discrepancy between the teacher candidates and the mentors in terms of teaching philosophy	The practicum as shaping their identity
Asymmetrical power relationship with the mentor teacher	
Exerting agency	
Restriction to agency	
Being decisive about implementing her teaching philosophy	
Being concerned about her future self as a teacher	Directions for future selves as a result of the practicum experience
Satisfaction	
Relief	
Believing that she could teach	

3. FINDINGS

In this part of the study, narratives of three pre-service teachers will be reported case by case in order to describe in detail how these pre-service teachers constructed their identities during the practicum.

3.1. The First Participant (Bahar)

The first participant Bahar is an idealist and motivated pre-service teacher as she loves English and teaching English. She wants to be a good teacher and then, a good academician to help her prospective students to become successful English teachers. She is self-confident; therefore, she was delighted when she was given the chance to teach during the practicum as she mentioned in her first reflection paper:

“It is great to take the responsibility of a class because in this way I could see how far it is possible to transfer what I have learned during the undergraduate courses to the real classroom.”

She did not want mentor help and did not ask for it as she believed that she should learn how to cope with the possible problems by herself since she was given the control of the class. Her main

purpose as a pre-service teacher during the practicum was to help students develop a positive attitude towards English through adopting communicative language teaching methods. She wanted to achieve this through providing students with guidance and scaffolding since she had a very bad experience related to English learning:

“Our teachers used to humiliate us and they did not motivate us to learn English, which was a traumatic experience for me. Therefore, I think it is important to encourage students and build rapport with them. Only in this way, they can succeed.”

According to her, maintaining authority in the classroom was important to facilitate learning. On the other hand, she tried to empathize with her students since she had a similar background with the students. Moreover, she also learnt about the behaviors or attitudes she should avoid in her class through observing the mentor teacher:

“While observing the mentor teacher, I have noticed that questions like-do not you understand? or did not you understand? - affect students negatively. Therefore, I pay attention to using “I” statements in order not to discourage or hurt them.”

She had a good relationship with the mentor teacher, and therefore, there was no “asymmetrical power relationship” (He & Lin, 2013) between her and the mentor teacher, however; she did not approve her teaching styles and attitudes towards students. Therefore, she was happy that the mentor teacher did not intervene while she teaches. She adopted communicative approach in her class and had ample opportunities to integrate communicative activities and exert her agency. During the classes she realized that students were reluctant to participate in communicative activities since they were 8th grade students preparing for high school entrance exam and were not familiar with communicative activities as their English courses were exam-oriented in which they had question-answer sessions and she said:

“I was not disappointed by their reaction because I was expecting to encounter with such a resistance. Still, I will not give up and try my best.”

Low L2 proficiency level of students was another problem which urged her to use L1 from time to time. Even though L1 use conflicted with her imagined identity as a teacher of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), it helped her realize that she had to tailor her teaching according to students’ L2 proficiency level. The narratives of Bahar revealed that she was aware of problems in language classes as she had a similar English learning experience. In fact, her prior negative experiences had a role in shaping her initial teacher identity as a teacher of CLT and an understanding and caring teacher. Therefore, she was not frustrated and she wanted to see how far it was possible to apply modern language teaching methods in a real classroom environment as she stated at the beginning of the term.

In the subsequent weeks, after numerous attempts, she came to the conclusion that it was not impossible to integrate communicative activities into her class as she found out that students were getting used to and participate in the communicative activities. However, when she also attempted to use English culture as content in her classes as she thinks that teaching the target culture is a part of her job; she encountered a stricter resistance, which affected her identity as teacher of CLT negatively:

“Since they were not exposed to any class in which English culture was introduced so far, they did not welcome the activities I brought to the class which was related to thanksgiving and Christmas. They rejected to do the activities. They told me that they were Muslims, not Christians and did not celebrate such days. Therefore, they rejected to write a Christmas card.”

Even though, Bahar faced challenges related to integrating communicative activities and the target culture, she did not give up since she was expecting to face these problems. After students’ negative reaction related to integration of target culture, she found a way through using popular culture in her class. She brought activities about Elon Musk and some famous singers to the class, and they

listened songs by the famous singers. She noticed that students loved it, which made her feel satisfied, and encouraged her in sticking to her teaching philosophy. During her attempts she understood that there was always a way to achieve her goals but she needed to be patient and prepare her students to the changes considering their needs, priorities, interests.

While trying to teach the language through modern methods, she was also aware of the importance of the affective dimension of language teaching. Therefore, she attached greater importance to student participation through scaffolding, and positive reactions of students contributed her identity as an understanding and caring teacher:

“I am decisive about using communicative activities in my classes. On the other hand, I do not want to discourage or offend my students. Therefore, I help and urge them during the activities, and provide them with constructive feedback related to their progress. I can see that it works. I have a student who stutters in my class. He used to sit at the back row and did not participate any of the activities in the previous weeks. However, he sits in the front row in my classes anymore and take part in the activities. He asks for feedback related to his performance in break hours, and I encourage him. It is amazing to see that he could speak English without stammering while he is stuttering when speaking Turkish. It shows us the great importance of teacher attitude towards the students.”

Despite the challenges and resistance, she encountered, she believed that she could be a good teacher and stick to her teaching. However, she had a concern related to her future career, which was likely to pose a threat her imagined identity:

“Students are accustomed to traditional methods and it is not easy to change. Furthermore, old and traditional teaching methods are adopted by the majority of the teachers and similar problems are everywhere. I am the minority. I am afraid of resembling them after some time. Since I will be working with other teachers sharing the same office, they can persuade me to be like them. This is what really concerns me about my future teaching career.”

3.2. The Second Participant (Esra)

Second participant is Esra. She is excited as she loves English and teaching English. However, she has concerns about her teaching and does not feel secure as she reflected in the first weeks of the practicum:

“I was worried whether I could teach when I first entered the class, but I did not encounter any problem during my first practicum day, and the mentor teacher did not intervene. This made me happy. I hope I will not face any problem in the coming weeks.”

Students' interest in English made her happy, and this motivated her to do her best during the practicum, which affected her identity development positively. However, she described herself as a decent and “smiling” teacher, and she thought that students would take advantage of it. Therefore, she had difficulty in managing the class from time to time. She had also difficulty in ensuring equal participation of the students, and large class size affected her imagined identity negatively:

“Students like the games and are very eager to take part in such activities; however, since the classes are very crowded, it is not possible for all the students to participate and those who could not have the opportunity to participate get frustrated and offended. I do not know how to overcome this problem.”

In the coming weeks, she realized that her being very tolerant towards students prevented her from managing the class effectively, which damaged her confidence. Upon observing and giving advises from her peers, she changed her attitudes towards students, she saw that it worked:

“There should be a balance between discipline and mercy: students like it when you show that you value them; however, they also want to learn and get feedback related to their performances. When I began to do these together and kept my distance at a certain level, I noticed that it became easier to manage the class and move on.”

She felt upset when she saw that mentor teacher mainly used L1 in the classes, and used translation frequently. On the other hand, she was familiar with this kind of teaching as she was exposed to it when she was a student, and she was expecting to encounter this type of teaching. Therefore, she was not frustrated when she witnessed this traditional type of teaching like Bahar as she also stated that she was not disappointed when she saw that communicative and modern methods were not adopted in the school. In contrast to what she witnessed, Esra supported that there should be very limited L1 usage in the class, and communicative approach should be adopted. However, in the coming weeks, she realized that it was not easy to integrate communicative activities into her class, which hurt her confidence as a teacher of communicative language teaching:

“I knew that it would not be straightforward for the students to get used to communicative activities at once as they did not want to step out of their comfort zone, and very limited number of student participation proved this. In one of my classes, after the activity, one student came up to me and told me that she liked the activity; however, she could not participate as she could not speak English. That’s why she was upset.”

She described herself an understanding and patient teacher, and it was important for her to care for students’ emotional well-being. Like Bahar, Esra also did not approve attitude of mentor teacher towards the students:

“I am trying to encourage the students to participate especially the ones who are introvert or inclusive students, I do not want them to fall behind. Seeing that they are treated cruelly by the other students really upsets me. Moreover, teacher attitude could be offensive. In one class, the mentor teacher told the students that they were embarrassing her because they could not answer the questions she asked. It was frustrating to see how discouraged the students became when they got such a reaction from the teacher.”

Unlike Bahar’s case, “asymmetrical power relationship” (He & Lin, 2013) was apparent in Esra’s case. Her mentor teacher strictly supported to follow course book which mainly consisted of grammatical exercises and drills, and was not open to alternative options. Moreover, there were some unnecessary units in the coursebook according to the Esra and inclusion of the target culture was very limited:

“There was a unit about funfair vehicles, it was unnecessary for the students to learn names of the vehicles in a funfair according to me. Moreover, several weeks were allocated for the unit. I asked the mentor teacher whether I could introduce and use some activities in the class related to a special day in the target culture, the mentor teacher did not accept indicating that we had to follow the units (the curriculum) strictly and we did not have enough time for other activities.”

Her objection related to the coursebook did not change anything and she had to follow coursebook while teaching, which restricted her agency, and affected her identity development negatively. The mentor teacher did not exist in the class during her teaching for several weeks, and therefore, she felt relaxed as having her in the class put a pressure on her. Although she had concerns about her teaching throughout the term, and students’ resistance to modern teaching methods along with mentor teacher’s restrictions increased her concerns, she realized that she loved children and she could teach them when she was given the full responsibility. However, she did not much chance to put

into practice her imagined identity during the practicum, which posed threat to her identity development:

“I used translation frequently as mentor teacher did because students were familiar with it and when I did not translate, they were getting frustrated. They cannot tolerate it when they do not understand as they have very low English language proficiency. I know there should have been very limited L1 usage in the class, but I could not resist students’ intolerance, and mentor teacher’s directions as she wanted me to teach in the way she did.”

Despite the fact that she was given restricted freedom by the mentor teacher, she was optimistic about her future career:

“Still, I feel lucky to see how far I could achieve my goals related to teaching despite all the challenges, and what kind of problems could be encountered. I know there will be always problems and unexpected situations; as a teacher I should have the courage to struggle for maximizing the effectiveness of my teaching considering students’ levels, needs, and interests.”

3.3. The Third Participant (Hülya)

The third participant is Hülya, and her university entrance exam score led her to choose ELT (English Language Teaching) department at a state university. In the first day of the practicum, she was asked to teach to a class spontaneously by the headmaster since the mentor teacher was absent:

“I used to think that I was unable to teach and I would never be a good teacher. However, after my first teaching experience which was spontaneous, I got positive feedback from my peers in the practicum. This really encouraged and motivated me for the subsequent days in the practicum.”

Even though she was not committed to teaching profession, she considered the practicum as venue where she should practice what she learnt during the teacher education programme. She was very excited during the first weeks of the practicum but she tried to act like a professional teacher in order to gain students’ respect, and she described herself as a disciplined teacher:

“I am the teacher and they are the students; they should recognize my authority and respect my profession so that I can manage the class.”

Even though she loved discipline as she was trained by disciplined teachers, she was opposed to fear-based discipline:

“I believe that I have to maintain my authority to be able to teach; however, I want to achieve this through communicating with my students. Therefore, I frequently use “I” statements to convey my messages explicitly, and try to motivate them to participate in class.”

She did not ask for mentor help as she thought that she should be able to cope with the class by herself since she was given the responsibility to teach during the practicum. She only asked for information related to students’ levels in order to tailor her teaching in accordance with students’ levels. However, she got feedback related to her teaching from her peers and sometimes mentor teacher during the practicum and she considered it as a valuable experience which would contribute to her profession. Especially constructive feedback and support from peers contributed to development of her teacher identity as she became more interested in teaching and students, and tried to find ways to engage students during the lesson.

She liked it when she met and interacted with the students and noticed that the students loved games. Therefore, she prepared activities including games in the following weeks. Since it was a new experience for her, she observed the students carefully during the first weeks of the practicum:

“I was anxious and afraid of doing something wrong at the beginning. Therefore, I observed the mentor teacher and the students carefully, and took notes related to them. I learnt a lot related to how to behave towards the students.”

Students’ interest towards English and her also motivated her to teach during the practicum, and she attached greater importance to positive student-teacher relationship like Bahar and Esra:

“I try to show my students that I value what they think and how they feel because they really need this. When I ask questions about themselves, they like it. While teaching emotions-happy, sad, upset, I asked students how they felt; when they felt happy, when they felt sad. They were surprised at first as their classes mainly included coursebook exercises. However, majority of the students participated and answered the questions enthusiastically.”

Challenges she encountered during the practicum led her to struggle for exercising her agency, which contributed to her identity development. She could not be oblivious to it when she noticed that students knew nothing about directions although they were taught by the mentor teacher one week ago:

“Through activities which included a problem situation like -I want to study in the library, how can I go there-I had the students to practice the directions since they even did not know ‘right-left’ although they were taught.”

Unlike Bahar and Esra, she was upset to see that students only memorize some basic words and sentences but they could not communicate; they did not understand when the same question was asked in another way or when the subject was different. They did not know alternative answers or questions:

“When I ask ‘how are you today’, they say ‘fine thanks’, this is a kind of ritual. One day I asked the same question and got the same answer. Then, I asked whether they really were all fine. They were bewildered. They could not answer.”

In spite of the problems she encountered during the practicum, she was happy that she had such an experience:

“I am not planning to be a teacher. I want to realize my dreams after graduation. However, I have seen that I could teach, and I can handle this profession if I have to. Realizing this made me feel satisfied.”

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study explored how three pre-service English teachers constructed their teacher identity during a 12-week practicum period. These pre-service teachers had different motives and concerns related to their future career even though they were all exposed to the same teacher education programme. While the first two participants (Bahar and Esra) were excited and motivated before starting the practicum, they faced challenges and experienced disappointments during the practicum. The third participant (Hülya) experienced similar challenges and disappointments; however, she was satisfied with the practicum process. Based on the sociocultural theory which suggests that teacher beliefs and attitudes are rooted in their background and previous experiences (Edwards & Edwards, 2017), it was found that especially negative experiences led student-teachers develop certain types of identities in order to avoid from making mistakes which their teachers did in the past. For instance, Bahar attached greater importance to affective dimension of teaching as she mentioned in her narrative her main purpose was to help her students develop a positive attitude towards English. The main reason for this was her being humiliated by her English teachers when she was a young learner which deeply affected her. Similarly, Hülya described herself as a disciplined teacher; however, her understanding of discipline was different from the one she was exposed to. She was opposed to fear-based discipline. Like Bahar, she cared about emotional well-being of students. In fact, three of the

pre-service teachers gave importance to affective dimension of teaching not only because of their past experiences but also what they witnessed during the practicum. They had the chance to observe how teacher (mentor) misbehavior and peer pressure could prevent students from learning and damage their self-esteem. On the other hand, it was a rewarding experience for them to see how their humanistic approach motivated and encouraged students to take part in the classes, and boosted their teacher identity as an understanding and caring teacher. In their study, [Yuan & Lee \(2016\)](#) also found that realizing his goals as a “friendly teacher” contributed to teacher candidate’s identity, and raised his confidence as it was important for him to build a positive relationship with the students. Pre-service teachers’ being aware of the importance of student-teacher relationship reflects realities of school context, which implies that when subject teacher education pay attention to skills related to student-teacher relationship and interaction, this may lead pre-service teachers develop a teacher identity which is ready to meet the expectations of a school context ([Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013](#)). All pre-service teachers identified themselves with teacher of communicative approach. This identity emerged and developed as a result of the methodology classes they received during their training in the teacher education programme, and their past experiences as English language learners. As a result of exposure to it, they were aware of the drawbacks of the traditional language teaching methods. However, their identity as communicative language teacher was challenged a lot in the field school as students were used to traditional methods.

At the end of the practicum, Bahar was content that she was able to integrate communicative language teaching methods into her class although she encountered student resistance and rejection from time to time. However, she had a concern about her future career as a language teacher; she was afraid of resembling other teachers as majority of teachers adopted traditional methods. Therefore, she described herself as the minority. Esra also attempted to use communicative methods in her class but she merely achieved her purpose. The main reason for her inefficiency was that she could not withstand student resistance and mentor teacher’s authority. As for Hülya, she adopted communicative activities in her class; however, she was not interested in how far she achieved at the end as she was not planning to be a teacher. Still, she was content to see that she could teach even if she did not want to. The gap between training received by pre-service teachers in the pre-service teacher programmes and realities of the school context pre-service teachers encountered during the practicum are frequently voiced in the relevant field ([Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013](#); [Yuan & Lee, 2015](#)). In fact, conventional methods are still prevalent in current educational context ([Tokoz-Göktepe & Kunt, 2021](#)). Therefore, the participants in this study were not disappointed by this gap although Hülya experienced some frustration when she realized that students were used to rote learning. All of them indicated that they knew what they would encounter in the practicum school where English is mainly taught through traditional methods. Still, school practicum was a valuable experience for them as they had the opportunity to see whether and how they could adopt communicative language teaching methods in their classes. Moreover, it had a role in shaping their identity as they had to face problems and make decisions related to their teaching ([Prabjandee, 2019](#)).

Although it was frequently acknowledged in the current literature that mentor teachers contributed to identity construction of pre-service teachers through providing support and guidance ([Yuan & Lee, 2015](#)), it was not the case in the current study. During the practicum, mentor guidance and support was very limited. Bahar and Hülya were content that they did not get any support from the mentor as they believed that they had to manage the whole process by themselves. Their mentor teachers did not intervene during their teaching. Therefore, they were happy as they had the chance to enact their agency through adopting the teaching method(s) they wanted. This finding shows how pursuing their goals helped development of teacher agency ([Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009](#)). As for Esra, the mentor teacher was in favor of strictly following the curriculum, which occasionally restricted her agency, and affected her identity development negatively. All of the participants did not

approve of teaching style of the mentor teachers as they mainly adopted traditional methods. Moreover, they were also critics of how mentor teachers treated students from time to time as mentioned in their narratives. Thorough observing the mentor teachers, they learnt how they should not treat the students. Although they did not get help and guidance from the mentor teachers, the pre-service teachers received from and provided feedback to their peers related to their teaching performances during the practicum which contributed to their identity construction (Cohen, 2010).

In conclusion, narratives of the pre-service teachers revealed that they constructed their identities largely based on their previous experiences as language learners, teacher training programme and their interactions with the parties in the field school. Considering its changing and dynamic nature, the issue of teacher identity should be handled with great care especially in the teacher education programmes (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teacher educators should support pre-service teachers in their identity construction process through stimulating them to be confident and agentic teachers. Therefore, it is important for teacher educators to know about experiences of the pre-service teachers so that they could understand their perceptions and other issues affecting their identities and come up with appropriate solutions as stated by Kayi-Aydar (2015).

Results of the study cannot be generalized as it was context-specific and included a limited number of participants. However, several issues raised in the study was common to a broader context in Turkey. One was about the traditional methods applied in the field school as this is one of the major problems related to language teaching pedagogy in Turkey. Another issue was the existence of pre-service teachers who did not mean to be a teacher as in the case of Hülya. Therefore, further and large-scale studies are needed in order to understand how these issues and other possible issues may affect identity construction of pre-service teachers and how to prepare pre-service teachers to handle with these problems. Lastly, this study relied on narratives of pre-service teachers. Studies including observing pre-service teachers could yield to a better understanding of how they constructed their identities in the practicum school, and including mentor teachers as participants could help to shed light on the interaction between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers, and how this interaction contributed identity formation of pre-service teachers.

5. REFERENCES

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