

## Beyond Technical Skills: The Integration of Language Competence into Professional Identity During International Teaching Practicum

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### ABSTRACT

In the context of globalized teacher education, the integration of language competence into the development of professional identity among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student-teachers remains insufficiently addressed. This study explores how non-native English-speaking student-teachers construct their professional identity through the lens of language competence during international teaching practicums. Employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the research investigates the lived experiences of two Indonesian EFL student-teachers who participated in the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) exchange program. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and document analysis, including lesson plans, reflective journals, and mentor feedback. The analysis identified four key themes: language competence as a catalyst for identity formation, self-awareness as a foundation for professional growth, the integration of disciplinary knowledge into teaching practice, and student-centered engagement. The findings reveal divergent pathways in identity construction, shaped by how each participant perceived and responded to linguistic challenges. One student-teacher reframed language anxiety as an opportunity for transformation, while the other struggled with persistent self-doubt despite technical preparation. This study addresses a critical gap in teacher education literature by emphasizing how language competence functions as a core element of professional identity, rather than a supplementary skill. The results offer practical implications for designing teacher education curricula that prioritize reflective practice, language support, and identity development. By situating language competence within the broader process of becoming an effective educator, this study contributes to a more holistic understanding of teacher preparation in international and intercultural settings.

## 1. Introduction

The journey of becoming a teacher in today's interconnected world involves far more than acquiring pedagogical techniques. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student-teachers, especially those participating in cross-border programs, the process entails complex negotiations between linguistic ability, cultural adaptation, and emerging professional identity. As English assumes an increasingly global role in education, student-teachers are required not only to teach the language but to embody it in culturally diverse and linguistically challenging classrooms. This dual expectation makes language competence an indispensable component in the development of professional identity.

One of the most transformative phases in teacher education is the teaching practicum, which serves as a critical bridge between theory and practice. According to Farrell (2008), the practicum exposes student-teachers to authentic classroom settings where they are entrusted with real teaching responsibilities. Zhao and Zhang (2017) emphasize that this period enables student-teachers to apply pedagogical knowledge, manage classrooms, understand student needs, and develop teaching confidence. Yet, teaching practicums, particularly in international contexts, involve much more than instructional mastery. They offer a fertile ground for shaping how student-teachers come to see themselves as educators. Beijjaard et al. (2004) argue that professional identity formation is not a passive process of adopting pre-defined roles but an active, evolving negotiation between personal

values and professional expectations. In this context, identity becomes an internalized narrative that is constructed and reconstructed through lived classroom experiences, reflections, and interactions with diverse learners and mentors.

The complexity of identity construction intensifies when teaching occurs in unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environments. Trent (2011) notes that transitioning from an EFL to an English as a Second Language (ESL) context during international practicums imposes new identity pressures on student-teachers. These individuals must simultaneously adapt to different institutional cultures, adjust their teaching styles, and assert their professional authority as non-native English speakers. Pavlenko (2003) adds that in such settings, linguistic identity becomes highly visible, and the teacher must regain professional legitimacy while navigating language proficiency judgments. The process is not only about managing classroom instruction but also about re-establishing credibility in environments where their non-native status can evoke self-doubt or external scrutiny.

Despite the increasing emphasis on global teacher mobility, literature focusing on how language competence shapes professional identity during international teaching practicums remains limited. Although studies by Yuan (2016) and Lee (2013) explore coping strategies of non-native teachers in global classrooms, few delve into how linguistic proficiency becomes integrated into identity development. Varghese et al. (2016) argue that language competence not only informs instructional practice but also influences how teachers are perceived by colleagues and students. Norton (2013) further frames language as a medium through which identities are continually negotiated. Liu and Xu (2011) emphasize that the globalization of English instruction demands that teachers constantly recontextualize their pedagogical approaches and align themselves with shifting standards of professionalism. However, many of these studies focus on experienced educators, leaving a gap in understanding how pre-service teachers navigate these dynamics during the formative stage of practicum. This gap extends to how language insecurities, identity negotiations, and classroom realities intersect in the lived experiences of student-teachers.

Building on these gaps, this study provides a focused investigation of how language competence is experienced and integrated into professional identity during international teaching practicums. Uniquely, it examines the nuanced emotional and reflective dimensions of this process among non-native English-speaking student-teachers. Drawing on the theoretical framework of foundational teacher competences proposed by Pennington and Richards (2016), this research sheds light on how identity construction is informed by self-knowledge, disciplinary understanding, context awareness, and student-related

perspectives. The novelty of this study lies in its dual-layered exploration: first, it reveals how student-teachers internalize language competence beyond its technical function, and second, it illustrates how contrasting identity trajectories emerge based on individual coping strategies and reflective depth.

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to unpack the emotional and intellectual processes that shape identity formation during international teaching. By analyzing student-teachers' lived experiences through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens, the research reveals how language proficiency operates not only as a pedagogical tool but as a central force in developing confidence, authority, and professional presence. The study aims to answer a critical question: How do student-teachers integrate language competence into their professional identities while navigating the complex social, cultural, and instructional demands of teaching abroad?

To provide empirical grounding, this study explores two Indonesian EFL student-teachers who participated in the SEA-Teacher Project, documenting their narratives, reflective journals, teaching materials, and mentor feedback. The structure of the study includes a comprehensive literature review that defines core concepts such as language teacher identity and foundational competence, followed by a detailed account of the research methodology, data analysis procedures, and findings organized by emergent themes. The final sections synthesize the results through a critical discussion that situates individual experiences within broader educational and sociocultural frameworks.

Ultimately, this study contributes to English language teaching by underscoring the inseparability of language competence and professional identity in international contexts. It calls for a reconceptualization of teacher education programs that not only strengthen linguistic and pedagogical skills but also foster self-awareness, reflective practices, and identity resilience. For ELT practitioners and educators, the findings emphasize the need to support student-teachers in developing holistic professional identities that are grounded in linguistic confidence and responsive to intercultural realities. By doing so, future language educators will be better equipped to teach effectively, adapt authentically, and grow meaningfully across global classrooms.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Teaching Practicum and Professional Identity Formation

Teaching practicum serves as a critical phase in teacher education, bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world application. Beyond the development of technical skills, it plays a vital role in shaping professional identity as student-teachers negotiate

personal values within institutional and professional expectations (Beijaard et al., 2004). This identity formation is cultivated through experiential learning and reflective engagement. Farrell (2018) emphasizes that reflection drives professional growth by encouraging student-teachers to examine their beliefs and instructional decisions. Through this process, they deepen their understanding of teacher cognition, which Borg (2015) defines as the interaction between knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practices. Reflection allows student-teachers to navigate pedagogical complexities while progressively enhancing their teaching strategies.

The development of professional identity is further supported by participation in communities of practice, where collaborative peer engagement promotes co-regulated learning and dialogue around educational quality and standards (Bransen et al., 2019). These peer interactions also support self-regulated learning, especially in learner-centered environments, as observed by Matsuyama et al. (2019). Additionally, action research is instrumental in this process. According to Yan and Cheng (2013), reflective cycles in teaching practice foster ongoing improvement and pedagogical adaptation, resulting in the development of new practical teaching theories. This reflective process aligns with the perspective of Wong and Trollope-Kumar (2014), who highlight that professional identity evolves through personal stories and the influence of role models encountered throughout an educator's career.

## 2.2. International Teaching Practicum: Complexities and Challenges

International teaching practicum introduces layered challenges for student-teachers, particularly in shaping their professional identity within unfamiliar educational and cultural landscapes. Trent (2013) emphasizes that teaching overseas requires student-teachers to adapt to new linguistic and cultural environments, which complicates their capacity to sustain a coherent sense of self. This dual adjustment affects how they internalize and reflect on their evolving professional roles. Galloway (2014) adds that identifying as Multilingual English Teachers (METs) enhances professional credibility, especially when these teachers' lived experiences embody the ongoing negotiation of linguistic and cultural identities in foreign settings. In this context, identity is not static but continuously redefined through immersion and adaptation.

The negotiation of cultural identity within English Language Teaching is essential for developing globally competent educators. Li (2017) stresses the importance of training teachers who are not only linguistically proficient but also culturally aware, particularly within the paradigm of English as an International Language (EIL). Teacher education programs must encourage student-teachers to engage

critically with diverse sociocultural perspectives and linguistic variations, a practice supported by Yücel and Yavuz (2019). Moreover, the formation of professional identity is deeply intertwined with teacher agency. Yang and Han (2022) argue that critical reflection enables educators to reassess their roles and foster identity transformation, while reflective practices in English Language Teaching (ELT) play a crucial role in shaping teachers' professional identities and competencies, as noted by (Liu et al., 2014). These practices challenge the dominant ideologies within ELT, fostering a deeper self-awareness among educators. As student-teachers engage in international practicum experiences, their capacity for reflection and responsiveness to cultural complexities emerges as essential. This capacity enhances their professional competence and aids in developing a resilient, globally informed identity. Reflective practice equips student-teachers with tools to navigate cultural nuances, which ultimately impacts their teaching effectiveness and adaptability in diverse settings (Liu et al., 2014; Haase et al., 2020)

## 2.3. Language Competence in Professional Identity Development

The connection between professional identity and language proficiency has become a crucial area of research in language teacher education. Language learners and teachers continuously use language to construct and reconstruct their identities. Norton (2013) stated that language is a tool for identity negotiation. In cross-cultural teaching setting, this identity work becomes more challenging since teacher must navigate various linguistics and cultural demands while maintaining their professional identity.

According to Pavlenko (2003), non-native English speakers face the unique challenges in which they must simultaneously maintain the effectiveness of teaching while negotiating their linguistics identity. These challenges result the terms "linguistic anxiety" which teachers' perceptions of their language competence directly impact their professional confidence and classroom effectiveness. These difficulties have been made worse by the globalization of English language instruction, since teachers are more frequently placed in situations where their proficiency in the language is continuously assessed and examined.

Yuan and Burns (2017) has investigated how language teacher identity connected with language competency. The findings showed pedagogical decisions and professional self-concept are influenced by teachers' perceptions of their language competence. They suggest that language competence serves not just as technical qualification but as a fundamental aspect of professional identity. Language competence also influences the way teachers perceive themselves and the way they are perceived by others.

## 2.4. Theoretical Framework: Language Teacher Competence

Pennington and Richards (2016) provide a comprehensive framework about language teacher competence. They distinguish two competences, namely foundational and advanced competence. Five essential elements involve in foundational competence: language-related identity, self-knowledge and awareness, disciplinary identity, student-related identity, and context identity. This framework is relevant for comprehending how student-teachers integrate language competence into their professional identity.

Language-related identity refers to teachers' understanding of themselves as users and teachers. It The way teachers navigate between their language identity and their professional identity will be revealed in this language-related identity. Self-knowledge and awareness include teachers' comprehending of their strengths, weaknesses, and developmental needs, which has a function as a foundation for ongoing professional growth.

Meanwhile, disciplinary identity involves teachers' understanding of their subject matter and their ability to transform academic knowledge into practical classroom applications. Student-related identity focuses on teachers' conceptualization of their role in relation to student learning and engagement. Lastly, context identity refers to teachers' ability to adapt their practice to specific educational environments and cultural contexts.

## 2.5. Gaps in Current Literature

Despite increasing scholarly attention to international teaching practicums, persistent gaps remain in how language competence is integrated into the development of professional identity. Although some studies acknowledge how non-native English-speaking teachers adapt to global contexts, few delve into the complex interplay between linguistic ability and professional self-concept. Professional identity is now widely recognized as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by communicative competence and pedagogical skills, which are essential for effective teaching in multicultural classrooms (Vinnikova et al., 2021; Alimbetov et al., 2024). Beyond theoretical knowledge, teaching competence involves the internalization of personal values, practical classroom strategies, and adaptability, all of which are nurtured through consistent interaction with culturally diverse learners and the development of professional flexibility (Vinnikova et al., 2021). A structured and intentional approach to fostering foreign language competencies, as argued by Popova (2024), plays a vital role in both linguistic development and professional identity formation. Additionally, communicative competence closely intersects with personal growth, shaping how teachers perceive their

evolving roles (Ayar, 2021; Ly & Tran, 2019), while early cross-cultural engagements significantly influence long-term professional perceptions and trajectories (Palina et al., 2023; Richards, 2021).

These gaps are especially evident in the limited research on how novice teachers integrate second language proficiency into their professional identities during practicum experiences. The prevailing focus on experienced educators has left student-teachers' challenges in adapting language skills to real teaching scenarios largely underexplored. Fan et al. (2024) note that task-based language learning allows student-teachers to effectively utilize their existing linguistic resources to meet instructional objectives, which in turn reinforces their professional identity. Furthermore, how student-teachers respond to linguistic challenges and how these experiences influence future career paths in international settings is an underexamined area. With global education increasingly demanding linguistically and culturally competent teachers, it is essential to understand how language proficiency informs long-term professional development and intercultural engagement (Hesan et al., 2019). Although self-awareness and reflective practice are acknowledged as pivotal to teacher growth, limited attention has been given to their intersection with language use in global teaching contexts. Reflection is particularly vital for enhancing pedagogical approaches and fostering self-confidence (Pardo & Téllez, 2015; Mesa, 2018). Addressing these gaps, this study aims to explore how student-teachers integrate language proficiency into their professional identities during international practicums, shedding light on the mechanisms through which they develop both pedagogical efficacy and a resilient professional self-concept.

## 3. Method

A Hermeneutic phenomenology approach was employed in this study since it is considered appropriate to study participants' previous experiences and interpretations of a phenomenon. According to Creswell (2013), the main objective of this approach is finding a rich and detailed description of the nature of the specific phenomenon under the study. This method allows researcher to investigate individual's subjective experience in detail while simultaneously putting them in a broad context.

This study was carried out in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Jambi, Indonesia. The participants were two EFL student-teachers who participated in the Sea Teacher Project Batch 9, a program run by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). For their teaching, they were placed at two distinguished educational institutions. The schools are Junior Laboratory School of President Ramon Magsaysay University and Mariano Marcos State University Laboratory High School.



**Table 1.** Research Participants' Profiles

Nama	Gender	Age	Semester	Having Teaching Experience	Practicum Site
Kiana	F	20	8	Yes	President Ramon Magsasay University (PRMSU) Laboratory, Junior High Scholl Grade VII President Ramon Magsasay University Laboratory, Junior High Scholl Grade VII
Windy	F	20	8	No	Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMSU) Laboratory High School, Junior High School

To obtain thorough information for this study, the researcher used two different data collection methods. The first is an in-depth, semi-structured interview. The researcher developed the interview protocol based on the Pennington and Richard's (2016) theoretical framework of language teacher competence. Analysis of documents comes in second. The researcher methodically examined relevant materials, including lesson plans, mentor evaluation reports, student-teachers' reflective notebooks, and student-teachers' blogs.

To derive meaningful insights from a variety of data sources based on, the researcher implemented a systematic and comprehensive analytical approach designed in analyzing the data. First, the researcher conducted multiple careful readings of all data materials while actively engaging with the content. Second, the researcher developed coding framework. Third, the researcher proceeded with the initial coding phase. Fourth, the researcher focused on testing and refining the coding framework. Fifth, the researcher proceeded with the systematic coding of the entire dataset. Sixth, the researcher initiated the theme development process by systematically grouping related codes into potential themes that emerged from the data. Seventh, the researcher conducted a deep examination of patterns both within individual themes and across the thematic framework. In the final phase, the researcher ensure that participants' voices were adequately represented in the findings by selecting strong and illustrative statements that best reflected each theme.

## 4. Result

### 4.1 Language competence as identity catalyst: contrasting pathways of integration

This section presents four interrelated themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' experiences: (1) language competence as an identity catalyst, (2) self-awareness as a professional development framework, (3) disciplinary identity

through academic knowledge integration, and (4) student-related identity manifested through pedagogical engagement. Each theme offers insight into how student-teachers internalize, respond to, and reflect upon language competence as part of their evolving professional identities during international teaching practicums. The findings reveal two distinctly different trajectories in how language competence functioned as a transformative agent in shaping professional identity. The participants, Kiana and Windy, both encountered challenges rooted in their linguistic self-perceptions. However, the ways in which they responded to these challenges exposed contrasting identity orientations and pedagogical mindsets.

Kiana's journey can be characterized as an instance of transformative growth. Confronted by the high proficiency of her students, she initially grappled with doubt and hesitation. Rather than allowing these insecurities to undermine her confidence, she reframed them as developmental opportunities. Language, for her, evolved from a perceived deficiency into a vital medium of connection, agency, and empowerment. As Kiana reflected,

*"When I was observing, I felt quite like, 'Oh no, will I be able to do this?' Because I felt that their English could be, could be on par with ours. Although not all of them... but some had really already, uh, become fluent in English, you know. Especially those in the upper classes, ninth grade and above, their English was really, really good already."*

(Excerpt 1, Kiana\_T2.5)

Instead of retreating from the challenge, she repositioned herself not as an infallible expert but as a facilitator of language experience. She embraced the role of an intermediary who could guide learners toward greater fluency through encouragement rather than linguistic perfectionism. Her teaching philosophy was grounded in authenticity and engagement, which she articulated as follows:

*“Teaching English, right? In my opinion, teaching English is where we as teachers are more about giving... We’re just intermediaries, because we can’t... English isn’t... it’s not like other subjects where you can say ‘Oh, this is like this, oh, this is like that.’ It’s more like, uh, in my opinion, teaching English is more about familiarizing the students with it, you know. This is what English feels like. How does English, uh, sound like. Then, how should you, uh, speak it, that’s how it is, ma’am.”*

(Excerpt 2, Kiana\_T2.1)

Through this lens, language became not merely a set of rules to be mastered but a lived experience to be co-constructed with her learners. Her professional identity was forged through resilience, reflection, and a redefinition of competence that centered relational learning and student empowerment.

In contrast, Windy's trajectory was shaped by ongoing linguistic anxiety and a heightened fear of negative evaluation. Her experience was marked by what may be termed anxious competence negotiation. Rather than embracing ambiguity or imperfection, she sought to minimize perceived risk by exercising rigid control over instructional content and delivery. She crafted detailed scripts for each lesson and rehearsed challenging pronunciations in advance. This coping strategy, while demonstrating dedication, reflected an underlying preoccupation with error avoidance and approval-seeking. Windy admitted,

*“I spent hours writing out exactly what I would say in class, even practicing pronunciation of difficult words, because I was terrified of making mistakes in front of students who might judge my English.”*

(Excerpt 3, Windy\_T.1.1)

Her approach underscored a strong internalized pressure to perform linguistic accuracy rather than to foster communicative authenticity. Consequently, her emerging teacher identity remained closely tied to performance and correctness, limiting her capacity to

fully embrace spontaneity, risk-taking, and pedagogical creativity in the classroom.

These contrasting narratives reveal that language competence is not a static attribute but a lived and emotionally charged experience that profoundly shapes professional identity. Where Kiana translated linguistic uncertainty into growth and agency, Windy responded with defensive preparation and restraint. These findings highlight the need to reframe language competence in teacher education as a flexible, identity-forming process rather than a fixed prerequisite. The affective and cognitive responses to language-related challenges ultimately delineated their developmental pathways and offer insight into how student-teachers negotiate the dual demands of linguistic performance and pedagogical presence during international teaching experiences.

#### 4.2 Self-awareness as professional development framework

Self-awareness emerged as a foundational element in the student-teachers’ professional identity formation. Rather than serving as a passive reflection of their capabilities, it functioned as a strategic lens through which both participants assessed, refined, and adapted their instructional practice. The data reveal that while both participants possessed self-awareness, the depth and direction of its application distinguished their developmental trajectories.

Kiana's narrative exemplifies how self-awareness can serve as a structured and empowering mechanism for professional growth. Her journey was marked by deliberate self-evaluation and continuous action toward improvement. Central to her approach was the use of a personal logbook, where she systematically documented her daily teaching-related activities. This tool not only reflected her commitment to accountability but also demonstrated her ability to diagnose instructional challenges and design targeted interventions. The following excerpt from her logbook captures the level of organization and intentionality she brought to her learning process:

Date	Activities	Start	End	Duration	Activity proof	Status
24/09/23	Discussing the plan of community service. Doing research regarding learning materials. Working on proposal outline	10:00	17:00	420 minutes	visiting	Validated

**Excerpt 4:** Kiana’s Logbook

This detailed record served as both a reflective instrument and a developmental roadmap. It enabled her to track not only her time management but also her evolving professional strategies.

Her awareness of pedagogical gaps extended beyond mere acknowledgment. Kiana actively pursued resources to fill those gaps. Her proactive stance is reflected in her interview, where she

described the absence of formal textbooks and the need to independently source teaching materials:

**Excerpt 5.(TK.2.2):**

Kiana: *Mhm.*

Interviewer: *But, the template was really given by, uh, their mentor.*

Kiana: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *So, does that mean with a textbook?*

Kiana: *No, there's no book—*

Interviewer: *No textbook at all? So where do we get the materials from?*

Kiana: *Google, search on our own.*

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Kiana: *Because, we were told, "you'll be teaching passive active voice". So it's up to us, for example, how we want to do it. Oh at that time, oh because their curriculum is, uh, focused on this, literature, literature, [...] literature oriented towards American literature*

In addition to identifying and addressing her weaknesses, Kiana maximized her existing strengths. Her initiative to expand lesson content beyond what was provided by her mentor was formally acknowledged in her teaching evaluation:

**Excerpt 6 (TK.1.2)– Time and Resource Management:**

...In terms of the learning resources, the demonstrator did not solely rely on the materials of the lesson that the mentor gave to them. She even explored the internet to expand the content of the subject which is beneficial to the learning of the learners...

This acknowledgement illustrates how self-awareness, when paired with initiative, becomes a driver of pedagogical flexibility and innovation. As Kiana encountered feedback and situational challenges, she responded with openness and adaptability. Her evolving self-perception enabled her to reshape her professional identity as someone committed to continuous learning and improvement, rather than constrained by limitations or external expectations.

In contrast, Windy's self-awareness was shaped more acutely by emotional uncertainty and linguistic vulnerability. Her awareness of limitations did not hinder her; rather, it propelled her to act with strategic intent. However, unlike Kiana, whose reflection was structured and expansive, Windy's introspection was often driven by anxiety and self-doubt. She recalled the tension between excitement and apprehension before departure:

**Excerpt 7 (TK.1.7):**

Interviewer: *Yes. As a pre-service teacher, what did Windy think? At that time? Now that you've passed, you're going to depart, what were you thinking?*

Windy: *Actually when I passed, I was happy,*

*ma'am, because previously I was very excited, but as time went on, I started overthinking, wondering if I could really do this or not?*

Despite these doubts, Windy demonstrated resilience by seeking practical support. She reviewed lesson plans from peers, consulted experienced participants, and meticulously noted effective strategies. This behavior reflects a form of adaptive professionalism, where personal insecurities are not avoided but acknowledged and actively managed. Her efforts signify an emerging identity grounded in preparation and perseverance, even if still tempered by caution and hesitancy.

Overall, the contrast between the two cases illuminates the dual nature of self-awareness in teacher development. When aligned with structured reflection and intentional practice, self-awareness can catalyze confident, adaptive professionalism. However, when rooted in insecurity, it may necessitate external support and validation to evolve into sustained pedagogical growth. In both narratives, self-awareness proved essential not only for recognizing professional gaps but for shaping the paths each student-teacher took to navigate and overcome them.

### **4.3 Disciplinary Identity: Academic Knowledge Integration in Professional Practice**

The development of disciplinary identity plays a crucial role in shaping a teacher's sense of professionalism, especially during the transitional stage from pre-service training to real-world practice. In this study, disciplinary identity is understood as the capacity of student-teachers to internalize, personalize, and activate their academic knowledge in meaningful pedagogical ways. The findings reveal contrasting patterns in how the two participants navigated this integration process, each illustrating the extent to which disciplinary knowledge was either transformed into a pedagogical asset or remained a source of uncertainty.

Kiana demonstrated a cohesive and intentional connection between her academic background and her teaching practice. Her approach was informed by her studies in TESOL, but what set her apart was her ability to engage with that knowledge critically and apply it constructively in her classroom. Rather than treating academic theory as something to be remembered or mechanically applied, she used it as a foundation for planning, reflecting, and innovating. Her mentor's evaluations consistently recognized this maturity and highlighted her effectiveness in subject knowledge, assessment design, and instructional methods.

#### **Knowledge on the subject matter – Proficient**

The demonstrator exhibited sufficient knowledge in the delivery of her lesson. She had a good

command of the language, and she adequately delivered the lesson with satisfaction in the part of the students.

(Excerpt 8, Kiana's Mentor Evaluation\_T.3.1)

### **Assessment of learning – Proficient**

The demonstrator exhibited an adequate prior knowledge in terms of assessing the learning of the student. Assessment while learning (formative) was given to students to know their learning progress. This came in the form of enhancement of learning and developing mastery of the lesson. Moreover, after the successful delivery of the lesson, the demonstrator administered a summative assessment to measure the overall learning and mastery of the learners to the lesson discussed.

(Excerpt 9, Kiana's Mentor Evaluation\_T.4.1)

### **Instructional Strategies–Proficient**

The demonstrator utilized a variety of instruction strategies, including the use of technology. She used slideshow presentations to give aide to her lesson. In terms of inclusivity, the demonstrator distributed equal opportunity for learners to participate and place into the mainstreaming of the successful learning of the rest of students. She showed no bias and selectiveness in terms of students' participation.

(Excerpt 10, Kiana's Mentor Evaluation\_T.3.3)

These evaluations reflect a strong disciplinary identity rooted in conceptual clarity and instructional creativity. Kiana did not wait passively for materials or guidance. Instead, she actively tailored her teaching plans to meet curricular expectations in a new cultural context. Her initiative and intellectual engagement are evident in her own reflection:

*"I researched the Indonesian curriculum extensively before arriving and found creative ways to align my theoretical knowledge with local educational expectations. When standard materials seemed insufficient, I explored additional internet resources to expand my teaching repertoire."*

(Excerpt 11, Kiana\_T.2.3)

This statement reveals a teacher who sees knowledge as fluid and responsive rather than fixed and procedural. Kiana's disciplinary identity evolved through reflection, improvisation, and context-sensitive application. Her practice was shaped not only by what she knew, but by how she questioned

and recontextualized that knowledge in ways that supported her students and enriched her instructional confidence.

In contrast, Windy's experience reflected a disconnect between academic preparation and professional engagement. Her motivation to enter the English education program was not grounded in a passion for teaching but in personal aspirations unrelated to the field. As a result, she approached her practicum with a sense of ambivalence, which undermined her disciplinary confidence. Instead of drawing strength from her training, she found herself overwhelmed by the intellectual demands of the classroom.

*"I was constantly worried about students asking detailed questions about syntax, like the nuanced usage of spaces between words. I just didn't have the deep knowledge needed to answer confidently."*

(Excerpt 12, Windy\_T.3.3)

This excerpt captures a moment of cognitive dissonance where the gap between knowledge and practice becomes apparent. Windy's anxiety stemmed not only from her awareness of what she did not know, but from her inability to access and apply theoretical knowledge in real time. Her uncertainty compromised her instructional presence and left her vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy.

Windy's perception of her academic path as a steppingstone rather than a foundation for professional identity significantly influenced her approach to teaching. The absence of a meaningful connection between theory and practice left her with a fragmented sense of her role. Her disciplinary knowledge remained passive, unintegrated, and largely untested within the practical demands of language education.

These two cases illustrate that disciplinary identity is not automatically developed through academic coursework. Rather, it depends on how student-teachers engage with knowledge, how they relate it to context, and whether they see themselves as agents of learning or recipients of information. Kiana's experience shows how academic learning can become a tool for empowerment when it is critically examined and practically adapted. Windy's case, on the other hand, demonstrates how academic disengagement can lead to hesitation, self-doubt, and diminished pedagogical impact.

Ultimately, disciplinary identity is not simply about possessing knowledge. It involves the ability to activate that knowledge in ways that are contextually relevant, pedagogically sound, and personally meaningful. Teacher education programs must therefore go beyond content delivery and provide space for inquiry, reflection, and identity work. Only



then can disciplinary knowledge move from the pages of textbooks into the dynamic space of the classroom, where it shapes not only what teachers do, but who they become.

#### 4.4 Student-Related Identity: Pedagogical Approaches and Student Engagement

This Student-related identity reflects how pre-service teachers view their role in relation to learners, how they interpret students' needs, and how they design engagement strategies that foster meaningful learning experiences. This dimension of professional identity is particularly revealing, as it encompasses the teacher's capacity to be responsive, inclusive, and pedagogically flexible. The findings in this sub-theme highlight two distinct expressions of this identity, with Kiana demonstrating a high level of responsiveness to learner diversity, while Windy struggled to convert her conceptual understanding of student-centered teaching into effective classroom implementation.

Kiana's student-related identity was defined by an intentional commitment to inclusive pedagogy. She adopted a student-centered approach that emphasized interactivity, accessibility, and differentiated instruction. Her mentor's evaluation praised her for incorporating a diverse range of instructional methods, including digital tools and varied classroom techniques that promoted active participation. This approach was not only innovative but also strategic, ensuring that students with different learning styles were accommodated throughout the learning process.

*The demonstrator utilized a variety of instructional strategies, including the use of technology.*

*(Excerpt 13, Kiana's Mentor\_T.4.2)*

In addition to diverse instructional methods, Kiana also demonstrated strong assessment literacy. She anticipated the need to measure students' comprehension immediately following lesson delivery and took proactive steps to address varying levels of achievement. Her preparation included the development of both formal assessment tools and corresponding remediation plans. The intent was not simply to evaluate, but to ensure that no learner was left behind due to gaps in understanding.

*The demonstrator anticipated in advance the measurement of learning of the students after the successful delivery of the lesson. A well-crafted assessment tool was developed, and individually distributed to assess the learnings of students. A well-crafted remediation tool was prepared in advance. If the outcome is on a positive note, the learners will proceed to learning the new concept or topic. Otherwise, a remediation will be given if the result is opposite to the expected outcome.*

*(Excerpt 14, Kiana's Mentor\_T.4.3)*

Through this dual focus on inclusive instruction and adaptive assessment, Kiana positioned herself as an empathetic and strategic educator. Her identity as a teacher extended beyond delivering content to actively curating student experiences. She was attuned to learner differences and structured her lessons to be both equitable and participatory. This pedagogical stance was underpinned by the belief that effective teaching is inherently relational. Her capacity to create a learning environment that responded to student needs illustrates the maturity of her student-related identity and her readiness to transition into full professional practice.

Windy, on the other hand, exhibited an awareness of the value of student-centered approaches but encountered difficulties in implementing them effectively. She acknowledged the importance of using interactive techniques such as games and discussions, particularly for language instruction where engagement plays a critical role in learner confidence and retention. However, her practical application of these methods was constrained by limited time management and uncertainty in instructional pacing.

Windy: *Yes, I, uh, I apologize because I've gotten used to being here for a while, ma'am, and one hour is actually really tight if—*

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Windy: *to practice teaching,*

Interviewer: *Teaching.*

Windy: *playing games, having interactive discussions, one hour is not enough.*

*(Excerpt 14, Windy\_T.2.4)*

This excerpt reveals a common challenge faced by novice teachers: the difficulty of aligning lesson plans with time-bound realities while still maintaining an interactive and student-responsive approach. Although Windy understood the theoretical importance of student engagement, she struggled with instructional prioritization. Her attempt to balance multiple pedagogical objectives within a fixed timeframe resulted in a sense of pressure rather than empowerment.

Windy's pedagogical stance was shaped by an internal tension between intention and execution. She wanted her lessons to be dynamic and student-focused, yet lacked the organizational clarity and classroom management strategies needed to make those ambitions materialize effectively. Unlike Kiana, whose student-related identity was reinforced through careful design and reflection, Windy's identity remained in flux, caught between aspiration and hesitation.

These divergent cases highlight that student-related identity is not solely shaped by pedagogical knowledge, but by the capacity to adapt that knowledge to real classroom conditions. Kiana's ability to develop inclusive strategies, anticipate

learning gaps, and prepare differentiated assessments reflects a well-formed teaching identity rooted in learner engagement. Windy's experience illustrates the developmental nature of this identity, showing that awareness alone is insufficient without structured support, planning, and practice.

In conclusion, this sub-theme reveals that effective student-related identity development relies on a combination of pedagogical vision, planning discipline, and reflective action. It also underscores the need for teacher education programs to provide more scaffolding in time management, lesson design, and responsive teaching techniques. When student-teachers are empowered to understand learners not only as recipients of instruction but as co-constructors of the classroom experience, their professional identity becomes both humanistic and pedagogically sound.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study offer a detailed understanding of how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student-teachers integrate language competence into their developing professional identities during international teaching practicums. Through the lens of two distinct cases, the study reveals how language proficiency, reflective self-awareness, disciplinary knowledge, and student interaction are interwoven within the identity formation process. These interconnections show that the development of a teacher's professional identity is a multifaceted process shaped by both internal dispositions and external classroom realities.

Language competence surfaced as a central influence in shaping professional identity. Kiana's case highlights how initial linguistic uncertainty can be reframed as a productive force for growth and transformation. Her ability to interpret challenges as opportunities reflects the idea that language teacher identity is not fixed but is continuously negotiated through experiences and interactions, as proposed by Trent (2013). Her transformation also aligns with the dynamic identity construction discussed by Varghese et al. (2016), where language becomes a vehicle for empowerment and self-positioning in the classroom. Conversely, Windy's experience underscores how unaddressed linguistic anxiety can hinder identity development and professional confidence. This emotional vulnerability supports Golombek and Doran's (2014) findings, which suggest that emotional and cognitive processes are deeply intertwined in shaping teacher identity. The emotional strain also echoes Norton's (2013) theory that language is not merely a communicative medium, but also a site of identity negotiation, particularly in intercultural teaching contexts.

Self-awareness functioned as both a reflective mirror and a strategic tool in the process of

professional development. Kiana's thoughtful use of reflection to identify her limitations, track progress, and plan targeted improvements reflects Farrell's (2018) emphasis on reflection as an essential component in teacher growth. Her ability to translate insight into action is supported by Johnson's (2009) sociocultural theory, which views identity as emerging through engagement with challenges and mediated experiences. Although Windy also demonstrated awareness of her limitations, her self-awareness tended to manifest in protective ways, serving more as an internalized coping mechanism than a driver of pedagogical innovation. This contrast demonstrates that self-awareness must be coupled with structured support and guided reflection in order to be transformative.

In the area of disciplinary identity, the findings revealed a clear difference in how participants translated theoretical knowledge into professional practice. Kiana consistently applied principles from her academic training to classroom decision-making, demonstrating a reflective, inquiry-based approach to pedagogy. Her actions illustrate what Borg (2015) describes as teacher cognition, in which professional knowledge, personal beliefs, and classroom action interact closely. Her agency in navigating curriculum demands and modifying content also reflects the role of personal initiative in professional development, as described by Kayi-Aydar (2015). In contrast, Windy struggled to connect her academic background with the intellectual demands of the classroom, indicating a fragmentation of disciplinary identity. Her uncertain grasp of core linguistic knowledge and her reliance on surface-level preparation reflect the dissonance described by Kubanyiova (2012), where a lack of alignment between personal goals and professional expectations can impede identity formation.

Student-related identity further illuminated the difference between pedagogical vision and classroom enactment. Kiana's ability to design inclusive instruction, implement formative assessment, and plan targeted remediation reflects the socially constructed nature of teacher identity as explained by Barkhuizen (2017). Her responsiveness to student needs, flexibility in delivery, and sense of shared learning align with Tsui's (2003) notion of adaptive expertise in teaching. Windy, while conceptually aware of the importance of learner engagement, found it challenging to apply these strategies under time constraints. Her experience illustrates the theory-practice divide that many pre-service teachers face, a challenge emphasized by Farrell (2015) and reaffirmed by Grossman et al., (2009), who observed that the enactment of effective teaching practices is central to the construction of teacher identity.

This study contributes to several underexplored areas in the literature. While prior research has addressed language teacher identity in general (Varghese et al., 2016; Liu and Xu, 2011), there is

limited focus on how student-teachers, particularly non-native English speakers, integrate language competence into their identity construction during international practicum experiences. Studies by Yuan (2016) and Lee (2013) have explored coping mechanisms, yet there remains a gap in understanding how such mechanisms evolve into coherent identity strategies within the context of foundational teaching experiences. Moreover, much of the available literature centers on experienced educators, rather than student-teachers who are actively constructing their professional self-concepts during the practicum phase.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic application of Pennington and Richards' (2016) framework of foundational language teacher competence. By examining the interplay of language-related identity, self-knowledge and awareness, disciplinary grounding, and student-centered engagement, the study presents identity formation as a developmental process that is emotional, cognitive, pedagogical, and contextual. It highlights that professional identity is shaped not only by technical mastery but by the ways in which student-teachers interpret, reflect on, and respond to the realities of teaching in diverse cultural settings.

These findings have practical implications for teacher education programs. Institutions must move beyond a narrow focus on methodological training and incorporate structured opportunities for identity work. Reflective practices should be scaffolded with feedback from mentors and peers. Language support should include strategies for building confidence and classroom presence, especially for non-native English speakers. Furthermore, coursework should provide opportunities for student-teachers to contextualize disciplinary knowledge through case studies, field experiences, and curriculum adaptation exercises. Mentorship models should be designed to foster agency, reflection, and pedagogical experimentation, allowing student-teachers to transform challenges into milestones of growth.

Future research should extend this inquiry by examining longitudinal developments in professional identity beyond the practicum. Such research could explore how identity evolves across the first years of teaching and how early practicum experiences continue to influence pedagogical beliefs and practices. Comparative studies across institutional, regional, or cultural settings could further illuminate how environmental factors mediate identity development. Research on the role of digital reflection tools, such as blogs, video journals, or online communities of practice, could also provide insight into how student-teachers engage in sustained identity construction. Finally, further exploration is needed into how variables such as gender, multilingual background, and teaching motivation interact with identity trajectories in pre-service language teachers.

## 6. Conclusions

This study highlights the pivotal role of language competence in shaping the professional identity of EFL student-teachers during international teaching practicums, demonstrating that it extends beyond technical skill to become a formative force in building confidence, pedagogical agency, and classroom presence. The findings reveal that identity development is shaped through the interplay of language-related experiences, reflective self-awareness, disciplinary knowledge, and student engagement. The contrasting trajectories of the two participants illustrate this complexity: one embraced language-related challenges as opportunities for growth, actively integrating reflection and adaptive teaching practices, while the other struggled with persistent linguistic anxiety, resulting in a more hesitant and performance-oriented identity. These insights affirm the need for teacher education programs to provide structured reflection, targeted language support, and meaningful opportunities for connecting theory with real-world teaching. The novelty of this study lies in its holistic application of Pennington and Richards' (2016) framework to pre-service teachers in intercultural contexts, offering a more nuanced understanding of how foundational competencies contribute to professional identity formation at an early stage. This study contributes to the broader field of language teacher education by advocating for the integration of identity-focused pedagogies that foster resilience and adaptability in global classrooms. Future research is encouraged to explore how identity continues to evolve beyond the practicum, particularly through longitudinal studies that examine the role of digital reflection tools, institutional cultures, and multilingual experiences in shaping long-term professional development.

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