

## **CONSTRUCTING THE TEACHER SELF: THE ROLE OF INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN SHAPING PRE SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHER PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores how initial teacher education (ITE) influence professional identity construction of pre service English teachers in rural Islamic-based schools in Indonesian context. Employing multiple case study design with six pre service teachers, the research utilized semi-structured interview. Findings reveal that initial motivation for teaching are varied, inspired by past educators, yet frequently accompanied by an underestimation of teaching complexity. Academic training provides foundational knowledge, but the practicum serves as a critical “reality shock,” profoundly reshaping perceptions and shifting focus from content delivery to a holistic understanding of teaching. The unique rural and religious context actively compels pedagogical adaptation, influence role perception and facilitate the integration of personal values. Support system, mentorship and peer networks are crucial for confidence development. The understanding of “being teacher” evolves from a task-oriented role to a multi-faceted agent committed to students’ holistic development. These insights underscore the need for ITE programs to enhance practicum design, strengthen mentorship and foster resilience and adaptability to support comprehensive professional identity development of future teachers.

**Keywords:** constructing; initial teacher education; English teacher professional identity

## **INTRODUCTION**

Professional identity plays a central role in shaping how teacher engage with their profession, influencing their motivation, instructional decisions, and long-term commitment to teaching. In the early stages of teacher preparation, identity is particularly malleable, formed through experiences in teacher education programs, mentorship, practicum and personal reflection. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of factors such as self-efficacy, teaching internship, and institutional culture in developing a teacher’s sense of professional self (Cai et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2025; Zeng & Liu, 2024). Meyer et al., (2023) emphasize that both actual and designated professional identities are influenced by teacher education programs and vary by the school type, while Huang et al., (2022) found identity profiles change with program progression. These findings affirm that initial teacher education (ITE) is a powerful space for identity construction.

Despite these insights, existing research remain fragmented and often constrained by context-specific limitation. For instance, studies such as Obiagu,( 2023) and Nawab & Zada, (2023) showed how negative perception and fall back career motivations shape identity and south Asian context, yet these are based on small or localized samples. Furthermore, few studies adopt a comprehensive, mixed method approach that integrates personal, institutional

and sociocultural factors. The development of scale (Zeng & Liu, 2024) and model (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2023) offer tools for measurement, but they rarely capture emotional or reflective dimension of identity work. This leaves a significant gap in understanding how ITE environments can be designed to address tensions and support emerging teacher identities holistically.

Teacher identity is increasingly viewed as a dynamic and evolving construct, not simply inherited or passively formed. As Tran & Dee, (2023) argue, identity formation involves negotiation between pedagogical, subject and professional knowledge. Dewi & Fajri, (2023) further demonstrate how confidence, motivation, and clarity around teacher roles emerge through teaching practice. These processes are deeply influenced by teacher agency, as shown in studies like Groenewald & Arnold, (2025) which highlight the importance of personal values and contextual resilience. Together, these findings suggest that ITE program need to be more intentional in supporting reflective, dialogical and practice-based identity development-especially as students move from theory into classroom practice.

The problem of this study addresses is that while the importance of professional identity construction in teacher education is widely acknowledged, the specific ways ITE program shape, support or undermine, these processes are not well understood across context. Current evidence points to the significance of internship (Cai et al., 2022), mentoring (Weiss et al., 2025) and educator influences (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2023) yet these elements are rarely studied as interrelated part of identity construction. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how ITE program influence the construction of professional identity among pre service English teachers at Islamic-based school in Indonesian context..

### ***Pre-Service Teacher Professional Identity Construction***

Professional identity constructions among pre-service teachers have emerged as a critical area of study within teacher education research. This process is understood not as a static acquisition of professional traits, but as dynamic, context-dependent, and on going negotiation belief, values and self-perceptions in relation to the teaching profession. Studies consistently showed that identity construction is influenced by personal motivations, past experiences and social interactions. This identity evolves in response to institutional and cultural pressures within educational settings.

Obiagu (2023) found that Nigerian pre-service teachers often entered programs with frustration instead of motivation. Their identities were shaped by social networks, self-image, and internal values. In Pakistan, Nawab & Zada (2023) reported that moral purpose and social expectation influenced identity in a profession seen as a fall back option. These findings reflect how identity is constructed through interplay of internal and external factors.

Tensions in identity are widely observed across studies. Raharjo & Iswandari (2019) identified six common tensions experienced by EFL pre-service teachers. These include discrepancies between their ideal and the practical demands of classroom. Coping strategies developed in response to these tensions indicate the emotional work embedded in professional identity development.

Tran & Dee (2023) showed that identity formation is not necessarily hindered by religious and racial factors. However, Christian-based institutional settings complicated how personal and professional identities merged. This complexity underlines the influence of the

training environment on identity. Institutional context remains a powerful force in shaping or obstructing identity integration.

Agency also plays a critical role in identity construction. Groenewald & Arnold (2025) documented a novice teachers' identity development in a rural setting. Teacher relied on personal values and contextual knowledge, highlighting individual resilience. Dewi & Fajri, (2023) found similar identity strengthening through initial motivation and hands-on practice.

Professional identity development is nonlinear and context-sensitive. Huang et al. (2022) noted a decline in identity strength across years of study among early childhood education students. Meyer et al. (2023) identified various identity profiles among German pre-service teachers. Their findings linked identity profiles to educational program types and perceived professional roles.

Reflective practice support professional identity formation. González-Calvo et al. (2014) used autobiographical methods to study teacher training impact. These narratives highlighted shifts in pedagogical beliefs and emotional awareness. Reflection emerged as a core tool in consolidating and evolving teacher identity.

### **Initial Teacher Education And Professional Identity**

Initial teacher education (ITE) influences how pre-service teachers form their professional identities. The structure and content of ITE programs help frame what it means to be a teacher. Pedagogical models and educator roles act as lenses through which identity is developed. Institutional philosophy can either reinforce or obstruct identity coherence.

Cuadra-Martínez et al. (2023) emphasized the significance of teacher educator profiles. Critical-intellectual educators foster more robust identity formation than traditional models. Mentorship quality, teaching style, and pedagogical beliefs shape identity perceptions. These findings show that educator influence is both direct and enduring.

A practicum experience is highlighted as pivotal. Cai et al. (2022) demonstrated that internships build identity through enhanced self-efficacy and engagement. Weiss et al. (2025) found that consolidation of identity peaked during special education internship. Hagan (2021) noted that real world challenges during practicum often redefine pre service teachers' understanding of the profession.

Structured reflection during ITE is important. Casanova-Fernández et al. (2022) recommended better alignment between academic training and fieldwork. Nawab (2024) discussed how dilemmas during practicum led to confusion and lowered confidence. This evidence supports the need for better-designed practicum support. Addressing these challenges may reduce identity fragmentation.

Measuring identity development remains an evolving area. Zeng & Liu (2024) created a 13-item scale evaluating professional identity dimensions. These include career commitment, knowledge acquisition, and efficacy beliefs. However, such tools should complement qualitative insight for comprehensive understanding.

Reflective assignments are useful in guiding identity work. Mommers et al. (2021) used online tasks to prompt pre-service teachers to define their roles and values. González-Calvo et al. (2014) employed logbooks and life narratives to trace identity shifts. These practice reinforce self-awareness and help contextualize professional growth.

Institutional and cultural variations also affect ITE's impact. Tran & Dee (2023) found that religious institution may misalign with students' personal-professional integration. Obiagu, (2023) and Nawab & Zada (2023) revealed societal stigmas surrounding teaching careers. Such influences call for more culturally responsive ITE frameworks.

ITE shapes not only skills but also the foundation of professional identity. Intentional design, effective mentorship, and reflective opportunities are essential. Programs must adapt to local and global demands to support identity growth. A nuanced understanding of ITE's influence can improve teacher preparation outcomes.

## **METHOD**

This study adopted multiple case study design to explore how ITE shapes the professional identity of pre service English teachers in Islamic-based junior high school in rural areas Indonesia. A case study is well suited to this type of inquiry because it allows for detailed, contextual exploration of complex phenomena in real-life setting (Schoch, 2020). Since identity formation is not isolated from teaching environments, faith-based context introduce unique influences on teacher development. In this study, Six individual Pre-English teachers, enables the researcher to compare and contrast identity construction across similar but distinct professional journeys (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic of Participants

Gender	Initial
M	GK
F	AL
F	NM
F	NH
M	KM
M	MA

The semi-structured interviews provided between consistency across participants and flexibility to explore individual experiences in depth. The interview guide include open-ended questions related to participants' initial motivation for becoming a teachers, their experiences during teacher training, their adaptation to teaching role and the challenges and supports they encountered along the way. Data analysis followed thematic analysis using (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Member checking and peer debriefing was used to validate interpretations and ensure trustworthiness.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### **Initial Motivations and Pre-Training Expectations**

The initial motivations for pursuing a career in teaching are notably diverse among the participants, yet common threads emerge. Many were inspired by impactful teachers from their own educational backgrounds; for instance, one participant (GK) was motivated by a high school English teacher who made learning "enjoyable and meaningful", while another (AL) cited teachers who demonstrated "passion, patience, and creativity". As they stated in the interview how the teachers inspired them.

...I was inspired to become a teacher because of my high school English teacher. She made learning enjoyable and meaningful. (GK)

...I expected teaching to be mostly about explaining lessons and giving test. I didn't realize how much patience and creativity it actually requires. (AL)



This suggests that the personal experience of being a student under inspiring educators often plants the seed for a future in teaching. Beyond personal inspiration, a strong desire for societal contribution also surfaced. One individual (NM) was driven by a commitment to "help students in rural areas get better access to education", reflecting a connection to their own upbringing. Another (KM) sought a "meaningful career where I could contribute to society". Furthermore, a deep passion for a specific subject, such as English, served as a primary motivator for one participant (NH) who simply "wanted to share that passion". These varied entry points indicate that the initial calling to teaching is a complex interplay of personal experiences, altruistic desires, and intellectual passions, rather than a singular, idealized pathway.

### **Influences on Early Perceptions: Personal, Family, And Student Experiences**

The foundational ideas about teaching are often deeply rooted in personal history and early socialization, long before formal university training commences. For several participants, family background, particularly having educators in the family, played a significant role. One individual (GK) observed his "mother was a teacher at a local elementary school," and watching her dedication shaped his view of teaching as a "noble and meaningful profession". Another (AL) grew up "surrounded by educators," with his mother's "dedication and care" leaving a lasting impression. This suggests that early exposure to the profession through family members can instill an appreciation for its impact and importance, influencing the very type of teacher one aspires to become as in their interview.

... Growing up, my mother was a teacher at a local elementary school. Watching her prepare lessons late at night and hearing stories about her students really shaped my view of teaching as a noble and meaningful profession. I always thought being a teacher meant making a real impact on people's lives. (GK)

... My early ideas about being a teacher were strongly shaped by both personal experiences as a student and the influence of my family. Growing up, I was surrounded by educators. My mother was a primary school teacher, and I often saw the dedication and care she put into helping her students learn and grow. Her stories about her students and the difference she made in their lives left a lasting impression on me. (AL)

Personal struggles as a student also served as powerful motivators. One participant (MA) recounted struggling with English until a teacher provided extra help, inspiring him "to become a teacher who supports students like me — the ones who need a little more attention and encouragement". This illustrates how individual academic challenges can foster deep empathy and a specific desire to address similar needs in future students. A unique pathway to teaching was observed in one participant (NM), whose experience "actually started when I was in junior high school" through "peer teaching activities" where he was appointed a leader. Initially, he "refused to become a teacher, but over time the environment always put me in that position". This case demonstrates that while intrinsic motivation is common, some individuals may develop their professional identity and commitment through an iterative process where external circumstances or pressures lead to an eventual embrace of the role, challenging a purely linear view of identity formation.

... As a student, I struggled with English and often felt left behind. But one of my teachers believed in me and gave me extra help. That personal experience made me want to become a teacher who supports students like me. (MA)

... My experience as a teacher actually started when I was in junior high school, where my school, especially the program I chose, had peer teaching activities. Where I was appointed to be the leader of my team. From the beginning I refused to become a teacher, but over time the environment always put me in that position. So I had no choice but to try to be a good teacher. (NM)

### **Impact of Academic Training and Critical Incidents**

University coursework provides essential theoretical grounding for pre-service teachers. Participants frequently cited specific subjects as influential, such as "Micro teaching subject" (GK), "TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), and Curriculum and Material Development" (AL), and "English teaching methodology course" (KM). The concept of structured lesson planning, like the "three steps, pre-activity, main activity and post-activity", was also highlighted as valuable for organizing teaching. These courses equip aspiring teachers with foundational knowledge and pedagogical strategies.

However, the most significant shifts in perception consistently occurred during actual teaching practice or microteaching sessions, which often served as a profound "reality shock." One participant (GK) noted, "In micro teaching course, I thought the students will do what I have plan. But not in the reality. It makes me curious". This stark contrast between controlled simulations and authentic classroom dynamics was eye-opening. Another (AL) described their teaching practicum as "one of the most eye-opening moments," where an idealized view of teaching was confronted by "real challenges: students who struggled to pay attention, unexpected classroom dynamics, and the emotional labor". Similarly, a participant (NM) realized during microteaching that teaching was "not just about knowing the material" after experiencing nervousness and struggling with time management. This highlights a critical theory-practice gap, underscoring that true understanding and identity transformation in teaching are primarily forged through direct, often messy, and challenging experiential learning, rather than purely theoretical instruction. The critical incidents described reveal a profound redefinition of what "teaching" entails, moving from a cognitive, content-focused perception to a more holistic understanding that encompasses emotional, relational, and adaptive competencies. The practicum, therefore, acts as a crucible where this broader, more complex professional identity begins to solidify.

... Courses such as Micro Teaching, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), and Curriculum and Material Development were very influential in shaping my understanding of teaching. From these courses, I learned how to design learning that is interesting and suits the needs of students. In addition, the lecturers provided a lot of practical experience and motivation, so that I am increasingly convinced that being a teacher is not just a matter of teaching, but also educating with the heart. (AL)

... Several aspects of my university coursework and interactions with educators have shaped my understanding of what it means to be a teacher. One influential factor has been my teaching experience in the classroom, such as microteaching sessions, classroom observations, and teaching practice. (NH)

### **Practicum Experiences: Challenges and Transformative Moments**

The practicum period presented pre-service teachers with a myriad of challenges that ultimately served as catalysts for significant professional growth. Common difficulties included classroom management and student engagement, with participants facing "students who struggled to pay attention, unexpected classroom dynamics" (AL) and the realization that "classroom management and adaptability are just as important as lesson planning" (MA). Student motivation also proved to be a hurdle, as one individual (NH) "struggled with student motivation in learning English".

... The most impactful experience during my teaching practice was when I successfully built a close relationship with students and helped them become more confident in speaking English, even though they were initially shy or afraid. The biggest challenge was the lack of learning facilities and the students' low interest in English due to minimal exposure in their daily environment. I had to be more creative in my teaching to keep the lessons engaging and easy to understand. (AL)

...My most memorable experience was being invited to community religious events with the students. It helped me bond with them outside the classroom. But honestly, I struggled with adjusting my lesson content to align with the Islamic school's values — I had to revise my plans often. (MA)

...I was deeply touched by the students' discipline during religious routines. It made managing the classroom much easier. However, I struggled with student motivation in learning English — many saw it as unimportant, so I had to constantly find ways to make lessons engaging and relevant. (NH)

Another pervasive challenge was resource limitations and language barriers. Several participants encountered "limited resources—minimal teaching aids—and students' low English proficiency" (GK), "lack of learning facilities and the students' low interest in English" (AL), and "lack of textbooks and facilities" (NH). These constraints, however, did not deter the pre-service teachers; instead, they spurred pedagogical innovation and adaptability. One participant (GK) "had to adjust my teaching methods and simplify instructions", while another (AL) "had to be more creative in my teaching". This demonstrates a direct link: resource scarcity and student needs directly drive pedagogical adaptation and creativity. The practicum, therefore, is not merely about applying learned skills but about developing the crucial professional trait of resourcefulness and flexible problem-solving in challenging environments.

...The most impactful moment for me was how warmly the students welcomed me despite their shyness. It taught me that building rapport is essential. The biggest challenge was the language barrier — many students struggled even with basic English, so I had to rely on visual aids and gestures a lot. (GK)

### **Influence of Religious and Rural Contexts on Teaching Practice**

The specific religious and rural contexts of the practicum schools were not passive backdrops but active forces that profoundly influenced the pre-service teachers' methods, role perceptions, and interactions with students. A consistent theme was the integration of values into teaching. One participant (GK) began to "include moral lessons in my English teaching, like using Islamic stories or proverbs", while another (AL) "integrated Islamic values such as honesty, cooperation, and responsibility into the lessons". This demonstrates how the environment actively co-creates the teachers' pedagogical identity, shaping not just *what* they teach but *how* they infuse values into their instruction. Adaptation to rural needs was also paramount. One individual (NM) learned to "simplify my methods" and use "more visuals and local examples" due to students' limited exposure to English in a rural area. Another (NH) found the rural context "pushed me to be more patient and flexible," particularly when students were absent due to "family or farming duties". This highlights the necessity of adjusting teaching strategies to align with the socio-economic realities of the community.

Crucially, the context also led to a significant shift in role perception. One participant (GK) began to see his role "not just as a language teacher, but also as someone who supports students' character development". Similarly, another (AL) understood that a teacher in such a setting is "not only an instructor but also a moral role model and guide". This indicates that the teaching environment is not a passive backdrop but an active force that fundamentally re-shapes a teacher's professional self, leading to a more culturally responsive and values-driven approach. The consistent observation that education in these contexts is inherently holistic, blending academic learning with moral and character development, illustrates that for these pre-service teachers, the rural and religious setting fostered a professional identity where the transmission of knowledge is inseparable from the cultivation of values, suggesting a broader understanding of a teacher's responsibility.

...The Islamic values at the school influenced me to include moral lessons in my English teaching, like using Islamic stories or proverbs. I saw my role not just as a language teacher, but also as someone who supports students' character development. It also made me more respectful and careful in choosing words and topics. (GK).

... The Islamic and rural context of the school made me more careful in selecting teaching materials and methods. I integrated Islamic values such as honesty, cooperation, and responsibility into the lessons. I was also more patient and warm in interacting with students, knowing that a teacher in such a setting is not only an instructor but also a moral role model and guide. (AL)

...Teaching in a rural area taught me to simplify my methods. Many students lacked exposure to English, so I used more visuals and local examples. The religious environment also made me adjust my materials — I avoided topics that might not align with Islamic teachings and focused on respectful communication. (NM)

... The religious and rural context of the school greatly influences the way I teach, view my role as a teacher, and interact with students. Teaching in a rural environment with strong religious values makes me more aware of the importance of incorporating local values into the learning process. (NH)

### **Intersection of Personal Values and Professional Identity**

The teaching experience, particularly within the specific school contexts, served as a powerful catalyst for the amplification and integration of personal values into the professional identity. Participants frequently described how their core beliefs aligned with the school's philosophy, leading to a deeper sense of purpose. For instance, one individual (GK) realized that his "belief in serving others aligned with the school's focus on religious responsibility and community," which made him "see teaching as a form of service". Another (AL) found his "personal values, such as sincerity in teaching and the desire to be beneficial to others," aligned well with the school's Islamic philosophy, strengthening his professional identity. This suggests a symbiotic relationship where the professional role provides a platform for individuals to fully embody and express their core values, leading to a deeper sense of purpose and commitment.

Specific personal attributes were consistently integrated into their teaching approach. Patience, a personal trait for one participant (GK), became "a key part of my teaching" as he learned that "every student has their own pace". Other values such as "sincerity, patience, empathy, and responsibility" (AL), and "creativity" (KM) were explicitly mentioned as becoming central to their professional practice. For several participants, the alignment of personal values with the school's religious philosophy led to a perception of teaching as a "spiritual responsibility" (KM) or "living out the values of Islam through my role as an educator" (NH). This goes beyond typical professional duties, suggesting that in these specific contexts, the professional identity acquires a profound spiritual dimension. This implies that for some, teaching becomes a vocation that fulfills not only professional aspirations but also deeply held moral and spiritual convictions, leading to enhanced commitment and a holistic sense of self.

...Initially, I didn't think much about how my values matched the school's. But over time, I realized that my belief in serving others aligned with the school's focus on religious responsibility and community. It made me see teaching as a form of service, which deepened my commitment to the role. (GK)

... My personal values, such as sincerity in teaching and the desire to be beneficial to others and aligned well with the school's Islamic philosophy, which emphasizes character and moral education. This strengthened my professional identity as a future teacher who cares not only about academic achievement but also about students' moral and spiritual development. (AL)

... I feel like my environment indirectly influences me, where I have to be patient with students who often sleep during class. (NM)

...I feel that education is not only about transferring knowledge, but also about shaping people to be moral and useful to society. My professionalism as a prospective teacher has also grown stronger, because I feel that I am not only doing a job, but also living out the values of Islam through my role as an educator. (NH)



...At first, I focused mostly on academic goals. But the school's philosophy of integrating faith into learning changed how I viewed teaching. I started to see it as a spiritual responsibility too, not just a job. That shift helped me develop a more holistic sense of my professional identity. (KM)

## **Discussion**

### **The Profound Influence of Socio-Cultural Context**

A significant revelation from the interviews is the profound and active influence of the rural and religious school contexts on the pre-service teachers' professional identity construction. These environments were not merely passive settings but dynamic forces that actively shaped pedagogical choices, refined role perceptions, and redefined the very essence of a "good teacher." The strong religious values prevalent in these schools, for instance, prompted teachers to integrate moral lessons and Islamic principles into their English instruction (Halstead, 2007; Sahin, 2018), using stories and proverbs to connect with students on a deeper level (Aliyeva, 2025; Mammadova, 2024; Mutonyi, 2016). This integration highlights that education in these contexts is inherently holistic, blending academic learning with character and moral development.

Furthermore, the rural setting necessitated a fundamental shift in teaching methods, compelling teachers to simplify instructions, utilize more visuals, and incorporate local examples due to students' limited exposure to English and occasional absences linked to family or farming duties. This adaptation underscores the need for culturally responsive pedagogy. The teachers' role perception also evolved significantly, moving beyond that of a mere language instructor to encompass being a moral role model, a guide, and a supporter of students' character development. This demonstrates that the socio-cultural context is a powerful co-creator of pedagogical identity (Capitano & Naudé, 2020; Kajonius, 2021), fostering an approach where the transmission of knowledge is inseparable from the cultivation of values and a deep respect for local traditions.

### **Navigating Identity Tensions and Fostering Resilience**

The journey of professional identity construction is rarely linear and often involves navigating internal tensions between personal traits and professional demands. Several participants described grappling with such conflicts. For example, one naturally introverted individual (GK) found daily public speaking "emotionally draining" and had to actively "push myself out of my comfort zone". Another (AL) worked on "balancing my quiet personality with the need to be assertive and confident", learning to adapt "without losing my true self". These experiences reveal that professional identity is not simply adopted but actively negotiated, requiring individuals to reconcile their pre-existing personal attributes and values with the expectations of the professional role and the specific contextual demands (Pappa et al., 2017; Pierson, 2024). This negotiation process, often involving discomfort and adaptation, is crucial for developing a resilient and authentic professional self.

Other tensions arose from conflicting values, such as the desire for academic freedom versus strict religious content boundaries (KM), which was addressed through creative problem-solving and using neutral, value-aligned examples. Similarly, the conflict between

providing emotional support and maintaining professional distance (MA) led to learning how to set "healthy boundaries while still showing care and empathy". These adaptive strategies—pushing comfort zones, learning to adapt while maintaining authenticity, creative problem-solving, and setting boundaries—demonstrate the development of crucial professional competencies. This implies that successful identity construction involves finding ways to integrate personal authenticity with professional efficacy (Bloom et al., 2021; Dvir, 2020; Marschall, 2022; Pierson, 2024), rather than abandoning one for the other, highlighting the importance of self-awareness and strategic self-management in sustaining a long-term career in teaching.

### **The Evolving Teacher: From Content Deliverer to Holistic Developer**

The analysis consistently reveals a profound and transformative shift in the pre-service teachers' understanding of what "being a teacher" truly encompasses. This evolution moves decisively from a narrow initial focus on content delivery and academic goals to a broad, multi-dimensional commitment to student development, character building, and life shaping (König et al., 2020; Valtonen et al., 2021). Participants initially viewed teaching primarily as delivering lessons and giving tests, but through their practicum, they came to see it as inspiring, managing diverse learning needs, and building relationships. This expanded understanding includes roles such as motivator, role model, counselor, and even a second parent, highlighting a dynamic and deeply human role.

This continuous growth mindset is further reflected in their future aspirations. Beyond merely becoming effective classroom practitioners, many expressed a desire for broader, systemic influence, such as starting community learning centers, developing culturally relevant curricula, or becoming teacher trainers. This trajectory from individual classroom practice to a vision of systemic improvement underscores a deepening commitment to the profession, fueled by the intrinsic rewards of witnessing student growth and making a meaningful impact on lives. The evolution signifies a professional identity that embraces a holistic view of education, recognizing that a teacher's responsibility extends far beyond academic achievement to encompass the complete well-being and character formation of their students.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This thematic analysis of pre-service teachers' experiences underscores several significant findings regarding the formation of their professional identity. Firstly, initial motivations are diverse, often stemming from personal inspiration or a desire for societal contribution, though frequently accompanied by naive expectations about teaching's complexity. Secondly, academic training provides foundational knowledge, but the practicum serves as a critical "reality shock," profoundly reshaping perceptions and fostering a shift from a content-focused view to a more holistic understanding of teaching.

Thirdly, the unique rural and religious contexts are not passive backdrops but active forces that compel pedagogical adaptation, influence role perception, and facilitate the integration of personal values, often imbuing teaching with a spiritual dimension. Fourthly, support systems, particularly strong mentorship and peer networks, are crucial for confidence

development, though the absence of such support can paradoxically foster self-reliance and reflection. Finally, the understanding of "being a teacher" evolves from a task-oriented role to that of a multi-faceted agent committed to students' holistic development, with future aspirations often extending to broader systemic influence, sustained by the intrinsic rewards of student growth. Three implications for teacher education and policy; enhance practicum design, strengthen mentorship and peer support and develop resilience and adaptability.

Despite the aforementioned, this study has limitation. First, the study took place in Islamic-based school where the findings do not reflect non religious-based school. Second, the participants were six Pre-service teachers. Future research is suggested to involve more participants to gain a comprehensive and representative data. Besides, future research should involve non religious-based school as a site of the study to broad the findings.

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