

# How to Cultivate an Excellent English-Teacher-in-Future?—A Study on the Changes on Pre-service Language Teacher Identity During the Practicum

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For the teacher's professional development, identity plays a crucial role in promoting the teacher's maturity and skills. For pre-service teachers, the level of identity determines whether they are willing or even determined to take teaching as their future career, and also represents whether their professional development is smooth. Therefore, the research on pre-service teachers' identity is of great significance. Combining quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, this study aims to explore whether the identity of pre-service English teachers changes before and after the practicum and the influencing factors during the practicum through questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. Based on the four dimensions of identity proposed by Xun, Sun, and Peng (2014), this study investigated the juniors before their practice and the seniors who had practiced for two months. It is found that the scores of careers belonging, foreign language teaching belief, English proficiency, work involvement, professional behaviour tendency, and foreign language teaching reform are higher than those of the students before the practicum. Through semi-structured interviews, it can be concluded that the factors affecting identity include personal factors, mentor factors, job content, and organizational support factors. According to the survey results, this study puts forward corresponding suggestions to improve the positive impact of practicum on students' identity.

*Keywords:* teacher identity, pre-service English teacher, teaching practice

## Introduction

EFL teachers' professional development has always been the concern of EFL teacher education. It is a series of psychological changes throughout the whole process from pre-service professional education to in-service professional education (Jia, 2003). It stresses the professional improvement inside of a teacher as an individual (Ye, 2001), reflects the dynamic change teacher would experience in professional development, and tries to explore how to catalyze the change. With this object, the teacher's identity, as a dimension reflects the teacher's self-awareness and behaviors during the teaching, values heavily in the exploration of the EFL teacher's professional development. However, studies on teacher identity mostly focus on in-service teachers, while there is relatively little literature on pre-service teachers, which plays an instructive role in teacher education. Based on the two, it's of great importance to conduct a study on pre-service English teachers.

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The study is empirical research, which intends to investigate the change in pre-service teachers' identity before and after the practicum. Additionally, the study will discuss the individual and social elements that affect pre-service teacher identity, which would offer reference values in the cultivation of normal English students from the aspect of practicum.

### **Relevant Studies on EFL Teacher Identity and Pre-service Teacher Identity**

After analyzing 69 studies on the teacher identity from SSCI, Pei and Li (2017) find that many of them focus on the construction of pre-service teacher's identity, including professional construction of pre-service teachers identity in the curriculum (Tsui & Law, 2007; Trent, 2010; 2013) and professional construction of pre-service teachers identity in practicum (Yuan, 2016; Trent, 2013). Apart from that, X. J. Zhang, S. Zhang, and Tian (2018) explore how pre-service ESL teacher identity develops through cross-border writing activities, in which ESL pre-service teachers from Millersville University read, comment, and discuss with students from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies about their writing.

In the aspect of research method, there are qualitative analyses more than quantitative analyses. One reason is that a case study based on narrative study and classroom observation has its natural advantage of being easily controlled. Another reason is that rare teacher identity scales are tailor-made for Chinese EFL teachers (Xun, Sun, & Peng, 2014).

To collect large data, questionnaires are of great importance (e.g., Pei & Li, 2017). However, in-depth interviews, classroom observation, and reflective journals are commonly used in small-sample studies to be more accurate. How the narrators tell the story, depict their inner feeling, and use metaphor becomes the concern of the researchers' analysis. Guo and Wang (2009) apply a case study by tracing the whole process of practicum of an undergraduate. They create a model describing the pre-service teacher's professional development process. Recently, researchers use metaphor as a useful tool to explore teacher identity (Fang & Zhang, 2021). Metaphor reflects a teacher's view on teaching and the role he or she plays. It works on the conceptualization of teaching, learning, and reflection (Poom-Valickis, Oder, & Lepik, 2012).

To test the validity of the present scale and make a complete investigation on the factors that influence the pre-service teacher's identity, this study plans to apply EFL Teacher's Identity Scale made by Xun et al. (2014) and semi-interview as the main methods to collect data.

## **Method**

### **Research Subjects**

The subjects are junior and senior students majoring in Normal English. All the students are from Foreign Language School in Jiangxi Science and Technology Normal University. A total of 34 questionnaires were issued, of which 29 were completed and valid, including seven questionnaires from pre-service normal students (junior) and 22 questionnaires from post-service normal students (senior). All the senior students have been receiving the practice training for two months.

Besides, this study used purposeful sampling to obtain the maximum amount of information in quantitative research. To explore other possible factors that may influence pre-service teachers' identity during the practicum, four interviewees from three different practice schools were involved.

### **Research Instruments**

**Questionnaire.** EFL Pre-service Teacher's Identity Scale (pre-practicum version) and EFL Pre-service

Teacher's Identity Scale (post-practicum version) are applied in this research. They are revised by Chen and Hu (2019) from EFL Teacher's Identity Scale (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.920$ , KMO = 0.828) designed by Xun et al. (2014). Both versions divide EFL teacher identity into four dimensions: career identity, profession identity, individual identity, and situation identity. Each dimension corresponds with two factors. Career identity relates to career values and a sense of belonging. Profession identity is connected with the belief in language teaching and English proficiency. Individual identity involves job involvement and behavior tendency in occupation. Situation identity has to do with perceived organization support and the reform of English teaching.

These two versions are similar but written in different tenses (the pre-practicum version used more future tense and the post-practicum version used more present tense). Considering that pre-practicum interviewees do not have perceived organization support, the concerning five items were removed in the pre-practicum version.

**Semi-structured interview.** The semi-structured interview cost half an hour. It consisted of three parts. The first part was the basic information about the interviewees and the school he/she was working in. The second part concerned their relationships with the practice school, the students, and the teacher educators, including the instructors in the university and the instructors working in the practice school. Additionally, the third part revolved around their views and opinions about English teaching and English teacher. During the interview, the interviewees were encouraged to speak out their attitudes and inner feeling as more as possible.

**Procedures.** After issuing and receiving questionnaires, the data were processed in SPSS and Stata 16.0. A total of 34 questionnaires were distributed. After filtering out questionnaires that have too many highly similar answers, 29 valid questionnaires were returned, including seven from the pre-practicum version and 22 from the post-practicum version.

The process of the semi-structured interview was recorded and transcribed into an electronic document. Some keywords would be extracted and analyzed to explore other elements that may influence pre-service teachers' identity.

## Result

### Questionnaires Survey Results

**Reliability and validity test of the questionnaires.** Before analyzing the scores, the questionnaires should be reliable and valid. The reliability and validity tests were done in SPSS.

Table 1

#### *Reliability of the Questionnaires*

	Number of items	Number of samples	Cronbach $\alpha$
Questionnaire of pre-practicum version	29	7	0.883
Questionnaire of post-practicum version	34	22	0.94

Since the number of items is not even, Cronbach is used as an analysis tool. As the result shown in Table 1, the reliability of the two questionnaires is excellent. Both of the Cronbach  $\alpha$  are above 0.8.

Because the number of samples is too small to work out, KMO test and Bartlett test are unable to be done.

**Pre-service English teachers' identity before the practicum.** According to the Table 2, the pre-service teachers' identity before practicum is generally between four and five, which means that the junior student

interviewees generally have a high level of identity. Among the seven factors, the career values score the highest and English proficiency scores the lowest. It shows that the pre-service teachers before practicum think that the work of English teacher has a significant impact on students as well as the development of society, but these interviewees are not confident in their ability to demonstrate using the English language properly and fluently.

Table 2

*Identity of Pre-service EFL Teachers Before the Practicum*

Dimension	Scores each item gains in the dimension	Factor	Scores each item gains in the factor
Career identity	4.469	Career values	4.785
		Career belongingness	4.04
Profession identity	3.952	Belief in language teaching	4.23
		English proficiency	3.38
Individual identity	3.985	Job involvement	4
		Behavior tendency in occupation	3.971
Situation identity	4.238	Reform of English teaching	4.238
Pre-service teacher identity	4.118		

Table 3

*Mean Test on Seven Factors (Pre-practicum)*

Variables	Female	Mean 1	Male	Mean 2	Mean Diff.
Career values	5	18.8	2	20	-1.2
Career belongingness	5	13.2	2	9.5	3.700*
Belief in language teaching	5	25	2	26.5	-1.5
English proficiency	5	10.4	2	9.5	0.9
Job involvement	5	21.8	2	15.5	6.300*
Behavior tendency in occupation	5	20.8	2	17.5	3.3
Reform of English teaching	5	13.2	2	11.5	1.7
Pre-service teacher identity	5	104.4	2	90	14.4

Note. \* The mean difference is significant at the 0.1 level.

The Table 3 shows the average scores the different genders get in seven factors. Their general scores show no significant difference in identity. In the factor of sense of belonging and the factor of job involvement, the male got significantly higher scores than the female. It means that the male pre-service teachers have a stronger sense of belongings, and they are more confident about their passion on teaching.

**Pre-service English teachers' identity after the practicum.** The Table 4 reveals the scores in the eight different factors. The general score of pre-service teachers' identity is more than four, which is also at a high level. There are only two factors between three and four: English proficiency and perceived organization support. Similar to the pre-service teachers before the practicum, these pre-service teachers still lack confidence in their ability to socialize with English, but they do attach importance to English teachers as a career. Additionally, they got only 3.108 in perceived organization support. It can be explained that these students in practice did not feel valued by the practice school; they neither thought they could communicate with practice school equally.

Table 4

*Identity of Pre-service EFL Teachers After the Practicum*

Dimension	Scores each item gains in the dimension	Factor	Scores each item gains in the factor
Career identity	4.396	Career values	4.523
		Career belongingness	4.227
Profession identity	4.137	Belief in language teaching	4.35
		English proficiency	3.71
Individual identity	4.141	Job involvement	4.036
		Behavior tendency in occupation	4.246
Situation identity	3.538	Reform of English teaching	4.257
		Perceived organization support	3.108
Pre-service teacher identity	4.051		

Table 5

*Mean Test on Eight Factors (Post-practicum)*

Variables	Female	Mean 1	Male	Mean 2	Mean Diff.
Career values	19	17.95	3	19	-1.053
Career belongingness	19	12.89	3	11.33	1.561
Belief in language teaching	19	26.11	3	26	0.105
English proficiency	19	11.21	3	10.67	0.544
Job involvement	19	20.26	3	19.67	0.596
Behavior tendency in occupation	19	21.53	3	19.33	2.193
Reform of English teaching	19	12.79	3	12.67	0.123
Perceived organization support	19	15.26	3	17.33	-2.07
Pre-service teacher identity	19	120.1	3	117	3.053

Note. \* The mean difference is significant at the 0.1 level.

The Table 5 reveals the mean difference between the two genders. The overall scores of pre-service teachers' identity are higher in the female group. In the factors of career values and perceived organization support, the average scores of male are higher than that of female. And in the rest of the six factors, the average scores of female are higher, especially in the factor of behavior tendency in occupation, which shows the greatest difference among the eight factors—2.193 points difference. It is worth mentioning that all these differences are not significant, which means that there are no gender differences in the scores of pre-service teachers' identity.

**The comparison between the pre-service teachers' identity before and after the practicum.** Although the pre-practicum version questionnaire does not test the factor of perceived organization support, the rest of the factors can still be contracted. Since the two versions of questionnaires have different numbers of items, the scores are calculated as the scores divided by the number of items. The result of the t-test and the median difference test are respectively demonstrated in Table 6 and Table 7.

Surprisingly, the students after practicum get a lower score in the overall level of pre-service teacher identity, which is inconsistent with the prediction. But it still shows the tendency to increase in most of the factors. Except for the factor career values, the scores students after practicum get are generally higher than the scores of students before practicum. Another reason for the lower score is that the students after practicum only get 3.108 points in the factor of perceived organization support, which is the lowest score among the eight factors and does not been presented in both tables.

Table 6

*Contract on the Scores Each Item Gains in the Seven Factors (Mean Test)*

Variables	Students before practicum	Mean 1	Students after practicum	Mean 2	Mean Diff.
Career values	7	4.786	22	4.523	0.263
Career belongingness	7	4.048	22	4.227	-0.18
Belief in language teaching	7	4.238	22	4.348	-0.11
English proficiency	7	3.381	22	3.712	-0.331
Job involvement	7	4	22	4.036	-0.036
Behavior tendency in occupation	7	3.971	22	4.245	-0.274
Reform of English teaching	7	4.238	22	4.258	-0.019
Pre-service teacher identity	7	4.118	22	4.051	0.067

Note. \* The mean difference is significant at the 0.1 level.

Table 7

*Contract on the Scores Each Item Gains in the Seven Factors (Median Test)*

Variables	Students before practicum	Median 1	Students after practicum	Median 2	Mean Diff.
Career values	7	5	22	4.5	3.435*
Career belongingness	7	4	22	4.333	0.286
Belief in language teaching	7	4.167	22	4.333	0.343
English proficiency	7	3.667	22	3.667	0.008
Job involvement	7	4	22	4	0.095
Behavior tendency in occupation	7	3.8	22	4	0.343
Reform of English teaching	7	4	22	4.333	0.026
Pre-service teacher identity	7	4.172	22	4.015	1.981

Note. \* The mean difference is significant at the 0.1 level.

Likewise, the mean difference in Table 6 is not statistically significant. And the median test result in Table 7 also proves that—it only shows a significant difference in the factor career values.

### Interview Survey Results

The interviewees were selected from those who expressed their willingness to participate in the semi-structured interview and one was invited. Their basic information and the scores they got are presented as follows.

Table 8

*Information of Interviewees*

Name	Practice school	Practice grades	Duration of interview
Miss Wang	School A	Grade nine	26 min.
Miss Yang	School A	Grade seven	26 min.
Miss Zhou	School B	Grade eight	28 min.
Miss Zhang	School C	Grade seven	37 min.

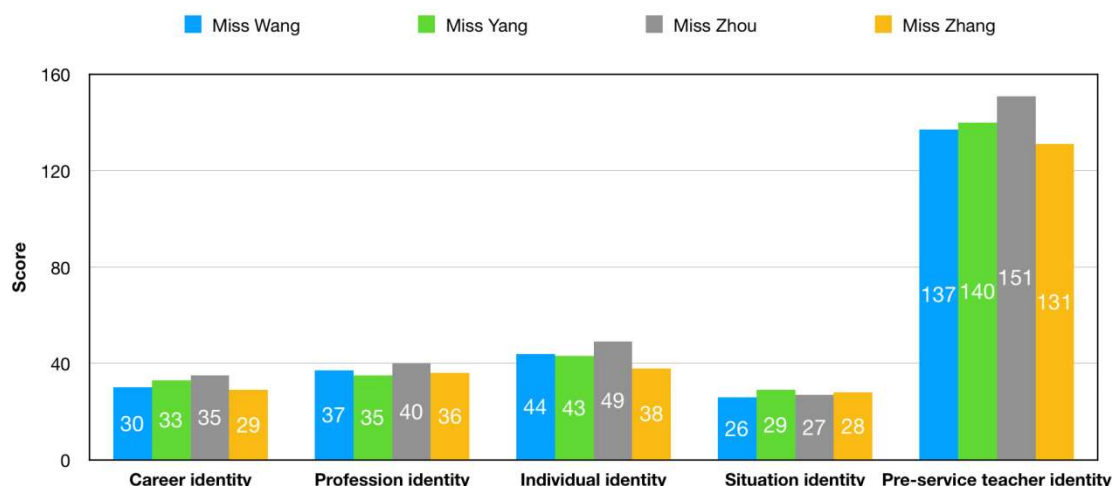


Figure 1. Scores each interviewee gets in the previous questionnaire.

### Factors That Influence the Pre-service Teacher Identity

**Job content.** What influences teacher identity is not the volume of work, but the opportunity of communicating with students face to face, especially when there is no other teacher. Among the four interviewees, Miss Zhou not only does the job of supervising text reciting, homework correcting, and supervising discipline, she also answers questions after class and does sports with students. She has cordial relations with her students who naturally share jokes with her. Miss Wang is also as busy as Miss Zhou, but she finishes most of her work in the office. When being asked about relationship with students, she even doubts whether these students remember her.

**The instructing style of the mentor.** On the first visit to the practice school, mentors would be assigned to each pre-service teacher. Their four mentors also have four kinds of altitude toward these interviewees. Similar to the classification of parenting style, the mentor's instructing style can be divided into authoritarian instructing, authoritative instructing, permissive instructing, and uninvolved instructing. Miss Wang's mentor is strict with every detail and treats her like a subordinate. The authoritarian instruction makes Miss Wang stressed. Compared to Miss Wang's severe teacher, Miss Yang's mentor is way too loose, because she seldom contacts or talks to her. This uninvolved instructing way sometimes makes Miss Yang felt being ignored. Fortunately, Miss Zhou has a good mentor with an authoritative instructing style. Her mentor always gives her advice on how to deal with problems in a lesson. She also shows interest in Miss Zhou's innovative teaching plan and is glad to discuss more.

**Support from university.** Usually, the support from the university shows how much the practice students are cared about, and it is reflected by the teacher educator who is responsible to visit practice school and require about the practice condition. The teacher educators do not visit School A frequently, so Miss Wang and Miss Yang do not feel a strong sense of support from the organization.

**Practice school.** During the practicum, having equal communication with practice school makes practice students feel respected and supported. According to the interview, pre-service teachers in School A say that their personal belongings used to be moved or thrown by students and it was not addressed well. Miss Zhang says that School C did not allow them to use the water cooler. School B did nothing bad, but also did not try to help pre-service teachers to fit into the new environment. These events influence interviewees' scores in situation identity—they all got the lowest scores in this dimension.

**Motivation for practice.** During the interview, the researcher finds that Miss Zhang obviously lacks motivation and passion in practice. She is preparing for the postgraduate entrance exam and views this practice as an obstacle. It leads to her low involvement and lower identity.

## **Discussion**

### **Current Situation of Pre-service Teacher Identity**

Although there is no statistical significance between the scores before and after the practicum, the scores on most factors still show a tendency to elevate. It also reveals that less than two months of the practicum does not reach a significant result in pre-service teachers' identity. All the pre-service teachers recognize the value of English teacher's work. On the other hand, they lack confidence in their English proficiency. As for the differences between the male and female identity, the male before practicum have a stronger sense of belongings and are more confident about their passion on teaching. But after practicum, these two genders' identity situations are similar.

### **Factors Influence Pre-service Identity During the Practicum**

For the factors that contribute to the identity change, they can be concluded to be individual motivation & characteristics, mentor's style, job content, and the support from the practice school & the teacher educator.

The level of personal motivation decides the strategy pre-service teachers would apply during the practicum. Usually, when they have a clear target to be an English teacher, they would involve in the job positively; when they doubt the value of the practicum, we do the job passively. The optimistic or pessimistic personality would also regulate the identity level positively or passively. The mentor is the most effective element that strongly influences the identity. Almost all the practice students hope to learn after a highly skilled mentor who is willing to give accurate guidance, and the most important thing is to talk with the pre-service teacher equally. Equal communication shows respect and conveys the message that "both of us are equally seen as the English teacher", which would be helpful to improve the sense of belonging. Job content is another essential element that decides identity because it represents the chance to directly communicate with students, especially on the occasion where there is no other teacher. The frequent interaction between the pre-service teacher and the student would consolidate the identity as an English teacher. The support of the practice school and the teacher educator positively affects belongingness. The caring from the stronger institution makes practice students feel that they are being respected and cared. It helps them to blend into the practice school quickly and happily.

## **Conclusion**

Some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the questionnaires were not completed by the same group of people when they are before and after the practicum. Due to the limited time, the identity data before practicum were replaced as the data of the senior students. So the result of the collection cannot get rid of the personal influence. The limitation also lies in the researcher's limited data collection ability. There are only 29 valid questionnaires, which is a small number and leads to the null result of KMO; additionally, the subjective tendency during the semi-interview and the analysis of the interview results. Because of the researcher's habit of conversation, some of the questions were asked in a close way. It showed a subjective tendency and limited the freedom of the interviewees' answers.



Despite these limitations, conclusions can be drawn. First, practicum can be helpful for pre-service teachers to increase identity. Second, a positive attitude, high motivation, an authoritative mentor, more chances to speak with students, and the support from organizations are the positive factors that increase pre-service teacher identity and promote the professional development.

Future studies can keep exploring how the mentors influence practice students. They can search the relationship between mentor's and the practice students' identity, or how different instructing styles impact practice students' practice results.

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