

Research on the identity of pre-service English teachers and its influencing factors

He Maola

Yangtze University, Jingzhou City, Hubei Province, China

Received: 13 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 10 Oct 2025; Accepted: 14 Oct 2025, Published on: 19 Oct 2025
©2025 The Author(s). Published by TheShillonga. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



Abstract— To explore the experiences and influencing factors of identity construction among pre-service English teachers, this study examined three pre-service English teachers enrolled in the second year of an Academic English Master's program at a university. Employing semi-structured interviews combined with multi-level coding data analysis, the research was conducted within a three-dimensional framework encompassing professional identity, personal identity, and situational identity. Findings reveal that identity construction among pre-service English teachers is a dynamic and complex multi-stage process, evolving sequentially through role recognition, theoretical learning, practical exploration, and identity formation. This process is shaped by both personal factors (teaching experience, professional competence, teaching motivation) and external factors (significant others, institutional environment), with the influence of “significant others” being the most pronounced. These findings offer practical insights for optimizing pre-service English teacher training systems. However, the study acknowledges its limitation of a relatively short time span, suggesting future research could track the identity development dynamics of pre-service teachers after they enter the profession.

Keywords— Pre-service English teachers, Teacher identity construction, Teaching practicum, Influencing factors

I. INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of educational globalization and deepening reforms in English education, teacher identity—as a core factor influencing teaching quality and professional development—has emerged as a research hotspot in teacher education. The pre-service stage, serving as a critical foundational period for teachers' professional growth, directly shapes future educators' sense of professional belonging, teaching beliefs, and practical

competencies. The dual nature of English as both a tool and a humanities subject presents unique challenges for pre-service English teachers' identity formation. They must not only enhance both their linguistic expertise and pedagogical competence but also navigate the transition from “student” to “teacher” through the interplay between theoretical learning and teaching practice.

Existing research has explored the connotations and influencing factors of teacher identity from diverse

perspectives. Among these, the three-dimensional framework proposed by Christopher Day et al., encompassing professional identity, personal identity, and situational identity, provides crucial theoretical support for analyzing the multidimensional composition of teacher identity. Additionally, studies by domestic and international scholars on the role of personal traits and external environments in identity construction lay the foundation for this research. However, existing research still holds room for further exploration regarding the details of identity construction among pre-service English teachers in the critical context of educational practicum, particularly concerning the differences in identity experiences between pre-service teachers with different educational backgrounds (English education majors versus non-English education majors). Educational practicum serves as a bridge connecting theory and practice, representing a crucial stage where pre-service teachers confront real teaching scenarios, encounter role conflicts, and undergo identity reshaping. Systematically exploring the identity construction experiences and their influencing mechanisms during this process holds significant practical implications for refining teacher training models.

Based on this, this study focuses on the identity construction process of pre-service English teachers during their three-month secondary education practicum. The core research questions include: What identity construction experiences do pre-service English teachers undergo during their practicum? What key factors influence the formation and development of their teaching identity? Through in-depth interviews with three pre-service English teachers

from different academic backgrounds, this study aims to reveal the dynamic characteristics of identity construction among pre-service English teachers and clarify the mechanisms of various influencing factors. This research seeks to provide empirical evidence for optimizing university English teacher education curricula and refining internship guidance systems, thereby facilitating smoother professional identity construction and transition for pre-service English teachers.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Research subjects and content

In response to our research question:

- (1) What are the pre-service teacher's experiences of teacher identity construction?
- (2) What factors impact on teacher identity construction?

The subjects of this study were three pre-service English teachers enrolled in the second year of a Master's program in Academic English at the same university. Among them, two had undergraduate degrees in English Education, while one had a degree in Business English. All participants were required to complete a three-month teaching practicum at secondary schools. During this period, they engaged in subject teaching practice under the joint supervision of university mentors and school supervisors, undertaking tasks such as lesson preparation, classroom instruction, homework grading, and textbook research. Their basic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic information of questionnaire survey participants

Research subjects	Undergraduate institution and major	Whether there is internship/educational experience	Educational level
A	Teacher training institution, Teacher training English	Yes	Second year in junior high school

B	Comprehensive university, Teacher education English	Yes	Second year in high school
C	Comprehensive university, Business English	No	First year in high school

2.2 Research subjects and content

The four dimensions and sub-dimensions of identity construction in this study primarily reference Christopher Day and Alison Kington's (2008) classification of English teachers' professional identity, encompassing professional identity, personal identity, and situational identity. Their theoretical framework is presented in Fig. 1. Professional identity refers to pre-service English teachers' understanding and perception of the profession, their positioning and assessment of their professional competence development, including their beliefs about English teaching and their evaluation of their professional knowledge (i.e., English language proficiency). Personal identity refers to the extent of commitment and behavioral tendencies demonstrated by teachers during their practicum both inside and outside the classroom, as well as their self-assessment of teaching management capabilities. Situational identity pertains to the support and assistance received from schools and mentor teachers, along with teacher-student relationships, experienced by pre-service teachers during their educational practicum.

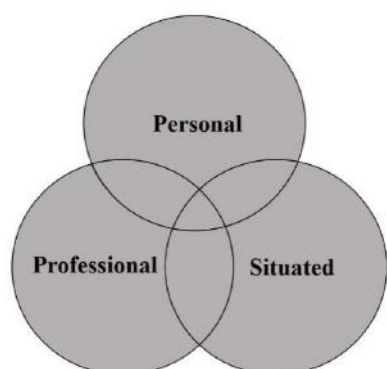


Fig. 1. Research framework

The two major dimensions of influencing factors are categorized into personal and external factors based on existing literature, drawing on findings from Xie Shuhai (2016), Wei Ge and Chen Xiangming (2015), Luebbers (2010), and others regarding identity construction determinants. Personal factors include pre-service teachers' own teaching motivation, teaching experience, and professional competence. External factors primarily stem from significant others encountered during practicum, such as practicum mentors, students, and fellow colleagues, as well as the work environment and atmosphere of the host school.

2.3 Research methods

This study primarily employs the interview method. The process of constructing teacher identity is often achieved through narrative approaches such as descriptive recollection. Semi-structured interviews assist pre-service English teachers in recalling daily teaching experiences, summarizing and reflecting on their work performance and role positioning. Furthermore, interviews validate, explain, and supplement findings from questionnaire surveys. While questionnaires broadly outline changes in pre-service English teachers' identity during their three-month practicum, interviews delve deeper into analyzing the dynamic shifts across different identity dimensions. The interview content focuses on pre-service English teachers' sense of identity and its influencing factors, while also examining potential identity conflicts encountered during practicum. The interview outline was designed with reference to Xun Yang's (2012) interview questions for a survey on high school English teachers' identity formation. It primarily focuses on changes in pre-service English

teachers' professional identity, subject identity, personal identity, and situational identity. Modifications were made based on the research subjects and the educational practicum context, resulting in a final set of 11 interview questions. Specific interview questions include the degree to which student teachers identify with their professional roles and their sense of professional belonging; their understanding of English teaching and learning; reflective evaluations of their commitment to teaching work; and their perceptions of the school's organizational environment. They also cover the primary difficulties and pressures

encountered during the internship, issues identified in teaching practice and their perspectives on these issues; conflicts and contradictions in role positioning; and the extent to which various factors influence English teaching practice during the internship.

2.4 Research process

Based on the objectives and research design of this study, three pre-service teachers were selected for in-depth interviews. Detailed interview information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Interview information

Interviewer	Respondent	Internship targets	Interview time	Interview location	Duration
Wang	A	Eighth grade	2024.9.5	Playground	36 Mins
He	B	11th grade	2024.9.5	Playground	35 Mins
Liu	C	10th grade	2024.9.5	Dormitory	38 Mins

Each interview lasted approximately half an hour. The researcher invited participants to recall their internship experiences, answer questions from the interview outline, and, with informed consent, recorded the sessions and transcribed them into verbatim transcripts. For data analysis, this study employed a multi-level coding approach to examine changes and characteristics in pre-service teachers' identity construction during educational internships, as well as potential identity conflicts faced by pre-service English teachers. When reviewing the interview transcripts, the author adopted the perspective of the research subjects to identify representative, emotionally charged expressions. These raw examples were then semantically summarized and categorized into primary codes, further grouped into secondary conceptual categories, and ultimately elevated to tertiary codes: professional identity, personal identity, and situational identity.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Pre-service English teacher identity

3.1.1 Professional identity

The category "Mission and Responsibilities of English Teachers" refers to respondents' understanding and perception of the duties and mission-based responsibilities associated with the role of an English teacher. "Role Adjustment" denotes the potential shifts in identity that pre-service English teachers may encounter during their practicum (e.g., transitioning from student to teacher identity), the fatigue experienced when juggling different role-based tasks (such as subject teaching duties and homeroom teacher responsibilities), as well as situations where role identities lack clarity and presence. "English Language Proficiency" encompasses "Oral Expression" and "Subject Knowledge." "Oral Expression" refers to pre-service English teachers' ability to communicate in English during teaching practice. "Subject Knowledge" denotes pre-

service English teachers' mastery of the English subject matter appropriate for the grade level they will teach. The encoding information is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Partial encoded information on professional identity

Level 3 encoding	Level 2 encoding	Level 1 encoding	Original example sentence
Professional identity: Understanding of values, sense of belonging, and understanding of teaching	Professional values	The mission and responsibilities of an English teacher	I believe a good teacher keeps up with the times, pays attention to students, and is full of passion. (B)
	Professional belonging	Character adjustment	It won't be like before, where being full of ideals was itself an idealized state. To view teachers in that way is to indulge in wishful thinking. (B)
	English teaching philosophy	Understanding of English teaching	Focus on students and approach teaching from their perspective, maintaining a fresh perspective on instruction and adapting teaching methods according to the subject matter. (B)
	English language proficiency	Spoken expression	Oral expression requires contextual simulation and practice. (B)
		Subject knowledge	Corpora have transformed my teaching philosophy, while discourse analysis has given me a clearer understanding of the content I teach, enabling a more meticulous refinement of teaching materials and methodologies. (B)

3.1.2 Personal identity

“Task Completion Rate” refers to the level and extent to which pre-service English teachers fulfill their duties and complete assigned tasks during their teaching practicum. “Self-directed learning and seeking assistance” refers to the extent to which pre-service English teachers proactively engage in professional learning or seek guidance from others when encountering challenges during their practicum.

“Professional conduct evaluation” encompasses “teaching competency” and “practicum performance.” “Teaching competency” denotes the pre-service English teacher's assessment and reflection on their instructional abilities during the practicum; “practicum performance” refers to the pre-service English teacher's evaluation and perspective on their own behavioral and work performance throughout the practicum period. And the encoding information is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Partial encoded information on personal identity

Level 3 encoding	Level 2 encoding	Level 1 encoding	Original example sentence
Personal identity: Commitment to teaching and related professional behavioral tendencies	Work Commitment: Enthusiasm and dedication toward internship work	Task completion rate	There weren't many opportunities to attend classes during the internship; I only attended one session. (B)
		Self-directed learning	Will ask peers, teachers, or look online to solve the problem. (B)
	Professional behavior evaluation: Assessment of internship performance	Teaching competence	Through practical experience, I have come to recognize some shortcomings in my teaching approach. (B)
		Internship performance	Through the internship, I enhanced my diverse skills. (B)

3.1.3 Situational identity

“Sense of organizational support” encompasses “guidance and learning opportunities provided by the school” and “assistance and guidance from mentors and colleagues.” “Guidance and learning opportunities provided by the school” refers to professional growth opportunities offered by the practicum school to pre-service English

teachers, such as classroom observation opportunities and teaching research discussions. “Support and guidance from mentors and colleagues” refers to professional guidance and assistance provided to pre-service English teachers by mentor teachers and other subject group teachers. “Teacher-student relationships” includes “average relationships” and “harmonious relationships.” And the encoding information is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Partial encoded information on Situational identity

Level 3 encoding	Level 2 encoding	Level 1 encoding	Original example sentence
Situational identity: Support and assistance from the internship school, relationships with supervising teachers and students	Sense of Organizational Support: Assistance and support provided by teachers at the internship school, parents, elders, and others.	Guidance and learning opportunities provided by the school	My internship supervisor has been very supportive, encouraging me to teach using my own ideas without imposing restrictions, and giving me considerable freedom to explore. (B)
		Guidance provided by mentors and colleagues	Each teacher has a different teaching focus and their own unique teaching philosophy, and there is something worthwhile for me to learn from each of them. (B)

	Teacher- student relationship: The relationship with students, as well as the attitude and feelings toward interacting with them.	Relationship is average	My relationship with students is generally average. Sometimes, even when I put in the effort, I don't see results—the students play a crucial role too. If they don't receive feedback on their learning, they can become discouraged. (B)
		Get along well	I get along quite well with my students, and they are very supportive of me. (B)

3.2 Factors influencing pre-service English teachers' identity formation

3.2.1 Personal factors influence pre-service English teachers' professional identity

Upon entering the practicum setting, the identity construction of pre-service English teachers is influenced by their teaching experiences, encompassing both prior teaching history and experiences gained during the practicum. Conducting practicum classes is a major task every pre-service English teacher must complete. Through repeated teaching practices, pre-service teachers generate new pedagogical insights and reflections. Pre-service teachers accumulate practical teaching experience during their practicum. Through repeated practice, they generate fresh insights and reflections on teaching, which significantly contributes to enhancing their instructional proficiency. One teacher mentioned in an interview: “The first time I stood at the front of the classroom, I felt I had some semblance of a teacher. Overall, it went reasonably well. Subsequent lessons saw me grow increasingly proficient, with my classroom management skills improving significantly. I not only learned to control the pacing of a lesson but also effectively managed student discipline.” As teaching practice experience accumulates, pre-service teachers enhance their ability to manage English classrooms.

All three teachers mentioned in the follow-up interviews that one reason they chose to become English teachers was their solid English proficiency.

“I chose to become an English teacher because I have more to rely on in this area; this profession aligns with my major.” (Teacher A)

“After all, I majored in English, so I have some foundation, which makes me feel I have the capability to be an English teacher.” (Teacher B)

“I believe my language knowledge is sufficient for teaching high school English.” (Teacher C)

Teaching competence influences pre-service English teachers' evaluations of their own professional conduct. Teacher B remarked in the second interview:

“During my first class, I followed the PWP model (pre-reading; while-reading; post-reading) step by step as taught in school. Yet I wasn't sure how to refine and implement it more effectively. While preparing, I often felt helpless. Ultimately, the teaching outcomes were unsatisfactory, leaving me quite disappointed.”

3.2.2 External factors exert a significant influence on the construction of identity

In the study, the author found that while both pre-service teachers chose English teaching because it aligned with their own English proficiency, the support of those around them also played a significant role. Their motivation to pursue English teaching stemmed primarily from external factors, including their recognition of the advantages

inherent in the teaching profession and their own professional limitations. From Teacher A's interview, it became clear that the stability of working within the system was seen as a major draw of the teaching profession. When explaining their choice to become a teacher, Teacher A even quoted a popular online phrase that best reflects the job-seeking orientation of young graduates today: "The end of the universe is a permanent position." This indicates that pre-service teachers highly value the stability of the teaching profession. Furthermore, the relationship between teachers and students directly impacts teachers' work morale and experiences, making the construction of pre-service teachers' identities inextricably linked to teacher-student dynamics. Teacher B stated in the interview: "I think what motivated me to want to become a teacher was, well, interacting with students and the influence of role models among the teachers around me. Then, during my practicum, my relationship with students was, well, okay—just average. I dreaded teaching them. This might stem from a gap between my expectations of students and their reality." This demonstrates that the teacher-student relationship is also a crucial factor in shaping teacher identity.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. The process of constructing teacher identity is dynamic and complex, involving exploration and growth across multiple stages and dimensions.

Role Perception Stage: Before embarking on their teaching career, pre-service teachers first develop an initial understanding of the teaching role. This typically stems from their educational background, family influences, societal perceptions, and personal expectations of the teaching profession. **Theoretical Learning Stage:** Pre-service teachers receive systematic instruction in educational theory and teaching methodologies at universities or teacher training colleges. **Practical Exploration Stage:** During internships or educational placements, pre-service teachers begin applying theoretical

knowledge to real-world teaching contexts. **Identity Formation Stage:** Through teaching practice, pre-service teachers start to develop a sense of identity with their role as educators.

2. The construction of pre-service English teachers' professional identity during educational internships is influenced by both personal and external factors.

Personal factors include teaching experience, professional competence, and motivation for teaching, while external factors encompass significant others and the school environment.

Analysis indicates that the factor of "significant others" exerts the most pronounced effect on pre-service English teachers' identity construction, followed by professional competence, school environment, teaching motivation, and teaching experience.

Overall, the experience of pre-service teachers in constructing their professional identity is an ongoing process of exploration, learning, and growth. They encounter various challenges and difficulties but also gain development and progress through these experiences. Through this journey, they gradually clarify their educational philosophy and teaching methods, forming their unique teaching style.

Additionally, this study focuses on the impact of educational internships on pre-service English teachers' identity construction, with a relatively short time span. During this period, teachers' sense of identity may experience temporary fluctuations and instability, thus only representing identity construction during the internship phase. Consequently, the study lacks sufficient attention to the subsequent professional identity development of pre-service English teachers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Gu M, Benson P. The formation of English teacher identities: A cross-cultural investigation [J]. Language Teaching Research, 2014, (1): 1- 20.
- [2] Luebbers J B . How Foreign Language Preservice Teachers' Development, Identities, and Commitments are Shaped During Teacher Education [D]. The Ohio State University, 2010. Identities, and Commitments are Shaped During Teacher Education [D]. Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2010.
- [3] Day C, Kington A. Identity, Well-being and Effectiveness: The Emotional Contexts of Teaching [J]. Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 2008, 16(1):7-23.
- [4] 寻阳. 我国高中英语教师身份认同研究[D]. 上海外国语大学, 2012.
- [5] 谢淑海. 实习支教生教师专业身份建构过程的叙事研究 [D]. 东北师范大学, 2016.
- [6] 魏淑华. 教师职业认同研究[D]. 西南大学, 2008.
- [7] 马红宇, 蔡宇轩, 唐汉瑛, 吴伦敦, 李凯, 周宗奎. 师范生教师职业认同的 内在结构与特点[J]. 教师教育研究, 2013, 25(01): 49-54.