

# Authoring the Teacher Within: A narrative inquiry of Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers' identity formation



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**Abstract** This research paper uncovers psychological and sociological aspects of identity construction by pre-service English teacher students in Indonesia using the Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry (TDNI) perspective. By taking a human and social science approach, it explores how teachers' identities are constructed within the adventure of experiencing emotions, establishing connections with others, and adapting to environments. Five preservice English education final-year students were involved in narrative interviews, reflective journals, and contextual observations as part of their School-Based Teaching Practice (SBTP). The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and shadow observations. They were thematically analyzed in relation to the dimensions of interaction (social inter-relating), continuity (apparent development), and situation (challenging context). Results suggest that taking on a teaching identity is a non-linear iterative process influenced by emotional transformation, emotionally supportive relationships with mentors and students, and the ability to reconcile contextual constraints, including school rules and student diversity. This paper is a testament to how SBTP served as a transformative "place" where pedagogical beliefs, self-efficacy, and professional values were negotiated and internalized. The findings highlight the importance of integrating structured reflection and mentoring into SBTP to support identity formation. This study enriches the literature of teacher identity by drawing on narrative inquiry, educational psychology, and sociological analysis in a local EFL teaching practicum context, which provides a specific contribution to broader debates in the human and social sciences about professional identity formation, emotional growth, and transformative learning.

**Keywords:** professional identity, emotional dimensions of learning, teaching practicum, pedagogical reflection, sociocultural context

## 1. Introduction

In the past decades, teacher professional identity has emerged as a core subject of study in education, particularly following the awareness emerging around its importance to teacher development, pedagogical decisions, and student outcomes (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Professional identity does not only reflect how teachers see themselves, but also how they are constructed and position themselves within culturally, institutionally, and socially determined sites of practice (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021). It is also recognized that teacher identity is not a predetermined state, but it is constantly shaped by personal experiences, pedagogical beliefs, contextual pressures, and professional interactions (Flores & Matos, 2022; Li, 2023).

Professional identity construction is significant for Western preservice teachers who are in the midst of their significant educational and professional transition, that is, from student to teacher. Thiastic identity formation is often characterized by ambivalence of self as pre-service teachers negotiate their idealism with the harsh realities of classroom life (Chan et al., 2023; Wong & Liu, 2025). Research findings indicate that the formation of a strong professional identity during teacher education is a key factor in predicting teachers' commitment, efficacy, and resilience (Ye et al., 2025; Low et al., 2025). Furthermore, pre-service teachers' self-perception also influences their reflection, adaptability, and lifelong learning (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Li & Khairani, 2025).

Several theories were employed to frame the idea of teacher identity, ranging from psychological to sociocultural ones. The sociocultural perspective, in particular, provides a powerful optic because it centers context, discourse, and social interaction in identity construction (Roth & Lee, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In this perspective, identity is not considered an

array of interior attributes, but a product that is articulated and negotiated by people taking part in meaningful social practices. Pre-service teachers are influenced in constructing and re-constructing their professional selves, which is formed by teaching practicums, learnability from the mentors, institutional expectations, and cultural narrative (Meyer et al., 2023; Huang & Wang, 2021).

The narrative inquiry approach has become an influential methodological tool to investigate teacher identity. Drawing from personal stories and real-life experiences, narrative inquiry enables the investigation of identity development through different times and spaces (Arifin et al., 2023; Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021). Identity is to be recognized as storied, situated, and relational — an outcome of the interactions among past experiences, current practices, and imagined futures (Varis et al., 2023). Narrative research has contributed to an in-depth understanding of how teachers make sense of the tension in their work and exercise their agency (Truong et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2022).

Although there is an increasing body of literature on teacher identity, the majority have targeted in-service teachers or contexts in Western and developed countries (Zhang & Wang, 2022; Flores & Matos, 2022). In particular, there remains a dearth in knowledge regarding how teacher identity is realised within under-represented exploration sites, for example, Indonesia, in which socio-cultural, linguistic, and educational narratives are likely to have significant influence on the experiences of pre-service teachers (Arifin et al., 2023; Krisdianata & Mbato, 2022). In Indonesia, EFL teacher candidates typically encounter contextual challenges (e.g., paucity of teaching and learning resources, examination-driven curriculum, and social expectations) that have an impact on their identity formation (Humairoh et al., 2024; Moradian et al., 2023).

Moreover, the current digital transformation perspective of global crises, such as the one brought about by COVID-19, has brought new dimensions to professional identity development. Digital pedagogy, emotional resilience, and online skills competence are now part of how teachers construct their professional identities (Su, 2023; Ulla et al., 2024). Pre-service teachers are expected to navigate not just the systems of traditional classrooms, but the pressures for technology integration, student inclusion, and socio-emotional supports (Najjarpour, 2025; Bai & Li, 2025). Identity formation today, then, needs to be considered within a more complicated instructional landscape.

It is hoped that this study can be a tribute to current knowledge, as it aims to scrutinize how the professional identity of Indonesian EFL preservice teachers is constructed by using narrative inquiry. Applying the TDNI framework, the paper helps unveil subtle pictures of how former and current pre-service teacher felt, and reflected on their practicum experiences. This way, we can have a comprehensive view of what English teachers-to-be are doing to build their identities in the sociocultural and institutional landscape of Indonesian schools (Tavakol & Tavakoli, 2022; Guo & Sidhu, 2024).

Through focusing on the voices of pre-service teachers directly, this research highlights that teacher education programmes should centralise identity in the preparation of teachers. Supporting identity development does not only imply skill acquisition, but also the articulation of reflective spaces, mentor relationships, and adaptive experiences that lead pre-service teachers to experience themselves as competent, accomplished, and ethical professionals (Zembylas, 2018; Truong et al., 2025). The authors hope the results of this report will encourage more context-based teacher education models in Indonesia and other parts of the world. The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do pre-service EFL teachers in Indonesia construct their experiences during the School-Based Teaching Practice (SBTP)?
2. How do interaction, continuity, and context contribute to their professional teacher identity?
3. What emotional, social, and contextual factors influence their developing teacher identity as English educators?

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

The study was qualitatively designed as research focused on narrative inquiry, based on the Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry (TDNI) model of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), to investigate the professional identity construction of pre-service English language teachers with a focus on School-Based Teaching Practice (SBTP). Narrative inquiry is well-suited to explore the nuances, contradictions, and emotional aspects of identity development in teaching contexts where participants tell their narratives in their voices (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021; Arifin et al., 2023).

Unlike traditional approaches to qualitative inquiry, such as case studies or ethnographies, narrative inquiry is not only focused on observable behavior. Instead, it explores how people construct meanings of their roles and thereby form self-identifications in relation to both available institutional and classroom discourses (Xu & Connelly, 2023). With teachers' identity being fluid, relational, and co-constructed through social interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Flores & Matos, 2022), narrative inquiry is the epistemological and methodological approach that best fits its aims.

### 2.2. The Overall Research Framework: 3D Narrative Inquiry (TDNI)

The Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry (TDNI) model offers a perspective to explore identity through three interconnected lenses:

- Interaction (Sociality), which encompasses emotion, social relationships, the performance of institutional roles, and positioning within a social hierarchy;
- Continuity (Temporality), focusing on the temporal development of changes, content, and identity—before, during, and after SBTP;
- Situation (Place), referring to the specific physical and social contexts (schools, classrooms, communities) where identity is enacted (Chan et al., 2023; Woodcock et al., 2022).

By intertwining these dimensions, it provides researchers with a tool to map how pre-service teachers narrate and interpret their emerging identity amid relational, temporal, and contextual complexities. TDNI also helps examine how culture, emotion, and pedagogy influence identity both explicitly and subtly (Meyer et al., 2023).

### 2.3. Research Context and Participants

The study involved three state universities in East Java, Indonesia, focusing on final-year students majoring in English education who participated in their SBTP placements. These experiences included four-month placements in various school settings, both urban and rural, and in public and private institutions. The sample was intentionally selected, and five informants (coded A–E) were chosen based on specific criteria.

- EFL final-year students doing their SBTP.
- Readiness to participate in deep reflection and storytelling.
- Placement in various teaching contexts.

The number of participants aligns with the narrative inquiry principle that emphasizes depth over breadth when studying lived experience (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021; Xu & Connelly, 2023). The aim was not to produce generalizable results but to explore the richly storied identities and their development over time and across different geographical areas.

Although it was a small sample size, this study reached data saturation with rich and thick data. Participants all took part in interviews throughout the stages of SBTP implementation, and kept reflective journals. Then, it is easier to discern recurring structures of experience and meaning. Higher-order themes and new insights were sought for in the additional data. When no emerging themes or new insights came up, data collection was stopped. Consistent with the narrative approach, the goal of this study was not to form general statistical conclusions but rather analytical transferability. The varied institutional contexts of the participants – comprising both public and private universities, as well as experiences with teaching practice in different school settings – painted a complete picture and enabled the researchers to think about the findings in relation to comparable contexts in pre-service English teacher education.

### 2.4. Data Collection Procedures

Information was collected through semi-structured narrative interviews and reflective journals, reinforced by additional school documents (e.g., syllabus, schedules). The process was developed through three steps:

- Narrative Interviews: Each participant was interviewed twice (60–90 minutes) using open-ended questions designed to encourage reflection on events from their teaching placement. Questions included:
  - Can you tell us about a moment that changed the way you see yourself as a teacher?
  - How were you engaging with students and colleagues?
  - How did you feel about yourself while you were teaching, and how did that feeling influence your self-esteem?

Interviews were also transcribed and translated from Bahasa Indonesia to English. The accuracy was ensured through back-translation procedures.

- Reflection: Participants provided their own self-written journals at three points during and after the practicum. These reflections provided information about emotional struggles, changes in learners, classroom issues, differences in pedagogy, and growth (Lan, 2024).

- Contextual Documents: Additional information through school profiles, classroom assignments, and institutional policies were scrutinized to triangulate narrative results and deepen understanding.

This methodological triangulation improved credibility and highlighted the nuanced relationship between individuals' stories and institutions (Moradian et al., 2023).

### 2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on a narrative thematic approach as proposed by Clandinin et al. (2016), in four iterative stages:

- Development of life narratives recapturing each participant's experience over time, identifying turning points and narrative arcs.
- Codification of the themes was congruent with the dimensions of TDNI
- Factors such as fear of failure, mentor as a role model, student connectedness, and curriculum constraints were grouped into categories: interaction, continuity, and situation.
- Cross-case synthesis to highlight commonalities, divergences, and tensions in shared identity.

- Theorization of findings by relating the emergent themes to prior conceptual frameworks (e.g., dialogical identity theory, teacher emotion research).
- To enhance rigor, two qualitative research specialists reviewed the coding, and member checking was conducted with participants to validate the reconstructed stories.

## 2.6. Ethical Considerations

This investigation exceeded institutional research ethics for educational studies. Before data collection, all participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, how it would be conducted, and their right to decline participation. Written informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation were assured. Pseudonyms were assigned to all data extracts and narratives to protect participants' identities. The study received approval from the institutional research ethics committee of the participating universities.

## 2.7. Trustworthiness and Limitations

Credibility was achieved through data triangulation (multiple sources of evidence), member checking, and peer debriefing. However, as is common in narrative research, conclusions are not statistically generalizable but analytically transferable to comparable educational environments. Future research might include longitudinal tracking or a classroom video analysis to complement self-report data.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. RQ1: How do pre-service EFL teachers in Indonesia construct their experiences during the School-Based Teaching Practice (SBTP)?

Across the five narratives, the SBTP was described as a transformative, emotionally meaningful experience. Their reflections consistently depicted moving from anxiety and doubt to the confidence of becoming a professional.

Participant A said, "The practicum was an unforgettable experience, and my mentor and the students were supportive, making me feel like a real teacher for the first time. The school community, she said, also gave her opportunities to take part in festivals and public events, which enriched her sense of being a practitioner and broadened her view of teaching beyond the classroom.

Participant B said she learned about the balance of empathy and authority. 'I Had to Adapt, Sometimes Daily' She acknowledged that initially she "had to adapt to students' different abilities and behaviors," but said that after a while she had come to believe that effective teaching needs flexibility: "In one class I can be a relaxed teacher; in another I must be strict." These flexible transitions signified her professional growth.

Participant C shared that her practicum experience made her realize the importance of classroom management and motivation under the Merdeka Belajar policy. She noted that "some students lacked interest, so I needed to guide and walk with them closely." It has shaped her perspective that good teaching is about caring and emotional presence.

For Participant D, patience and relationships felt defining to her as a teacher. "I wanted to be the teacher, not afraid but respected," she said, on the importance of emotional strength and positive interaction in promoting a good learning atmosphere.

Participant E approached the practicum with thoughts of moral responsibility and emotional development. For her, teaching meant not just imparting knowledge but "changing students' bad behavior for the better." This experience reinforced her belief that English teachers must have empathy to go along with pedagogical techniques.

Across cases, participants framed the SBTP as a "rite of passage"—a place where they felt engaged in challenges and affirmed in their calling; a place where they uncovered what it is actually like to "become a teacher." Their narratives suggest that the teaching practicum was not just a technical experience, but rather an intense personal and emotional journey leading to identity transformation.

### 3.2. RQ2: How do interaction, continuity, and context contribute to their professional teacher identity?

#### 3.2.1. Interaction (Social Relationships)

All participants emphasized the importance of relationships in shaping their professional identities. The 'sibling-like' connections with students were considered the most meaningful. Participant A mentioned that the students served as "mirrors" reflecting her personal and professional growth through their feedback—showing interest in learning and valuing her efforts. Mentors were also seen as important role models for demonstrating professionalism and composure. Participant C stated, "One of the valuable lessons my mentor taught me is how to deal with difficult students calmly. I made that my standard."

Interactions between peers also served as arenas for discussion and emotional affirmation. For instance, Participant D regularly shared teaching tips and received encouragement from fellow practicum teachers, gaining affirmation and comfort.

Overall, these social relationships help internalize pedagogical knowledge and emotional/ethical dispositions as part of teacher identity.

### 3.2.2. *Continuity (Temporal Development)*

According to the stories of participants, a vivid temporal feature appeared in their self-identity. Prior to the SBTP, very few felt secure and confident. Participant B reported, "I did not think that I could explain very clearly or control a class." Most had mixed feelings of anxiety and success during their practicum. Participant E reported a change from daily anxiety to feeling accomplished and proud after performing effectively in an interactive speaking task.

Participants reported increased confidence as teachers, and with the postpracticum concluded, the ability to self-identify as such. Participant D: "I know now that teaching is not about providing information – it is about being there, being human. This emergent knowing of self shows that the teacher's being is not fixed but constantly remade in looking back at what has been, alongside the work of the present and into what may be".

### 3.2.3. *Situation (Contextual Conditions)*

Social realities, including school culture, institutional constraints, and classroom heterogeneity, were powerful forces in shaping identity formation. Those assigned to schools without enough resources — such as a lack of digital devices or sturdy building infrastructure — experienced more stress but also saw a larger boost in creativity and adaptability—for example, participant C improvised by displaying hand-drawn visuals when the projector failed.

Pedagogical behavior was also affected by institutional policies. Participant E talked about the ban on mobile phones, prompting her to do less high-tech stuff and "become a bit more traditional again," thinking of activities like role-play or group storytelling. They all acknowledged classroom heterogeneity, and in particular that it was difficult to cater to different language learning motivations. Participant B used visual supports and peer tutoring to foster attention. In sum, these context variables did not thwart the identity formation process; on the contrary, they paved the way for pedagogical agency and adaptive competence.

## 3.3. *RQ3: What emotional, social, and contextual factors influence their developing teacher identity as English educators?*

### 3.3.1. *Emotional Factors*

Several participants described the SBTP as an emotional rollercoaster, swinging from anxiety and fear of judgment to self-confidence. At the start of their practicum, they struggled with feelings of not measuring up and self-doubt. Participant B remembered, "I was worried that students would not respond to me because I look so young." Participant E also felt this way: "Each class felt like a test of patience and confidence." However, over time, these same feelings became learning opportunities through day-to-day class discussions and mentor input. Another Participant D said: "When I was able to deal with a loud group calmly, I kind of realized I could actually do this." The structure of facing and controlling emotions led to emotional well-being, which is an essential part of developing a teacher identity based on empathy and self-awareness.

### 3.3.2. *Social Factors*

Social contact was crucial in shaping participants' professional identities. Initially, many struggled to find ways to be friendly with children while maintaining control of the classroom. Participant A vividly illustrated this tension: "I wanted my students to be relaxed, but sometimes they would get too comfortable, and it was hard for me to take control of the class." As the intervention progressed, participants started customizing their own relational warmth to balance assertiveness or what participant D called "being kind but firm."

Interactions with mentors and peers provided support as well as challenge. Though mentors demonstrated professionalism and poise, conflicting advice at times left them uncertain. On the other hand, peer collaboration turned into a form of validation and stroking. Another participant reported that "Speaking to my peers who had similar problems gave me the feeling I was not alone. These social negotiations were important in assisting participants in internalizing the ethical and interpersonal realms of being an English teacher.

### 3.3.3. *Contextual Factors*

Respondents' identities were constructed within contexts of structuration that involved struggles over the institutions of schools, classroom conditions, and sparse resources. Those assigned to resource-poor schools faced two barriers to success: lack of resources and inflexible curricula. Participant C stated, "There was a projector breaking down all the time; I drew pictures. It was exhausting, but rewarding when students got it." These limitations prompted innovative thinking and enhanced participants' perception of control.

Furthermore, institutional practices – such as the ban on mobile phones or the emphasis on exam preparation – were often seen as obstacles to innovation. Instead of resisting these norms, however, the participants found new ways to adapt.

Participant E described, “We opted for role plays and storytelling in place of online resources; it worked as students found it more interesting.” These adaptive responses demonstrate how contextual challenges encouraged pedagogical innovation and identity development.

The emotional, social, and situational challenges faced by the participants demonstrate how constructing an individual identity is never easy or smooth. Instead, it is a product of tension, negotiation, and adjustment. The narratives of the participants show how professional identity is learned through the reconciliation between emotions and expectations, relationships and responsibilities, ideals and practical institutional work. In this ongoing negotiation, they increasingly transform their identity from learners of teaching to English language educators.

### 3.4. Cross-Narrative Synthesis

Although the learner narratives emerged from varied institutional settings and teaching scenarios, cross-narrative analysis highlights parallel trends in prosodic professional identity construction of pre-service English teachers. The narrations of the participants in sum show that identity is not established step by step, but as a continuous balancing act between emotional states, social situations, and contextual demands in teaching practice.

The cross narratives reveal that emotions — anxiety, self-doubt, and growing confidence over time — are triggers for professional reflection. It is crucial to remember that emotions are not products of the classroom, but resources through which participants gain critical perspectives on their own work as teachers and mentors in relation to one another and also come to voice new understandings of themselves. This is a recurring pattern in the stories of all participants, but the intensity and shape of these emotions vary.

The narrative synthesis also verifies that the identity construction depends largely on the social relationships that are developed in practice teaching. Engaging with students, mentor colleagues, and peers generates a dialogical zone that disrupts pedagogic belief and tests it out or amends it. In this sense, teacher identity is constructed not within an isolated individual but through the process of relating.

Finally, although speakers experienced institutional barriers and adverse classroom conditions, cross-storylines show how these negative limits led to the construction of professional agency. Respondents improvised and adapted learning and pedagogy in their search for meaning about whom they were studying. In general, this synthesis shows that the development of prospective teachers’ identity is a complex and evolving process mediated by emotions, relationships, and context that steer their pathway to professionalism.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Emotions as Catalysts: Identity as Becoming, Not Given

In this study, the construction of identity for the pre-service teachers in teaching practice is comprehended not as something stagnant or linear, but dynamic and developing. Instantaneous events do not develop professional identity, but as a result of the continued emotional involvement in which teaching practice leads to self-reflections and the re-negotiation of roles and meanings as a teacher. In this sense, 'feelings' are not considered as situational responses; instead, they become important elements in the process of "becoming" a teacher in real pedagogical experience.

It is sobering to the idea that emotion is just a reaction to the world outside us. In line with recent research (Zhou & Shen, 2023; Su, 2023), this study shows that this is true: an emotional response acts as a constructive force that encourages reflection, progress, and changes in the story. When participants shared vulnerabilities in teaching and learning or moments of pedagogical uncertainty, these emotional doubts and tensions became a source for self-examination and rethinking their roles as teachers. This aligns with the findings of Bai and Li (2025), who argue that 'teacher identity represents an effective dimension between internal beliefs and external processes'.

By embracing emotion as a form of pedagogical knowledge (Yang et al., 2021), this research re-conceptualizes the practicum not merely as a cognitive enterprise, but as an apprenticeship in sentiment—a moral and relational undertaking where teachers learn not just how to teach, but whom they are becoming through teaching. This perspective further expands the theoretical conversation proposed by Zembylas (2018), in which affect plays a key role in teacher subjectivity and ethical stance in the classroom.

### 4.2. Identity as Dialogical With Context: Temporal and Social Dynamics

The construction of prospective teachers' professional identity in this study can be understood as a dialogical process, which happens due to continuous interaction with social and institutional contexts. Identity is not something that is built individually and independently, but through intercommunication with students, colleagues, or mentors, as well as time-variant new social expectations and positions. In this sense, teaching practice would be a dialogic space in which three forces - self-understanding, institutional requirements, and pedagogical encounter - connect to trigger prospective teachers’ professional orientations. This aligns with the dialogical model of identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), which suggests that identity develops as an ongoing negotiation between internal self-knowledge and the positions taken.

Participants' stories reflected how affirming experiences (e.g., feedback from a supportive mentor, strong rapport with students) fostered self-assurance and legitimacy, while unsupportive experiences provoked concern or reorientation. These findings parallel those of Wong and Liu (2025), in which relational experiences may reinforce or challenge identity, depending on the quality of dialogue.

Unlike stationary trajectories in more developed settings (i.e., Flores & Matos, 2022), the Indonesian pre-service teachers' identity development seemed non-linear: marked by stages of regression and progress. Respondents oscillated between certainty and insecurity, which aligns with Xu and Connelly's (2022) concept of "identity loops," suggesting that introspection helps organize thoughts amid disruption.

The cultural factor is also crucial. In contrast to the literature that mainly focuses on lateral collegial relationships (Yuan & Lee, 2022), this study highlights an Indonesian norm of showing hierarchical respect even in caring relationships. This cultural specificity broadens the Southeast Asian perspective on the relational mode of identity construction, reinforcing the underlying universality of these dialogical templates.

#### 4.3. Contextual Constraints as Generative Space

Although institutional obstacles are presented as barriers, such as a lack of resources or a rigid curriculum (Chan et al., 2023), this study shows how pre-service teachers used situated creativity within these constraints. For instance, respondents adapted by preparing homemade materials, passing in stories, or modifying the curriculum to meet situational needs. These results have lent credence to Zhou and Shen's (2023) argument that pedagogical creativity tends to thrive in adversity.

Furthermore, reframing constraints as opportunities for agency is a significant contribution. Instead of feeling disempowered, participants claimed their own authorship of teaching practices by implementing innovations within existing constraints. This supports the assertion from Li and Khairani (2025) that commitment and self-perception serve as mediating factors against teacher agency in a practicum setting.

It is in this sense that the present study emphasizes resilience and improvisation as essential aspects of identity formation in under-resourced settings. The Indonesian SBTP, in particular, functions as a laboratory for ad hoc professionalism—a space where identity is shaped not despite but through adversity.

#### 4.4. The Power of Narrative: Reframing Identity Research

The decision to use narrative inquiry, particularly the Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry (TDNI) model (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), was made because of its ability to produce a rich, detailed account of participants' lived experiences. Temporal dimension: Life course as identity trajectories; Social dimension: Identity, self, and affect in context; Situational dimension: The local grounding of place and practice.

Unlike other qualitative methods like case studies or ethnography, narrative inquiry provides a detailed account of how identity evolves through interactions and within sociocultural contexts (Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021). The use of life stories and reflective journals allowed participants to express internal contradictions, transformative moments, and insights that might otherwise remain implicit.

These methodological strengths make a significant theoretical and empirical contribution not only to the context of EFL teacher identity but also to research on how identity can be studied as a fluid, storied, and moral phenomenon (Meyer et al., 2023; Guo & Sidhu, 2024).

#### 4.5. Implications for Indonesian Pre-Service Teacher Education

This research emphasizes the need for teacher education programs in Indonesia to shift away from purely academic training and incorporate emotional literacy, reflective practice, and culturally sensitive approaches into their curricula. It also highlights the importance of providing space and guidance for pre-service teachers to explore who they are becoming, rather than solely focusing on what they will teach.

Since teaching practicums can be emotionally volatile and relationally intense, identity formation in pre-service teachers may also need to be encouraged through mentoring, dialogic feedback, and journaling practices at an institutional level (Humairoh et al., 2024; Lan, 2024). It is also important to consider the specifics of cultural identity development, such as showing respect for authority while simultaneously promoting self-expression—a dilemma many Indonesian teacher candidates face. Ultimately, identity should be viewed not as a fixed product but as an evolving capacity to handle complexity with agency, empathy, and self-reflection.

#### 4.6. Implications and Limitations

This study has several practical implications:

- Curriculum Implications: Teacher education programs should include modules on emotional awareness, identity reflection, and narrative authoring.

- Design for mentorship: Programs should give mentors strategies to identify and support the emotional and professional growth of mentees.
- Policy-Level Recommendation: Reflective identity development should be included as an additional core competency in national teacher certification standards.

Nonetheless, its methodology also has limitations. The small purposive sample (5 respondents) prevents generalizability but aligns with narrative inquiry principles. Self-report is susceptible to memory bias or social desirability, and there are no classroom observations to verify what was reported. To triangulate evidence and broaden the interpretation, future research could also include longitudinal tracking, video ethnography, or digital multimodal reflections. Additionally, studies might examine how these approaches would vary in different regional or institutional cultures in Indonesia to address the identity process among various groups of teachers (Arifin et al., 2023; Tavakol & Tavakoli).

## 5. Conclusions

Drawing on the frameworks provided by Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry (TDNI), this study examined how Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers develop, maintain, and disrupt their professional identities during the SBTP. The results indicate that identity formation is more complex than a simple progression toward mastery and involves a dynamic, ongoing negotiation influenced by affective, social, or situational factors. The participants' stories demonstrate that experiencing turmoil, meeting people, and encountering circumstances are not obstacles but factors in building resilience and fostering growth toward self-understanding.

Three key insights emerged. First, emotional hardships—such as fear, self-doubt, and frustration—served as enabling conditions for learning, transforming vulnerability into empathy and professional resolve. Second, the interactions participants had with students, mentors, and colleagues dialogically framed experiences that allowed them to reshape their pedagogical beliefs. Third, constraints of context—whether institutional rigidity or resource scarcity—fostered adaptive thinking and creative agency. Overall, these findings emphasize that identity is not static but rather affective, relational, and influenced by context: an emergent process of “becoming” a teacher.

Notwithstanding these findings, the study has some limitations. Generalization is also limited due to the relatively small purposive sample of subjects and the narrative methodology employed. There could be bias in self-reported stories from recall or selective memory. Additionally, the cultural and institutional features of the regional context in which the study was conducted might not be representative of more general educational settings. However, these limitations highlight the beneficial effect of identity inquiry in context and the interpretative richness that qualitative methods can provide.

In terms of its theoretical implications, the study enhances our understanding of teacher identity more comprehensively by emphasizing emotional, social, and situational aspects within the TDNI framework. It redefines emotions as epistemic catalysts for teacher learning, rather than merely peripheral responses. From a practical perspective, this means that teacher education programs should reimagine the practicum as a space where identity is approached reflectively rather than solely as a performance assessment. Pre-service teacher education programs that include structured reflection, dialogic mentoring, and emotional literacy training can better prepare pre-service teachers to effectively face challenges as they work toward becoming teachers.

This framework could be expanded in future research to include longitudinal designs that focus on identity during the transition into in-service teaching. Quantitative or convergent mixed-methods studies might explore the relationships between emotional regulation, teacher agency, and instructional efficacy in more detail. Comparing different contexts or countries for EFL and non-EFL settings to better understand how the sociocultural and institutional aspects influence teacher identity would add an important dimension to the diversity among various environments.

Finally, this study reaffirms that becoming a teacher is not a fixed destination but a daily negotiation of emotion and rationality, autonomy and constraint, self and others. This is essential for developing an educated educator who is deep, sensitive, and not only intellectually but also emotionally and contextually, morally.

## 6. Declarations

### 6.1. Ethical considerations

In this study, participants gave informed consent after a description of the study's purpose and methods. Voluntary participation was offered, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Institutional approval was also obtained. All authors are responsible for the content, and the manuscript has neither been submitted nor published elsewhere.

### 6.2. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used exclusively for language editing and grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

### 6.3. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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