

## EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Identity and Position During Teaching Practice

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### Abstract

**Background:**

As student teachers shift to preservice teachers during teaching practice, it is necessary to find out how teaching practice could shape their identity and position, especially in the EFL context where English is taught as a foreign language. Based on this purpose, this study seeks information on preservice teacher identity and position during teaching practice by taking discourse analysis lenses.

**Methodology:**

This study used descriptive research to describe EFL preservice teachers' identity construction and position. Adopting Fairclough's (2013) theory relationship between language, power and social used as data analysis. An interview transcript was used to investigate the meaning behind the spoken text of two EFL preservice teachers.

**Findings:**

The finding found they shared similar identity construction across two different contexts where preservice teachers conduct their teaching practice. Starting as a student at university and transferring to school as a teacher made them construct a new identity after several times teaching students and positioned themselves in school by participating in several activities.


**Conclusion:**

It found that positioning oneself could influence the identity development of preservice teachers. However, the unexpected condition that forced them to teach online made them feel less than a teacher and try to get an identity recognized by the environment by positioning themselves in the school context.

**Originality:**

In contrast to earlier studies that investigated the anxiety of preservice EFL students, this study focused on describing how EFL preservice teachers' identity construction related to the position assigned to them in the real classroom setting.

**Keywords** : *identity construction; position; preservice teacher*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Being a preservice teacher is meaningful as student-teachers will transfer their knowledge to school students. As they transform from students to teachers, preservice teachers will encounter a shift of identity that is often challenging in school settings (Nguyen & Yang, 2018). Before going to school, they were students but changed into a professional teacher in a short time. Due to inexperience, preservice teachers brought their imagined identity of the ideal teachers they wanted to perform in the schools. The imagined identity was influenced not only by their ideas, but also by their sociocultural surroundings' learning or practicum experiences (Jiang et al., 2021). People's actions are crucial to their identity (Fairclough, 2013). However, several teachers may find the imagined identity will be different as they encounter the real situation. Teaching practice is offered to student teachers as an opportunity to apply their knowledge to practice becoming effective teachers (Yuliani Dwi Astuti). As we know, during teaching practice, student-teachers will have a role as a real teacher and are responsible for all teaching administrative components such as making syllabus preparation, lesson plans, and teaching experience (Zulfikar et al., 2020). A study from Goktepe & Kunt (2021) revealed a teacher describes how external factors - including restrictions imposed by mentors and limitations on classroom materials - prevented her from trying new teaching techniques. This case showed that the imagined identity might change when preservice teachers face the real classroom situation.

According to Wenger (1999) identity is formed as individuals engage in socially relevant activities valued by certain communities. Their identity formation is influenced by belonging-engagement, imagination and alignment. Engagement is a sort of participation that involves individuals engaging in activities, doing stuff, working alone or with others and socializing. Through engagement, student teachers are exposed to direct experiences that shape their identities through participation or non-participation in the school context. Meanwhile, imagination can generate identification relationships that are as significant as those resulting from engagement. It is also to perceive ourselves from a different perspective, reflect on our circumstances, and to consider new possibilities. Lastly, alignment coordinates an individual's activities within larger systems and organizations, allowing the identity of a larger group to be incorporated into the identities of the individual members. A study by Márquez-García et al. (2020) indicates preservice teachers learn about the teaching profession through feeling, belonging, placing the action in a social perspective and sharing experiences with others. Learn by feel means preservice teachers describe their learning experiences as being filled with

various sensations, emotions, and feelings, including excitement, joy, happiness, fear, and appreciation. They also develop a sense of belonging in the school community where they completed practicum. In addition, establishing formal and informal relations in diverse settings (social, cultural, functional) enable them to consider the complexities of social justice from new perspectives and share the experience with other colleagues as reflection. The reactions they experience at school and communication with colleagues and students influence preservice teachers' perceptions of themselves and their future (Sallı & Osam, 2018). It is in line with Kanno & Stuart (2011) that found the development of a teacher's identity is linked to classroom practice. Given the fact that the preservice teachers did not entirely portray themselves as teachers, they lacked power over their class. Once preservice teachers become accustomed to their roles and the associated attributes, they have power over students.

In addition, preservice teachers are also confused about their position in school because the status given to them as a teacher was temporary. Once a position is accepted or taken, it comes with particular entitlements and responsibilities. A position is relational and could provide challenges in terms of power because it can be used for individual or other people's business in different ways and rights (Sosa & Gomez, 2012). According to McVee et al. (2018), positioning can be understood as people's actions which are observable and relatively defined as social acts, and members of the conversation inhabited specific locations. Later, they distinguished position and positioning as two different concepts. A position can show a person's social status, moral or personal qualities, skills, or abilities; meanwhile, positioning refers to being put in place by someone else or putting someone else in place. According to Sallı & Osam (2018), positioning is a discursive practice because it involves language and the production of social realities or meanings, shaping the people involved. Mairitsch et al. (2021) showed that in context of UK and Austrian, as preservice teachers attempted to balance their university and private-life obligations, they noted difficulties with time management and organization, a lack of spare time, and a general sense of "survival" during their teacher training program. It can be indicated that preservice teachers face several issues regarding their positions while teaching practice. As a teacher, they put themselves in a professional mode, while at other times, they lack boundaries that make them feel complicated. It is also in line with McVee et al. (2018) explanation that they encounter self-positioning while having two identities: a personal identity as a human being and a social identity as a teacher. Similarly, Högberg et al. (2020), a Swedish students-teachers find out that working as teachers requires them to find a balance between various dilemmas and positions that have an impact on their

professional role, teaching mission, the relationship among private and professional lives, and who they choose to be as individuals and concerning their students. In addition, in the Indonesian context, Hapsari & Ena (2019) found that even when teachers were in the same situation, they positioned themselves differently. Both teachers in their research assigned to teach in class are challenging to deal with. One teacher positioned herself as a strict teacher to handle the class, while other teachers positioned themselves as powerless teacher since they gave up on engaging with students who were more powerful than her. In the Kayi-Aydar (2015) study, it was found three preservice teachers positioned themselves as teachers of all children. However, they performed different roles. One positioned herself as a bridge between students and society, while two others positioned themselves as guides for students. Another study by Vanassche & Kelchtermans (2014) also revealed teachers' identity is related to how they positioned themselves toward students. Their study identified three positioning of teachers. There are: the teacher educator of "pedagogues" means teachers are expected to teach students and promote their personal growth and development. The teacher educator of reflective teachers defines a teacher's role in terms of the need for a reflective approach to teaching, and the teacher educator of subject teachers is defined as teachers who believe their major responsibility is to teach children specific knowledge. The findings demonstrate how teachers position themselves in schools and influence their teaching process. It is in line with Badia & Liesa (2022) that teachers develop their identity and professional development along with how they position themselves in context. Since they conducted a study with large participants, it is also revealed teachers encounter new unexpected positions such as ensuring a positive learning environment or working with experts outside the school, taking part in extracurricular activities and mentoring student-teachers.

On the other hand, Eslamdoost et al. (2020) showed that how a teacher positioned herself at school was also influenced by social context, which later changed her teacher identity. In their study, a teacher said that she was part of a group of language teachers. Eventually, when she saw other teachers and students as "uncultured" and a source of problems in establishing her professional identity, she tried to distance herself from ELT teachers in Iran, alleging them of "advertising the foreign culture". As a result, teachers as individuals acquire different positions over a period of time to develop particular identities (Mansouri, 2021).

According to Kayi-Aydar (2015), positioning theory is still connected to critical discourse analysis approaches as it states that social norms shape and change the way language is used in any discourse. Discourses are a variety of representations of human society that are

innately positioned – differently positioned social actors 'see' and portray social life in various ways, resulting in various discourses (Fairclough, 2013). When the larger socio-political discourses are brought into the analysis, a positioning analysis may use the principles of critical discourse analysis.

Studies about preservice teachers regarding their identities and positions are still limited especially in EFL context. It is essential to understand the preservice teachers' identity and their positions when they are required to have teaching practice in a school context. Preservice teachers may often find challenges during teaching practice, such as a lack of classroom management experience or developing a relationship with other teachers and colleagues. This will be more challenging when they have teaching practice in schools that do not use English as the medium of instruction. In this context, English is used as a foreign language and taught in classes with students from various backgrounds.

In this present study, the researchers used critical discourse analysis as the foundation in order to search for precise meanings, reach agreements on ideas, and learn from practice. On the other hand, it did not reflect participants' interpretations and/or subjective experiences of what is described, nor did they consider the specific teaching, school, and social context that might influence the resulting speech. As Fairclough (2013) defined, one of its functions is the role of discourse in constructing the social identity of community members, which in this case are preservice teachers. It is necessary to investigate it since how a preservice teacher positions himself is related to developing his professional identity, specifically when teaching English as a foreign language. To address this limitation, this paper combined positioning theory and critical discourse analysis to seek the meaning of spoken text regarding preservice teachers' identities and positions during teaching practice in the EFL context.

Based on the reasons stated above, this study focused on answering the following research question: (1) how do EFL preservice teachers shape their identity and (2) How do EFL preservice teachers position themselves during teaching practice?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The aims of this study are to explore preservice teachers' identities and positions during teaching practice by employing a case study research design. A case study design was implemented to seek an understanding of participants' identities and positions. In order to define how social context shapes the position of preservice teachers, the researchers interviewed two students from the same private university in Indonesia that taught English in different schools. Two participants; Ria and Laila (*all names are pseudonyms*), were assigned

to teach English at Senior High School and Vocational High School. Both are asked to share their experience as teachers during teaching practice to see whether the social environment can produce different identities and positions. As a program at university, students were required to have teaching practice for three months. During that time, they were required to do some tasks related to teaching activities such as preparing the materials, teaching in the class, and participating in the school's environment. The participants were selected through convenience sampling, which participants are chosen because they are willing and able to take part in this study (Creswell, 2015).

This study used interviews to discover preservice teachers' identities and positions during teaching practice by adopting interview questions from (Márquez-García et al., 2020) related to the preservice teachers' experience in the teaching practice. Due to the time limitation, the interview was conducted after the participants finished their teaching practices. Since one's position can be figured out through people's speech acts, this study focus on obtaining students-teacher story and paying attention to their speech during interviews by adapting Fairclough (2013) theoretical analysis as a guide to understand the meaning behind spoken text and social practice in order to define participants' positions in their teaching practice context. The data analysis is divided into three parts: description, interpretation, and explanation. As an effort to provide a systematic method for investigating the relationship between text and social context (Sameen et al., 2021).

### **3. FINDINGS**

#### ***3.1 Preservice Teachers' Identity***

Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, this study seeks information about preservice teachers' identity during teaching practice to recognize how social context shaped their identities by using interview transcripts as the genre of the discourse. Ria (*pseudonym*), a preservice teacher, encountered first-time practice as a teacher with who she had never had the role before. She repeatedly stated that she was nervous and worried about how she would teach her students. It is shown in one of her first excerpts that stated:

*"I imagined myself being a teacher but in my first teaching, I felt nervous. Even though it's only an online class".*

She later added, *"My first impression was happy because I could interact with them. But, I also feel nervous about how I will teach them, especially male students because the only experience is from micro-teaching at university".*

In addition, situations that forced her to teach online classes prevented her from fulfilling her desire to be a good teacher. Ria (*pseudonym*) expresses herself by stating, “The most memorable challenge that I remember was how I teach them and whether the material delivered to students clearly”. She explicitly shared her struggle as a new member of the school community by saying there was a memorable challenge she faced and added the consequence of her speech.

Ria’s case was different from Layla (*pseudonym*). Even though she is aware that she is also a student, she has strongly defined herself as a teacher and already knows what she will do later.

*“Before I went to school, I was just a student whose identity changed into a teacher and before having teaching practice I already imagined myself to be a cheerful teacher that interacts with many students and practices my public speaking”*. Later, she added *“because this is my first time teaching a real student, I felt nervous and excited. My first impression was that my students were willing to listen and respect me. I was also surprised because I could deliver the material well. My imagination matches what I expected but also doesn't match”*. In her last statement, she connected two opposite ideas that turned out to be her concern as a preservice teacher.

She stated that *“because being a teacher through online classes, I cannot have real interaction with students. I just imagined myself standing in front of class, practicing my public speaking, and have interaction with students. But, COVID 19 made the teaching activities conducted online”*. Based on her answer, she described her concern toward teaching students. She implies that she wants to teach them at real class so that she could serve a great performance but it cannot be occure due to the pandemic COVID-19.

In contrast to Ria, Layla was a preservice teacher aware of the challenges she faced during online teaching.

*“I overcome this by believing that I am needed and expected by the campus to carry out the university’s name and I am also determined to bring new stories from the experience of being a teacher before becoming a real teacher later. I prepared myself before teaching students by looking out sources. As I want to improve my public speaking, I sometimes record my voice and search at YouTube whether my pronunciation was right or not”*. The way she elaborated her speech indicates that she made a deliberate decision to accept the conditions of teaching through online learning while continuing to make achievements during teaching practice.

### **3.2 Pre Service Teachers’ Position**

Ria defined her position during the teaching practice as a student teacher. She explained, *“Because I am not a real teacher and I am just a student teacher, I tried to put myself in the position that pushes me to adapt well in teaching practice”*.

Based on her excerpt, she stated that she was not a real teacher because the status given to her was temporary since her real position is a student. It implies she set a boundary between herself as a student teacher and a teacher.

However, in her next speech found out that she is unconsciously accepting her position as a teacher since she added *“I also participate in the school community even though I was shy before and afraid of making mistakes. As time goes by, I am able to adapt and contribute to school activities”*.

It is similar to Layla who positioned herself as not a “real teacher”.

*“As I am not a real teacher, I tried to maintain good attitudes that the campus has suggested by greeting everyone at school, participating in the school community such as helping the librarian, taking part in voluntary works, coming to school on time, and school administrations”*. She also mentioned that she never forgot to introduce herself as a student teacher. Both of the participants always mentioned that they were a student teacher not a real teacher for students.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

Ria and Layla (*all names are pseudonym*) were preservice teachers from a private university. They were expected to be language teachers and must complete three months of teaching practice at school as their first experience in a real classroom situation. Before went to school, preservice teachers were required to take microteaching as a requirement for attending teaching practice. As a program from the university, they were sent to teach at different schools. Thus, they have a shift of identity from student to preservice teachers.

Both of participants mentioned that their identity as a teacher was acquired when they were already at school. It is in line with Nue & Manara (2022) found that during the teaching practicum, preservice teachers develop their identities through frequent discursive engagement, reflection on their practice in class, and inner dialogue with their current two selves (i.e., the student-self and the teacher-self). However, they consistently identify as individuals outside the school's community. It is shown in their excerpts that they were only students and always made boundaries about themselves. The finding also aligns with Wenger (1999) that Through engagement or non-participation in school settings, preservice teachers are exposed to direct experiences that influence their identity. When they imagined themselves as a teacher before, all of the participants, before conducting teaching practice, could identify their perspectives, reflect their situations and consider new options and their activities as teachers and participation in the school environment form their identity as members of the community even though at first they keep their distance because they feel they have not become fully teachers. All participants also revealed their concern toward teaching students as they encountered COVID-19, which made them teach students in the online class. This finding resonates with Marav (2022) that found barriers in the classroom made teaching inefficient since it was disruptive and inconvenient, while this study found the barrier was online teaching activity. Despite the



barrier they encounter in a real classroom setting, preservice teachers are referred to as prospective teachers since they are still learning and discovering what it means to be a teacher when they enter the classroom (Chu, 2021).

Regarding their positions at school, positioning may also push preservice teachers to create new identities other than those they desired to perceive (Hapsari & Ena, 2019). Through this case, participants construct an identity after they positioned themselves in the school environment when they started their teaching practice. In accordance with the previous study, Huang & Wang (2021) teachers' positions are influence their classroom teaching by imposing themselves through their imposed positionings. It differs from a study by Näykki et al. (2021) that found due to their differing position, and preservice teachers find it easier to participate than in-service teachers. As they were repeatedly stated that they create a boundary from beginning, it indicates that at the time of starting their teaching practice they were imposing themselves in the position of a teacher. This is caused by due to their personal experiences and the available philosophies in their social contexts, the identity positions of language teachers are in a dynamic state of change (Mansouri, 2021). By positioning themselves in the school environment, they communicate their identity as students and social identity as teachers while at the school to form a complete entity (Salli & Osam, 2018). After several times being a member of the school community, Ria and Layla finally adapt to the school's atmosphere since they explain their efforts to be a part of the school. It is in line with the finding from Kayi-Aydar (2015) that when preservice teachers are given a chance to speak up, they can build positive individual and solid professional identities. Their identity as a teacher is founded on how they position their students. It suggests that there were some identities that they did not want to perceive, but due to the circumstances, they were forced to construct certain identities (Hapsari & Ena, 2019).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that identity and position are connected in constructing preservice teachers' identities. When student teachers are allowed to immerse themselves in a professional environment, they can establish a new identity based on their field of competence and position themselves to fit in with their environments. Although these two preservice teachers teach at different schools, they begin their careers as a teacher with the same identities. Due to the fact that they could only meet students online, they had to adapt their projected identity to match their new identity and position themselves with the proper effort so that their professional career would not be harmed.

Given the fact that this study only investigated two preservice teachers, it has some limitations. First, the data was taken after they completed their teaching practice due to the time limitation. Therefore, the finding only revealed the first impressions when they taught at schools and after completing the teaching practice. Second, the data did not explicitly address

how preservice teachers faced some challenges outside the classroom activity topic, such as the obstacle of teaching language. Future researchers may conduct this topic with a longitudinal study to see the pattern of how identity constructed and position could impact identity development during teaching practice. Additional instruments such as journal entries or memo could be given to the participants to get richer data about the identity construction and position.

The implication of this study addressed that teaching practice plays an important stage in how student teachers construct their identity. It is important to reveal how identity is constructed because it will be different for each preservice teacher according to their social context.

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