

# **EFL pre-service teacher identity development during international teaching practicum program: A narrative study**

**Salma Anindya, Arilia Triyoga\***

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

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## **ABSTRACT**

The international teaching practicum provides pre-service English teachers with opportunities to enhance their professional experiences and develop their teacher identity. This study explores the professional identity development of two Indonesian pre-service English teachers during a one-month teaching practicum in the Philippines, focusing on the factors shaping this process through the lens of teacher professional identity. The research centers on two students from the English Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta. Employing a qualitative narrative approach, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically within the framework of teacher professional identity. Findings reveal that the practicum significantly advanced the participants' professional identity across its key dimensions. Mentor teachers' guidance, positive student relationships, and a supportive practicum environment were critical to this development. These results highlight the interplay between individuals and their environment, emphasizing the need for a nurturing setting to foster personal and professional growth.

**Keywords:** *International teaching practicum; Teacher identity; Pre-service teacher*

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\* *Corresponding author:*

Arilia Triyoga  
Universitas Ahmad Dahlan  
Jl. Kapas No.9, Semaki, Kec. Umbulharjo, Kota Yogyakarta, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55166, Indonesia  
Email: [arilia@pbi.uad.ac.id](mailto:arilia@pbi.uad.ac.id)

## **1. Introduction**

Teacher identity is an essential task for pre-service teachers because a teacher identity is not spontaneously formed; it requires an ongoing and dynamic process. Pre-service teachers go through a process of reflection and self-discovery throughout their education, where they begin to create their teacher identity through various experiences and interactions which can be obtained through international teaching practicums. During this process, pre-service teachers begin to integrate the ideals, beliefs, and norms associated with being a teacher. The strong identity of pre-service teachers can also contribute to their resilience in facing challenges during teaching practice.

Several studies have been undertaken to investigate pre-service teachers' experiences during international teaching or internship courses, one of which is the SEA-Teacher program. Research conducted by Wijayanti and Syahrurah (2021) explored the reflection of pre-service teachers who took part in the SEA-Teacher program for 4 weeks, from the pre-departure program to reflection in the last week. Other research by Kuncahyo et al. (2023) and Nazhafah and Muslim (2021) focuses on the experiences of pre-service teachers related to cultural problems faced by participants in the host country which can help increase their awareness and views on cultural diversity. While research on the contributions and benefits of the SEA-Teacher program to pre-service teacher competence has been carried out by Auni et al. (2022) in which the results of the two studies broadly state that the SEA-Teacher program contributes to personal and professional development and global or intercultural awareness.

As a prospective teacher who has not or even has no teaching experience, the practice of teaching directly is undoubtedly not easy. In international teaching, pre-service teachers will experience even more significant challenges, especially concerning language and cultural differences. The results of a study Chasanah and Sumardi (2022) show that adapting to a native language and culture and facing multicultural classroom situations are challenges faced by pre-service teachers during international teaching practices. In classroom processes that require communication between teachers and students, language differences can be a barrier to interaction and instruction in the teaching and learning process. In addition, cultural differences and diversity in each country, such as social norms and customs, allow pre-service teachers to experience culture shock, difficulty adapting, and misunderstandings (Rustandi et al., 2025). This is because there are differences in educational systems and practices in each country, which require that pre-service teachers who are undergoing international teaching practicums adjust to the educational systems and practices of the country where they teach, and one of the international teaching programs that numerous institutions have implemented is SEA-Teacher.

SEA-Teacher or Southeast Asia Teacher is an exchange program organized by SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization). The program which runs in a month provides an opportunity for prospective teacher students from universities in Southeast Asia to have teaching experience or hands-on practice in schools in other

countries, especially those involving the Teaching and Education Faculties of various participating universities. SEA-Teacher program aims to enhance teaching skills, to improve English proficiency, to broaden perspective and to foster adaptability. EFL pre-service teachers who can participate in the SEA Teacher programme are students who are considered active and have good academic performance and fluency in English.

In addition, through various challenges and barriers during practicum, pre-service teachers develop their adaptability, problem-solving skills, and resilience as they overcome these challenges, which can be valuable traits for any teacher. Hasymi and Nurkamto (2023) argue that the practicum gave excellent insight into multicultural education, deepening the participants' understanding of varied teaching approaches, the role of teachers, and the intricacies of the local educational system. Moreover, a global mindset in teacher education allows all teacher candidates to develop crucial cultural competencies that will allow them to collaborate with pupils from a variety of backgrounds (Back et al., 2022) that can bring innovative and culturally sensitive teaching approaches to their classrooms in the future. All of the abilities mentioned can be developed and highlighted by pre-service teachers when participating in international practicums. Furthermore, international teaching practicum develops EFL pre-service teachers' communicative competence, pedagogical abilities, new worldviews on education, career ambition and new opportunities that contribute to the development of their teachers' identity (Auni et al., 2022). Moreover, teaching practicum is a transformative power in identity formation which offers essential insight into the future educators' development (Fajaria, 2025). According Beijaard et al. (2023) teacher identity formed from two processes; professional learning and identity formation.

This research looks into how EFL pre-service teachers develop their teacher identity while participating in the SEA Teacher program. Apart from realizing that SEA Teacher as an international teaching program is a great opportunity for participants to shape their identity, the reason for researching this topic is that there still needs to be more research examining the development of pre-service teacher identity in the SEA Teacher program. Therefore, this research explores the professional identity of EFL pre-service teachers during SEA Teacher and the factors that influence the development of pre-service professional identity.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. EFL pre-service teachers*

An English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher has completed an English teaching qualification at a teacher education institution, has their training recognized, and has been officially assigned to teach English as a foreign language through the Teacher Professional Education Program (Loeneto et al., 2022). Building from the pre-service teacher definition, an EFL pre-service teacher can be defined as an individual who is preparing to become a certified teacher in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The term primarily describes someone who is in the process of finishing their

training and as a teacher in order to teach English to students who do not have English as their first tongue.

According to Roberts (2016) as language teachers, EFL pre-service teachers should have an in-depth understanding of English teachers' knowledge before they come to the field. This knowledge is divided into six categories. The first category is content knowledge which is related to the teachers' mastery of the target language. In this category, EFL teachers should master listening, reading, speaking and writing before they teach. The second is pedagogic content knowledge. Pre-service teachers must have the ability to know and understand what must be taught in the target language based on the learners' needs. The third is general pedagogical knowledge which focuses on how to teach. Pre-service teachers should master the skills in classroom management, classroom activities, teaching techniques and methods, teaching resources, assessment and so on. Next is curricular knowledge. In this category, pre-service teachers should have a good knowledge and understanding of the syllabus, curriculum, teaching materials, and assessment. The fifth is contextual knowledge where pre-service teachers must have the ability to understand their surrounding environment like characteristics of learners, school or wider system to build good social relationships. The last category is process knowledge which consists of skills and attitude. Pre-service teachers must understand their profession and how it should be developed over time.

## *2.2. EFL Pre-service teachers' identity*

Teacher identity is formed and developed through a series of experiences or interactions, education, and reflection on their role in the educational process. Lauwo et al. (2022) view teacher identity is interwoven with teachers' idea about what is /is not part of their area of responsibility and influence, what being a "good" teacher implies, and their sense of the types of impacts they are capable of making as teachers. Pre-service teachers' image of their future students, as well as their perception of their own linguistic resources and the relevance of these resources to their teaching are vital to their teacher identity. Due to this, investigating pre-service teacher identity is an essential issue for building an identity for a future teaching career as well as guiding more successful teacher training programs.

For EFL teachers, English has an impact on shaping and defining their professional identity and autonomy in their field as EFL teachers have the responsibility to teach the target language reflectively and critically with their own will (Dilek & Altas, 2022). This is in vein with Nunan (2017), who stated that the identity of the language teacher is critical for a teacher who is not a native speaker of the second or foreign language that they teach. Grounded from the theoretical framework proposed by Kelchtermans (2009), namely teachers' personal interpretive framework, teacher identity is used as a lens for teachers to view their work, give meaning to it, and act within it. The EFL pre-service teachers' identity also refers to this framework where there are two domains of the teacher's interpretation framework formulated by Kelchtermans: professional self-understanding

and subjective educational theory. Professional self-understanding refers to the teacher's conception of themselves as teacher which is as a result of a continuous process of making meaning of experiences and its effect on the "self" (Kelchtermans, 2009).

The first component of professional self-understanding is *self-image*, defined by Kelchtermans as a teacher's image of their profession, which is based on personal perceptions and other people's views on teachers, for example, comments from students, colleagues, school principals, etc. Self-image can determine the success of a EFL Pre-service teacher's performance, where a positive self-image of the teacher will develop self-confidence and self-esteem and enable teachers to see themselves realistically, thus leading to maximum performance of their duties (Sukron et al., 2022). The second component is *self-esteem*, which refers to the teacher's assessment of his or her performance as a teacher. Kelchtermans (2009) mentioned that through self-esteem, emotions are also involved in teaching.

Individuals with low self-esteem are more emotionally vulnerable and susceptible to turnover, burnout, etc. (Kelchtermans, 2009). Conversely, EFL pre-service teachers with high self-esteem will create a sense of comfort and satisfaction in their teaching practicum. The third is *task perception*, which includes how teachers understand and interpret their duties and obligations to do their work well. Task perception reflects that in acting, teachers need choices that are full of values and moral considerations. Kelchtermans (2009) argued that Evaluation systems, new rules, and educational reforms that conflict with teachers' job conceptions would have a significant impact on their sense of self-worth, satisfaction with their jobs, and so on. The fourth is *job motivation*, which refers to the reasons that make someone decide to become a teacher, continue teaching, or stop working. Motivation drives a teacher to behave in order to achieve their goals and make efforts toward their objectives (Börü, 2018). Kula (2022) argued that motivation, especially internal motivation for teaching contributes to the pre-service teachers' identity development. These motives can develop and change over time and are influenced by several factors. Kelchtermans (2009) highlights that task perception and work environment are important factors for job motivation.

Moreover, the formation of EFL pre-service teachers' identity cannot be separated from the difficulties or challenges they experience during the education program, especially during practicum experiences. Therefore, understanding the development of pre-service language teachers' identity in teacher education programs will help teachers better prepare them to face teaching challenges and provide insight into how they build their professional identity. During their teaching practicum, EFL pre-service teachers may go through a learning path that includes struggle, solitude, and conflict they would face in a real classroom. They may experience foreign language anxiety, which can impact their speaking skills, affecting their class performance. In addition, teaching experience that is far from ideal can lead to unpreparedness for EFL pre-service teachers when facing real classroom situations, also can ultimately affect their identity during their education stage (Buendía-Arias et al., 2020).

### *2.3. Factors affecting EFL teachers' identity development*

EFL pre-service teachers' identity development occurs throughout a teacher's career, and various factors influence it. According to Pennington as cited in Oruç (2013), there are two orientations that can be the basis for considering teacher identity. It comes from social psychology, which produces a perspective on teachers' social identity, and teacher education literature, which provides a perspective on teachers' professional identity. This is in line with Bernal (2023), who argue that teacher identity is developed through personal and professional identity. Professional identity is concerned with policies, teachers' educational goals and social expectations of what they should be. In this case, educational policies, reforms, and mandates can impact teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. Changes in curriculum, assessment practices, and accountability measures may affect teacher identity.

The personal dimension reflects EFL Pre-service teachers' life outside school, which is related to the teacher's role in social and family life. As stated by Lau et al. (2022), teacher identity is naturally influenced by the social environment through the people closest to them who accompany their life journey. Additionally, related to personal factors, Cheng (2021) found that personal characteristics can influence individuals in developing their identity as a teacher. Personal characteristics of EFL pre-service teachers such as extroversion, introversion, empathy, patience, and adaptability can influence how teachers interact with students or peers and their ability to adapt and grow as educators.

Othman and Fahd Aljuhaishi (2021) found that the teaching environment also influences teacher identity development. EFL pre-service teachers' experience on teaching practicum in another county contributes to their teachers' identity development. Other findings by Othman and Fahd Aljuhaishi (2021) also indicate that supportive community members like mentor teachers encourage the development of teachers' identity in terms of pedagogical skills and linguistic competence. Besides that, interactions with students, both positive and challenging, can influence a teacher's identity.

Other factors are pointed out by Auni (2022) that the development of pre-service teachers' identity is influenced by the training they attend and practicum teaching experience during undergraduate education. This is in line with what Wu (2022) said that pre-service teachers' previous experience in teacher education is a determining factor in professional identity construction. The pedagogical approaches, philosophies of education, and teaching methods learned in teacher preparation programs can contribute to a teacher's identity development.

### *2.4. International teaching practicum*

Along with significant transformations in education due to globalization and expanding world connectivity, international teaching settings are being included in teacher preparation programs in order to provide future teachers with insight, abilities, and cultural competency. Blair in Huang et al (2023) stated that a global perspective is

needed in teaching practice to facilitate the pre-service with adequate intercultural knowledge, skills and point of view. This perspective can be gained through international teaching practicum experience.

According to Auni et al. (2022), an international teaching practicum is a program that exposes students to the international experience and other cultural perspectives outside of their own environment. The primary purpose of an international teaching practicum is to offer teachers the opportunity to gain hands-on teaching experience in a different cultural and educational setting. Through their study, Nazhafah and Muslim (2021) indicate that differences in beliefs and religions, sexual orientation, cultural practices, language barriers, and psychological stress are directly involved in the intercultural experiences of EFL pre-service teachers during SEA Teacher. In this case, participants will develop their intercultural awareness and identity by learning to deal with these differences by understanding and adapting to cultural differences. For EFL pre-service teachers, this international teaching practicum is an important stage to develop their teachers' identity because they teach in a country where English becomes the second language. The international teaching practicum also contributes to the EFL pre-service teachers to compete in the international level as transnational teachers.

### **3. Method**

The research method used in this study is qualitative research with narrative inquiry that focuses on narratives or stories about language learning and teaching experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Through narrative inquiry, this research explored pre-service teachers' experiences during international teaching practice through their stories. Identity has become the most frequently stated theme in narrative studies of teaching and learning (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Therefore, this study employed narrative inquiry to obtain more in-depth and comprehensive information from pre-service teachers regarding the development of their teacher identity.

The subject of this research was Sienna and Anna (pseudonym), two female student teachers of English Education at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta. Sienna and Anna participated in the SEA Teacher 2023 program batch 9 in the Philippines. Sienna got the opportunity to teach at the Junior High School Department of Saint Anthony from 21 August to 19 September 2023, while Anna carried out her teaching practicum at Capiz State University from 9 September to 7 October 2023.

In order to collect the data, the researchers used a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. Questions in the semi-structured interview included participants' general experiences during the international teaching practicum and specific questions developed from aspects of professional identity by Kelchtermans (2009), which include self-image, self-esteem, task perspective, job motivation, and future perspectives, which were adjusted to the participants' international teaching experience. Open-ended questions aimed to allow participants to express their views (Dursun, 2023), elaborate on their answers, and allow the researcher to pursue emerging themes (Barkhuizen et al.,

2014). The interview is video recorded as well. The interviews provided the core data for this study.

To analyze the data, researchers used three analysis steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles&Huberman,1984). In this study, data reduction was completed by thematically analyzing the transcribed interview data. Then, to present the data, researchers presented it narratively by retelling stories that reflect the experiences of research participants and arranging them logically to help readers understand the story. The last step is conclusion drawing and verification, where researchers developed conclusions and interpretations based on organized data by summarizing the findings concisely and coherently. Verification was done by re-examining the raw data to ensure that interpretations are based on the data and not biased.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Sienna's reason on choosing the major in the university

Sienna, a 23-year-old woman, ventured from her hometown to pursue her ambition of becoming an educator. She enrolled in the English Education program at a private university, driven by her passion for teaching that had been ignited since her youth. Initially inspired by her deaf childhood friend, Sienna had a special desire to teach students with special needs.

I felt that my childhood friend was smart, but because the school was far away and she had to help her family, there was no special attention for her to develop herself. That is what made me think that I have to become a teacher so that other people with disabilities do not feel what my childhood friend felt. Since then, I have been very committed to becoming a teacher in a special school. (Interview 2)

However, Sienna's ambition to work as a teacher in a special school came to a halt when she was unsuccessful in the SNMPTN and SBMPTN (university entrance test). Therefore, she chose to major in English Education, a field she had been interested in since childhood and had the support of those around her.

As an aspiring teacher, Sienna emphasized the fundamental roles and obligations of being an educator. She highlighted the importance of thoroughly understanding the subject matter and putting students' needs first. Sienna stressed the importance of recognizing each student's progress and needs, advocating a teacher-student relationship as a "friend" to facilitate interesting and fun class discussions. In addition, she emphasized the importance of soliciting feedback from students to refine teaching methods and emphasized the responsibility of teachers to be role models for their students.

As a foreign language teacher, Sienna believes that English teachers should have a high level of creativity. Given that many still find it difficult to learn English, creative teaching methods are essential to increase student engagement in the classroom and



facilitate effective learning. Despite her conviction, Seinna initially struggled with self-doubt at the beginning of her journey as a pre-service teacher.

I questioned myself whether I could be creative. Can I utilize media, such as games, to make the class run successfully, make the students participate and instil in them that learning English is fun? That is what I thought. I doubted myself whether I could or not. (Interview 4)

During her educational journey, Sienna gained many new perspectives on the teaching profession, especially by engaging in teaching practicum activities. She has done teaching practicum three times in primary, junior and senior high schools. Through the practicum, she gleaned insights beyond mere instruction, realizing that a teacher's role extends beyond imparting knowledge, she narrated *"We also have to support the students emotionally, encourage the students, must be able to classroom management, planning the lesson, deliver the lesson effectively, and keep the students safe."* (Interview 1). This shows that her teaching practice has enriched her perception of the tasks of a teacher.

#### *4.1.1. Sienna's international teaching practicum*

Through her participation in SEA Teacher, Sienna aspires to utilize the valuable lessons she learned in the Philippines to enhance her role as an educator in Indonesia. She wants to apply these insights not only to improve her teaching methods, but also to realize the qualities of a proficient teacher. In addition, Sienna also wants to expand her international connections and network through her involvement in the program.

Before embarking on her journey to the Philippines, Sienna is also preparing for her teaching demonstration in the Philippines. Her initial focus was on selecting teaching materials for the upcoming practicum. During the technical briefing at her university, participants were advised to incorporate cultural elements into their teaching demonstrations. Sienna chose to incorporate literature into her presentation and intended to deliver it through storytelling which she believed would effectively introduce cultural nuances. However, she admitted that her pre-departure concept of the demonstration would still need further refinement through observation during her practicum experience.

Sienna completed her one-month practicum in the Philippines at a private educational institution. Comparing it to schools in Indonesia, she observed that the infrastructure of the school where she taught was superior, partly due to its private status. During her first week, she focused on observation, shadowing her mentor teacher in various classes. The school's system and its students captivated her attention during this period.

Unlike schools in Indonesia, Philippine schools combine 11-13 subjects in one day, resulting in a tight learning schedule from 7am to 5pm. The students bring various books in container boxes on Monday and leave them in class until Friday. Despite the busy schedule, the students showed great enthusiasm and energy in their lessons by actively participating and engaging with the teachers during the lessons. Sienna concluded that

the students' dedication to education is impressive as they never complain even though they spend most of their time in school.

Sienna also observed the dynamics of student-teacher interactions during practicum. Instead of showing awkwardness and avoidance, students were enthusiastic and did not hesitate to greet their teachers whenever they met them, and often approached their teachers in their free time. The relationship between students and teachers at the school seems very close, characterized by frequent physical interactions such as hugging and embracing.

During her teaching practicum, Sienna was mentored by Ms. George, a teacher whose dedication and student-focused approach became a source of inspiration for her during and after the SEA Teacher program. Ms. George, a Visual Graphic Design graduate, seamlessly integrated her love for art into her teaching methods. Recognizing that most students in her school are visual learners, she customizes her lessons by using visually appealing aids such as well-designed PowerPoint presentations, videos, and encourages extensive student interaction.

Every morning, Ms. George starts the day by incorporating an energizing activity such as singing or dancing to infuse excitement into the learning environment. She chooses in-class exercises over assigning homework, prioritizing hands-on learning experiences. In addition, Ms. George implements a reward system by distributing congratulatory coupons to students who excel in quizzes or actively participate in class discussions. These coupons serve as additional points that students can accumulate over time.

That is what I imitate (from Mom George) for my demo teaching. I give students rewards, then show something that pleases the students' eyes, because they are mostly visual and high of curiosity. (Interview 2)

Ms. George consistently offers guidance and support to Sienna in her teaching endeavours and readily provides unsolicited advice and feedback. Sienna often asked Mrs. George for feedback on various aspects of teaching, including learning media, lesson planning, and classroom activities. In addition, Ms. George also instructs students to be kind to Sienna. Sienna has also received praise from her mentor teacher several times. She expressed, *"Mom George has encouraged me throughout this process and has been supportive."* (Interview 2)

Sienna looks up to Mrs. George as her role model. She wants to be a teacher like Ms. George, who is supportive and student-cantered so that her students can idolize her. Due to her frequent interactions with her mentor teachers, she also realized that all the teachers at her host school are very dedicated to educating the students there.

Many people think that being a teacher cannot guarantee us because the salary is small and all kinds of things. However, because I see teachers there, they work with love, they work with patience, and they have become my idol and influencer. (Interview 4)

As Sienna entered her first week of teaching practice, she was assigned to teach Grade 7 students with the literature material based on the curriculum. She had previously prepared Indonesian literature for teaching, so she thought this was a fitting material to integrate Indonesian culture into her teaching. For her lesson, she chose to present the legends of Bandung Bondowoso and Roro Jonggrang. Sienna carefully prepared all the necessary materials and media for the session.

At the beginning of the class, Sienna presented Prambanan Temple using a video format, taking into account the students' preference for visual learning. She described, *"Their eyes sparkled when they saw the video I showed them."* (Interview 2). She continued, *"When the video was finished, they applauded and said that was really good"* (interview 2).

The students were very excited about the material that Sienna brought. She narrated, *"They were pleased when I introduced my culture to them in class."* (Interview 2). By using videos and captivating storytelling, Sienna took the students on a virtual journey to Prambanan temple, prompting them to think creatively. Her presentation sparked a desire among students to visit Indonesia and witness the magnificent Prambanan Temple firsthand. Furthermore, students appreciated Sienna's adeptness in teaching literature in English, a subject they often found challenging. To deepen their engagement, Sienna organized a Q&A quiz with enticing prizes, like keychains from Indonesia, igniting enthusiasm among the students to participate actively.

Even so, Sienna initially harbored doubts about the effectiveness of the materials she had prepared. She was worried that her storytelling would not be able to engage the students. In addition, she was dissatisfied with the use of multimedia resources when teaching literature. During the demonstration, she only displayed photographs depicting Bandung Bondowoso and Roro Jonggrang. She believed that incorporating real props into her storytelling sessions would be more effective and increase student engagement. However, due to inadequate preparation, she did not prepare any props in advance. Reflecting on her teaching demonstration, Sienna recognized the need for greater interactivity with her students and a more focused approach to the specific skills to be imparted through storytelling. She admits that her teaching methodology and skills are only average and far from good. However, despite her doubts and dissatisfaction, she expressed, *"But because the feedback was good, they were happy and enjoyed it. When I came in, they were excited, so it was worth it"* (Interview 2).

Sienna admits that she still has room for improvement in managing her classroom dynamics during teaching practice. When she interacted with her students, she tended to stay in one spot and rarely approached and interacted individually with students. This tendency partly stems from her nervousness, especially when under the observation of the mentor teacher, which sometimes makes her freeze. Despite these challenges, Sienna recognizes her strengths, especially in fostering strong relationships with her students during her practicum in the Philippines. She prides herself on her good self-control and finds herself adept at handling students with diverse personalities. She understands the

natural behaviour of children, so she does not think it is necessary to use anger when dealing with their actions.

Her bond with her practicum students was remarkable, characterized by a sense of comfort and ease in interaction. The students would ask light-hearted questions or eagerly offer compliments. They greeted her enthusiastically, often asking for hugs, giving gifts, and even asking for photos together. Even after the practicum, Sienna maintained regular communication with the Filipino students through text messages. These interactions became a significant source of motivation for Sienna, reaffirming her passion for the teaching profession.

#### *4.1.2. Sienna's reflection after the international teaching practicum*

Reflecting on her month-long practicum in the Philippines, Sienna believes that she has performed admirably as a pre-service teacher. This shows an increase in her confidence compared to the uncertainty she felt before joining the SEA Teacher program. She now sees herself as professional enough to teach in her host school. Sienna attributes her success to adjusting to the supportive environment at her practicum site. This was felt after she returned from SEA Teacher and participated in the practicum in Indonesia. She felt less mentally supported by her mentor teacher in Indonesia compared to her experience in the Philippines.

Upon her return from SEA Teacher, Sienna experienced growth in both her professional and personal life. On the professional side, her dedication to teaching has increased, fuelled by meaningful experiences and exchanges with educators and students in the Philippines. These experiences left a lasting impression and provided invaluable insights, including how to build relationships with students. Her professional evolution became even more evident during her TEYL practicum in Indonesia, where she became more adept at interacting with students, especially young learners. She expressed *"I am still happy when I meet students and I don't feel it drains my energy."* (Interview 2).

Sienna also felt the positive impact of SEA Teacher on her personality. All the praise she received during the practicum made her love herself more and be prouder of her own achievements. In addition, she also applied to be more open in expressing affection for people around her, just as her students in the Philippines expressed affection for her. Overall, Sienna feels that her initial expectations before joining this practicum have been achieved. Sienna experienced a positive transformation in her personality thanks to her participation in the SEA Teacher program. The recognition and praise she received during her practicum boosted her confidence and pride in her accomplishments. She also became more open in expressing affection to others, mirroring the affection she received from her students in the Philippines. Overall, Sienna feels that the program has met her initial expectations.

Sienna expressed her aspiration to work abroad in ten years' time. She envisions herself as a volunteer educator, sharing her skills with rural communities in Indonesia and possibly abroad. If she pursues a conventional teacher role, she sees herself working in

an international school. Over the next ten years, she would like to experience significant growth in her personal development and teaching abilities.

#### *4.1.3. Anna's reason on choosing major in the university*

Originally from the same province as Sienna, Anna migrated to Java with dreams of becoming an educator. Enrolled in the same educational institution as Sienna, Anna had a strong interest in English, which she had nurtured since childhood. Her passion for the language, coupled with inspiration from a teacher during vocational school, led her to a career in teaching. The teacher's unique teaching method, where students had to memorize 500 words in just half a semester, made Anna find herself passionate and determined to excel in English education.

Despite her initial enthusiasm for English education, Anna admits to not having high expectations when entering the program. She remained hesitant to fully commit to teaching and considered possible alternative career paths. In addition, she acknowledged her shortcomings, feeling unprepared for the demands of teaching, especially in conveying complex concepts to students. She also still questioned whether her personality matched the qualities of an effective teacher.

I feel like I might be boring as a teacher because compared to other people, I still lack the personality to be a teacher. I do not know how to be friendly in front of my students. (Interview 4)

Anna believed that a teacher's duty is to ensure students grasp the material. During her practicum, she consistently aimed for student retention and motivation. She emphasized the importance of a teacher's amiability, diverse teaching methods, English immersion, and knowledge enrichment to excel as an English teacher. Sequential delivery of lessons and activities was crucial to her sense of accomplishment. However, she acknowledged her shortcomings in spelling and explaining concepts, and she sometimes neglected certain teaching activities like ice-breakers or concluding sessions.

As an education student, Anna had to complete three types of practicum experiences: pre-service teacher practicum 1 and 2, and Teaching English for Young Learners. She has completed two mandatory practicums from her program of study, practicum 1 and TEYL practicum, as well as one practicum through SEA Teacher, an international teaching program in the Philippines. In her faculty, participation in SEA Teacher can replace practicum 2.

Anna set a goal to travel overseas before turning 25. She attempted to participate in a student exchange program before but was unsuccessful. However, through the SEA Teacher program, she achieved her goal. Her desire to travel abroad was inspired by her father, who had worked overseas when she was young. *"I always see my future as studying or working abroad"* (interview 1). Anna believes that being a SEA Teacher is an excellent opportunity for her. By joining SEA Teacher, Anna hopes to enrich her teaching

experience and increase her confidence. She wants her public speaking skills to improve after practising teaching in the Philippines.

Before heading to the Philippines, Anna worked to improve her English, recognizing the importance of English as a second language in the country, and feeling that her English skills were lacking. In addition, as an introvert, the prospect of engaging in a teaching practice was a daunting challenge. She harboured concerns about her ability to deliver the subject matter effectively. Therefore, in addition to honing her teaching skills, Anna set out to perfect her public speaking skills, especially when speaking in front of students. Every night, she diligently practiced in front of the mirror by simulating teaching scenarios to prepare himself for actual teaching practice. In addition, she was also advised by her university mentor to start drafting lesson plans.

#### 4.1.4. Anna's international teaching practicum

Anna did a month-long practicum in the Philippines. On her first visit, she noticed that the infrastructure and environment at the school was similar to her hometown. Located quite far from the city, it takes 45 minutes to reach the school. Unlike some schools in Indonesia that are equipped with projectors, LCD screens, and other facilities, the facilities in this school are very limited. There is only one TV available, which is allocated to certain classes, so many classes do not have adequate facilities. *"Fortunately, I was assigned to teach in a class with good facilities and cooperative students" (Interview 1).*

For eight days in two weeks, Anna intensively observed classes, focusing on Mondays to Thursdays. Her observations included various subjects taught in English and other subjects. School hours usually run from 7am to 3pm, totalling about 8 hours. During the observation period, Anna was amazed by the incredible energy and enthusiasm of the students. Although they are young, they always show passion and cooperation during lessons. They eagerly participated in class activities and vigorously raised their hands to answer or ask questions. In addition, they also showed great discipline and respect for their teachers. *"It is lovely to imagine when I am teaching and being listened to carefully and having obedient students" (Interview 1).*

In addition, the students showed genuine sincerity and easily showed affection to their teachers. They always greet their teachers when they pass by and do not hesitate to give hugs. In addition, they also show their affection by giving gifts every day. They gave Anna cake on her first practicum day. During breaks, the students engaged her in conversation, often asking her about Indonesia or her culinary preferences. Anna was also close to a student named Reynolds, who regularly messaged her in the evenings to confirm her availability to teach the next day. This relationship continues, with Reynolds often asking when Anna will return to the Philippines. These warm and positive interactions have fostered a feeling of acceptance and love throughout Anna's practicum. She addressed *"Even though I am an introvert, they reach out to me" (Interview 1).*

During the practicum, Anna is guided by Mrs. Wen, her mentor teacher, who is the ideal image of an educator for Anna. Mrs. Wen has a cheerful and friendly attitude typical of an elementary school teacher, which made her loved by her students. Instead of sticking to the subject matter, Ms. Wen often incorporates songs into her lessons, delivering them with vigour to generate enthusiasm in her students. Anna observes Ms. Wen's adept classroom management skills; while she keeps the atmosphere relaxed, she is quick to assert her authority, when necessary, yet still with gentle reprimands to direct her students.

At first, I thought being an elementary school teacher was difficult. But when I saw the way Mom Wen teaches, it made me feel like being an elementary school teacher is fun. (Interview 1)

Anna often receives positive comments from educators at the school. Some even thanked her for the warm welcome from the students and her friendly attitude towards them. Anna felt a marked difference between Ms. Wen and the teachers there compared to the teachers in her home country. She believes that it was only during her time there that her aspiration to become an elementary school teacher was further fuelled after observing the personalities and instructional approaches of the teachers.

At the end of the observation period, Anna's supervising teacher gave her the opportunity to lead the class as a trial run before starting her official practicum. She had the autonomy to choose the teaching materials and opted to follow the curriculum, which included the concepts of count nouns and mass nouns. Prior to the teaching demonstration, Anna diligently prepared materials and drafting the lesson plans with the guidance from her mentor teacher, especially on the parts that were different from the lesson plans in Indonesia, which she found confusing. In addition, before her classroom teaching practice, Anna practiced independently in the dormitory, asking her friends in the Elementary Education department to provide feedback on her teaching methods for elementary school students.

Anna's teaching demonstration began by engaging her students in a brainstorming session and ice breaking for the first five minutes. After that, she uses video media to illustrate the concepts of count nouns and mass nouns. Despite using visual aids, she still explains the material verbally and facilitates interactive question and answer sessions with her students. In addition, she encourages group work by assigning different tasks to each group. During her teaching, Anna emphasizes the use of visual media such as videos and PowerPoint presentations, which she says her students really enjoy. Their enthusiasm is evident during video screenings and quizzes presented through PowerPoint, as these visual media are rarely used in their classroom environment which usually only uses whiteboards and printed materials.

Having an introverted nature and doubts about her public speaking skills, Anna worried that she would struggle to deliver the material effectively in front of the students.

The pressure was on her to deliver the material in a way that elementary school children could understand. Despite her doubts before the demo, she expressed, *"Thankfully, they understand and also seem to enjoy it when I teach"* (Interview 2).

Reviewing her teaching methods, Anna recognized the need to improve her classroom management skills. She admitted to feeling too nervous and thus lacking interaction with her students. In addition, she realized shortcomings in her articulation, which often resulted in mispronunciations during teaching. She wishes she could be more relaxed when teaching. Reflecting on her demo teaching experience, she admitted that she felt nervous because many eyes were on her, which made her blank and silent. She also regretted her unhealthy condition at that time so that she could not perform optimally.

#### *4.1.5. Anna's reflection after the international teaching practicum*

Despite facing various challenges during her teaching practice, Anna is confident that she has the competence to fulfil her responsibilities as a teacher. She diligently applies what she has learned and observed during the observation period. During her teaching practice, she demonstrated adaptability in her interactions with students and showed patience in dealing with students' different personalities. Contrary to her initial perception upon entering teacher education, Anna now sees herself as having a warm and approachable demeanour, which she considers one of her strengths. Her ability to effectively engage with students was evident in her interactions during the practicum.

Anna believes that her experience teaching abroad in an elementary school has shaped her approach to working with young students. She observed the professionalism of the teachers there and learned valuable lessons to apply in future practicums or when she becomes an elementary school teacher. Recognizing the need for different strategies when teaching young students, she applied the insights she gained during SEA Teacher to her TEYL practicum in Indonesia, particularly with grade 1 students. Reflecting on her experience, she felt less anxious in teaching and more adept at managing the students' engagement.

Anna's participation in the international teaching practicum has had a significant impact on her desire to pursue a career in teaching. Initially, she admitted that she was unsure about her future as a teacher. But after taking part in SEA Teacher, she solidified her decision to become a professional teacher. Immersed in the dynamics of a real classroom, she found that teaching was less daunting than expected and she relished the opportunity to impart knowledge to students. This experience fuelled her determination to enrol in a teacher professional program (PPG) after graduation. Anna envisions herself teaching through the P3K program in her hometown or in any assigned location. In addition, she aspires to expand her teaching horizons further through international volunteering opportunities, aiming to enrich her teaching experience abroad.



## **5. Discussion**

### *5.1. EFL pre-service teacher identity development during international teaching practicum program*

#### *5.1.1. Self-Image*

Self-image is an element of professional identity that refers to the EFL pre-service teachers' self-concept about themselves and the perceptions of teachers, colleagues, or students about themselves as teachers (Kelchtermans, 2009). Based on the two narratives, both pre-service teachers perceived themselves as lacking and doubted themselves as a teacher before undergoing the international teaching practicum. Sienna considered herself average and wondered whether she could be a creative teacher so students could enjoy her lessons. On the other hand, Anna thought her personality did not reflect that of a teacher, as she did not know how to be friendly with students. These doubts certainly have a significant impact on their identity as prospective teachers. Their initial perception of themselves indirectly influenced their actions during the practicum period. The teaching practicum made Sienna try to be a more creative teacher in learning. Anna tries to be a friendly teacher by approaching students and building good interactions with them every day. Based on the narrative, through their effort, both have succeeded in developing their initial self-concept for the better during the practicum period. As the findings of the study by Prawiro (2021) show that by understanding themselves, pre-service teachers will be able to determine how they act.

Comments from both teachers and students also influenced the changes in self-concept. Successful completion of a teaching practicum program is often recognized by students, peers, mentors, or supervisors. Mentor teachers of both Sienna and Anna helped them during their teaching practicum. It boosted their motivation and will to have good performance during their teaching demo. Both Sienna and Anna, who passed the teaching practicum one in Indonesian school, felt that the positive feedback from their Philippine mentor teachers influenced them more than their Indonesian mentor teacher in their first teaching practicum program. As the findings by Triyoga et al. (2024) positive feedback and validation of their teaching skills can boost pre-service teachers' confidence and strengthen their professional identity. While Prawiro (2021) showed that constructive feedback, especially from mentors, points out areas for improvement and contributes to pre-service teachers' professional development. Based on the participants' narratives, all comments received were positive adjectives or compliments; for example, "fun," "good," "you did well," and "enjoyed." These positive comments then dispel doubts and help strengthen the pre-service teachers in building their self-concept.

#### *5.1.2. Self esteem*

Self-esteem refers to how well pre-service teachers evaluate their weaknesses and strengths when teaching and what students like about their teaching (Kelchtermans, 2009). The narratives show that both Sienna and Anna had high positive self-esteem about their teaching roles during the practicum. Both pre-service teachers attributed their self-

esteem to their personalities, which involved interacting with students. Both Sienna and Anna described their strengths about students, as they stated in the narratives, such as *"friendly," "have a good bond with students," "able to match frequency with students,"* and *"able to understand students' characteristics."*

Self-esteem further refers to the fact that emotions are also essential in teaching, as discussed in the study by Prawiro (2021) and Triyoga et al. (2024). Both pre-service teachers experienced doubts and insecurities about their teaching before demo teaching. However, after the demo, the doubts paid off with positive feedback from the students they taught. From the demo teaching of both pre-service teachers, the students liked their teaching, which used visual media such as video or PowerPoint. However, after evaluating their demo teaching, Sienna and Anna felt they needed more interaction with students. They both have the awareness to improve classroom management. This aligns with a study by Triyoga et al. (2024) who stated that the feelings that arise after teaching are also used to reflect on what they can do better in their teaching. This suggests that seeing tangible results from their teaching efforts can increase pre-service teachers' confidence in their ability to make a difference and boost their self-esteem.

### 5.1.3. Task perception

Task perception includes pre-service teachers' ideas about what professional programs, tasks, and responsibilities entail to do their jobs well (Kelchtermans, 2009). Prior to their international teaching practicum, Sienna and Anna already had their own perspectives on teachers' responsibilities and duties. Based on their experience in their first teaching practicum in Indonesia, they saw that the teachers' responsibilities do not only lay on teaching, but the teachers are also responsible for the administrative stuff. During the practicum period, they tried to apply their previous understanding of teachers' duties to their teaching practice so that they felt they had done well. However, as Nghia and Tai (2017) revealed in her findings, understanding the profession's nature, which is an aspect of pre-service teacher identity, is not fully developed until before the teaching internship or practicum. Through observations during the practicum period, pre-service teachers' perspectives on teachers' responsibilities and duties became richer. This is mainly influenced by their mentor teachers as experienced teachers. After observing how their mentor teachers teach, they learned how teaching strategies or methods attract students, especially young learners.

As in the narrative, what they learned from their mentor teachers they also applied to their teaching. In addition, as research conducted by Nghia and Tai (2017) stated, the teaching practicum is a time when pre-service teachers' idealistic expectations of the profession are challenged, Anna had an initial assumption that being an elementary school teacher was difficult. Her perspective changed when she saw how her mentor teacher worked with her students. She became aware of how teachers approach young learners with their characteristics. For Sienna and Anna, it is easier for them to have a personal approach to their students because the Philippe's class size is ideal, 20-25 students in a

class. It is different from Indonesia's class size, which is bigger than that, 30-40 students in a class. This finding suggests that the international teaching practicum experience enriches pre-service teachers' perceptions of their profession.

#### *5.1.4. Job motivation*

Job Motivation refers to the pre-service teacher's primary motive for becoming a teacher and the people or experiences that influenced their decision Kelchtermans (2009). The narratives prove that both participants were initially motivated to enter teacher education due to their interest in English since childhood and the influence of people in their past. However, this motivation was insufficient for them to pursue their careers as teachers. After participating in the international teaching practicum program, there was a development of motivation between the two through observations, interactions, and experiences at the practicum site. This is similar to the study by Nghia and Tai (2017) which showed that pre-service teachers still have unrealistic assumptions and expectations of the profession until their internship. Both Sienna and Anna took their international teaching practicum experience as a new reinforcement for their confidence to take up the future teaching profession.

This aligns with a study by Triyoga et al. (2024) who found that practicum experience positively impacts pre-service teachers' motivation toward the teaching profession. These experiences include pre-service teachers' interactions and relationships with students and teachers, which leave a lasting impression on them. More specifically, the teachers in the practicum school also became new people who influenced their beliefs. Both of them were encouraged to become teachers when they saw the dedication of professional teachers in teaching. In the SEA-Teachers program, one mentor teacher focuses on three pre-service students, so the students get full attention from their mentor teachers. In Indonesia, in the teaching practicum program one mentor teacher is usually responsible to more than three students. This suggests that mentor teachers serve as role models for pre-service teachers by demonstrating the importance of commitment and passion for the profession.

#### *5.1.5. Future perspective*

Future perspective is the pre-service teachers' expectation towards the future of their profession. Both pre-service teachers had the desire to work abroad long before joining the international teaching practicum program. Based on the narratives of both participants, there was a development of a stronger motivation to work abroad after they experienced a positive international teaching experience for them. The experience made them want to experience it again in the future. Both have the same expectation in the next few years to seek international teaching experience through volunteering or even becoming a teacher abroad. This also proves that international teaching practicum allows pre-service teachers to see their career opportunities as teachers more broadly. Pre-service teachers' perspectives on their future as teachers were also expressed in a study by Nghia

and Tai (2017) who stated that pre-service teachers' identity development during internships involved some imagination about themselves outside the teaching community, such as reflections on what they will do in the future or how their work will be in the future.

## *5.2. Factors influenced EFL pre-service teacher professional identity*

### *5.2.1. Mentor teachers*

One factor that influences the development of pre-service teachers' professional identity is the presence of mentor teachers who guide them during the practicum period. From the narratives of the two pre-service teachers, it can be concluded that their mentor teachers greatly influenced their professional identity development, especially in task perception and job motivation. Their mentor teachers became their inspiration and role models in realizing the image of a good teacher. Using experienced teachers in the school environment as role models and observing how they interact with students and handle challenges can shape prospective teachers' perceptions of what it means to be a teacher and influence their professional identity development. The pre-service teachers' initial understanding of the role and tasks of teachers at the beginning of their education also expanded after they directly observed their mentor teachers, both in teaching and interacting with students.

In addition, Sienna and Anna felt more motivated to become teachers when they observed and got to know their mentor teachers. The mentor teacher's passion, enthusiasm, and dedication to teaching can be a robust role model for pre-service teachers. A commitment to observing and a love of teaching brought by their mentors, especially during the observation period, strengthens pre-service teachers' second step in pursuing this profession. The influence of mentor teachers on pre-service teachers' identity development during practicum has also been proven by Prawiro (2021) in his study. This is also in line with a study by Nghia and Tai (2017) who found that pre-service teachers' identities are strongly shaped by the community where the internship occurs, especially their mentors.

### *5.2.2. Relationship with students*

Another factor that influenced the participants' professional identity development was their relationships with students during the practicum period. The research findings show that Sienna and Anna had very positive relationships with students. This relationship then influenced most of the elements of their professional identity, such as self-image, self-esteem, task perception, and job motivation. Based on their narratives, the students they teach often praise and appreciate them during practicum. They did not hesitate to show their affection towards both participants. This treatment positively influenced both participants, who could be more confident in carrying out their duties and felt high self-esteem in front of their students. As stated in the narratives, the positive interactions with students during the practicum also led to the participants' passion and

determination towards the teaching profession. In addition, the frequency of meeting and interacting with students made pre-service teachers understand how teachers should treat their students. This is in line with Prawiro (2021) who found that good relationships help pre-service teachers better understand their students, which impacts teaching practices and contributes to their identity.

### *5.2.3. Practicum environment*

Based on the observations and assessments of both participants, the culture and school system they practiced was very different from their home countries. Their narratives show a very positive and supportive environment, judging from the pre-service teachers' interactions with the students, mentor teachers, and other teachers in the school. Nghia and Tai (2017) show a contrast, where pre-service teachers experience a marginalized identity during their internship as they are not fully accepted as members of the school community at their initial internship. Another study by Triyoga et al. (2024) also shows the influence of the school environment, where pre-service teachers struggle to develop their teacher identity because they experience self-doubt that can be linked to school culture.

In her narrative, Sienna stated that her supportive school environment allowed her to adjust well and become more professional in carrying out her duties. On the other hand, Anna expressed her motivation to become an elementary school teacher, which only emerged when she was in her practicum school in the Philippines. This was because the school's positive and supportive climate fostered her sense of belonging and commitment, in contrast to when she did her practicum in Indonesia. This shows that a supportive practicum environment has an influence on job motivation as an element of professional identity.

## **6. Conclusion**

The international teaching practicum program has fostered enriching experiences, broadened perspectives, and left a positive impact on pre-service teachers. This program has significantly contributed to the development of all facets of their professional identity, including self-image, self-esteem, task perception, work motivation, and future aspirations. As these elements of professional identity strengthened, pre-service teachers gained enhanced confidence and clarity in their teaching roles, a deeper understanding of their responsibilities, and increased motivation, alongside a more defined vision of their future as educators.

The development of professional identity during the international practicum was profoundly influenced by factors within the practicum school. The guidance of mentor teachers, positive relationships with students, and a supportive school environment played pivotal roles in this process. These findings underscore the critical role of the environment in shaping individual identity, influencing personal development, behavior, and perceptions.

While this study provides valuable insights, further research is needed to deepen the understanding of these dynamics. Future studies could address current limitations by utilizing larger, more diverse samples and adopting longitudinal designs to examine changes over time. Additionally, cross-country comparative studies could illuminate how contextual factors shape professional identity development. Expanding the scope and rigor of future inquiries will contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

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