



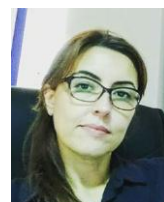
Turkish EFL Teacher Candidates' Early Teacher Identity

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Abstract

The topic of teacher identity has lately begun to be associated with general notions of teacher training and development. Becoming an expert through gradual learning and teaching also calls for awareness of self-identity as a teacher when considering the standards of the teaching profession. Language teachers start to develop their identity as a teacher during their higher education at language teaching departments, and the development in concern constitutes the basis of their roles in the teaching process. With that in mind, the current study was motivated to investigate perceptions of Turkish EFL teacher candidates on their early teacher identity. The participants of the study were senior students enrolled in two English Language Teaching Departments at a state university and a private university in Turkey. Data were collected from the students in concern through a Likert-type questionnaire during their teaching practicum. The research findings indicated that they held a high level of early teacher identity scores, and that they somehow significantly differed in their perceptions about early teacher identity with regard to gender and the attended university type.

Keywords: Early teacher identity, EFL teacher candidates, Pre-service teachers, Teacher training.

Citation | M. Pinar BABANOĞLU; Reyhan AĞÇAM (2019). Turkish EFL Teacher Candidates' Early Teacher Identity. Asian Journal of Education and Training, 5(2): 386-391.

History:


Received: 29 March 2019

Revised: 6 May 2019

Accepted: 12 June 2019

Published: 9 August 2019

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Publisher: Asian Online Journal Publishing Group

Acknowledgement: Both authors contributed to the conception and design of the study.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study was reported; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained.

Ethical: This study follows all ethical practices during writing.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating perceptions of Turkish EFL teacher candidates on their early teacher identity. The research findings indicated that they held a high level of early teacher identity scores, and that they somehow significantly differed in their perceptions about early teacher identity with regard to gender and the attended university type.

1. Introduction

It is undoubtedly obvious that teachers' role in the teaching process has changed recently and teachers' responsibilities have been concerned as crucial in the learning process (Vick, 1998). For becoming a professionally well-developed teacher, one should ask himself/herself the question 'who am I' as they are mostly attributed with the role model in the classroom. Côté and Levine (2002, cited in Krzywacki (2009) explain teacher identity formation as a continuous process between ego, personal and social levels where the identity can express itself. To be more specific, the ego identity represents internal mental processes that are the basis for individual understanding of one's own teacher identity while personal identity level refers to the personal engagement in interaction with others in a particular context. Social identity, on the other hand, represents a socially constructed understanding of reality, in this case, socially shared perceptions of being a teacher, a social reality which influences a person and can be influenced by a person through everyday interaction with other people (Krzywacki, 2009).

In relation to the idea of being lifelong, ever-growing and ongoing, teacher identity is defined as a process in which teachers constantly re-interpret their experiences (Beijaard *et al.*, 2000). Lasky (2005) defines it as the way teachers define themselves to themselves and to others (p.899) and "teacher identity –what beginning teachers believe about teaching and learning as self-as teacher- is of vital concern to teacher education" (Bullough, 1997). Examining new teacher identity can be considered as an important step to develop more effective teacher training programs and identity development of a teacher is related to understanding the notion of self (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Day (2004) argues that it is crucial in teacher education to prepare teachers who are informed and flexible to manage the imposed changes in the curriculum and education policies while trying to understand issues such as teachers' sense of educational aim, practices, teacher identity, and agency (cited in Torres-Rocha (2017)).

Language teachers start to develop their identity as a teacher during their higher education at language teaching departments. The development process in concern constitutes the basis of their roles in the teaching process. It is important to identify the self-perceptions of pre-service language teachers related to teacher identity. Developing new teacher identity is crucial especially for prospective non-native EFL teachers owing to the challenging nature of language teaching (e.g. field-specific challenges and instructional challenges). Tüm and Kunt (2013) point out that EFL teacher students may have foreign language anxiety and this may have adverse effects on the application of grammar rules and the execution of speaking skills. For non-native EFL teachers:

"The issue of teacher identity plays a major role in describing the many identities adopted by these non-native speaker teachers, who need to juggle at least 3 identities—L2 user, L2 learner, and L2 teacher—along with various sociocultural and political identities that are established in various institutional and interpersonal contexts" (Ortaçtepe, 2015).

In respect of instructional challenges, Yazan (2016) states that although pre-service teacher education programs introduce them to theoretical aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign language along with teaching methodologies, they have to engage in further learning activities in the workplace when they start their classroom practice as novice teachers. The dynamic, complex, and ongoing nature of teacher learning leads to understand teachers' preparation as a process which is closely connected with their past experiences and future aspirations and especially in early stages in career, teachers may encounter many challenges and have to make strategic decisions and take strategic actions (Yazan, 2016). They are considered capable of overcoming such instructional or institutional difficulties once they are well-prepared and they develop awareness of professional identity and social reality as a teacher.

The relevant literature review shows that teacher identity has been investigated from different perspectives. Varghese *et al.* (2005) scrutinized theoretical perspectives on language teacher identity while Farrell (2011) examined experienced ESL teacher professional role identities. Xu (2013) studied EFL teacher identity formation and change in a longitudinal way and reported that imagined identities can change due to institutional and educational reasons. Wu and Garza (2015) looked at pre-service bilingual ESL teacher identity development and underlined the importance of suggested activities in teacher education programs. In a study on language teacher identity formation, Tran and Sanchez (2016) emphasized professional and personal factors. Yuan (2016) showed that teaching practicum and mentoring teachers influence identity formation of student language teachers whereas negative mentoring can impede it. Karimi and Mofidi (2019) attempted to explore L2 teacher identity and concluded that education initials should establish an explicit focus on teacher identity.

All in all, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, most of the previous research has been conducted with a core focus on in-service rather than pre-service teachers' professional identity (Farrell, 2007; Chiang, 2008, cited in Wu and Garza (2015)). Hence, in order to bridge the research gap, the current study was set out to examine the Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' views and perceptions on their early career identities. Accordingly, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the perceptions of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers on their early teacher identity?
2. Do Turkish pre-service EFL teachers significantly differ in their early teacher identity regarding gender and the attended university type (private vs. state)?

2. Method

Based on the research objective, the quantitative research method was employed in this study. A quantitative research method involves the use of numerical data to summarize, describe, and explore relationships among traits (McMillian & Wergin, 2006, cited in Liu and Channell (2015)). The following sub-sections are intended to describe and outline the research sampling, data collection tool and data analysis procedure.

2.1. Participants

96 senior students attending the English Language Teaching program at a state university and a private university in Turkey participated in the current study. They were chosen through the purposive sampling method, which is ‘a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources’ (Patton (2002) cited in Palinkas *et al.* (2015)). Their demographic features are presented in Table 1:

Table-1. Demographic Features of Participants.

Demographic Variable	Groups	n	%
Gender	Female	76	79,2
	Male	20	20,8
University Type	State	65	67,7
	Private	31	32,3

As illustrated in Table 1, female participants outnumbered their male counterparts (F=79%; M=21%). At the time of data collection, approximately 68% of all participants were studying ELT at a state university while 32% of them were studying the same discipline at a private university in Turkey. Furthermore, they were undergoing teaching practicum as part of their compulsory education.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

The research data were comprised of Turkish pre-service teachers' views on their early teacher identity that were obtained through the Turkish version of Early Teacher Identity Measure (ETIM) (Friesen and Besley, 2013; Arpacı and Bardakçı, 2015). The tool in concern consisted of Likert-type questionnaire with 17 statements on new teacher identity to be judged as *I strongly disagree*, *I disagree*, *Neutral*, *I agree*, and *I strongly agree*. One of the statements is exemplified below:

1. I often doubt whether I am the right person to be a teacher.

Within the questionnaire, some items were about self-categorization (participants' perceptions of themselves as a teacher) (Items 5,8,9,10,17), some of them are related to confidence in becoming a teacher (Items 1,3,7,11,12,16) while the others address the involvement with children as a teacher (Items 2,4,6,13,14,15). It is noteworthy that Items 1, 3, 7 and 10 were coded reversely as they included negative statements. The results were interpreted taking into consideration the fact that the higher the total score of the scale, the higher level of positive perception of early teacher identity.

3. Data Analysis

Data were gathered from the participants via the afore-mentioned questionnaire, and processed and analyzed using SPSS 15.0. The reliability of the questionnaire was high with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90. The independent samples t-test was applied to the elicited responses for comparison of the participants in terms of gender and the attended university type, and the significance level was set at 0,05 ($p < 0,05$).

4. Results

Initially, all items in ETIM voted by participants were processed for general descriptive statistics which emerges the total means of items.

Table-2. Descriptive Statistics of Overall Scores of Items in ETIM.

Item	M	sd
1. I often doubt myself whether I am the right person to be a teacher.	3,85	1,25
2. If I had more time to work voluntarily, I would prefer to work with children.	3,72	1,20
3. I have no idea about what it is to be "a good teacher".	4,31	0,99
4. My family often asks my advice about working with and taking care of children and adults.	3,35	1,10
5. I see myself as a teacher.	3,84	1,12
6. I feel pleasure to help children learn and discover new things.	4,26	1,05
7. I often doubt my competencies about being a good teacher.	3,63	1,13
8. I easily imagine myself to work with children and adults and to help their development.	4,06	1,00
9. I can easily qualify myself as a teacher.	3,84	1,00
10. I hardly imagine myself teaching a group of children and adults.	3,81	1,18
11. I am sure that I can develop the necessary skills and methods to be a good teacher.	4,23	0,85
12. I am sure I will be a good teacher one day.	4,32	0,84
13. I do best to work with children and adults in my free time.	3,79	1,04
14. It is so satisfying for me to help a child to learn something new.	4,46	0,86
15. I feel happy when I help children in their activities.	4,33	0,88
16. I am pleased with the progress that I have made in my teacher training.	4,00	0,94
17. Teaching is inherent to me.	3,75	1,11
Total	67,57	10,87

According to Table 2, EFL teacher candidates' scores of early teacher identity are in total $67,57 \pm 10,8$, which refers to "positive at high level"¹. The highest scores respectively are; "14. It is so satisfying for me to help a child to learn something new" ($4,46 \pm 0,86$), "15. I feel happy when I help children in their activities" ($4,33 \pm 0,88$), "12. I am sure I will be a good teacher one day" ($4,32 \pm 0,84$), "3. I have no idea about what it is to be "a good teacher"

¹ 85-17=68/5=13,60; 17,00-30,60: very low, 30,61-44,20: low; 44,21-57,80: medium level; 57,81-71,40: high; 71,41-85,00: very high

(4,31±0,99), “6. I feel pleasure to help children learn and discover new things” (4,26±1,05), “11. I am sure that I can develop necessary skills and methods to be a good teacher” (4,23±0,85) revealed at “positive at very high” level scores. The least score was found for Item “4. My family often asks my advice about working with and taking care of children and adults” (3,35±1,10) which has “positive at low” level points.

Subsequently, the independent samples t-test was administered to the data to see whether the participants significantly differ in their perceptions on early teacher identity with respect to gender. The related results were provided in Table 3.

Table-3. T-test Scores of Gender Comparison.

Item	Gender	n	M	sd	t	p
1. I often doubt myself whether I am the right person to be a teacher.	Female	76	2,18	1,28	-0,59	0,560
	Male	20	2,00	1,12		
2. If I had more time to work voluntarily, I would prefer to work with children.	Female	76	3,86	1,12	2,21	0,029
	Male	20	3,20	1,40		
3. I have no idea about what it is to be “a good teacher”.	Female	76	1,58	0,90	-2,14	0,035
	Male	20	2,10	1,21		
4. My family often ask my advice about working with and taking care of children and adults.	Female	76	3,47	1,06	2,10	0,038
	Male	20	2,90	1,17		
5. I see myself as a teacher.	Female	76	3,92	1,00	1,33	0,188
	Male	20	3,55	1,47		
6. I feel pleasure to help children learn and discover new things.	Female	76	4,28	1,07	0,29	0,774
	Male	20	4,20	1,01		
7. I often doubt my competencies about being a good teacher.	Female	76	2,30	1,03	-1,23	0,222
	Male	20	2,65	1,42		
8. I easily imagine myself to work with children and adults and to help their development.	Female	76	4,11	0,95	0,81	0,418
	Male	20	3,90	1,21		
9. I can easily qualify myself as a teacher.	Female	76	3,84	0,98	-0,03	0,975
	Male	20	3,85	1,09		
10. I hardly imagine myself teaching a group of children and adults.	Female	76	2,12	1,12	-1,12	0,266
	Male	20	2,45	1,39		
11. I am sure that I can develop the necessary skills and methods to be a good teacher.	Female	76	4,26	0,77	0,76	0,449
	Male	20	4,10	1,12		
12. I am sure I will be a good teacher one day.	Female	76	4,36	0,83	0,73	0,465
	Male	20	4,20	0,89		
13. I do best to work with children and adults in my free time.	Female	76	3,82	1,00	0,44	0,659
	Male	20	3,70	1,17		
14. It is so satisfying for me to help a child to learn something new.	Female	76	4,50	0,87	0,93	0,356
	Male	20	4,30	0,80		
15. I feel happy when I help children in their activities.	Female	76	4,39	0,87	1,34	0,183
	Male	20	4,10	0,91		
16. I am pleased with the progress that I have made in my teacher training.	Female	76	4,01	0,93	0,27	0,791
	Male	20	3,95	1,00		
17. Teaching is inherent to me.	Female	76	3,79	1,07	0,68	0,498
	Male	20	3,60	1,23		
Total	Female	76	68,42	9,95	1,50	0,137
	Male	20	64,35	13,67		

In gender comparison, the t-test scores revealed a significant difference between female and male student teachers in certain items. For instance, “Item 2. If I had more time to work voluntarily, I would prefer to work with children”.(t=2,21; p<0,05), and “Item 4. My family often asks my advice about working with and taking care of children and adults”(t=2,10; p<0,05) indicated a significant difference in favor of the female participants who obtained significantly higher scores than the male participants. In “Item 3. I have no idea about what it is to be “a good teacher”, the male participants had significantly higher scores than females (t=-2,14; p<0,05). The scores for the other items did not yield a significant difference between the participant groups in terms of gender (p>0,05).

In the last analysis, participants’ ETIM scores were compared via independent samples t-test concerning the attended university type. The test results are shown in Table 4.

The comparison of the ETIM scores regarding the attended university type indicated a significant difference in "Item 1. I often doubt myself whether I am the right person to be a teacher." (t=2,24; p<0,05). The participants attending the state university had significantly higher scores than those studying at the private university. No significant difference was found for the other items (p>0,05).

5. Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

As pointed out in Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) investigating new teacher identity is an important issue both for developing an identity for a future teaching job and to guide for more effective teacher training programs. This fact is more significant for language teachers due to the challenging nature of their future job. This challenge is probably bigger for the Turkish pres-service teachers of English who will be working at state schools in Turkey since they are going to be supposed to teach a foreign rather than a second language, which increases the probability of being the only source of information and model in the learning process for their students. Besides, they are going to be expected to teach that specific language within a very limited class hours and to stick to the assigned curriculum which is designed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Moving from this particular fact, the present study examined the early teacher identity of these pre-service teachers in order to gain a deep insight into their perceptions about their future role as EFL teachers.

Table-4. T-test Scores of Type of Attended University Comparison.

Item	Uni.Type	n	M.	sd	t	p
1. I often doubt myself whether I am the right person to be a teacher.	State	65	2,34	1,29	2,24	0,028
	Private	31	1,74	1,06		
2. If I had more time to work voluntarily, I would prefer to work with children.	State	65	3,88	1,14	1,89	0,062
	Private	31	3,39	1,28		
3. I have no idea about what it is to be “a good teacher”.	State	65	1,69	0,93	0,07	0,945
	Private	31	1,68	1,11		
4. My family often asks my advice about working with and taking care of children and adults.	State	65	3,38	1,04	0,39	0,698
	Private	31	3,29	1,24		
5. I see myself as a teacher.	State	65	3,86	1,03	0,22	0,823
	Private	31	3,81	1,30		
6. I feel pleasure to help children learn and discover new things.	State	65	4,40	0,75	1,91	0,059
	Private	31	3,97	1,47		
7. I often doubt my competencies about being a good teacher.	State	65	2,32	1,12	-0,65	0,516
	Private	31	2,48	1,15		
8. I easily imagine myself to work with children and adults and to help their development.	State	65	4,12	0,74	0,86	0,394
	Private	31	3,94	1,41		
9. I can easily qualify myself as a teacher.	State	65	3,74	0,92	-1,51	0,135
	Private	31	4,06	1,12		
10. I hardly imagine myself teaching a group of children and adults.	State	65	2,11	1,05	-0,96	0,341
	Private	31	2,35	1,43		
11. I am sure that I can develop the necessary skills and methods to be a good teacher.	State	65	4,29	0,72	1,05	0,295
	Private	31	4,10	1,08		
12. I am sure I will be a good teacher one day.	State	65	4,35	0,74	0,52	0,604
	Private	31	4,26	1,03		
13. I do best to work with children and adults in my free time.	State	65	3,82	0,95	0,32	0,747
	Private	31	3,74	1,21		
14. It is so satisfying for me to help a child to learn something new.	State	65	4,51	0,71	0,82	0,417
	Private	31	4,35	1,11		
15. I feel happy when I help children in their activities.	State	65	4,43	0,71	1,59	0,116
	Private	31	4,13	1,15		
16. I am pleased with the progress that I have made in my teacher training.	State	65	3,92	0,89	-1,16	0,248
	Private	31	4,16	1,04		
17. Teaching is inherent to me.	State	65	3,83	1,07	1,04	0,302
	Private	31	3,58	1,18		
Total	State	65	68,08	9,53	0,66	0,514
	Private	31	66,52	13,38		

Outcomes of ETIM analysis administered to their responses revealed that their early teacher identity scores were quite high in general, indicating their highly positive attitude about their future job. They obtained the highest scores for Items 15 and 14 (involvement with children), followed by Items 12-11-3 (confidence in becoming a teacher). The participants attending the state university had higher scores in Item 1 “I often doubt whether I am the right person to be a teacher”, which is related to confidence in becoming a teacher. This might be attributed to several facts such as social, financial and employment concerns even if it is not a distinguishing factor in favor of private universities as being better teacher training providers.

Azizi *et al.* (2013) underline that some weaknesses that public universities encounter such as the focus on knowledge rather than competencies, insufficient control of student practice and lack of student success in professional arena directly influence students' perception about their professional identity. Moving from this argument, public universities and the Council of Higher Education could be encouraged to take necessary precautions to overcome these weaknesses. Namely, the teacher training programs might be redesigned with a distinctive emphasis on competencies rather than knowledge and the practitioners could be encouraged to follow these programs. The practitioners in concern could also be recommended to and create more opportunities for the pre-service teachers to gain experience in real teaching settings, and to provide them with effective guidance when needed.

In comparison of ETIM scores regarding gender, the male participants obtained significantly higher scores than the female participants only in item 3 “I have no idea about what it is to be “a good teacher” whereas the reverse was revealed for Item 2 “If I had more time to work voluntarily, I would prefer to work with children” and Item 4 “My family often asks my advice about working with and taking care of children and adults”. As Item 3 is related to confidence in becoming a teacher while Items 2 and 4 express involvement with children, these results may stem from the social and environmental factors, point of views and gender stereotypes which urge the general ideas of teaching is generally associated with women and taking care of children is their natural job (Ullah, 2016) and which may unavoidably affect the male teacher candidates' approaches to professional roles as teachers.

As a concluding remark of the study, as noted in Karimi and Mofidi (2019), the education initials should establish an explicit focus on teacher identity especially at state universities that offer EFL teaching programs. Even if the general tendency of the participants were positively high towards the early career teacher identity in this research, it is understood that the notion of “to be a teacher” in addition to “to be a language teacher” should be emphasized in practical ground and addressed particularly in teaching practicum period in order to create internalization by EFL teacher candidates and take the load off their minds for teacher future jobs in advance which may help them to constitute a wholesome language teacher identity.

The present study was limited to the data obtained from 96 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in one state university and one private university in Turkey. It was also restricted to a single data collection tool with closed-

ended questions. Hence, future attempts might explore an increased number of teacher candidates adding open-ended and/or interviews with in order to gain more fruitful and generalizable results.

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