

## From Imagination to Practice: Unravelling the Professional Identity of a Pre-service EFL Teacher

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### ABSTRACT

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This study uses a narrative inquiry method, focusing on the transformation journey of a pre-service EFL teacher named Brandon (pseudonym), to explore the complex process of professional identity construction and reconstruction for pre-service teachers to teach EFL from a teaching practicum. The study gathered information about critical events that shaped Brandon's professional identity through semi-structured interviews and diaries before and during his teaching practice. Using an innovative "story constellation" approach, the research creates a three-dimensional narrative, weaving together temporal, personal, social, and contextual aspects. This exploration of Brandon's journey illuminates the core tenets of effective language teaching, including adaptability, empathy, continuous learning, and a student-centred approach, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the (re)construction of EFL teachers' professional identities. This study widens knowledge of EFL teachers' pre-teaching professional experiences and offers important implications for teacher education programs.

### Introduction

Pre-service EFL teachers' professional identity development is a crucial yet challenging process (Gutiérrez et al., 2009). Acting as role models, teachers demonstrate vital characteristics such as humor, tolerance, trustworthiness, and honesty, as pointed out by various researchers (Bashir et al., 2014; Benekos, 2016; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2019; Ülavere & Veisson, 2015). Besides, educational programs, responsibility shifts, and interactions within schools are some variables that influence this emotional journey (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2017; Sutton et al., 2009). Many theories and frameworks have shed light on this identity development process, such as Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, Lave and Wenger's (1991) contextualization theory, Schön's (1983) reflective practice theory, and Tillema's (2000) the model of teacher professional development.

Research on constructing teachers' professional identity is a global focus, particularly in second language teacher education (SLTE) (Ardi et al., 2023; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Solari & Martín Ortega, 2020). This study area is especially pertinent for pre-service EFL teachers transitioning from students to practitioners (Yazan, 2018). In Vietnam, English teacher education programs follow a standardized curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education and Training (2015). These programs cover general and specialized knowledge, including an 8-week, 5-credit teaching practicum. This practicum is crucial for training pre-service teachers, in which university lecturers and school teachers supervise them. During this period, they engage in instructional planning, lesson observations, lesson plan development, and independently teaching at least eight lessons. This hands-on experience is vital for enhancing their pedagogical skills, highlighting the importance of teaching practice in their education (Nguyen, 2014). This stage plays a significant role in influencing pre-service EFL teachers' career choices (Nguyen, 2014), prompting local studies to explore how contextual factors, mentorship, and personal experiences shape their professional identity (Le et al., 2023; Ly & Tran, 2019; Tran et al., 2022). Additionally, recent educational reforms in Vietnam have shifted English language education towards a student-centered approach and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Vu & Nguyen, 2021). These changes challenge pre-service EFL teachers as they adapt to real-world teaching environments through which their professional identity continues to evolve in response to reflective practice, feedback, and changes in educational contexts, reflecting the dynamic nature of the teaching profession.

Several studies have sought to determine the impact of specific contexts on professional identity transformation (Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Sardabi et al., 2018; Yuan & Liu, 2020). Recent studies have also focused on the challenges faced by novice teachers and their professional identity reconstruction (Fallah et al., 2021; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Trinh et al., 2022). These studies clarify the complexities of professional identity development among novice teachers in different contexts. They have gained valuable insights into constructing and reconstructing professional identity among pre-service EFL teachers by emphasizing the dynamic nature of identity transformation, the influence of specific teaching contexts, and the role of support systems. Their findings also provide valuable insights for both experienced teachers and novice teachers, guiding future English teachers' preparation and professional development, especially exploring various aspects of teacher identity, including its formation, characteristics, and dimensions. However, there remains a need to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and the specific experiences of pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practicum. In Vietnam, more research is needed to focus explicitly on pre-service EFL teachers' experiences, interactions, and reflections before and during their teaching practicum and how these experiences contribute to developing their professional identity (Tran & Huynh, 2017; Ly & Tran, 2019). Therefore, this study addresses this research gap by conducting a narrative inquiry into a pre-service EFL teacher's professional identity construction and reconstruction in the Vietnamese context.

## Literature Review

### *Teachers' professional identity*

In education, the concept of professional identity comprises three key definitions: self-images nurtured by teachers (Knowles, 1992), the connection between teacher duties and identity

(Volkman, 1997), and values shaped by personal experiences (Tickle, 2000). Besides, Beijaard et al., (2000) describe it as a combination of subject matter, pedagogical, and didactical expertise, influencing behavior and roles in the classroom (Le, 2013; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). Furthermore, Trinh et al. (2022) emphasize cognitive knowledge, self-awareness, and relationships, indicating what teachers find essential in their profession. Within this complex pattern of developmental processes, Thelen and Smith's (1994) Dynamic System Theory considers multiple emerging paths, which produce a broad spectrum of professional formations. Finally, Zhao et al. (2022) prove in their quantitative research methods that it also enables people to be grouped according to how far they perform the stated levels of professional identity to provide more details of the complex web of sometimes contextual influences that shape the educators' sense of self in the specified context of the educational setting.

### *Teachers' professional identity (re)construction*

Teachers' professional identity, shaped by personal, social, and educational factors (Bressler & Rotter, 2017; Doğan & Erdiller Yatmaz, 2018), refers to their perceptions, roles, beliefs, and values in teaching. The construction process begins in pre-service education, involving coursework, practicum, and reflection (Beijaard et al., 2004). Then, novice teachers adapt their initial ideas during real classroom experiences, influenced by interactions with students, colleagues, and the community (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010). With time and experience, professional identity is reconstructed through continuous reflection, professional development, and adapting to educational changes (Farrell, 2015). Additionally, external factors such as school culture and social norms influence teachers' identities, leading to adjustments in their teaching methods (Hofstede, 1980). Reflective activities such as journaling and peer collaboration are also crucial to this ongoing process (Schön, 1983).

### *Factors influencing identity formation*

Various potential factors influencing pre-service EFL teachers' professional identity formation have been proven in the literature, such as positive language learning experiences and sociocultural influences (Beijaard et al., 2004; Darvin & Norton, 2015). Their identity is also molded in teacher training programs, impacted by curriculum, teaching methods, and mentorship (Day & Gu, 2010; Farrell, 2015). Cultural identities become distinct when these things change and grow (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Additionally, emphasis is placed on a shift from traditional instructional modes to modern pedagogy in language education to make it less passive and student-centered (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Student motivation and learning outcomes are enhanced through interactive activities, project-based learning, or technology integration. As a result, teacher education programs cultivate professional identity.

Furthermore, it is noted that adverse childhood experiences impact some of the career choices, including becoming a preschool teacher (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014). Moreover, the alternative ways in which in-service teachers develop their identity include teaching experience, emotion, and mental health (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Li & Liu, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). In comparison, the ecological system theory enlightens the factors that shape the teacher's identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). It provides knowledge about different aspects that influence their career paths, emphasizing the complexity of personal as well as social and environmental

narratives as they unfold in shaping and reshaping teachers' professional selves in time. In addition, there is another context: Weaver-Hightower's (2008) ecological perspective framework. This model also comes with four parts of the metaphor of ecological units: actors, relationships, environment, structures, and process. It identifies the nuanced interdependence in EFL teachers' (re) professional identity construction.

Educational relationships and mentorship, which focus on the interaction processes between educators and learners in formal educational contexts, also stress the critical nature of positive education-related interactions for developing one's professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2000). Mentoring helps the pre-service teachers be guided and encouraged in teaching practices they intend to adopt and practice appropriate methods and disciplinary actions to enforce when teaching. These relational experiences contribute to professional identity development, indicating the sociology culture, which is part of the educational environments (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010).

Also, intrinsic motivation explores the internal drive and personal motivations that propel educators toward professional growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation indicates how a sense of purpose, autonomy, and lifelong learning among educators is fostered, which is essential for sustained professional and identity development in teaching. The integration of intrinsic motivation enriches our understanding of how personal agency and self-determination contribute to the construction of teachers' professional identities (Beijaard et al., 2004; Farrell, 2015).

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

According to Gay (2021), educators should change their attitudes about multiculturalism to embrace it to ensure that teaching and learning occur in culturally responsive contexts. The incorporation of Multicultural Education, that is, multicultural content in the curriculum and a multicultural approach to teaching, will reduce discriminative practices. Further, quality care and development tailored to cultural interactions also focus on students of diverse origins to achieve culturally relevant learning; intercultural communication guarantees learner accomplishment parity. Therefore, teacher preparation programs must be as culturally responsive to ethnic diversity as K-12 classroom instruction.

### *Constructivism*

The constructivist approach offers a valuable theoretical framework for teacher professional identity development. Constructivism posits that the learner constructs everything that one learns and knows from the lived experiences and interactions, hence the environment (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Concerning teacher identity, Miller (2012) points out that constructionist conceptions focus on individual experiences, reflective practice, and social interactions that bring about the conceptualization of teacher identity.

From a constructivist perspective, teachers' professional identities are not static but evolve through ongoing interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader educational community (Beijaard et al., 2004). Teachers construct understanding and develop their identities, reflect on their experiences, and modify their beliefs and practices based on these interactions. The constructivist approach emphasizes the importance of individual autonomy and context in

teachers' professional identity development.

### *Reflective Practice*

Emphasizing the active role teachers play in constructing and reconstructing their professional identities through reflection and ongoing learning, reflective practices encourage teachers to critically examine their learning experiences, identifying areas in which they need to develop and refine their professional identity (Schön, 1983).

The constructivist approach (Brooks & Brooks, 1999) combined with reflective practice as a methodological approach provides a robust framework for understanding and examining teacher professional identity development (Schön, 1983).

### *Research Questions*

This study explored a pre-service EFL teacher's professional identity construction and reconstruction before and during the teaching practicum. By employing the narrative inquiry method, the study sought to provide a nuanced, participant-centred, temporally sensitive, and constructivist approach to understanding Brandon's professional identity development as an EFL teacher. It attempted to address the following questions:

1. How did the participant construct his professional identity before the teaching practicum?
2. How did the participant reconstruct his professional identity during the teaching practicum?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The study was conducted at a large public university in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region. The English language teacher education program is one of the university's significant training programs. Brandon was in his final year of the program and participated in the teaching practicum at a high school in a rural area. This made him a typical participant within the study's target population, and his engagement in the program offered insights into the experiences and challenges faced by pre-service EFL teachers in the region. He had a very good ability at school and has not taken English language proficiency tests. Hailing from a modest background in a Mekong Delta province, he discovered his passion for teaching while enrolling in the program. Influenced by his parents and guided by his "Heart, Mind, and Authority" philosophy, he delved into his unique experiences before and during the teaching practicum. His philosophy provided the study with personal values and principles influencing his development as a future EFL teacher. Furthermore, this includes his travel from K12 schooling through a four-year English teacher education program at university and involvement in an English Language Teaching reform program at a high school where he taught during the teaching practicum. This is important because it demonstrates a variety of experiences that have influenced the formation of his professional identity. Due to his unique background, experience, philosophical orientation, and active participation in teaching, he is used as a case study to understand the

intricacies involved in professional identity development among pre-service EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. Therefore, this paper aligns with its research aims by examining how a pre-service EFL teacher constructs and reconstructs his professional identity in the context of English language teacher education in Vietnam.

### *Data collection & analysis*

The research employed semi-structured interviews and teaching diaries for data collection. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study because they can capture personal experiences and perspectives, which align with narrative inquiry method. This approach allowed participants to share their unique stories and reflections, enhancing the authenticity of narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). These interviews were conducted both before and during the teaching practicum. Before the teaching practicum, the interview covered the participant's background, motivation, expectations, changes during teacher training, self-assessment, and anticipation for teaching practice. During the teaching practicum, the interview delved into the participant's experiences, reflections, and interactions during the teaching practicum, focusing on how these aspects have shaped and influenced his professional identity as an English teacher (See Appendices for interview questions).

Before the interviews, the participant received explanations of the research's aims and provided informed consent. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes, recorded using portable devices. Vietnamese was used during the interviews to cover the topic and allow flexibility for the participants. Besides, teaching diaries enhanced the study's validity through triangulation and allowed the real-time recording of reflections and experiences. Detailed instructions were provided to the participant on effectively documenting his experiences in the diaries, covering aspects such as lesson planning, classroom interactions, reflections, and mentor-teacher engagements. The participant was requested to maintain teaching diaries in Vietnamese for eight classes.

The research adopted the three-dimensional space narrative inquiry framework, focusing on interaction, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). "Story constellations" contextualized experiences within diverse contexts, allowing for interpretation and reinterpretation over time. Narrative exemplars, presented as story fragments and woven into "story constellations," explored the formation of pre-service EFL teachers' professional identities (Craig & Olson, 2002; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Mishler, 1990).

Analytically, three techniques were employed including broadening, burrowing, and storying and re-storying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These transformed field texts into research texts, contextualizing practicum experiences within literature, examining emerging themes, and positioning evolving identities within professional trajectories. This original toolkit forms the basis for school-based inquiries (Craig, 2015). The analysis process encompassed transcription of interview data, construction of narrative texts, validation by the participant - sharing the narrative texts with the participant to ensure that they accurately reflect his experiences, coding, and categorization of recurring patterns and emerging themes across narratives (Luna-Reyes & Andersen, 2003). Data from teaching diaries and interviews were independently transcribed, coded, and then merged to identify convergences and divergences in Brandon's experiences.

Triangulation involved comparing themes in teaching diaries and interview data to validate findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of Brandon's professional identity (re)construction before and during the teaching practicum.

## Findings

### *Before the Teaching Practicum*

Before the teaching practicum, Brandon shared several critical events associated with his stories to live by (Figure 4.1). These events collectively illustrate the multifaceted process through which Brandon constructed his professional identity. Each aspect contributed to his evolving identity as an English teacher. Supporting evidence to further elaborate on each aspect of the story will be provided in line with this.

### *Early Experiences with English Learning*

Brandon's early encounters with English learning in elementary school were uninspiring and lacked depth, leaving little impact on him. He expressed,

*During primary school, the impression of a particular subject was quite novel as it was a foreign language. It felt more like an introduction and a means of getting acquainted, rather than leaving a strong impression. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

Middle and high school saw a shift towards abstract learning, devoid of practical applications, making it difficult for him to engage with the subject. He said,

*As I progressed to middle school and high school, I found that the subject became more academic and abstract. The textbooks and materials lacked practicality. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

However, during university, Brandon's passion for English was ignited through diverse subjects, extracurricular activities, and practical experiences. Engaging in designing lesson plans and giving presentations allowed him to apply theoretical knowledge practically, enhancing his understanding. He shared,

*When I entered university, I studied different subjects and took part in extracurricular activities. I participated in constructing critical response reports and giving presentations. In particular, I learned public speaking skills such as designing lesson plans or compiling exercises. These experiences provided practical exposure and sparked my interest. In terms of academic content, the depth of learning was greater compared to my years in middle school, high school, and primary school. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

These experiences revealed the real-world relevance of English, transforming it from a mere academic subject to a gateway for communication, self-expression, and cultural exchange. This realization motivated Brandon to pursue a career as an English teacher, driven by his genuine passion for the language and his desire to inspire future students.

### *Influence of English Teachers*

Throughout Brandon's educational journey, he encountered English teachers who tailored their teaching styles to suit students' developmental needs. In elementary school, teachers emphasized discipline and academic standards, laying the foundation for responsibility. He said,

*Most teachers adhere to certain standards, but their management style can vary depending on the age group they teach. For example, in primary school, teachers tend to have stricter discipline in terms of academic etiquette and homework submission. (Interview 1)*

In secondary school, teachers created a supportive, empathetic environment, fostering open communication and guiding students through adolescence challenges. He revealed,

*In the secondary school, the management style remains somewhat similar because this stage coincides with the psychological development of adolescents. Therefore, teachers are meticulous in managing their students' learning process. Additionally, during class time, teachers are enthusiastic and dedicated. Apart from exercises in textbooks, they also provide additional materials for students to work on outside of the classroom. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

High school teachers balanced strictness with flexibility, adjusting their approach based on students' performance. He shared,

*But in high school, the amount of knowledge becomes more extensive, but teachers still maintain their standards in teaching. However, occasionally, they may be more lenient and less strict, without excessive difficulty. There can be some flexibility or adaptability based on the amount of knowledge and the specific situations and exercises in the lesson. Teachers may adjust their approach according to the students' performance and the nature of the tasks. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

He added,

*For example, in elementary school, teachers are fantastic in understanding the students' psychological needs. They are right in the sense that students always comply with their instructions. Additionally, teachers serve as ideal role models for students. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

*As for secondary school, there is a significant change in students' thinking due to the onset of adolescence. However, in general, teachers still maintain a strict approach in teaching. Regardless of the difficulties, teachers are dedicated and provide guidance. They may offer individual conversations to encourage students who are struggling in a particular subject. (Brandon, Interview 1)*



*Moving on to high school, there might be a slight relaxation because students are more mature at this stage. There is still some level of restraint, but it is not necessarily rigid. It could be more of advice-giving, and if students are unable to meet expectations, teachers might let them handle it on their own. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

These interactions highlighted the importance of teachers understanding students' needs, adapting methods, and creating supportive environments.

### *Teaching Methods and Curriculum*

Brandon observed a dominance of traditional teaching methods in his English education, characterized by teacher-led discussions and rote vocabulary learning. He revealed,

*Most teachers taught using the traditional teaching method, where the percentage of teacher talk was typically around 70 to 80%. Throughout the lesson, the teacher played the roles of management, guidance, and correction, with a limited amount of student speaking time. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

He advocated for interactive and communicative teaching techniques, emphasizing the importance of warm-up activities, games, and real-life situations to engage students. He added,

*For example, back then, there was no teaching using modern textbooks or current teaching methods, which typically involve warm-up activities or games to introduce the lesson. Instead, teaching was often done directly. When it came to teaching vocabulary, most teachers would write words on the board and ask students about their meanings and parts of speech, then check and review them with the whole class. The vocabulary teaching method was quite limited compared to now. I believe it has changed because nowadays teachers use visual aids such as pictures or provide examples for different situations. They may even use puppets during speaking practice. Speaking practice itself was rare in my subject curriculum when I was studying. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

Moreover, Brandon emphasized the need for more in-class speaking practice, proposing interactive activities like role-plays and group discussions. He said,

*Even in middle school and high school, speaking practice was only conducted during oral exams or assessments. In those instances, teachers would provide instructions for students to study at home or give them the assignment along with some hints for them to work on independently. However, there were limited opportunities for in-class speaking practice, or if there were any, they were scarce within a particular lesson. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

He stressed the need for more in-class speaking practice, proposing interactive activities like role-plays and group discussions to create a student-centered, communicative learning environment.

### *Personal Motivation and Professional Growth*

Initially, Brandon's decision to study English lacked personal motivation, being primarily influenced by family encouragement and convenience due to its proximity to his home. He said,

*It's not really about personal motivation because initially, I didn't have a specific direction for studying this field. I didn't even have a clear plan for pursuing higher education. However, partly due to my family's influence, I chose this field because it was conveniently located near my home, with a commute of about 40 minutes. Therefore, the motivation didn't originate from within me but rather from my family's encouragement to pursue education. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

Reflecting on his journey, Brandon identified two distinct phases: the first encompassed the beginning of his university studies until the middle of his second year. In contrast, the second phase spanned from the middle of his second year until now.

In the first phase, he struggled due to a lack of interest, ineffective learning methods, and poor time management skills. His introverted nature posed challenges in communication-intensive activities required for English language teaching.

*In the initial stage, I lacked motivation to study, and I was generally careless, not investing much effort into my studies. This was due to several reasons, including a lack of intrinsic motivation, the absence of effective study methods, poor time management skills, and my introverted nature. As a result, I had limited communication skills, which posed a challenge in this field of study that requires frequent group work, communication, and presentations. I struggled in these aspects. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

However, a significant shift occurred in the second phase when specialized courses and practical teaching aspects ignited his genuine interest.

*However, in the second stage, I gradually developed a strong interest in my studies. I had the opportunity to delve into specialized subjects such as vocabulary teaching methods, grammar instruction, and strategies for teaching the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Currently, I am still learning about English language teaching methods for young learners. In addition, I have the opportunity to study practical subjects such as instructional design, assessment and evaluation, and the psychology of English language learners. These subjects provide valuable insights into understanding the psychological nature of students in the classroom. It helps me address classroom challenges and guide students to achieve better learning outcomes. (Interview 1)*

This transformation marked his professional growth, emphasizing the importance of personal motivation and continuous self-reflection in shaping his identity as a teacher.

### *Qualities of a Successful English Teacher*

Brandon's initial perception of an ideal teacher emphasized fluency and effortless classroom management. However, practical experiences led him to value a teacher's strong foundation in knowledge, effective teaching methods, and understanding of classroom dynamics.

*Talking about the initial model, I believe I would be the raw, unedited version of a teacher who is naturally skilled and capable of handling any classroom situation. This means being able to handle and resolve all classroom issues and effectively transmit the best information to students. It could simply be an excellent English teacher who speaks English fluently, like the wind. In Southern Vietnamese dialect, we say someone speaks English "like the wind." However, after gaining practical experience through internships and observing classes in various schools, I have come to realize that the important aspect of the teacher model has evolved significantly. A teacher should start from being "standard" meaning having a strong foundation of knowledge, along with good teaching methods and skills. They should also be able to grasp the classroom dynamics to adapt their teaching and handle pedagogical situations accordingly. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

Before entering the teaching practicum, he pursued building the image of a teacher with three virtues: *Heart* (Tâm), *Mind* (Trí), and *Authority* (Uy). In terms of *Heart*, Brandon stressed the importance of genuine dedication, patience, and active listening. He believed teachers should provide accurate information, admit mistakes, and inspire students to learn. He aimed to make English accessible and engaging by nurturing students' passion for learning. Regarding *Mind*, Brandon emphasized the role of knowledge and wisdom in guiding students. He wanted to use his expertise to show that learning English is achievable. He valued educating students about the right learning methods and correcting misconceptions promptly.

*I believe that teachers should possess professional ethics that are focused on the Heart (Tâm) and Mind (Trí) of the teacher. The Heart and Mind of a teacher require wholehearted dedication to teaching students. In particular, teachers need to have patience and actively listen to their students. Sometimes, we need to truly listen and take a step back to allow our students to open up to us. Our Heart can guide us to teach accurate and standardized knowledge. If we make pronunciation or vocabulary mistakes, we cannot hide them behind our professional facade. Instead, we need to correct ourselves promptly and provide accurate information to our students, as teachers are not just teaching one generation but many generations. If we teach inaccuracies, it will have a long-lasting negative impact. Secondly, the Heart and Mind of a teacher can also be seen as the ability to use our knowledge to inspire and ignite students' passion for learning. We use our genuine care and the wisdom we have gained to educate students, allowing them to realize that learning English is not excessively difficult. Furthermore, even if English is challenging, we, as teachers, are there to guide and provide students with the right learning methods. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

Despite modern limitations on Authority (Uy), he believed it should be a blend of respect and trust earned through teaching practice, creating a motivating and respectful learning environment.

*I think that the Authority of teachers in the present time is limited due to modern regulations that restrict the use of disciplinary measures. However, I still believe that teachers can hold students accountable and impose consequences if they make mistakes. Without proper guidance and strong discipline, it would be challenging to establish order and discipline in the classroom. Although the use of Authority should not exceed reasonable boundaries or go against ethical standards, it can be used to create a sense of responsibility and motivate students to learn. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

These virtues shaped his professional identity, aspiring to create a positive and engaging learning environment for his students.

#### *Significance of Psychological Understanding of language learners*

Brandon's transformative experience in the English Psychology course, taught by Ms. Jenifer, deeply influenced his teaching perspective. Ms. Jenifer's enthusiasm, dedication, and thought-provoking methods inspired him. The course exposed him to the psychological aspects of language learning, sparking his interest in understanding diverse learners' responses to teaching techniques.

*When it comes to the transformative experience of a particular subject, I think it would be the English Psychology course taught by Ms. Jenifer. After taking that course, the first thing that struck me was Ms. Jenifer herself. She brought a lot of enthusiasm to the learning process and showed great dedication in her teaching. Particularly, her instructional methods and the discussion exercises she provided were profound. The questions she posed were thought-provoking. Furthermore, studying the content of the course sparked a strong interest in me, especially in terms of self-enlightenment and discovering things that I hadn't learned before. It was a revelation to learn things that no one had previously shared with me. (Brandon, Interview 1)*

This awareness led him to incorporate psychological insights into his teaching approach, creating a supportive learning environment tailored to students' individual psychological dynamics.

*Especially when working on research papers about different learning profiles or exploring the blend of teaching and learning methods, I found those experiences to be incredibly practical. They made me truly aware of what I was doing and where I stood in terms of my own learning journey. Moreover, I discovered aspects of myself that I hadn't previously recognized. I believe that my most significant experience was taking the English Psychology course, as it allowed me to delve into the psychology of*

language learners and gain a deeper understanding of their learning experiences. (Brandon, Interview 1)

This understanding shapes his professional identity, enabling him to deliver a more meaningful and effective learning experience for his students.

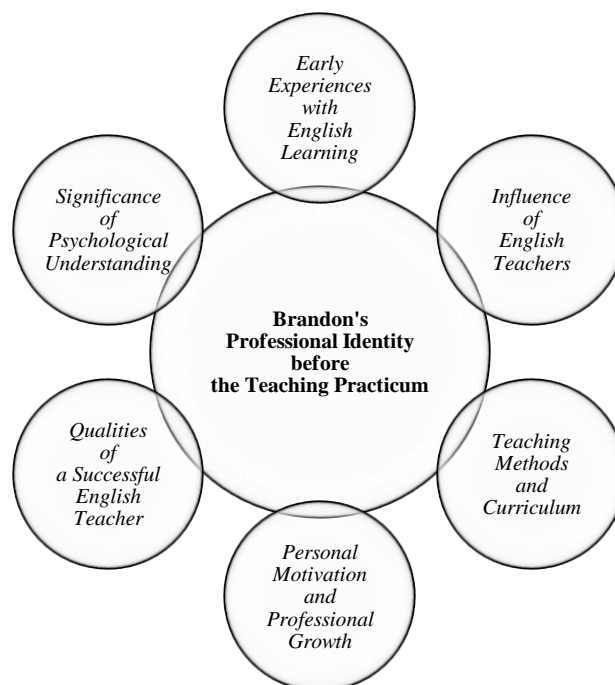


Figure 4.1 The major story threads underlying Brandon's professional identities

### *During the Teaching Practicum*

Throughout his practicum, Brandon grappled with challenges related to lesson planning, classroom management, student behaviour, and developing a professional identity. In navigating these complexities, he demonstrated adaptability, empathy, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Brandon recounted several critical events associated with his stories to live by (Figure 4.2). Every aspect of Brandon's experience contributed to his development as an English teacher. Supporting evidence will be provided throughout this narrative to further elaborate on each aspect of his story.

### *Idealization versus Reality*

Brandon's teaching practicum journey began with elaborate lesson plans that included various complex phases, emphasizing teamwork, presentation, and public speaking skills.

*Before teaching practice, I set the goal of completing ideal lesson plans (including all pre-practice, practice, production, and consolidation parts), teaching consolidation by using real-life questions and scenarios. The production phase focuses on teaching teamwork skills and presenting in front of the class to build and guide students on teamwork, presentation skills, and public speaking skills. (Teaching Diary)*

However, he encountered challenges when implementing these plans due to diverse student proficiency levels.

*The most profound thing I realized throughout that teaching practicum process was how difficult it was to apply ideal lessons. A complete lesson with all the steps, highlighted and effective Production and Consolidation was challenging to students who had an average to intermediate English proficiency level. (Teaching Diary)*

Recognizing the gap between his ideal plans and students' readiness, he adapted his approach.

*Perhaps the ideal lesson plans are not suitable for the students. Full-featured lessons with various tasks often overwhelm them. Some students have never participated in lesson construction. There were very few raised hands. (Brandon, Teaching Diary)*

He simplified lessons, focused on specific student needs, and tailored instruction accordingly. This shift reflected his adaptability, emphasizing the importance of understanding students' capabilities and adjusting teaching methods.

*I realized that I can still apply ideal lesson plans by adapting them to the students' proficiency levels. Focus on improving weak areas and skills. It's unnecessary to have an extravagant Production part when the students are struggling with the Practice section. There's no need to compromise students' understanding for the sake of following the teaching plan or worrying about completing the curriculum. (Teaching Diary)*

This newfound flexibility showcased his ability to adjust his teaching methods to suit the students' abilities and engagement levels.

*An ideal lesson, a well-designed plan, is when the provided data helps students fill in their knowledge gaps and apply those skills to exercises. (Brandon, Teaching Diary)*

This transformative experience shaped his identity, highlighting the significance of flexibility and practicality in effective teaching.

### *Adaptability and Flexibility*

Brandon's teaching practicum experience was defined by his adaptability and flexibility in response to his students' needs and challenges. Brandon explained,

*After the completion of the first lesson, I realized that my students were weak in speaking skills and lacked confidence in communication. They were hesitant to participate and reluctant to raise their hands (Brandon, Interview 2).*

He recognised his students' weak speaking skills and lack of confidence and simplified his lesson plans, transforming tasks into discussions and warm-up activities to provide more practice opportunities.

*I simplified my ideal lesson by transforming Task 1 into discussions or using it as a warm-up to save time, allowing me to focus on teaching other tasks such as Task 2, Task 3, and providing more practice opportunities for the students. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

Additionally, he modified time-consuming assignments into multiple-choice formats to ease the process for students. He explained,

*Some tasks required the students to search for and answer questions, and writing the answers sometimes consumed too much time and posed difficulties for the students. To address this, I modified it into a multiple-choice format, providing only three answer choices instead of four, making it easier for the students to complete. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

Furthermore, open to feedback and collaboration, he sought opinions from others and proactively addressed unfamiliar situations. Brandon expressed,

*I am open to seeking opinions from others. If I don't have any information or solution for a particular situation, I gather opinions first and then ask for assistance in finding a solution. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

Regarding classroom management, Brandon exhibited adaptability by understanding cultural differences. He took the initiative to introduce himself, creating a positive atmosphere and bridging the gap between his students' shyness and his proactive approach. Brandon shared,

*So there was no need to hesitate, I had to take the initiative and I could introduce myself first to make the students feel positive and energetic about my greetings, and then they would be more open to me because they were in a shy state, while I had to be proactive. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

His ability to adjust his teaching methods and behaviour showcased his adaptability, fostering a supportive learning environment and contributing to his students' growth. These qualities were pivotal in shaping his professional identity as an educator.

#### *Classroom Management and Student Behavior*

Brandon demonstrated classroom management skills during his teaching practicum by handling a challenging situation with a rude student. He recognised the impact of his reactions on the classroom atmosphere, maintaining emotional control to prevent adverse effects on other students.

*There was a day when a student talked rudely to me... I controlled myself and didn't yell at him because when we yell at a student in class, it deeply affects the pressure and psychology of other students. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

Understanding the importance of students' backgrounds, he conducted research and gained insights from the homeroom teacher, allowing him to respond empathetically.

*I did some practical research and asked the student's current homeroom teacher for information about this student's family circumstances. The teacher told me that the student has a difficult family situation, which might be why his behavior is sometimes not good. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

While being friendly, Brandon maintained a professional distance to uphold standards.

*Despite being friendly with students, there was still a certain distance. The distance between teachers and students was necessary. It had to be a professional standard. (Interview 2)*

He actively sought engaging teaching methods, emphasizing the need for innovative approaches to encourage student participation.

*Even when I provide handouts and assignments, they still do not complete them. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

To foster a positive classroom culture, he rewarded students' efforts, encouraging a solid study spirit. He shared,

*In my homeroom sessions, I used to give two students a small gift to encourage their study spirit... It underscored the belief that all students deserved recognition, respect, and academic encouragement. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

Additionally, he emphasized fair communication, ensuring every student felt valued and heard.

*Students had the right to express their thoughts, their demands, their questions, and their difficulties... Their voices should have been treated equally in the classroom. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

These strategies created a supportive, respectful, and engaging learning environment, reflecting Brandon's commitment to empathy, fairness, and inclusivity in his teaching approach.

### *Sympathy and Understanding*

Reconsidering the situation in which a student behaved rudely to him, in another aspect, Brandon exemplified remarkable empathy and emotional control, refraining from reacting in anger and choosing silence to manage the situation.

*When a student talked rudely to me. Honestly, at that moment, I was angry, but I controlled myself and didn't yell at him. Because when we yell at a student in class, it deeply affects the pressure and psychology of other students... To handle that situation, I chose to remain silent. At that time, I took deep breaths to regulate my breathing, and then I sat down and stared at that student... (Interview 2)*

Brandon's calm response evoked a sense of fear and remorse in the student. Moreover, he delved into the student's family situation, offering compliments and advice.



*I chose to give him compliments to make him feel that even though he was wrong, his apology was acknowledged... I advised him not to behave like that because it would have a more negative effect on himself than on others. (Interview 2)*

This empathetic approach highlighted Brandon's genuine concern for the student's well-being and illustrated his dedication to supporting their personal growth.

### *Mentorship and Guidance*

Brandon's teaching journey was profoundly shaped by his mentor teacher, who provided valuable insights into effective classroom management techniques. By closely observing and interacting with the mentor, Brandon learned when to adopt a broad overview and when to be strict in classroom management.

*When I sat with my mentor teacher and observed, I learned the way he managed the classroom... I observed the attitude of my colleagues when they were teaching, and at that time, the teacher's demeanor became stricter to encourage better cooperation between the students and the teacher. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

He absorbed the mentor's teaching philosophy, emphasizing clear expectations, explicit instructions, and a positive classroom environment.

*I learned when to have a broad overview of the class and when to be strict. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

Brandon actively implemented these strategies, showcasing his proactive approach to enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

*Through the mentorship, I have gained valuable insights into effective classroom management techniques... I have started implementing similar strategies, such as setting clear expectations, providing clear instructions, and establishing a positive classroom environment. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

The mentor's influence became integral to Brandon's teaching identity, enabling him to navigate challenges and continuously evolve as an effective EFL teacher.

### *Peer Learning and Collaboration*

From the beginning, Brandon valued peer learning and collaboration, actively seeking feedback and suggestions from colleagues on English assignments. He completed tasks and presented his ideas to colleagues, welcoming their feedback and corrections. Brandon mentioned,

*I think that usually, in terms of interaction with colleagues in the same subject area, discussing English exercises, I would first complete the tasks myself. Then, I would present my ideas to my colleagues to receive their feedback, suggestions, and corrections. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

His openness extended to attending colleagues' classes to acquire knowledge and skills related to teaching. Brandon explained,

*I might request assistance from the subject teacher or mentor, as well as from colleagues, to attend classes that I haven't had the chance to teach yet, so that I can gather more information. Attending their classes allows me to acquire more knowledge and skills related to teaching various aspects of the lesson. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

Brandon actively exchanged ideas and opinions with colleagues, especially in unfamiliar or challenging situations. He sought opinions and assistance, focusing on addressing pedagogical issues and minimizing negative impacts on students' morale. He stated,

*I am open to seeking opinions from others. If I don't have any information or solution for a particular situation, I gather opinions first and then ask for assistance in finding a solution. Regarding colleagues in the same field, when working as class teachers, we often exchange information directly or through phone calls about the class situation. Especially in dealing with pedagogical situations, we focus on addressing those situations and minimizing any negative impact on students' morale. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

His active involvement in collaborative processes showcased his dedication to continuous improvement and his belief in the power of collective expertise, contributing to a supportive community of teachers and fostering an environment of growth and improvement.

### *Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion*

During his teaching practicum, Brandon consistently prioritized cultural sensitivity and inclusion. Despite his closeness in age to the students, he maintained a respectful atmosphere by correcting inappropriate forms of address, emphasizing proper language use and respect in student-teacher interactions.

*In terms of age, well, I am not much older than the students... At the beginning, when I started teaching the class, the students would often address me as 'anh' (older brother), but at that moment, I would correct them and not allow them to use incorrect or inappropriate forms of address. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

Additionally, he embraced an open-minded and inclusive approach, fostering a welcoming environment where students felt accepted and valued for their cultural identities.

*I believe that as a foreign language teacher, it is important for me to be open-minded and comfortable in interacting with students more freely. I make sure to communicate with them regularly, even on a daily basis. For instance, before each class, I send them a message about what we'll be covering, the important points, and how to approach the topic. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

He actively communicated with students, encouraging participation and ensuring equal treatment of voices, creating an inclusive space where diverse perspectives were respected and appreciated.

*Students had the right to express their thoughts, demands, questions, and difficulties... Their voices should have been treated equally in the class. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

### *Transformation of Beliefs*

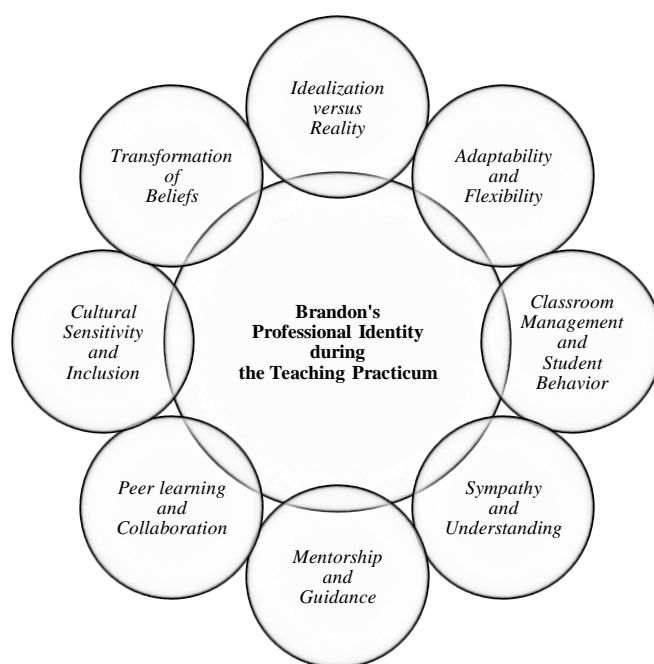
Brandon's core beliefs in Heart and Mind were reinforced during the teaching practicum, emphasising the importance of nurturing these aspects as an English teacher.

*Previously, I mentioned three perspectives: Heart, Mind, and Authority. I believe that I can dedicate my efforts to nurturing and strengthening the first two perspectives, which are Heart and Mind. (Brandon, Interview 2)*

However, his perspective on *Authority* underwent a significant transformation. Initially focused on rigid authority, he came to value *Perseverance*, representing resilience and adaptability in fulfilling teaching duties, structuring lessons, deepening knowledge, and handling unexpected challenges.

*When it comes to Authority, I might not be able to fully embody it, and it has also undergone changes...through my teaching experiences,...Authority can be transformed into Perseverance. It refers to resilience. It is the resilience to fulfill teaching obligations, strive for well-structured lessons, enhance knowledge, and handle unexpected pedagogical situations. (Brandon, Interview 2).*

This shift highlighted the significance of flexibility and continuous growth in his teaching philosophy.



*Figure 4.2* The major story threads underlying Brandon's professional identities

## Discussion

This study explored a pre-service EFL teacher's professional identity (re)construction before and during the teaching practicum. Brandon's journey illustrates the significance of adaptability, empathy, continuous learning, and a student-centred approach to effective English language teaching. His experiences highlight the complexity of teaching and the constant evolution required to meet students' needs effectively.

### *From Influence to Passion: Imagined Professional Identity*

Brandon's journey toward constructing his professional identity before the teaching practicum offers valuable insights into the pre-service EFL teachers' formative experiences. Before entering the teaching practicum, his professional identity development reflects a transformative journey influenced by intrinsic motivation, pedagogical adaptability, ethical considerations, and a commitment to student-centered education.

First, Brandon's initial lack of personal motivation emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in shaping teachers' professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). His change during his university studies, which resulted from the specialized courses and practical experiences, exemplifies the fluidity of the professional identity formation process, which is determined by internal processes and personal development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Vygotsky, 1989). Intrinsic motivation is one of the most important factors influencing the formation of professional identity, which provides them with purpose and commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Brandon's journey highlights the transformative potential of personal growth and intrinsic motivation in shaping effective educators prepared to meet the diverse demands of teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Second, Brandon's insistence on using interactive and communicative pedagogy aligns with current educational paradigms that call for active learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). This indicates pedagogical flexibility and sensitivity to the learning needs of other students because he focused on warm-up activities, games, and real-life scenarios. In essence, Brandon aims to follow the principles of a student-centered approach to learning and use various techniques that would allow him to involve as many students as possible and make the material more engaging by using elements of participation and practical application. This creates an active and effective learning environment that enhances his students learning (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Ly, 2024; Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Additionally, Brandon's integration of ethical values - Heart (Tâm), Mind (Trí), and Authority (Uy) - into his professional identity emphasizes the importance of professional ethics and integrity in teaching. Ethical teaching practices embody principles and values that guide educators when interacting with students, colleagues, and the larger education community (Beijaard et al., 2000). His focus on ethical considerations shows the complex interplay between personal values and professional conduct. The emphasis on ethical consideration underlines the coincidence of his thoughts and deeds as a teacher (Tickle, 2000). Emphasizing ethical considerations, Brandon contributes to forming a solid professional identity with integrity, authenticity, and a deep sense of responsibility for students' learning and well-being.

Lastly, Brandon's transformative experience in the English Psychology course highlights the

significance of psychological awareness in adapting pedagogical practices effectively. Brandon is committed to student-centered pedagogy and personalized learning experiences by integrating psychological insights into his teaching approach. Personalized learning approaches stress that psychological understanding should be integrated into tailoring educational interventions according to the characteristics of individual learners (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Moreover, leveraging psychological insights allows Brandon to increase student engagement and learning outcomes by aligning instructional methods with individual learning preferences and cognitive processes (Schön, 1983; Trinh et al., 2022). He pays excellent emphasis to psychological awareness; when coupled with adaptive teaching practice responding to learner dynamics and academic challenges, it forms a vital armament. Brandon's profound grasp of learners' psychological dynamics finds resonance with the principles of Dynamic System Theory, a paradigm that recognizes the diverse growth patterns leading to varied professional identities (Thelen & Smith, 1994).

Evidently, the impact of the experiences from K12 schooling to the teacher education program on Brandon's professional identity was significant. A student-centered approach, intrinsic motivation, integration of psychological insights, and a commitment to adaptability and continuous growth characterized it. His narrative reflects a deep sense of purpose and dedication to creating engaging and supportive learning environments, driven by a passion for empowering learners through effective and meaningful teaching practices.

#### *From Theory to Practice: Dynamic Growth in the Teaching Profession*

Brandon's experiences demonstrated a transformative journey in his evolution as an English teacher during the teaching practicum. First, Brandon's immersion in authentic teaching settings during the practicum corresponds with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. This theory explains that the learning process is converted into concrete experiences. By actively participating in teaching activities such as managing the classroom, lesson planning, delivering instructions, and interacting with students, Brandon employed theoretical knowledge in practical settings, facilitating the integration of teaching norms and values into his professional identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, emphasizing the importance of social interactions and mentorship in shaping professional development.

Second, Brandon's adoption of reflective practice aligns with Schön's (1983) Theory of Reflective Learning, emphasizing critical self-assessment and adaptation in professional development. Brandon is committed to continuous improvement by evaluating teaching strategies and adjusting approaches based on student needs and feedback (Schön, 1983). Besides, Tillema's (2000) framework of reflective teaching further emphasizes the integration of personal beliefs with pedagogical practice for effective professional development, highlighting the transformative potential of reflective learning in shaping professional identity.

Next, Trinh et al. (2022) highlight that teaching is a highly dynamic process and the importance of adaptability in responding to diverse classroom challenges. Brandon's capacity to modify instructional methods, accommodate varying student proficiency levels, and foster inclusive environments reflects an understanding of the multifaceted demands of teaching. This adaptive

approach resonates with contemporary educational paradigms emphasizing flexibility and responsiveness to student needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012), highlighting Brandon's capacity to navigate complex educational contexts.

Additionally, Brandon's inclusion into the teaching community facilitates knowledge exchange and group problem-solving through cooperative contacts with mentors and colleagues. In line with Moss and Pittaway's (2013) social learning framework for professional contexts, this highlights the critical role that mentoring plays in forming teachers' professional identities (Beijaard et al., 2000) and the significance of collaborative relationships in teacher development and professional identity construction and reconstruction (Nguyen & Truong, 2021).

Furthermore, Brandon's proactive attempts to recognize and accommodate cultural variations are consistent with modern viewpoints on culturally sensitive teaching (Gay, 2021). Brandon has a dedication to establishing inclusive learning environments by promoting fairness and respect in the classroom (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This demonstrates Brandon's commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion and is consistent with contemporary frameworks highlighting the significance of cultural competency and responsiveness in educational practice (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Last, Brandon's shift towards emphasizing perseverance and adaptability over rigid authority reflects Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) framework of evolving teaching philosophies. His life-changing event demonstrated his willingness to adapt and dedication to ongoing professional development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This is consistent with current viewpoints on the development of teachers, which highlight the fluidity of teaching beliefs and values and the significance of reflective adaptation to changing educational environments (Day, 1999).

Observably, Brandon reconstructed his professional identity during the teaching practicum through engagement, real-world teaching experiences, and self-reflection. It was distinguished by flexibility, knowledge application in the real world, introspective practice, and reaction to obstacles in the classroom. His experiences demonstrate the intricate interactions that occur when theoretical knowledge, real-world application, cultural immersion, and ongoing development are all part of developing into an efficient and sympathetic English language teacher. His journey provides insights into the complex influences forming teachers' professional identities by highlighting the dynamic interplay of social, environmental, and personal aspects, reflecting the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

## **Conclusion and Implications**

This study explored a pre-service EFL teacher's professional identity (re)construction before and during the teaching practicum. It is evident that Brandon's path reflects the complex process of developing a professional identity in teaching, which is defined by flexibility, knowledge application in the real world, reflective practice, and responsiveness to problems in the classroom. Brandon embodies the attributes of an effective and compassionate English language educator by embracing ongoing improvement and upholding the principles of student-centered education and cultural responsiveness.

His experience has essential ramifications for programs that support teacher development and education. First, Brandon's development emphasizes how crucial comprehensive teacher preparation programs are. In addition to teaching pedagogy, educational institutions should emphasize developing students' social, emotional, and reflective abilities. This all-encompassing strategy guarantees that aspiring teachers will be resilient and confident enough to navigate the challenges of the teaching profession. Second, discussing the long-term effects of solid teacher-student connections on the educational environment is essential. These relationships are the cornerstones of healthy learning environments; institutions must promote and foster them actively. Building these relationships that promote trust and involvement in the classroom is made possible by mentoring programs, which are especially created to support empathic teaching techniques (Nickel & Zimmer, 2019).

Next, the adept use of reflective practices during Brandon's teaching practicum emphasizes their pivotal role in professional development. Teacher education programs should seamlessly integrate reflective activities, discussions, and critical evaluations into their curriculum. Reflection empowers educators to meticulously analyze their teaching methods, identify areas for improvement, and adapt to the diverse challenges of modern classrooms. By embracing reflective practices, educators can continuously refine their teaching approaches, ensuring an adaptive and effective pedagogy (Bleach, 2014). Besides, Brandon's ability to adapt his teaching methods and navigate challenges underscores the importance of adaptability and resilience in the teaching profession. Teacher training programs should incorporate realistic scenarios and simulations, exposing future educators to various teaching challenges. This exposure equips them with the skills and mindset necessary to respond adeptly, ensuring effective teaching even in the face of formidable circumstances.

Additionally, Brandon's experiences mentoring teachers highlight tailored mentoring programs' critical role. Individual mentoring profoundly affects pre-service teachers, providing them with a practical perspective and developing their natural enthusiasm for learning. Such individual mentoring contributes significantly to a successful transition from imagined to practiced identity, building confidence and competence in novice teachers (Trinh et al., 2022). Moreover, professional development is central and essential for teachers' careers (Yaremko et al., 2019). Brandon's journey highlights the constant nature of professional development. Therefore, educational institutions must be open to ongoing learning and reflection throughout teachers' careers. It ensures that teachers remain at the forefront of developing teaching strategies and teaching methods through opportunities to engage in vibrant communities, attend workshops, and gain advanced qualifications. Continuous professional development is the intersection of creating a dynamic and continuously improving educational environment.

Finally, Brandon's transformative shift from disinterest to fervent dedication underscores the profound impact of intrinsic motivation in the teaching profession. Educational institutions should prioritize the cultivation of intrinsic motivation among pre-service teachers. Passionate educators, driven by internal enthusiasm, are more inclined to invest in continuous learning and development. This intrinsic motivation not only enriches the educators' professional lives but also enhances the overall quality of education, fostering an inspiring and engaging learning environment (Paulick et al., 2013; Dao, 2021).

### *Limitations and Further Recommendations*

The study focuses on Vietnam, which may limit its usefulness in other countries or educational systems. Cultural and educational differences can significantly affect pre-service teachers' experiences. Therefore, applying these findings elsewhere requires caution. Second, teaching diaries are the only triangulating source, which might need more robust supporting evidence due to time constraints and pre-service EFL teachers' busy schedules during the teaching practicum.

After acknowledging the limitations of this study, some aspects of the future research directions were proposed. First, future research could improve pre-service teachers' use of teaching diaries. Researchers could offer teachers specific prompts or templates to encourage deeper reflection on their experiences and emotions throughout their practicum. Second, researchers need to compare experiences of pre-service teachers from different regions and countries. This would reveal similarities and differences, leading to a better understanding of how culture shapes their practicum experiences.

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## Biodata

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## Appendix 1 – Interview Protocol

### Round 1 interview questions

#### A. Personal background, and motivation for learning and becoming an English teacher

1. When did you start learning English?
2. Did you enjoy the English program during your K12-schooling years?
3. How do you feel about the English teachers who taught you? Their style, personality, teaching methods, and English proficiency?
4. What motivated you to choose to become an English teacher?

#### B. Expectations and changes during the teacher training program

5. Based on your experiences from learning English until entering the English teacher training program, what qualities do you think you will possess as an English teacher?
6. What are your expectations before entering the teacher training program?
7. Has the program met your expectations so far compared to what you anticipated?
8. Did you face any challenges during the learning process, and how did they impact your perception of the teaching profession?

#### C. Self-assessment and expectations for teaching practice

9. In your opinion, what qualities does an English teacher need to have?
10. Have your thoughts about the qualities of an English teacher changed from the beginning of the program until now? If so, how?

11. As you're about to experience teaching in a real school environment for two months, what kind of teacher do you think you will be in front of the class?
12. How do you assess your English proficiency and your teaching methods?
13. What do you expect from the upcoming teaching practice program?

## **Round 2 interview questions**

### **A. Initial beliefs, teaching experience, and professional identity**

1. Did your teaching practicum experience reinforce your initial beliefs about becoming an English teacher? If so, how? If not, why?
2. Can you describe a specific case during the teaching practicum where you felt your professional identity was challenged? How did you react in that situation?
3. Were there any particular aspects of teaching or classroom management during the internship that you found particularly challenging? How did you handle those challenges? How did they affect your professional identity?
4. How did you adapt to this practicum environment? How did this experience impact the formation of your professional identity?
5. Were there any other factors that influenced/contributed to the formation/strengthening of your professional identity? Can you describe them in detail?

### **B. Interactions and feedback during the teaching internship**

6. During the teaching practicum, did you often interact with your mentor teachers regarding various professional aspects? Can you provide some examples of these interactions? How did they influence your professional identity?
7. Did you receive feedback from your mentor teachers? How did this feedback contribute to shaping/improving your professional identity?
8. Regarding interactions with colleagues, do you often exchange ideas or seek advice on various professional aspects or handling situations that occur in the classroom? How does this impact your professional identity?
9. Were there any skills or knowledge from university that were not suitable for real-world English teaching? How did you address these differences? How did these experiences impact your professional identity?

### **C. Teaching style, expectations, and self-reflection**

10. How do you manage difficult situations and challenges in the classroom while maintaining professionalism?
11. Have you built relationships with students and their families? If so, how? How do these relationships influence your professional identity?
12. Were there any expectations or standards set by the school or teaching program during your internship? How did you balance your teaching style and beliefs with these expectations and standards? How did this shape your professional identity?

## **Appendix 2 – Teaching Diary**

### **GRADE 10 ENGLISH – GLOBAL SUCCESS – VOLUME 2**

#### **1. Completed Lesson: Reading – Unit 8**

Task: Skim & Scan

Objective: Guide and help students become familiar with Skim & Scan techniques

Result: Achieved

The teaching session was successful, but since it was the first practice session, there was still some hesitation and lack of understanding about the overall class situation, as well as the weak areas and skills of the students.

Teaching Method: Chalkboard (no PowerPoint slides) with the purpose of making students feel more engaged as most of them are used to chalkboard teaching.

Personal Reflection: Although the lesson was completed on schedule, I didn't succeed in motivating the students to actively participate; they still showed hesitation, and very few of them raised their hands to participate.

I communicated with the students through Zalo after the lesson, answering their questions and guiding them.

#### **2. Completed Lesson: Listening – Unit 8**

Even though the lesson plan was not fully executed, I consider the teaching session as complete since the main goal was to help students practice Listening and Filling in the blanks.

Result: Most students understood the task and more of them participated by raising their hands to answer questions compared to the first lesson. I personally felt very pleased with my efforts and the response from the students. I will correct the assignment and provide feedback to the students in the next lesson.

Experience from the previous lesson: Prepare and use electronic lesson plans and handouts.

#### **3. Completed Lesson: Writing – Unit 8**

Objective: Review paragraph structure and help students write a paragraph.

Result: Achieved, but the students remained passive, and the group work spirit was not evident.

Personal Reflection:

Despite thorough lesson preparation, I couldn't ignite the students' enthusiasm for learning due to the complexity of writing skills, which require a lot of vocabulary and language proficiency. Moreover, the English level of the students is moderate to average, and English is not their strength.

Approach to addressing the issue:

After class: I contacted and guided students through Zalo, explaining the format and outline of a paragraph.



#### **4. Completed Lessons: Communication and Culture**

CLIL: Unit 8

Getting Started: Unit 9

Language: Unit 9

Speaking: Unit 9

CLIL: Unit 9

Everything proceeded as planned, but I still couldn't motivate the students even after trying various methods, including teaching through translations.

Perhaps the ideal lesson plans are not suitable for the students. Full-featured lessons with various tasks often overwhelm them. Some students have never participated in lesson construction. There were very few raised hands. I realize that it's challenging to apply an ideal lesson plan to a class with a moderate to average English level and lacking motivation.

### **REFLECTION**

#### **Before teaching**

Before teaching practice, I set the goal of completing ideal lesson plans (including all pre-practice, practice, production, and consolidation parts), teaching consolidation by using real-life questions and scenarios. The production phase focuses on teaching teamwork skills and presenting in front of the class to build and guide students on teamwork, presentation skills, and public speaking skills.

I still believe in the teaching principles of "Heart, Mind, and Authority" in my professional teaching and students' consciousness. Many students haven't found effective learning methods, and they often feel demotivated during the learning process. I believe I can bring a new perspective to English lessons, making them more positive and engaging.

#### **During teaching**

The most profound thing I realized throughout that teaching practicum process was how difficult it was to apply ideal lessons. A complete lesson with all the steps, highlighted and effective Production and Consolidation, was challenging to students who had an average to intermediate English proficiency level.

#### **Personal experiences**

During the first lesson, I aimed to make students feel at ease and get used to my teaching style. However, despite using traditional teaching methods like writing on the board, most students were still hesitant, especially when learning vocabulary in a traditional way. Teaching vocabulary through pictures, synonyms, and antonyms confused them, showing their lack of comprehension. In summary, students neither understood nor listened to what I was trying to convey.

I started to change my lesson planning and vocabulary teaching approach. I switched to using electronic lesson plans and taught vocabulary through pictures, synonyms, or antonyms, but they were related to the recently taught words, e.g., "Upload" >< "Download." Additionally, I redesigned exercises in the Practice section from original "Answer the questions" to "Multiple choices." I taught students how to read quickly, identify main ideas and details, and practice listening by filling in the blanks. Furthermore, I used a shaker to practice pronunciation and intonation, which made the classroom lively due to the students' curiosity. However, when it came to co-planning the lessons, they still remained passive.

These events greatly influenced my teaching process and my perspective on applying "Heart, Mind, and Authority" in students' education. These experiences deeply impacted my outlook on life, education, cognition, and the learning process. Despite this, I still believe in my principles and my teaching approach and remain determined to maintain and enhance "Heart, Mind, and Authority" or, alternatively, "Heart, Mind, and Perserverance" depending on the situation and students' psychological understanding.

I realized that I can still apply ideal lesson plans by adapting them to the students' proficiency levels. Focus on improving weak areas and skills. It's unnecessary to have an extravagant Production part when the students are struggling with the Practice section. There's no need to compromise students' understanding for the sake of following the teaching plan or worrying about completing the curriculum. An ideal lesson, a well-designed plan, is when the provided data helps students fill in their knowledge gaps and apply those skills to exercises. At least they shouldn't sit there trying to copy the lesson, as I teach too quickly to finish the lesson on time.

Moreover, teachers need to inspire students. Use sincerity, knowledge, and authority to teach and advise students. Teachers should not only teach academic knowledge but also impart life skills to students, making knowledge practical and enhancing students' moral values, as "learning must be accompanied by practice."