

## **EXPLORING INDONESIAN EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

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**Abstract:** Professional identity refers to the self-perception that is related to work. Personal professional identity influences behavior and actions in the work environment. A strong impression of professional identity causes individuals to act in accordance with the norms, ethics, and standards of their profession. Professional identity is an inseparable concept in all professions including the teaching profession. Although much research has examined teachers' professional identity, research on prospective teachers who are still in training is still limited. Many researches emphasis identity among qualified teachers with the assumption that they have a more established identity compared to pre-service teachers who are still developing their professional identities. Acknowledging its importance may encourage further research and contribute to a broader understanding of teacher development, which is informed by knowledge of what factors influence professional identity at all levels. Qualitative descriptive approach is employed in this study. The study is conducted on 13 pre-service teachers majoring in English education who have had field teaching experience. The research instruments used are questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and literature research. Then the data is analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate a crucial factor in the establishing of pre-service teachers' professional self-concept, namely the initial motivation when choosing an English education major. Pre-service teachers also expressed an awareness of the role of professional identity in enabling effective professional performance. Additionally, holding positive perspectives about their chosen profession appears to support skills development that provides new perspectives to the preparation of expert teachers

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**Keywords:** *professional identity development; pre-service teachers; indonesian context*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

A well-developed professional identity is an essential component across all occupations, but is particularly critical for those in educational roles, as it aligns professional reality with personal and professional identity (Goodson, 2020). It enables interpreting identity into professional practice through appropriate conduct. Both practicing and pre-service teachers must cultivate this identity for ethical awareness and competency. Although there are many studies on teachers' professional identity, many of them only focus on the identity of in-service teachers because they are considered to have a more established professional identity, while pre-service teachers are still volatile and vulnerable to significant changes when transitioning from students to professionals. Therefore, researching identity formation among pre-service teachers is important. This study aims to explore the development of pre-service teachers' professional identity and how they perceive the importance of their professional identity.

Previous research by (Moore & Hofman, 1988) asserts that professional identity is known as the proportion in which individuals perceive their job duties as purposeful, interesting, and compatible with their other life responsibilities. When people believe that their work has value and appeal, they will be driven to become professionals in their field. There is a clear link between professional identity and motivation. Scientific studies reveal that teachers' professional identity includes their self-perceptions as education professionals, such as their views of their own abilities, motivations, pedagogical perspectives, and interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues. (Anspal et al., 2012; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Hong, 2010; Izadinia, 2013; Kelchtermans, 1993; Nickel & Zimmer, 2018; Stenberg et al., 2014; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010)

Additionally, within numerous studies, teachers' professional identities have been linked to self-concepts, while others emphasize teachers' roles (Lamote & Engels, 2010). In profession where an individual's sense of self is interlinked profoundly with their professional work, the personal and professional domains cannot be detached, as it appears implausible that an individual's fundamental personal identity will not influence their fundamental professional identity. (Lamote & Engels, 2010). It indicates that having a professional identity and acting professionally can affect attitudes and behaviors. In education, this aligns with research that found professional identity shapes teaching practices (Beijaard et al., 2004). In addition, main parts of teachers' professional identities have a big effect on their teaching methods, efforts to improve professionally, and opinions on changes to education policy (Beijaard et al., 2004). The professional identity of teachers encompasses their self-image and acknowledgment as part of the teaching profession (Friesen & Besley, 2013). The professional identity of student teachers involves both their current self-conceptualizations as educators as well as their ambitions concerning the optimal teacher self they hope to become. The student teachers' professional identities are influenced by a variety of factors, including their previous experiences, learning in teacher programs, and active experience in actual classrooms. Individual professional identity also represents a person's attitude towards their occupation and function (Hanna et al., 2020). As noted by (Beijaard et al., 2004), initial life events, watching exceptional teaching role models, familial influences, and important persons can all help to shape one's professional identity as an educator.

The degree of passion and commitment teachers have toward their profession affects their professional identity and personal wellness (Skinner et al., 2019). Teachers' overall wellness is substantially impacted by their professional identity, sense of efficacy, and self-esteem, all of which are formed through interpersonal encounters and relationships. Moreover, a student teacher's motivation to teach influences their choice to pursue teaching as a career. It drives them to learn, accomplish their professional goals, and stick with teaching even when they face difficult situations and challenges (Pop & Turner, 2009). Although teachers develop their professional identities throughout their careers, teacher preparation programs play a key role in establishing the foundation for their emerging professional selves (Nickel & Zimmer, 2018). According to research by (Hanna et al., 2020; Izadinia, 2013), student teachers' professional identities include their positive attitudes about the teaching profession as well as how they see themselves as teachers presently.

The topic of professional identity on teacher has been widely researched, but the research about pre-service teacher professional identity is limited. Research often focuses on practicing teachers because they have a more established professional identity. Professional identities of pre-service teachers' are still emerging and are adaptable, thus significant alterations may occur as they advance from student to professional responsibilities. Pre-service teachers' professional identity is still evolving and may not be as clearly delineated as that of experienced teacher. While investigations into pre-service teacher professional identity development are limited compared to research on practicing teachers, recognizing its importance can promote further scholarly inquiry and contribute to a more holistic understanding of teacher growth. Both researchers and teacher educators stand to gain insights from examining factors that shape professional identity during the initial stages of teachers' careers. To address the gap in the

literature, the present study aims to explore how pre-service English teachers in training construct and internalize the professional identities of themselves in the context of the Indonesian school regulation. This research specifically investigates and elucidates the professional identities of pre-service instructors who are still undergoing training and have not commenced their teaching roles. The questions of this research are: (1) What determines pre-service teachers choose English education as their pursue degrees? (2) How significantly has the professional identity of pre-service teachers developed recently? (3) How do pre-service teachers view the significance of professional identity formation?

#### **METHOD**

To examine and investigate pre-service teacher professional identity, this study used a descriptive qualitative methodology. As stated by Moleong (2011), descriptive qualitative research elucidates phenomena associated to individuals comprehensively including behaviors, perspectives, motives, actions, and more, with findings presented comprehensively through verbal and textual descriptions (Shodiq & Marhamah, 2021). Thirteen students (10 females and 3 males) from English education major volunteered to take part in the study. Participants selected for the research were required to meet specific criteria to ensure they could suitably address the research questions under investigation. Participants must be from seventh semester education majors who have completed field teaching programs in order to acquire comprehensive and clarified data.

Presently, triangulation is a strategy utilized in social science research. As elucidated by (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003), triangulation involves corroborating data from multiple sources to identify consistencies and patterns across the dataset (Elsje et al., 2023). Therefore, this research employed three various instruments to gather the data: questionnaire, in-depth interview, and library research. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews are primary data, which will then be validated by theories from the library research method. The questionnaire was distributed via google form to the selected sampling. The questionnaire questions are open-ended to explore data and information more freely. The researcher will manually review participants' responses and select five individuals for in-depth interviews. These interviews will serve to verify the consistency of participants' prior answers and elicit more detailed information. Interviews will be conducted by recording conversations, contingent on participants granting permission. Questionnaire and interview findings will then be validated through comparison with existing literature.

For data analysis, the researcher employed thematic analysis, defined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as the procedure of determining patterns and themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This method facilitates the systematic organization and rich description of detailed data to enable interpretation of various facets of the research topic. Thematic analysis used to analyze the participants' responses from questionnaire and interview by reading the answer carefully and highlighting the point of the answer. To categorize the data, the researcher utilized coding by annotating participants' responses based on commonalities and distinctions. Coding refers to applying codes to qualitative data, grouping and regrouping the coded data to integrate meaning and elucidate phenomena (Grbich, 2007). This process enables the segmentation, categorization, and relinking of data (Saldana, 2008). The coded data then will form the themes. The researcher subsequently generalizes the responses in order to formulate data outcomes. The results will then be validated using library research after the data have been

assembled. To avoid errors in data interpretation, the researcher proofreads and manually examines the answers through questionnaires or interview transcripts.

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In initial investigations about motivations of pre-service teachers' for pursuing teaching as a profession, researchers must first determine participants' rationales for selecting an education major. The researcher gathered data on motivations for choosing education majors from 13 respondents. An open-ended questionnaire was utilized, enabling participants to expand on their reasoning. Responses were then evaluated to highlight participants' replies. Questionnaire items probed respondents' motivation for majoring in education, envisioned career paths post-student teaching, evolution of professional identity towards becoming educators after undertaking practicum experiences, and impetuses for opting to become teachers. During data analysis, members of the research team cross-validated coding of responses and thematic categorizations. The team also shared insights from coding each pre-service teacher's data and comparisons across participants. Through iterative discussion, variances in coding and thematic categorization were addressed until consensus was achieved regarding data interpretation.

**Table 1. Pre-service motivation choosing the study program – initial motivation.**

Name*	Gender	Motivation for choosing the study program	Initial sense of self-as-teacher in the future
Harry	M	I want to be an educator and motivator of students	Yes
Richie	F	I want to give benefits to the nation's children and be a good influence for them.	Yes
Ilana	F	I choose education study to share my knowledge to others	Yes
Pricile	F	Be a teacher because it is my dream and my parents as well	Yes
Alice	F	I want to teach my future student to increase their quality	Yes
Willie	F	I prefer to the concentration (English language) rather than the “education”	No
Aulia	F	I want to be the professional teacher and become the government employees	Yes
Hailey	F	I want to be a careful and dedicated teacher	Yes
Haura	F	Actually, this is not my first choice yet I think be a teacher it is not too bad idea	No
Fani	F	I initially had an interest in education, but not specifically in becoming a teacher.	No
Ryan	M	I have an interest in positively influencing my students and being an agent of change	Yes
Aldo	M	I just want to be successful by not just being a teacher.	No
Ningrum	F	My first motivation because my parents want me to be a lecturer and convinced me to choose education major	Yes

\*All of the name written are pseudonym

The data presented in the aforementioned table demonstrates that the predominant proportion of pre-service teachers possess intrinsic enthusiasm to embark upon pedagogical careers. According to the data collected, there are 9 teacher education students who are motivated to become teachers when choosing an education major, while the other three people have different motivations when choosing an education major. Referring to the responses of the respondents above, there are still many students who want to be teachers for a variety of reasons and motivations. Their motivations might be classified as intrinsic, extrinsic, or altruistic.

Inherent inspirations encompassing facets like the significance of instruction and aspiration for educating, subject mastery, and capability constitute intrinsic motivations (Bergmark et al., 2018). The presented information indicates that at least four pre-service teachers have an innate desire to become a teacher.

“I want to be an educator and motivator of students” (Harry)

According to the findings, Harry expressed a desire to become an educator and motivator after completing his degree at the English education department where he was teaching. This aligns with

(Korthagen, 2004) assertion that initial impressions and experiences shape one's vision of the teaching profession, as exemplary individuals have significant influence over the development of professional identity. This notion also aligns with:

“I choose education study to share my knowledge to others” (Ilana)

Ilana's motivation is also inherent, stemming from a deeply rooted ambition to satisfy the educator's obligation of sharing knowledge to students. Knowledge sharing refers to the systematic gathering and distribution of implicit and explicit information with others. The goals are self-improvement, amplified workplace efficacy and efficiency (Bibi & Ali, 2017). The decision to decide teaching as a career is said to be motivated by natural motivations, which are frequently characterized as passion derived from internal satisfaction and significance (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). In teacher development, intrinsic motivation manifests as a yearning to nurture children's growth through the broader educational enterprise. For instance, pre-service teacher may opt to teach to satisfy desires to assist and direct children in ways unavailable otherwise, or to find fulfillment through interpersonal engagement in academic setting (Nickel & Zimmer, 2018). In contrast, extrinsic motivated people take action because of instrumental values, rewards, competition, obligation, and approval (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the data obtained, extrinsic motivation is represented by one of the participants :

“I want to be the professional teacher and become the government employees” (Aulia)

Aulia's motivation is based on the desire to achieve the title of professional teacher. This aligns with the reality that prospective educators' motivations to become teachers encompass perceiving the role as a relatively prestigious occupation that is treasured by the wider community (Van Overschelde & Garza, 2020). Furthermore, study reveals Aulia's desire and ambition to become a government-employed educator. In Indonesia, government instructors are recognized as having solid career paths and good salary. This is consistent with research demonstrating that pre-service teacher demonstrate significant motivation deriving from possibilities of stable professional paths with steady income (Van Overschelde & Garza, 2020).

An additional form of motivation is altruistic desire, encompassing a perspective of teaching as an esteemed and socially beneficial career, coupled with an aspiration to assist children's growth and effectuate positive change in the community. This motive is shared by several responders, as evidenced by Alice's responses:

“I want to teach my future student to increase their quality”

Alice's motivation exemplifies altruistic drives, whereby teaching is construed as a socially rewarding vocation reflecting a “service theme” (Ye et al., 2022). Such motivations have long been linked to teaching, defined in 19th century conceptions of the profession as a "exceptional noble job" (Heinz, 2015). Altruistic motive echo research (Ye et al., 2022) on educators' ethical duties to nurture and support students. Psychologically, this responsibility signifies an obligation to demonstrate care and accept accountability for negligence.

Having explored pre-service teachers' motivations for pursuing English education degree programs, this study will subsequently investigate developments in their professional identity formation following academic and practical pedagogical preparation, as well as potential associations between initial

motivations and professional identity development progress. Data related to the progress of professional identity formation can be examined through the following table:

**Table 2. Professional Identity Development**

Name (Pseudonym)	Professional Identity Development		
	Developed	Limited	Undeveloped
Harry	✓		
Richie	✓		
Fani			✓
Ilana			✓
Pricile		✓	
Alice	✓		
Willie		✓	
Aulia	✓		
Hailey	✓		
Aldo	✓		
Haura			✓
Ryan	✓		
Ningrum		✓	

The interpretation of the data given is according to their teaching experience during field practice whether they have applied the code of ethics as a teacher and how they see themselves as a teacher. The grouping of the data given is based on their answers to questions through questionnaires and then explored comprehensively through indepth interviews. The aforementioned data table delineates that of the total sample of pre-service teacher surveyed, seven already possess a fully formed professional identity, three assume their identity are established but require further cultivation, and the other three denote a thorough absence of vocational identity correlated with the teaching occupation.

Looking at the connection between pre-service teacher developing professional identity and their original motivation for choosing an English education major, it can be seen that of the seven with a well-developed identity, six were initially motivated to become teachers. This suggests the initial motivation influences professional identity growth. Those entering with an intrinsic desire to teach find it easier to shape their self-concept as teachers, as their foundational goal aids forming an identity. This finding aligns with previous research by (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010) which discovered which pre-service teachers with intrinsic desires to adapt are tend to have positive perceptions of their teacher training program and their student teaching experiences. The existing analysis additionally signified that pre-service teacher possessing extrinsic motivations to accommodate held more favorable perspectives of their preliminary classroom instruction encounters. Additionally, there is some concern that merely conforming to the expectations of others could result in an unhealthy self-concept and only superficial dedication to those standards. In contrast, a teacher who discovers intrinsic worth in those ideals is more likely to take an adaptive, growth-oriented approach and aim for expertise (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Nickel & Zimmer, 2018).

On the other hand, there are three participants who assumed they have limited professional identity, and the others assume that their professional identity is undeveloped. Meanwhile, there are only three of them who have initial motivation to be a teacher. This shows that sometimes initial motivation does not always influence the progress of professional identity formation, although motivation can dominantly help the establishment of pre-service teachers' professional identity. Numerous elements can

influence the development of pre-service teacher individuality, including a lack of exploration or even mismatch perceptions between their perception and reality. A research suggests adopting a teacher identity without exploration can restrict developing a mature professional identity (Pillen et al., 2013). Challenging rigid beliefs may be needed to create identity dissonance and transform student teachers' views Chong (2011) in (Friesen & Besley, 2013) characterizes this as the gap between idealistic notions of teaching and practical realities. She notes this dissonance may lead to disillusionment and frustration if students are not oriented to real classrooms.

When studying the growth of professional identity, it is critical to comprehend future educators' ideas on the value of professional distinctiveness. As suggested by prior research, examining student teachers' views on the value of professional identity is critical, as more positive perceptions of its importance can motivate them to further advance their professional growth. The present study obtained qualitative data through interviews with five participants, including three females and two males. The findings from these interviews are as follows:

“The existence of teacher professionalism can demonstrate good teacher quality. This professional identity is important because it can be realized in the practices carried out by teachers and can affect the effectiveness of the learning process” (Richie)

Richie expressed that having a professional identity enables teachers to enhance their skills and improve their instructional practices. This aligns with finding that teachers' beliefs and professional identity shape how they navigate educational changes (Beijaard et al., 2000). Relatedly, research on teachers' self-efficacy in impacting student growth has expanded our understanding of pedagogical practices. As (Titu, 2019) discussed, beliefs lie at the core of teachers' thinking and guide how they choose to apply knowledge and implement classroom ideas.

One other participant expressed a comparable perspective:

“Professional identity must be owned by teachers because when a professional teacher can deliver material with his ability he can master the material, and understand the teacher's code of ethics” (Aulia)

Beyond the pedagogical expertise teachers must possess, Aulia highlighted that a professional identity is critical for enabling educators to adhere to established codes of ethics. As (Titu, 2019) discussed, ethical codes shape appropriate teacher conduct and role fulfillment. Teachers who have difficulty grasping their identity and purpose in the classroom tend to experience discouragement, prompting resignation. In contrast, those more adept at comprehending and adapting to their professional identities as teachers may be more inclined to persist.

The answer regarding the importance of professional identity for teachers was complemented by another participant:

*“Professional identity is essential for educators and underpins their roles and responsibilities. . Teachers who identify as professionals are more likely to present material in a relevant and engaging manner, motivating students to achieve academic excellence. Beyond the classroom, professional identity promotes a sense of social responsibility, encouraging educators to become actively involved in educational initiatives and to contribute to improving education as well as society. Essentially, professional identity is the foundation for effective teaching, shaping educators' character and increasing their overall educational impact” (Ryan)*

Ryan accurately notes the essential role of professional identity provides. A comprehensive review of Ryan's perspective suggests that an emphasis on educators' professional identities is likely to have a profoundly favorable impact on pedagogical and learning processes in the classroom. Educators with strong professional identities are frequently able to demonstrate knowledge of subject content, clear explanations of concepts, and effective pedagogical strategies, hence boosting academic accomplishment

among learners. Ryan's comments are consistent with earlier research suggesting that professional identity reflects in educational practice (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Nickel & Zimmer, 2018). Furthermore, Ryan's perspective is consistent with previous research indicating that identity reflects individual convictions and shapes behaviors. The professional identity of teachers is the foundation of their personality and behaviors. Given that teachers have a important role on student learning, scholars and practitioners should investigate educators' professional identities as part of collaborative efforts to foster outstanding education and learning experiences (Hsieh, 2014).

Academic study has demonstrated that pre-service teachers' professional identities influence extrinsic motivation for knowledge acquisition and professional integration (Zhang et al, 2016), where as (Moore & Hofman, 1988) it was revealed that pre-service teachers with weak professional identities were inclined to report learning exhaustion. According to the sociocultural approach, learning instructional abilities is a critical component of developing professional identity (Dahl, 2018). As pre-service teachers proceed through the teacher training journey and engage in practitioner community customs, their professional identity continues to emerge (Dahl, 2018). Pre-service teachers develop an identity as community members by participating in the teaching community's communal and cultural behaviors, gradually transitioning from outsiders to insiders inside the educator group (Friesen & Besley, 2013).

To cultivate pre-service teachers' professional identities, targeted activities such as group seminars, assessments, field teaching experiences, and mentorship from expert professors who can assess their self-concept as teachers may be effective. Professional identity development is an important process in teacher education and community involvement, influencing motivation, engagement, stress, and career decisions among pre-service teachers. Moreover, scholars denote that multiple factors can impede professional identity building among pre-service teachers, including strain from deficient compensation and stringent demands, which can engender occupational exhaustion and abandonment (Wang et al., 2020). However, multiple studies show that pre-service teachers prefer teaching careers in order to make significant social contributions (Hennessy & Lynch, 2016).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research examined professional identity development among pre-service English educators. The objective was to determine how cultivating professional identity during teacher training may impact their eventual effectiveness as in-service teachers. Findings indicate motivations for pursuing an English education degree relate to shaping professional identity as a student teacher. Pre-service teachers possessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to educate extensively exhibited entrenched professional identities at the onset of practical engagement. As anticipated, internal motivations can shape perspectives on and desire to improve capabilities. The study also investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of professional identity's importance to gauge their awareness and motivation to actively develop it. The rationale was that pre-service teachers exhibiting robust professional identities will display strong instructional skills and professionalism as in-service teachers. Research on professional identity carries implications for increasing pre-service teachers' cognizance that self-conceptions positively affect enhancing their skills and caliber as educators, which will assuredly improve teaching effectiveness in schools when instituted. Fostering professional identity in pre-service teachers enables fully formed

professionalism as future teachers, profoundly influencing performance and student outcomes in teaching and learning.

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