

# Investigating Identity Construction Processes of Pre-Service English Language Teachers in a Turkish Context: A Pilot Study

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## Abstract

It is known that teacher candidates have gone through a long journey to develop a teacher identity. In this journey, there can be lots of issues that affect their identity development personally and professionally such as their experiences as a student during their education, the theoretical and practical knowledge they acquired during their studies in teacher education programs and their teaching practices in the field during practicum. However, there is a limited body of research about this issue in Türkiye. With all these in mind, a pilot study was carried out as part of a PhD thesis to investigate the identity construction processes of pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers in a Turkish context. The participants were chosen from the ELT Department at Çukurova University during the 2020-2021 academic year. There were 4 volunteer pre-service ELT teachers in the study. The study was based on a qualitative approach and it was designed as a case study. For reliability and validity, various instruments were used. An open-ended questionnaire, a reflection form and a semi-structured interview were used as data collection tools. The gathered data have been analysed, compared, and presented based on content analysis procedures. The results indicate that there is a strong relationship between participants' individual learning experiences during their prior educational life and their teacher identity construction. Although the teacher education program plays an important role in the identity construction of pre-service teachers, many other issues affect teacher identity construction processes such as role models, motives, perceptions, expectations, etc.

**Keywords:** teacher education; language teacher identity; identity construction, pre-service language teachers, qualitative research

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Teacher Identity Construction**

Identity has a significant impact on teacher commitment and educational reform (Cohen, 2010; Day et al., 2005; Thomas, 2003). It is widely accepted that the transition from student to teacher is a long journey. This journey is a transformative process that involves changes in student teachers' identity construction processes. Becoming a teacher is a more complex process than many pre-service teachers could anticipate (Beattie, 2000; Britzman, 2003).

Even though most teacher education programs last four or five years, the process seems to be much longer than that. According to Britzman (2003), teacher identity is formed as part of the process of teacher learning and it begins when an individual decides to teach as a career. Furthermore, teachers' earlier "school experiences, the ideas and approaches promoted by their teacher education programs, and an ideal of the teachers they hope to become" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011, p.6) shape their teacher identity. Therefore, building a teacher identity is influenced not only by teacher education programs, but also by many other variables. Lortie (1975) referred to this process as "becoming a teacher" in one of his works, where he views pre-service teachers bringing a background that affects their attitudes about teaching and the role of teachers.

Moreover, teacher learning must be viewed as a practice as well as a complex system entrenched in the "structures, histories, and cultures of schools" (Battey & Franke, 2008, p. 127). As a result, teacher identity is "multidimensional, idiosyncratic, and context-dependent" (McCann & Johannessen, 2004, p. 219). It is also influenced by earlier self-concepts and social positions (Olsen, 2008a). Furthermore, as they learn about teaching both conceptually and practically, novice teachers constantly reconstruct their perceptions of themselves as instructors and the image of teachers they hope to become. They are continually negotiating and adopting new teacher identities, which influence their professional development as educators.

As numerous elements influence pre-service teachers' transformation process, it is not easy to provide relevant pedagogical knowledge to pre-service teachers and then expect them to become successful teachers by implementing this theoretical knowledge in their classroom practices. According to Korthagen (2011), student teachers' prior knowledge plays a crucial part in their understanding; their values, attitudes, and beliefs are influenced by their previous experiences, which is why they may be resistant to change in teacher learning. Due to these factors, pre-service teachers frequently put a lot of effort into creating their professional identities while also attempting to fit themselves into a variety of discourses about teaching that is based on their prior experiences and expectations and that is at odds with what they

learn and experience during their practicum and in-the-field teaching experiences (Britzman, 2003; Johnston, 2015). Because of this, beginning teachers constantly struggle to integrate their ideas of their past, present, and future selves into their teacher identities (Britzman, 2003).

Furthermore, it is claimed that teachers' identities are constructed based on their ideas, values, and practices that govern their engagement and commitment in research that uses narrative and biographical analysis of teachers' experiences with teaching (Barkhuizen, 2016). On the other hand, Yazan (2018) defines language teacher identity (LTI) as "teachers' dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and position themselves (and are positioned by others) in social contexts" (p. 21).

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework**

According to Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) and Weiner & Torres (2016), professional identity offers a framework for comprehending how teachers express their teaching philosophies and how those articulations may affect their practices and actual teaching experiences. The core questions of this study, namely, what kind of teachers pre-service teachers desire to become and how they view their roles as teachers, may be greatly understood by looking at the identity creation processes of pre-service teachers. The complexity of "who pre-service teachers are, what they know and believe, how they learn to teach, and how they carry out their work in diverse contexts" (Johnson, 2006, p. 236) calls for more study.

A great number of studies have been generated as a result of research on novice teachers' experiences and difficulties, particularly in the United States, Canada, and Europe (Wright, 2010; Martínez, 2014; Farrell, 2015a) but there is a limited body of research in Turkey. Especially, the number of studies on language teacher identity in language teacher education has increased in recent decades (Barkhuizen, 2017; Trent, 2011; Tsui, 2007; Yazan, 2019), particularly on professional development (Clarke, 2008; Jackson, 2015; Varghese et al., 2005), which focused on teacher learning, teacher thinking and beliefs, content, and pedagogy (Varghese et al., 2005). Nevertheless, existing research does not adequately represent the variety of dimensions in this research topic, especially in Turkish contexts.

## **1.3. Aims of the study**

The primary goal of this qualitative study is to investigate how pre-service teachers create their personal and professional identities during their teacher education. Examining the issues related to the processes of teacher identity construction is necessary to comprehend and improve teacher education programs. Another purpose of this study is to clarify the significance of several variables that influence how teacher candidates form their identities. Despite some understanding of all the aforementioned issues, second/foreign language

teacher education programs cannot meet the demands of beginning teachers. However, if these issues are evaluated and examined from various perspectives, it would be a substantial addition to the profession in terms of increasing public awareness of the issue, improving teacher preparation programs, and offering new teachers a range of support.

The theoretical framework of this study draws on sociocultural theories of learning (2009b), more specifically those of identity formation (Beijaard et al., 2004), positioning theory (Harré, Tracey, Pilkerton-Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Pre-service teachers continuously transform their identities as they reflect upon the roles they must play and examine the needs of the learners while teaching. Therefore, this study was shaped by early identity development through a sociocultural framework in terms of prior learning history, professional expectations, agency, and reflective practices.

With all these in mind, the following research questions emerged:

- 1) What is the relationship between the pre-service ELT teachers' personal background and their early teacher identity construction in a Teacher Education Program in a Turkish context?
- 2) How do personal and professional experiences during initial teacher education relate to early teacher identity construction of pre-service ELT teachers?

## **2. Methodology**

As the current study is completely qualitative, it is exploratory, descriptive, and interpretative. As a research method, a case study methodology was utilized to investigate and obtain in-depth details regarding the experiences of pre-service teachers during their initial teacher education and student teaching experiences in practicum. A case study is a type of research approach and empirical investigation that analyzes phenomena in their natural setting (Yin, 2009). Data collection procedures were developed to address research questions that drew on the theoretical frameworks of situated teacher learning, identity development, and socio-constructivist views of learning (Beijaard et al., 2004) within communities of practice (Caudle, Moran, & Hobbs, 2014; Wenger, 1998).

### **2.1. Setting and the Participants**

The current study was conducted in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department's undergraduate program at Çukurova University in Adana, Türkiye. Çukurova University is a state university bound to HEC (Higher Education Council) that prepares future teachers in a range of subjects. To be able to work in public schools in this context, teacher candidates must have at least a bachelor's degree as part of their degree requirements. Four volunteer

pre-service ELT (English Language Teaching) teachers who were studying in the fourth grade in the ELT department participated in this study. As criteria for selecting the participants, all the participants were supposed to complete the compulsory methodology courses before the practicum placement. The present study assigned each participant a number from 1 to 4 (i.e. TC1, TC2, etc.) to prevent confusion. Since the data was collected during the pandemic, all the processes were completed online. The details about the participants can be seen in the table below.

### 2.1.1. Participants' Profile

The participants of the study (2 males and 2 females) were volunteer teacher candidates who had different backgrounds. Two of the participants (TC1, TC4) graduated from a university previously from another department and this was their second degree at the university. Only one participant (TC1) could not pass the proficiency test held by the school of foreign languages at university and she studied in prep class for one year. All the participants attended a high school as part of the practicum. Three of the participants (TC1, TC2 TC3) did not have any teaching experience until their practicum. Only one participant (TC4) had teaching experiences other than practicum in different contexts such as private tutoring, language courses, and online teaching. Only one participant (TC2) went abroad for Erasmus and he studied abroad for an academic semester. There is no teacher in the families of the participants. The details can be seen in the table below.

*Tab. 1. Demographic Profile*

Teacher Candidate	Gender	Age	First Experience of Learning English	Teaching Experience	Type of School S/he attended as part of Practicum	Experience Abroad
TC1	Female	31	10	Only Practicum	High School	No
TC2	Male	26	10	Only Practicum	High School	Yes/Erasmus Projects
TC3	Female	22	10	Only Practicum	High School	No
TC4	Male	29	6	Private Tutoring Online Teaching Practicum	Primary Secondary High School	No

### 2.4. Data Collection Tools

Teachers' identity construction can be examined through biographies, stories, reflective tasks, and by discussing issues with their senior or junior colleagues as much as they try to frame and reframe their teaching worlds, beliefs, ideas, etc. (Farrell, 2011). An open-ended

questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a reflective report were used to collect the data. The data collection tools were prepared by the researchers based on the related literature.

#### **2.4.1. Open-ended Questionnaire**

It was divided into two sections, one of which was the participant's demographic profile, which consisted of ten questions. The second section consisted of ten open-ended questions based on the research questions. It was sent to the volunteer participants via email during the spring semester of the 2020–2021 academic year.

#### **2.4.2. Reflection Form**

The researcher created a reflection form based on the research questions. It focused on participants' personal experiences primarily during their education at the ELT department. It was shared with the participants via e-mail and completed by the pre-service teachers. The form had seven sections and fourteen guiding questions. All participants regarded the guiding questions to be clear and understandable.

#### **2.4.3. Semi-structured Interview**

The interviews were conducted online in the participants' mother language since they felt less anxious when expressing themselves. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's agreement and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher later translated them into English. Based on the prior data, the missing points in the open-ended questionnaire or some parts in the reflection forms were covered during the interviews, and some additional questions were asked based on the participants' responses.

### **3. Findings**

**3.1. Research Question 1:** What is the relationship between the pre-service ELT teachers' personal background and their early teacher identity construction in a Teacher Education Program in a Turkish context?

#### **3.1.1. Main Emerging themes**

As a result of the data analysis, four main themes emerged:

**Aims and Motives for becoming a teacher**

**The effects of role models**

**Pre-service teachers' perceptions of the qualifications of an ideal teacher  
Expectations from the Teacher Education Program**

**3.1.1.1. Aims and Motives for becoming a teacher**

**Aims for becoming a teacher**

Pre-service teachers mostly agree on contributing to society in a way. Three of the participants want to alter society for the better. They explicitly express their belief that teaching entails more than only imparting knowledge. The decision to become a teacher and to accept the identity of a teacher was not made solely based on logic, but it also contains powerful emotions and is influenced by the participants' values. Participants reflected on the issue in the following:

*TC1: I want to make a difference in students' lives.*

*TC2: I would explain it as enlightening students' paths. I wanted to become a teacher because I believe that this job is suitable for me. I would like to work in one of the public schools in Turkey.*

*TC3: I want to become a teacher so that I can touch and make a difference in people's lives. My goal is to be useful and helpful to more people.*

**Motives for becoming a teacher**

Participants have different kinds of motivations to become a teacher. While one of them wants to be a good role model for the students like her teacher, the other one thinks that he is good at teaching. Their statements can be seen below:

*TC1: I want to impress students like my teacher did in my life.*

*TC2: Actually, my motivation was to work in a public school. I still want it. I also believe that I can be a good teacher in terms of transmitting knowledge to students.*

Another participant touched upon a critical issue that she has experienced:

*TC3: My motivation was the classes I did not like. Whenever I gave up, I studied English more and more. Also, my English teacher in high school always supported me.*

On the other hand, some participants chose this profession for some individual reasons and their excerpts were shared below:

*TC3: When I was 16, in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I decided to become a teacher. When I realized I did not want to deal with Physics and Turkish literature, I decided to study English.*

*TC4: I chose this department because my family lives in this city and I'm good at English, I could obtain a good GPA without much effort. I am not trying to become a teacher, I'm just trying to obtain a good GPA so that I can continue post-graduate studies.*

### **3.1.1.2. Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Qualifications of an Ideal Teacher**

It is known that perceptions have a great impact on humans and they shape many things in human life. Teacher candidates were asked to reflect on the qualifications of an idealized teacher in their minds. All the participants have an idea about the qualifications of an ideal teacher. While some of them focus on teachers' characteristics and emotional aspects, the other focuses on the teaching and management skills of the teachers. From the perspective of pre-service teachers, the excerpts below reflect their perceptions:

*TC1: Teachers should affect his/her students. Teachers should make his/her students want to become a better person.*

*TC2: I think he should be patient, thoughtful, and dynamic.*

*TC3: A teacher should be creative, willing to teach, and willing to make a difference in people's lives. I think becoming a teacher starts with a love of learning and teaching. I think it's about your character too. Being a good teacher is important but people have to like you too. If they don't care about you it doesn't matter if you are amazing at your job.*

*TC4: Natural ability to teach. A teacher should have a natural affinity for teaching. You can be number one in the world, do everything by the book, and still fail since you are dealing with people. It's more of a social ability than something you can learn via books or education. You know there is that person who is good with the lesson and people naturally gather around that person before the exams and when he or she explains sth., you just learn it there. You understand and can do more stuff in the exam thanks to that half an hour session. That person has that ability. That's the best explanation for the situation.*

*TC4: Teachers should keep the lesson short and only point out what's crucial to their students. They should involve them in the class naturally, make them think and come up with ideas, lead them to answers, and give them interesting tasks (Not the tasks teachers think interesting, the ones students would find interesting.)*

### **3.1.1.3. The effects of role models**

The teachers that pre-service teachers met during their educational journeys have effective roles in their lives and future professions. Teachers are the most important role models in students' lives and they affect many things in their students' future. Three of the participants talked about their role models as their teachers from different contexts such as primary, secondary, and high school while one participant regarded his professors at university as his role models. Participants' excerpts are shared in the following:



*TC1: I had a teacher in the middle school whom I love so much. She was my English teacher and my role model. She was a passionate and caring person. When I was taking her lesson, I had this feeling that I was doing, achieving something. She affected me deeply so since then becoming a teacher was my primary goal.*

*TC2: My role model was my Turkish Literature teacher in high school. I liked the way he entered the class, taught, and communicated with us. Also, I have a friend who is an English teacher and I admire her a lot. I observed that she was satisfied with her job. I thought I could be satisfied as well.*

*TC3: My form teacher was my role model, she dedicated herself to teaching. Her only aim was teaching. Sometimes she dealt with her students one to one without breaking to teach. Sooner or later, you had to learn.*

*TC4: Some of my professors from the ELT department. They are all different when I think about them but they somehow possess a collection of those abilities I stated previously and some more.*

### **3.1.1.3. Expectations from the Teacher Education Program**

All teacher candidates come to the Teacher Education Program with some expectations in their minds. Whereas some only want to graduate from the department and start working after improving their teaching skills, some others want to benefit from the opportunities provided by the department such as the Erasmus Program or post-graduate education. Here are some of the excerpts from the participants:

*TC1: I wanted to complete my study and become an English teacher. My biggest plan was to join the Erasmus program but I couldn't do it.*

*TC2: Learning how to teach English was my highest expectation as I wanted to work in a public school.*

*TC3: Equipping with specific teaching knowledge and skills was my expectation. As a teacher, acquiring new skills and learning to make comprehensions are important for me.*

*TC4: I didn't have much in terms of expectations. I was hoping there would be a lot of English lessons that supported creativity. I wanted to obtain a high GPA as I intended to prepare for post-graduate education.*

**3.2. Research Question 2:** How do personal and professional experiences during initial teacher education relate to early teacher identity construction of pre-service ELT teachers?

Pre-service teachers spend 4 years in the Teacher Education Program and they take courses about methodology, psychology, educational issues and applied linguistics. Besides, they

have some practical experiences such as micro-teaching, practicum, community work, etc. during their educations. All these things affect their teacher identity development in a way.

### **3.2.1. Main Emerging Themes**

As a result of the data analysis, five main themes emerged:

- Pre-service Teachers' Views on the Teacher Education Program**
- Contributions of the Teacher Education Program to the Development of Pre-service Teachers**
- Challenges and Conflicts that Pre-service Teachers Met**
- Pre-service Teachers' individual practices about their future profession**
- Plans and concerns**

#### **3.2.1.1. Pre-service Teachers' Views on the Teacher Education Program**

Participants of this study benefitted from their education in different aspects. While some of them were talking about theoretical courses such as methodology, approaches, student psychology, material design, etc., some others focused on the practical side of education such as micro-teaching and practicum experiences. They talked about their experiences during the third year of their education. Their views about the Teacher Education Program are like these:

*TC1: I learned lots of things about being a teacher. Because in the third year, there were practical courses. We were supposed to act as teachers and be involved in the lessons. We acted as teachers and managed classes in micro-teaching sessions. I started to feel like a teacher at the end of the third year.*

*TC2: I think that methodology courses are the most beneficial ones, which are Approaches and Methods, Teaching English to Young Learners, Teaching English Skills, etc. At the end of the second year, I felt more self-confident since I learned more about how to teach English. I can say that I felt like a teacher candidate. With the help of these courses, we learned how to apply the theories we covered before. Also, I felt more experienced since I left many courses behind.*

*TC3: It helped me learn how to teach most effectively. It taught me how to communicate with students. I learned what is the most important thing in language teaching, how to teach English to young learners, how to manage the class etc. At that time, I felt like a teacher candidate because I was almost nearly equipped with teaching skills.*

*TC4: Courses that help with material design and student psychology helped a lot. Literature, Young Learners, and Material Design classes were rather relevant. In my third year, I felt that I was learning something that could be put to use as a teacher. These classes are directly*

*linked to students and designing content for the students. I felt that finally, I had some professional knowledge about the lessons I would be teaching.*

*TC2: We had too many skill-based, methodology, and pedagogical courses so far. I believe that there has been a great transformation. I believe that the teacher education program met my expectations.*

*TC3: In a practicum school, I learned how to be a teacher exactly. The teacher education program met my expectations because I am ready to teach. I can manage a class on my own.*

While three of the participants stated that this program could meet their expectations and they could feel like a teacher at the end of their education, one of the participants was not satisfied with the Teacher Education Program as it did not provide enough practice-oriented opportunities and he shared his opinions as such:

*TC1: Since we are going to schools to perform as teachers, we can say this is some kind of transformation. I would expect more involvement in performing as a teacher but it didn't happen. That's why the teacher education program hasn't met my expectations.*

### **3.2.2.2. Contributions of the Teacher Education Program to the Development of Pre-service Teachers**

The results indicate that the Teacher Education Program helped the participants in many aspects such as improving content knowledge (subjects, methods and approaches), pedagogical knowledge (how to teach, management skills), and pedagogical content knowledge (how to develop teaching skills, how to organize teaching). It also helped them explore their strengths and weaknesses to develop their teaching skills. During their educations, they experienced an exploratory journey as they practised teaching and saw the differences between theory and practice. All the participants reflected on the issue from various aspects below:

*TC1: Of course, I'm more experienced as a teacher. Because compared with the first year, I have some experience as a candidate teacher. The practicum we took in our last year has helped us a lot to become a teacher. However, I cannot feel like a teacher yet, I will become a teacher in time. With the experience I will gain in time, I will become a real teacher.*

*TC2: Of course, I improved my English. Also, my communication skills are better now. I can communicate with students better now.*

*TC3: Definitely, I developed myself. I did not know anything about teaching at first. Now, I am ready to teach. I think that I can be a teacher from now on. I am enough for the students to teach a second language.*

*TC4: You mostly learn from experience as a teacher. Therefore, practicum helps a lot. Now, I can identify certain student types better and I can choose more fitting material for them.*

### **3.2.2.3. Challenges and Conflicts that Pre-service Teachers Met**

Participants talked about having difficulties comprehending theoretical knowledge at the beginning. They had adaptation problems during practicum as they experienced theory-practice gaps. Three of the participants experienced teaching in a real context for the first time during practicum sessions. Also, they had difficulties while taking online classes during the pandemic. It was the first time they were taking online courses that is why they could not adapt easily. They shared their ideas below:

*TC1: The theoretical knowledge that I learned during my educational program was challenging for the first time. I dealt with them in time as I was doing my practice.*

*TC3: Sometimes, methodological terms were my challenges. I had difficulties to understand.*

### **3.2.2.4. Pre-service Teachers' Individual Practices about Their Future Profession**

All the participants talked about the Micro teaching sessions where they were supposed to prepare lesson plans and highlighted the importance of the practicum on their development as a teacher. They had opportunities to observe real classrooms and experience reflective practices. However, only one of the participants had experiences of teaching in other contexts for a while thanks to private tutoring and online teaching. Other participants did not take any action in terms of developing themselves in teaching on other platforms although they felt the lack of real teaching experience during their teacher education. Additionally, only one participant could join the Erasmus program although another one wanted to join but could not make it happen. However, the participants did not support themselves with other opportunities such as attending conferences, workshops, seminars, projects, etc.

### **3.2.2.5. Pre-service Teachers' Future Plans**

All the participants have some future plans and three of them would like to work as a teacher after graduation. One of them is already working as a teacher in different platforms and he is planning to go on his education. Another participant is also planning to get a Master's degree in the future. Their excerpts were shared below:

*TC1: I want to be a teacher in the Ministry of Education. This is my priority.*

*TC2: My short-term plan is to work in a public school. I'm not sure whether it will be a primary, secondary, or high school.*

*TC3: I want to work in any language course or any school after completing my education.*

However, two of them want to go on their academic careers:

*TC2: My long-term plan is to have a Master's degree, but I don't know when.*

*TC4: I want to proceed with a PhD education in Psychology if my applications are accepted and if not I want to start with a master's degree in the same field abroad. I already had them before I started to study in this department.*

### **3.2.2.6. Pre-service Teachers' Concerns**

As they need to pass the qualification exam to be able to work in a state school, they can have some other possibilities or alternatives for their profession. Even if they do not feel confident about some issues, they are keen on becoming a teacher. Three of the participants state that they do not feel self-sufficient as a prospective teacher and they believe that they need to have more experience to be able to feel sufficient. On the other hand, one participant (TC4) feels confident about teaching as he already teaches in different contexts. They commented on the issue as below:

*TC1: I don't believe I have all the qualifications because I should have more experience as a teacher.*

*TC2: I don't believe I have all the qualifications, but I have important qualifications such as patience, and kindness. I believe that I will be better in time because we will learn many things while working as well.*

*TC3: I don't believe that I have all the qualifications. Because I need to improve and develop myself. I need to take myself one step ahead.*

### **3.3. Results and Discussion**

All things considered, teacher identity construction is affected by many issues. The results of the current study indicate that it goes beyond the teacher education program. First of all, the results demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between participants' individual learning experiences during their prior educational life and their teacher identity construction. Most of them talked about their memories of learning and personal stories of their educational journey before higher education. It was also discovered that individual interests and qualifications had a substantial contribution to the creation of the teacher identity, as proposed by Nur'Aini (2018).

Secondly, some issues such as motives, aims, role models and expectations are really effective in participants' decision-making processes about their future profession and teacher identity development. In a similar vein, Bukor (2015) claimed that assumptions, ideas, and individual expectations and experiences all played a significant role in forming a teacher's identity.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that there is a strong relationship between teacher education programs and teacher identity construction in terms of helping prospective teachers improve their content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge about

methods and approaches, etc. As suggested by Bukor (2015) and McLean (2017), increasing professional knowledge in pre-service teachers helps improve confidence while also developing teaching competency and problem-solving. As a result, these issues are critical points for teacher identity development.

Another important issue based on the results is that there should be more opportunities to practice teaching. All the participants talked about the importance of practising teaching as much as possible before graduation and they feel the lack of enough experience about it even though two semesters were devoted to practicum. They stated that they did not have enough time and space to close the gap between their theoretical knowledge and practices. They also suggested that the practicum should start at an earlier period during teacher education. Similarly, Ivanova and Skara-Mincane (2016) found that pre-service teachers' professional development and self-efficacy views improved during their teaching experiences and for this reason, several student teachers expressed a desire for additional time and opportunities to teach in practicum schools. Therefore, it could be suggested that more teaching practices are needed to be able to close the gaps between theory and practice and this should be taken into consideration seriously by the stakeholders.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper aimed to reveal the relationships between pre-service teachers' personal backgrounds, personal and professional experiences during their teacher education and teacher identity construction in a Turkish context. According to the findings of the present study, which are consistent with previous research (Lankveld et al., 2017; Akkerman & Meier, 2011), teacher identity is a combination of numerous notions and aspects that are influenced and shaped by both the individual and the social settings in which they participate. Furthermore, identity is not fixed but rather varies with time and context (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Therefore, the results of the current study show that pre-service teachers are never the same individuals before and after the teacher education program and most probably their teacher identities will go on changing afterwards. Furthermore, the fact that participants required more opportunities to practice teaching may indicate that future language teacher candidates will require longer practicums (Meyers et al., 2017). With all these in mind, as suggested by Yazan (2019), teacher education programs need to be changed and reformed, and crucial activities need to be handled in a way that produces a relevant environment to be able to help student teachers understand who they are, become self-reflective, and learn how to become teachers.

#### **Implications and Recommendations**

As the present study is a pilot study, there is a limited number of participants and the researchers could not go on collecting more data about some critical issues because of limited

time. Therefore, general conclusions cannot be drawn. The pilot study, on the other hand, presents relevant individual perspectives. For these reasons, in the actual study, it was planned to conduct focus group interviews to reflect on them more from a broadened perspective. In doing so, it was aimed to explore more about the practicum experiences of pre-service teachers to be able to evaluate the relationships between practicum-related issues and teacher identity development.

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