The impact of the intrapersonal, interpersonal and ecological factors on pre-service second language teachers' identity construction

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Abstract

Purpose – This article reports on the intrapersonal, interpersonal and ecological factors that shaped the professional identity (PI) construction of five ESL Malaysian pre-service teachers (PSTs) during microteaching classes and teaching practicum.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is qualitative in nature aiming to give voice to ESL PSTs and allow them share their personal experience while constructing their professional identity. The semi-interview data were supported by observation data to validate what PSTs report in their interview. The researchers chose junctural points in the PI construction journey to follow the developmental line of PI growth and to live the experience with the participant. The project was a co-construction of knowledge and enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Findings – This inquiry revealed that PI is dynamic and changing constantly as one reinterprets and reevaluates self and interact and react to the various intrapersonal, interpersonal and ecological factors in their context. At the intrapersonal level, lack of practical experience and intrinsic motivation and sense of low self-efficacy created a perception of low PI in the beginning of the simulated practice. The findings also show that supportive interpersonal relationships developed within a facilitating context such as the simulated teaching class smoothed the emergence of high PI. However, when the interpersonal relationships and ecological context in the practicum settings were challenging, they hindered PI development and led to a PI crisis.

Practical implications – The article offers recommendations to enhance the pivotal role of teaching practice during PSTs' journey of becoming.

Originality/value – This study was conducted in one of the understudied contexts in regards of PI construction. It captured a holistic view of the PI construction. It showed that the interplay of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, in addition to ecological factors, is not isolated from each other. On the contrary, they were like a cycle circumscribing the PSTs and impact their PI construction. Hence, the authors believe that the study contributed with a comprehensive understanding of pre-service PI construction.

Keywords Pre-service teachers, Community of practice, Simulated teaching, Practicum, Social context, Professional identity

Paper type Research paper

When enrolling in a teacher education program (TEP), pre-service teachers (PSTs) start to engage and develop their content-based knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and

construct their professional identity (PI) (Pennington and Richards, 2016). Microteaching classes and school practicum are pivotal components of PST education programs that contribute largely to PST's journey of learning to teach (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The process of transitioning from being students to being teachers is influenced by the ongoing interplay between individual values and experiences and institutional and broader educational context (Kelly, 2006). The pre-service preparation stage requires close attention due to its importance to pre-service teacher professional identity construction (PSTPIC), which influences future careers (Grow, 2011; Tsui, 2011). "While it is important for teacher educators to understand what identities pre-service teachers construct, it is also crucial for them to understand why or how those identities are constructed" (Kayi-Aydar, 2015, p. 101). Besides, examining the various factors that shape PSTPIC during simulated and field practice can help teacher educators understand the kind of persons PSTs become and how that empowers or hinders their ability to respond thoughtfully to their students' needs (Fairbanks *et al.*, 2010; Olsen, 2008) and other real challenges in the actual teaching context. Furthermore, recognizing the range of factors that affect PSTPIC can encourage program designers to devise plans of teaching future teachers how to effectively negotiate contextual elements (Fairbanks *et al.*, 2010). PSTs can also benefit from understanding the factors that contribute to their own teacher identity and how these affect their learning to teach and engaging in their coursework (Horn *et al.*, 2008).

In spite of the strong evidence highlighting the need to continue investigating how PSTs transition from students who are learning to teachers who are constructing PIs (Rodgers and Scott, 2008), the majority of studies on PSTPIC have been conducted in Western-developed countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States). Izadinia (2013) raised the question of why research on identity emphasizes the Western cultural contexts but is very rare in developing or underdeveloped countries. Izadinia (2013) calls for more research to investigate PSTPIC in under-researched contexts to produce local knowledge that may significantly add to the body of knowledge in this area. Furthermore, the majority of PSTPIC studies focus on PSTPIC during field practice at schools (e.g. Abas, 2016; Cattley, 2007; Goh and Matthews, 2011; Khalid, 2014; Nguyen *et al.*, 2016), leaving PSTPIC during simulated teaching classes at TEP underexplored. To fill in this gap, the present study documents the unheard stories of five ESL Malaysian PSTs in exploring what factors contribute to their complex identity formation during their simulated teaching classes in the TEP and field practicum at schools. The dense description of the participants' experiences may enlighten stakeholders in this context *per se* and in other similar contexts about the factors shaping PSTPIC. Thus, the study's findings can offer insights for teacher educators to make decisions in terms of the knowledge base necessary for PST' curricular models or practicum and, consequently, be incorporated into TEPs (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009).

Theoretical framework
Three decades ago, research into PSTPIC was scarce. One explanation for this lack of research on teacher identity is the prominence of the acquisition metaphor in interpreting the human learning process, whereby learning is perceived as an internalization of knowledge within individual cognitive structures. The whole process of learning resides with the individual, isolated from the social context (Sfard, 1998). Traditional initial teacher education is perceived as an educational space where experts present received knowledge (e.g. abstract or theoretical knowledge) as objective and nonnegotiable Dowling (2009). Instructors and supervisors are expected to pass on a reasonable amount of study subject content. Upon gaining such knowledge on how to teach, it is hoped they would apply what they acquired in new contexts. However, "the cumulative effect of studying what language is and how it is

acquired may not necessarily translate into effective L2 teaching practices" (Johnson, 2006, p. 240). Experiential knowledge is thus valuable to developing PSTs teaching skills.

In response to "decontextualized learning" and the concept of an "isolationist learner" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6), the social learning theory proposes new ways of perceiving the learning process, where learning is conceptualized as engaging in the context of learning or the community of practice (CoP) in which it takes place. It emphasizes the role of the social context rather than the individual mind in developing one's knowledge and identity. Hence, engaging PSTs in a TEP with meaningful and contextualized activities to negotiate their understanding, beliefs and ideas about teaching can result in learning (Smith, 2006). In line with the social view of PST learning to teach, this study draws on Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning (1991) to investigate the intricate and complex social factors that contribute to the development of PSTPIC during teaching practicum. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory represents the ideas of CoP and peripheral participation as part of the theoretical framework that captures the role of the social factors that direct PSTPIC. It shows how a TEP can serve as a space where PSTs try out different identities and practices to construct their own teacher identity. Notions of sharedness, belonging and participation are key factors to supporting PSTs' learning and scaffold progress toward their professions. The situated learning framework explains the role and nature of social relations and forms of participation that could support or hinder the formation of PSTs' professional identity.

A number of studies have been conducted through the lens of the social approach to investigate PSTPIC in TEP(see, e.g. Ahmadi *et al.*, 2013; Fajardo Castaneda, 2011; Fajardo Castañeda, 2014; Freedman and Appleman, 2008; Merseth *et al.*, 2008; Smith, 2006) Some of these studies focus on the role of belonging to a teacher community in considerably shaping classroom practices and PI (Castañeda, 2014; Chong *et al.*, 2011; Olsen, 2008). Other studies attempt to understand the different social factors such as engagement in discourse socialization activities or identity in discourse in constructing PI (e.g. Nguyen *et al.*, 2016; Ahmadi *et al.*, 2013). These scholars contend that through dialogical interactions, PSTs are likely to reconsider their PIs.

The purpose of other studies is to highlight the struggles PSTs encounter while negotiating their PIs and the sources of such concerns (Cooper and He, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Smagorinsky *et al.*, 2004). Those concerns mainly stem from the contradictory nature of teaching and teachers' roles, classroom management and relationships (with students, mentors, colleagues, supervisors, the administration and community) (Khalid, 2014) in the practice context. The findings of these studies present concrete evidence of the importance of social factors for PSTPIC. They offer contextualized accounts of how interaction and participation in teaching practice contexts mediate PSTPIC. Lave and Wenger's work "offers us a starting framework from which to address some of the major challenges faced by the workplace learning literature" (Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004, p. 3).

However, situated learning assumption that individuals act according to the social context and structures neglects the numerous ways in which people relate themselves to such social surrounding. Placing individuals in their context may not be sufficient to understand the transformations they encounter in identity development. To bridge the gap in Lave and Wenger's peripheral role of the individual in their identity construction, the current study employs Hoffman-Kipp's (2008) understanding of PI construction to be a dynamic process resulting from interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. In reality, PSTPIC involves "values, beliefs, attitudes, approaches to interaction and language that have been developed within personal" contexts (family, own community and life history) "combined with understandings, pedagogical commitments and approaches and routines of professional practice" (Hoffman-Kipp, 2008, p. 153). PSTs bring to their TEP, their beliefs, values, motives, experiences and

most importantly their early professional images of themselves as teachers. Hence, personal identities and PIs are interwoven to PSTPIC.

Thus, our study takes an integrative framework of PSTPIC to capture the individual and social factors that impact PI construction to account for the wholeness of PSTPIC and ultimately to add to our knowledge of the complex, dynamic and contested process of learning to teach.

Methodology
Research approach and question
The data being discussed in this paper are part of a larger research project focusing on PSTPIC during simulated teaching and teaching practicum within a TESL teacher preparation program in a large public university in Malaysia. That project examines three areas of PSTPIC: PI transformations experienced by PSTs during their teaching practice stage, factors contributing to PSTPIC during practical training and adaptation processes employed by PSTs to develop their identities in response to the challenges in the surrounding context. The study is a qualitative case study using the constructive-interpretive approach. The present study considers the following question: what factors contribute to PSTPIC during simulated teaching and practicum experience?

Study context
This study was conducted at two sites: A Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program at a large public university in Malaysia, and three Malaysian public secondary schools in the urban area of Kuala Lumpur. The TESL program aims to prepare graduate teachers who are competent and skilled in teaching English. The program integrates English language skills, English literature and TESL courses. After the end of the second year, PSTs are required to attend one week at a school of choice. They are expected to observe teachers teaching and learn from them how to employ various teaching strategies and class management techniques. During the second semester of the final year, TESL PSTs join a simulated teaching class. The class builds on the different TESL method courses on teaching diverse language skills (i.e. reading, listening, speaking and writing). During this class, PSTs can practice teaching in the safe environment of their university. The second chance PSTs have to practice teaching is during placement in a secondary school assigned by the faculty. Now they are in a real context, working with real students under normal public school conditions. Classes in the secondary school usually consist of 32 students, including Malay, Chinese, Indian and a minority of other nationalities. PSTs are expected to teach 10 periods of English a week and two periods of a second method subject (moral class).

Participants
Five undergraduate ESL student teachers who enrolled in the final year of TESL program were selected as subjects in the study: Suzan, Iman, Muna, Fulla and Asmira (all pseudonyms). These five students were among 28 students taught by the first author's PhD supervisor. These five PSTs voluntarily accepted to participate in the study believing that the study findings will help them to become more aware of how PSTs construct PI and can serve as useful input to improve PSTs' preparation to become teachers. These students participated in simulated teaching classes and the field practicum at schools from the beginning to its end. Two are from urban areas, two are from suburban areas and one is from a rural area. Their age range is 22–23 years old.

Data collection and analysis
Two phases were undertaken to collect data. The first phase started at the TESL program when the PSTs began their simulated teaching. The second phase commenced as those PSTs moved on to different schools for their practicum. To gain such deep understanding and copiously discuss the factors that shape the participants' PI, two data collection procedures were employed: observation and interviews. The first author observed PSTs' interaction and teaching in the simulated teaching classes and practicum stage (observing two teaching practice classes for each candidate (middle of practice and the end). Each session lasted for two and a half hour. Observation during the simulated teaching classes served to gather field notes on the interrelationships among individuals and the effect of that on their development. The second phase started during the teaching practicum. The first researcher observed two classes for each participant. The classes attended were two successive periods of 80 min. The researcher took notes of the teaching activities and student interactions. She focused on how the teacher led the class and managed any recurring discipline problems.

A semi-structured interview is essential to gain insight into the contextual factors that affect the becoming process. The interviews were informed by data from observation and field notes. The interviews were semi-structured and ranged between 30 and 60 min. The interview questions were broad enough/more open-ended to gain insightful responses without imposing a specific structure upon the interviewees. In line with Merriam's (2009) recommendation, I reviewed the interview questions and weeded out poor ones. Later, the interview questions were piloted with two participants, Mona and Fulla, who helped develop the questions to probe the participants' perceptions and thoughts more easily. The first author interviewed each participant three times in each phase (i.e. beginning, mid-stage and end of the stage). These juncture points in the journey of learning to teach enabled following PSTs' developmental line while they were progressing in the teacher education program. Observation is the second strategy used in this study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A copy of each interview transcription was sent to the participants (Merriam, 2009) to ensure credibility and validity. The participants were allowed to delete, add or amend their interview transcriptions.

Later, the observation notes were compared with the data gained from the participants. These observation notes helped verify the PSTs' claimed identities. Using different research tools (interviews, observation and field notes) resulted in data triangulation, which led to in-depth and multiple insights to the analysis. The aim was to enhance the research validity and credibility. Data analysis was a manual ongoing process (i.e. collecting and analyzing data simultaneously). Following Saldana (2009), an inductive analysis or open coding of data to underline data segments that are relevant to, or answer the research question have been employed. The next step was to compare those segments with each other (axial coding/ analytical coding) to discover any regularities and create categories. The emerging categories are used to organize the findings reported below.

Ethical consideration
The participants in the study were invited to sign an informed consent letter that explained the purpose of the study, nature, length and procedures as well as the participants' role. They had the right to withdraw whenever they wanted without being threatened or subject to any pressure. The consent letter mentioned participation in semi-structured interviews, observations and audio taping for study purposes only. It was guaranteed that their data would not be shared with others whom they considered a threat, such as supervisors, mentor teachers, school principals or the university. Besides approval letters to conduct the study were obtained from the university and the schools.

Trustworthiness
To improve the trustworthiness of this study, a number of strategies were adopted, as recommended by Merriam (2009), Creswell (2009) and Baxter and Jack (2008). First of all, triangulation included different sources (eight PSTs) and tools (interview and observation) for collecting data. Another strategy used is grand member checking which helped check with the participants whether the researchers captured their perceptions correctly. The participants were given the chance to check the emerging themes and case analysis. Accordingly, follow-up meetings were conducted to allow them to comment on the findings. In addition, rich and thick data descriptions were provided, including on the context, participants, data collection procedures and decisions taken to proceed with data collection. This can help readers understand the process better and compare their own contexts for transferability issues. Finally, for prolonged engagement, the researcher spent long enough building a rapport with the participants to reach a saturation point in data collection.

Findings
This section presents the findings around the most salient intrapersonal, interpersonal and ecological factors influencing PSTPIC. The intrapersonal factors refer to the micro personal factors that influence the PST's identity construction, such as their attitudes, conceptualizations and their perceptions of themselves as prospective teachers. The interpersonal factors represent the interpersonal social relationships between PST and others in the teaching practice context. PSTPC is also shaped and determined by the broader ecological working context where PST operates.

| Study findings factors influencing PSTPIC | | | |
Hindering intrapersonal factors at the beginning of the simulated practice	Facilitative interpersonal factors during simulated practice	Hindering interpersonal factors during practicum	Ecological factors causing PI crisis
(1) Lack of genuine intrinsic motivation (2) Lack of practical experience (3) Low self-efficacy in terms of English proficiency	(1) PSTs-university supervisor relationship (2) PSTs-Peers relationships	(1) PST-mentor relationships (2) PST-university supervisor relationship (3) PST-senior others (at school) relationships (4) PST-peer relationship (5) PST-secondary school student relationship	(1) Poor physical condition of schools (2) Inadequate resources (3) Depleting and isolating context

Intrapersonal factors affecting PSTPIC
At the beginning of the simulated teaching classes, the participants expressed their sense of low PI; they could not see themselves as qualified effective PSTs. Their sense of low PI can be attributed to three intrapersonal factors: lack of genuine intrinsic motivation, lack of practical experience and low self-efficacy in terms of English proficiency. Suzan, Iman, Fulla and Asmira decided to become teachers because their desire to become doctors or engineers was unattainable owing to inadequate secondary school grades. Their fallback choice was to major in TESL.

> Teaching was the last resort for me. I always imagined myself as a dentist. Unfortunately, my secondary school scores were not high enough to allow me to study dentistry. I had to make another choice to go to university and I chose TESL. (Suzan)

The participants felt worried because they did not possess natural talents or capabilities which would motivate them to become teachers.

> I tried to convince my family that teaching is different from other professions. It's not only studying at university. . .. It's talent. . . For sure, I'm not one of those talented teachers. (Iman)

That lack of genuine desire affected voice tone when asked about how motivated they were to start practical training. All of the participants expected training to be exhausting and challenging. Fulla was afraid that her becoming journey would be tough: "I did not want to become a teacher and I know that I may face many difficulties during my teaching practice because I lack real motivation to do that".

Another intrapersonal factor resulting in a sense of low PI at the beginning of the simulated teaching pertains to participants' perception of their insufficient English proficiency. Asmira saw herself as an incompetent user of English, "I caught myself several times committing mistakes in my speaking, in grammar and in vocabulary usage". The participants also believed they lacked good command of vocabulary and grammar. Iman, for instance, said her vocabulary repertoire was not sufficient to express herself on all topics: "Sometimes I want to talk about, let's say the environment, but I find that I lack much vocabulary. . ... Being competent is crucial for teachers to gain their students' respect".

This frequent feeling of incompetence resulted in low confidence levels. The participants felt that teaching English in class could provoke anxiety, and they admitted the need to improve their English proficiency because language learning "is never complete, even for teachers" (Fulla).

Facilitative interpersonal factors during simulated practice

Contrary to the intrapersonal factors, the interpersonal relationships emerging during the simulated practice contributed vastly to PI development where the PSTs progressed from low PI to high PI. The simulated teaching class culture enabled the participants to build connections with peers and supervisor, expand their practical experience through microteaching lessons and create opportunities to reflect on their practices. Before setting off for training, the participants had a number of initial classes where they were encouraged to share concerns regarding their training, desired selves and feared selves as teachers. Becoming aware that they all faced similar concerns, the participants envisioned the CoP could help them handle those challenges. Fulla appreciated the discovery of sharing similar concerns with peers: "I did not know that they all fear similar things of becoming teachers. . ... I feel that we can support each other".

The PSTs gradually developed a coherent and collaborative group with their peers and supervisor. The participants' sense of belonging to their CoP became stronger over the course of the simulated teaching class. Fulla articulated "We started our microteaching lessons, and stronger bonds started to emerge between us all as a coherent group. . ... our interaction helped us a lot get rid of our stress towards teaching". The participants reported how the microteaching lessons improved their language proficiency, pedagogical skills, planning and time management skills. The progress they made in language and teaching skills resulted in enhanced self-confidence and motivation to go through the practicum. The PSTs reported a great sense of PI at the end of the simulated teaching classes and saw themselves as confident and relaxed prospective teachers. By being flexible, open and respectful, the participants encouraged each other to coalesce and build strong relationships. They aligned with their peers, considering them as a safety net where they could discuss worries, understandings and practices. When Suzan was asked how she felt when she got criticism from peers, she replied, "I was totally positive about that. They did not mean to hurt me".

Hindering interpersonal factors during practicum
On the other hand, the interpersonal relationships maintained during the school practicum among the participants, on the one hand, and school mentors, school leaders, school students and university supervisors, on the other hand, have been detrimental to PSTs' PI development and led to a PI crisis. The participants reported that their mentors observed one of their classes at the beginning of the practicum and provided feedback on that lesson. Considering the participants were new to the context, the mentors offered them quick and superficial feedback, focusing mainly on the PSTs' ability to control their students. Muna reported that her mentor's feedback was short with focus on classroom control:

> My mentor observed me once at the beginning of my practicum, but she did not give thorough comments. Her immediate comment was that I have to be firmer with Form 4 (10th grade) students.

The participants reported that the lack of genuine support with observation, guidance and feedback from their mentors made them experience many tensions regarding classroom management and teaching practices. Such tensions resulted in the participants experiencing low self-esteem and a sharp drop in their sense of self-efficacy. They chose to be silent to avoid the mentors' negative judgments. Fulla, for instance, looked to her mentor as a figure of authority:

She looked very serious, and she tried to walk around to see the students' progress. I felt quite nervous when she went around. I avoided consulting her on my teaching issues because I was afraid of being judged.

The PSTs expressed feeling lonely in the context of training. Iman explained:

> During the simulated teaching class, I could seek my instructor, my classmates, and other senior students at the faculty for help at any time. Here (i.e. practicum) I feel I'm totally alone like walking in the desert. My mentor is absent from the scene.

Thus, the participants reported that the sort of communication breakdown between them and their mentors added to their frustration and PI crisis.

Moreover, the participants recounted that the limited interaction with their university supervisors during field practicum resulted in a drop in self-confidence and teaching self-efficacy. For the PSTs, their supervisors' roles during practicum diminished to be assessors. The participants also felt that what their mentors had to say about their progress was more important than what their supervisors actually said. The participant-supervisor relationship was restricted to two observations, followed by post-observation conferences to give the PSTs feedback on their lesson delivery. From the participants' perspectives, the activities advocated by the university such as group work, games and songs were welcome in the school context, but it was difficult to implement. Asmira commented on her frustration with her supervisor criticizing her activities and time management: "He should have judged me based on the harsh environment of the secondary school. I waited for his guidance and support, not criticism. Meeting my supervisor added to my tensions and made me feel unconfident".

The participants also reported that their peers' presence during the practicum stage affected their agentic and innovative selves negatively in the practicum context. The participants and their peers encouraged each other to adopt a follower identity in the training context. Fulla, for instance, was convinced that the PSTs could not induce any changes in the practicum context: "It's better to listen to our mentors. It's not our job to change the context here". The participants and their peers perceived the school principals and mentors as their main assessors; hence, they had to conform to the school culture even when they objected to some school practices. Fulla articulated that:

> I did not complain because my peers thought nobody would listen to us and that we would gain the school disrespect.

The participants believed their peers dragged them away from enhancing their agency to induce change in the training context.

Finally, the participants indicated experiencing a PI crisis during practicum due to the secondary school students' attitude toward the PSTs, discipline issues and students' fluctuating motivation. The participants claimed that the school students' initial negative attitude toward them was shocking. Iman felt that her students saw her as a young trainee, or a student, and tried to take advantage of her: "It was shocking for me seeing them treat me as a student in their class, not a teacher. . .. I felt nervous every time I had to go to the class". According to the participants, the student discipline issue was the worst part of their PI construction journey. The participants reported that students' late arrival to classes, disruptive talking and yelling at each other was very upsetting. Fulla explained that such difficulties irritated and negatively overshadowed her lesson plan: "Sometimes I go into a Form 4 class (10th grade) and I find that half of the class is out and I have to wait". Besides, the participants mentioned that students' fluctuating motivation contributed to their PI crisis. Fulla, who was the most enthusiastic to use games in class, described how frustrated she felt when her students did not engage in her game: "They just did not have the desire to work. I tried to encourage them, but I failed. I felt frustrated and turned to a traditional activity".

Ecological factors causing PI crisis
In addition, the participants articulated that three ecological factors in the school context negatively affected their PI construction. The participants believed that the poor physical condition of the school buildings added to the difficulties they faced in class. The windows were open wide with no way to close them, which caused outside noise to disturb class. The participants had to speak very loudly to overcome the outside noise. Asmira, for example, felt exhausted from shouting all the time: "It was really tiring for me to shout all the time to cover the noise coming from around the school. I feel frustrated because I have much pain in my throat". In addition, the participants reported that inadequate school resources hindered their teaching performance and creativity. Asmira referred to her inability to use technology in class: "You cannot use computer and LCD inside class. . ... Eventually, I gave up the idea of integrating technology in class.

The participants also reported that audiovisual materials were not available at school; hence, they needed to prepare their own. The participants complained about having to pay for educational aid, so they tried to use minimal aid to save money. Fulla, for example, reverted to traditional teaching because she could not afford it otherwise: "I cannot afford to pay for all the educational aids that we need to teach. I found myself revert to traditional teaching.

The school administration assigned the participants responsibilities of extracurricular activities and covering absent teachers besides teaching classes. The extra load lessened their ability to focus on professional growth. Muna explained how the extra tasks were depleting for her:

> I thought I came here to practice teaching under the supervision of a mentor. But in fact, I work alone in my classes. When I do not have classes I have the task of training a group of students for extracurricular activities or go to a class of an absent teacher.

Iman perceived the effect of such extra load negatively: "I think they do not consider us teachers. They just want to make the maximum benefit of our presence on the school site" Participants thought that juggling all those burdens alone diminished their ability to construct a PI and led to their PI crisis.

Discussion
This study provides empirical evidence that the journey of becoming a teacher is complex and affected by the person and context, including opportunities it offers or challenges it

poses, to enact and develop one's PI. The participants attributed the low PI at the beginning of their student teaching to the lack of intrinsic motivation for becoming TESL teachers. In line with this finding, Mudavanhu (2015) reported that the majority of participants chose to become teachers because they had no other choice. Teacher educators ought to question PSTs' motives and address their need to invest in the journey of learning to teach (Darvin and Norton, 2015). The participants perceptions of their incompetence contributed to their low PI. This finding resonates with Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016), who found that their Finish ESL participants doubted their ability to become the teachers they hoped to be because they lacked confidence in language and pedagogic ability.

In addition, the current study findings on the facilitative interpersonal factors characterizing the simulated teaching classes are in line with recent studies that highlight the importance of belonging to a particular community where the individual can make sense of their role and develop PI (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Castaneda, 2011; Castañeda, 2014; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013; Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate, 2016). The PSTs in this study grew through lived experience. By sharing concerns, aspirations and hopes with peers, the participants discovered and imagined how their CoP could scaffold their PI construction (Wenger et al., 2002). Pulvermacher and Lefstein's findings (2016) support the current study in that sharing stories of concerns, hopes and practices enables building connections among CoP members and leads to professional growth.

The current study finding regarding the value of practical microteaching experience resonates with the results of a mixed method study with 78 ESL PSTs conducted by Ismail (2011). Ismail reported a positive impact on the participants' awareness of language and teaching competencies. Such practical opportunities enable PSTs to evaluate their teacher selves and see themselves through a new lens. Similar to Bodis et al. (2020), Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016) found that engaging their finish PSTs in a supportive professional community contributed to developing PI and confidence to decide how they would become professional teachers. Through collaboration, negotiation and reflection, the participants engaged in invaluable social activities that empowered them and enhanced ownership of their learning (Pulvermacher and Lefstein, 2016), thus facilitating the emergence of a high PI. The participants' positive experiences in the simulated teaching class yielded romanticized notions of their roles as teachers. Thus, PSTs who proceed to actual training with positive feelings and high confidence require supervisors, universities, mentors and schools to collaborate on "how to maintain and nurture this confidence" (Beltman et al., 2015, p. 239).

After the participants moved to schools to continue training in an actual school setting, the CoP expanded to include mentors, students, schoolteachers, principals and administrative staff in addition to peers and supervisors. All of the emerging interpersonal relationships in the practicum sites caused the participants to experience a PI crisis, represented by the participants feeling unconfident, burnt out, alone, isolated, ambivalent and nonagentic. The study findings reveal that the PST-mentor relationship was dysfunctional. The results identify insufficient teaching opportunities and ineffective communication as the main challenges that PSTs struggled with in their relationships with their mentors. These struggles resulted in a drop in self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. The concept of "apprenticeship" in CoPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991) entails the presence of an expert to guide a novice to construct new understanding and skills (Hoffman-Kipp, 2008, p. 156). In the case of the current participants, they had very limited opportunities to observe experts (here, experienced teachers) in action. PI is socially embedded and a teacher's knowledge of how to teach is constructed through experiences in the teaching context with other members (Pennington, 2002). An immediate discussion of practices could have taken the PSTs to a deeper level than the general comments they received. Korkko et al. (2016) reported how their Finish student teachers' practical theories developed owing to the feedback and dialogue

sessions during practicum. The sessions enhanced self-knowledge as teachers. Maijala (2021) reported similar results with her German trainees.

Furthermore, the PSTs revealed that ineffective communication with their mentors made them feel unsafe to open up. Rodgers and Scott (2008) emphasized that constructing an identity requires a dialogic space, where the external aspects of context and relationships interact with the internal aspects of individual stories and emotions. The findings of the current study pertaining to ineffective communication echo Yuan's (2016) and Albakri et al.'s (2021) findings, which revealed how negative mentoring constrained the PSTs' ideal identities (e.g. innovative teacher).

The participants avoided serious discussions with their supervisors of the gap between university perspectives, and classroom and secondary school reality. The avoidance of controversial debates with supervisors or even mentors was reported in other studies by Bullough and Draper (2004), El Masry and I Alzaanin (2021) and Veal and Rikard (1998). The researchers noticed that avoiding debates with authority figures like supervisors fostered a complex environment in which PSTs worked. Pulvermacher and Lefstein (2016) found that the successful storytelling sessions and reflections on PSTs' teaching performance were facilitated by the presence of supportive supervisors. A successful CoP requires the presence of an understanding facilitator who is able to network people and create focus for discussions (Wenger et al., 2002).

PST-peer relationship hindered PI development in current study. A number of scholars have reported the positive impact of peers on PSTs' PI development through providing PSTs professional and emotional support (Bowen and Roth, 2006; Kabilan and Izzaham, 2008; Khalid, 2014; Ong et al., 2004). Our participants revealed that peers encouraged them to conform to the school culture to maintain calm relationships and receive good assessments. Losing the agentic role in the practicum context due to negative peer influence echoes Kayi-Aydar's (2015) findings of the three participants, Elizabeth, April and Janet, who assigned themselves powerless and nonagentic positions. Even when the three participants had ideas or concerns to share with the school administration or mentors, they hesitated due to the power relationship in the practicum context. The participants in both studies did not feel empowered and feared devaluation by others at the practicum site. Hence, Ong et al. (2021) invite teacher educators to explore a dialogic and collaborative practice among PSTs and their peers to help them develop professionally.

A challenge that participants had to manage upon starting to teach in real classrooms was classroom disturbance and its negative influence on PSTs. This issue has been highlighted by studies in Germany (Dicke et al., 2015), Australia, (Cattley, 2007; O'Neill and Stephenson, 2014), Malaysia, (Khalid, 2014; Ong et al., 2004; Sueb, 2013) Colombia, (Castañeda, 2014) and the Philippines (Abas, 2016). In the literature, scholars argue that the struggle of being accepted by school students may be partially connected with the PSTs' own struggle with transitioning from university students to novice professionals (Friedman, 2000). A related situation was reported by Sara, Castañeda's (2014) Colombian participant, who experienced a sense of professional frustration because students did not take her seriously as a teacher. This students' negative attitude toward PSTs was also found by Nguyen et al.'s (2016) Chinese participant Lee, who was practicing teaching in an Australian public school. Lee reported that students devalued her as a student teacher from the first time she met them. She said they tried to test her and caused much difficulty while she was trying to handle class discipline problems. Whereas Lee had her mentor step in and help her overcome these problems, the current study participants were left to struggle alone. Recent research demonstrates that PSTs' sense of low confidence, exhaustion and burnout is in large part caused by student discipline problems (Friedman, 2006). The current participants were drained due to having to handle student discipline issues.

Furthermore, the impact of ecological factors cannot be underestimated since they can hinder or facilitate PSTs engaging in the training context and negotiating their possible teacher selves with others involved in the context (Williams, 2013). The participants revealed how ecological factors, such as poor physical condition of the schools, inadequate resources and a depleting and isolating context exhausted and drew them away from focusing on PI development. Studies conducted in the Malaysian context (Goh and Matthews, 2011; Khalid, 2014) reported classroom management as a major difficulty faced by Malaysian PSTs at practicum sites. However, those studies did not report on the relationship between the physical school condition and classroom management issues. Inadequate resources, such as available computer labs, LCDs or other educational aids in the secondary school context deprived PSTs of trying various interactive and innovative activities. The context proved to be frustrating for the participants. A similar challenge with inadequate or absent resources at practicum sites was reported by 50% of 44 Malaysian PSTs who participated in a study by Ong et al. (2004). The participants' complaints echo the current study participants' complaints of schools not providing educational resources except textbooks to support training and help PSTs try diverse teaching practices. Abas (2016) conducted a study in the Philippines to investigate difficulties faced by PSTs from different disciplines including ESL during field practice. Abas found it was difficult for the PSTs to access resources at the school sites, though the principals wished the PSTs would have convenient access to the premises. The principals justified this to the limited school equipment and facilities. Thus, these unfavorable conditions reduced PST s' motivation and created a dissonance between their situated identity in the practicum context and their pedagogical beliefs and values which they gained in the TESL program.

Besides poor physical conditions of schools and lack of resources, the participants were overloaded and drained by administrative duties, covering for absent teachers and engaging in extracurricular school activities. Similar tension was reported by Ong et al. (2004). The participants in Ong et al.'s study doubted the value of administrative burdens in enabling professional growth. Yuan's Chinese ESL participant (2016) complained of being assigned many administrative duties that kept her busy in the staff room and deprived her of focusing on engaging with students. Yuan's participants found such administrative assignments of no real relation to language teaching. Yuan's participant saw herself as a secretary and not an apprentice who came to the practicum site for training under her mentor's supervision. The participants saw themselves as marginalized and isolated from mentors and peers due to school burdens. The practicum context complexities staggered as the PSTs were sent alone to classes without the immediate supervision of mentors. Creating an autonomous self-dependent learner may be one of the major goals in education. However, this educational goal does not necessarily contradict the notion that novice trainees need guidance and scaffolding before they become confident in their performance (Wenger, 1998). Apprenticeship entails "guided participation" (Hoffman-Kipp, 2008, p. 156). Becoming familiar with the school norms as well as social and cultural values and routines would guide PSTs' PI construction and build self-confidence. Bloomfield et al. (2004) described how their student teachers gradually progressed in their practicum in Australia. First, they observed mentors' classes and were then involved in small teaching groups. Later, they started teaching under their mentors' supervision to try and evaluate their practices in open and nonjudgmental discussions. Bloomfield et al. 's (2004) study showed how student teachers gained experience and confidence over the course of training. The current participants suffered a confidence crisis during practicum.

Conclusion and implications
PI construction is strongly influenced by intrapersonal, interpersonal and ecological factors in the context of learning to teach. Intrapersonal factors underlined the low PI at the

beginning of the student teaching program. Lacking motivation due to their reasons of becoming ESL teachers, lack of confidence in one's English proficiency and pedagogical skills and feeling inexperienced strongly shaped the type of PI the PSTs developed. The findings suggest that teacher educators must help PSTs understand their pre-assumptions and connect with their teaching profession. Supportive interpersonal relationships developed within a facilitating context such as the ESL simulated teaching class smoothed the emergence of high PI. However, when the interpersonal relationships in the practicum context were challenging, they hindered PI development and led to a PI crisis. In a TEP, it is necessary to identify the important elements of intrapersonal, interpersonal and ecological factors, such as the roles of supervisors, mentors, peers, school administration, teachers and school students and trace how these elements may positively or negatively affect PSTs' PI construction. Besides focusing on individual teacher's tasks in teaching, more value should be given to developing interpersonal social interaction and integration within the professional context. Perspectives of collegial and mutual relationships between PSTs and mentors, supervisors, peers and other teachers could help inform identity construction positively. This study proved the assumption that teacher identity is relational; hence, it is important to consider the groups with which PSTs are involved in a TEP. Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016) suggested that a group facilitated by educators could offer PSTs the possibility to participate and understand their responsibilities to themselves and others. In addition, PSTs should be taught about the self as a teacher (Alsup, 2006). For a long time, TEPs have been built on content and pedagogical knowledge. Governmental or academic reforms have been made in attempts to respond to the interplay between these two types of knowledge. The question of whether PI matters remains part of the debate. For those who adopt the knowledge transmission perspective, PI does not matter (Tsui, 2011). This study showed how PI construction can inform PSTs' professional growth and affect their commitment to the profession. Consequently, PI should be an explicit component of focus for PSTs in any TEP.

There needs to be a closer collaboration between the Ministry of Education, schools and universities to form and abide by a clear training policy for PSTs. Such shared policy can provide a blueprint to mark the journey of PSTs in facilitating their transformation from university to school and to pave a clear path of action to illustrate how PSTs can learn to teach. Adoniou (2013) concluded that teacher preparation of PSTs was the most effective when there was collaboration and greater partnership between universities and schools. There is a need to involve university supervisors, mentors and PSTs in engaging sessions of three-way conferences to share decision-making and negotiating differences in perceptions, expectations and contributions to practicum teaching. In addition, supervisors need to spend more time at the practicum sites to help build trust and collaboration with mentors and PSTs.

This study was an attempt to explore PSTs' identity construction by building on their past memories and reasons to become teachers and their learning experiences in simulated teaching classes and practicum. Future research could expand the span of the study to cover the first years of the profession since teachers continue learning to teach (Olsen, 2008). Future research could probe whether PSTs learn to negotiate their identity development and pedagogical content knowledge. It may explore how previous experience with a TEP facilitates, or not, PSTs' interaction with their profession context in reconstructing their identities and continuing professional growth. In line with this perspective, future studies could explore whether students are able to cope with constructing their selves and professional identities.

Limitations

This study aims to add to the literature on exploring the process of constructing teacher identity, specifically ESL STs. However, some limitations are to be considered when

interpreting the results. One of the limitations stems from using a case study as the research methodology, whereby the results may not be generalizable to other populations. Another limitation is that teacher identity starts developing at the point when an individual decides to become a teacher and even long before that. Finally, the gender distribution may not be applicable in this study. The majority of ESL STs at the selected university are female. The number does not exceed eight students as the total population is 25, which was divided into three groups.

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