

**EXPLORING THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY PROBLEM AMONG PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: PEDAGOGICAL AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES**

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20385421>

**Abstract:** The rapid transformation of higher education systems requires not only the development of professional knowledge and competencies among future teachers but also the formation of a strong professional identity. However, many pre-service primary school teachers experience difficulties in perceiving themselves as future professionals, which negatively affects their motivation, pedagogical engagement, and career commitment. This study examines the problem of professional identity among pre-service primary school teachers from pedagogical and management perspectives. The study aims to analyze theoretical approaches to professional identity formation and identify existing challenges within teacher education systems. A systematic analysis of pedagogical and psychological literature, comparative analysis, and synthesis methods were employed. The findings indicate that professional identity development is influenced by motivational, reflective, institutional, and managerial factors. In addition to pedagogical approaches, educational management mechanisms such as mentoring systems, institutional support, monitoring, and individualized developmental pathways play a significant role. The study concludes that professional identity should be considered not only as a personal developmental process but also as a managed educational phenomenon requiring innovative management technologies.

**Keywords:** professional identity; pre-service primary teachers; educational management; teacher education; higher education; professional development

In the context of global educational transformation, teacher education systems face new challenges related to preparing highly qualified and professionally competent educators. Contemporary educational reforms increasingly emphasize not only subject knowledge and teaching skills but also the development of professional identity among future teachers.

Professional identity reflects an individual's understanding of themselves as a member of a professional community and influences career commitment, pedagogical beliefs, motivation, and professional behavior. For pre-service primary school teachers, professional identity is especially important because the primary education stage requires not only instructional competencies but also strong personal and professional values.

Despite curriculum reforms and innovations in higher education institutions, many teacher education programs still focus predominantly on cognitive and methodological preparation. As a result, students may acquire knowledge and competencies while lacking a stable sense of professional self-identification.

Therefore, examining the pedagogical and managerial dimensions of this issue becomes increasingly important.

Research aim: to analyze the professional identity problem among pre-service primary school teachers from pedagogical and management perspectives.

The concept of professional identity has been widely discussed in psychology, sociology, and education studies due to its significant role in personal and professional development. Researchers have approached professional identity from different perspectives, emphasizing self-perception, social interaction, professional roles, and contextual factors.

One of the earliest theoretical foundations of identity was proposed by Erik Erikson, who viewed identity as a dynamic process of self-development that evolves throughout an individual's life. According to Erikson, identity formation is closely associated with psychological development and the search for personal meaning. His theory emphasized that identity emerges through interactions between personal experiences and social expectations. Professional identity can therefore be understood as an extension of personal identity within a professional context.

From a social perspective, Henri Tajfel introduced Social Identity Theory, arguing that individuals define themselves through membership in social groups. Tajfel emphasized that identity is not merely an individual characteristic but also a product of social categorization and group belonging. In teacher education, this perspective suggests that pre-service teachers develop professional identity through participation in academic and professional communities. Their identification with the teaching profession becomes stronger when they perceive themselves as legitimate members of a professional group.

Similarly, James Paul Gee proposed that identity should be understood through multiple dimensions shaped by social contexts. Gee identified several perspectives of identity, including nature identity, institutional identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity. His framework highlights that professional identity is influenced by institutional structures and interpersonal interactions. For future teachers, university environments and educational practices become important contexts in shaping their sense of professional self.

Another influential contribution was made by Etienne Wenger through the theory of Communities of Practice. Wenger argued that identity develops through participation in shared professional activities and social learning processes. According to this view, professional identity is formed through active engagement, collaboration, and experience within a community. For pre-service primary school teachers, teaching practice, mentoring relationships, and collaborative learning experiences play a critical role in identity construction.

Within teacher education research, Douwe Beijaard made substantial contributions by conceptualizing teachers' professional identity as a dynamic and continuously developing process. Beijaard and colleagues emphasized that professional identity is shaped by teachers' experiences, beliefs, professional knowledge, and interpretations of practice. Their approach suggests that professional identity is not fixed; rather, it continuously changes through reflection and educational experiences.

A comparative analysis of these perspectives demonstrates that professional identity is a multidimensional construct influenced by psychological, social, institutional, and professional factors. While Erikson emphasized internal self-development, Tajfel and Wenger highlighted

social participation and group membership. Gee focused on contextual and institutional dimensions, whereas Beijaard specifically examined professional identity within teacher education.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, professional identity among pre-service primary school teachers can be understood as a dynamic process involving self-awareness, professional values, social interaction, and institutional support. Therefore, its development should be considered not only a pedagogical issue but also a management-related process requiring systematic educational support and innovative management technologies.

Professional identity has become one of the central concepts in teacher education research because it influences how future teachers perceive themselves, engage in professional activities, and adapt to educational environments. In recent decades, teacher education scholars have increasingly emphasized that becoming a teacher is not solely a process of acquiring pedagogical knowledge and instructional skills; rather, it also involves developing a strong sense of professional identity.

Teacher professional identity is often described as a dynamic and evolving understanding of oneself as a teacher. It includes personal beliefs, professional values, teaching philosophies, emotional experiences, and perceptions regarding professional roles and responsibilities. The development of professional identity enables future teachers to establish meaningful connections between theoretical knowledge and practical experiences.

Several researchers argue that professional identity formation begins before entering the teaching profession and continues throughout professional life. Pre-service teachers enter higher education institutions with prior experiences, beliefs about teaching, and personal expectations that influence identity development. During teacher preparation programs, these initial perceptions are often reshaped through academic learning, pedagogical practice, social interactions, and reflective experiences.

Research in teacher education indicates that teaching practice plays a particularly important role in identity formation. Field experiences allow students to move from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants within professional environments. During pedagogical practice, pre-service teachers encounter real classroom situations, communicate with experienced teachers, and begin to evaluate themselves as future professionals. These experiences contribute significantly to the construction of professional identity.

Reflective practice has also been identified as an important factor in identity development. Reflection enables future teachers to critically examine their experiences, beliefs, strengths, and professional goals. Through reflective processes, students become more aware of their professional roles and gradually develop a clearer sense of professional self-understanding.

Furthermore, mentoring relationships are considered essential in teacher education. Support from university instructors, supervisors, and experienced school teachers can positively influence students' confidence and professional adaptation. Mentorship creates opportunities for guidance, emotional support, and professional interaction, which contribute to identity formation.

Despite significant attention to professional identity in teacher education literature, many studies reveal persistent challenges among pre-service teachers. These include insufficient professional motivation, uncertainty regarding career choices, weak self-perception as future teachers, and difficulties in connecting theoretical preparation with practical teaching

experiences. Such challenges may negatively influence students' professional commitment and long-term career development.

For pre-service primary school teachers, these challenges become especially important because primary education requires not only subject competence but also strong professional values, emotional stability, communication abilities, and commitment to teaching responsibilities. Therefore, professional identity development should be considered a strategic component of teacher preparation systems.

From this perspective, teacher education institutions should move beyond traditional knowledge-centered approaches and create supportive educational environments that intentionally facilitate identity development through pedagogical and management mechanisms.

In modern higher education systems, professional identity development should not be viewed exclusively as an individual psychological process. Contemporary educational research increasingly emphasizes that identity formation is also influenced by institutional structures, educational environments, and management practices. Therefore, educational management plays a significant role in creating conditions that support the development of professional identity among pre-service teachers.

Educational management refers to the organization, coordination, monitoring, and improvement of educational processes aimed at achieving institutional and developmental goals. Within teacher education programs, management practices extend beyond curriculum implementation and administrative procedures. They also include the creation of supportive environments that encourage students' professional growth and self-identification.

Researchers argue that higher education institutions significantly influence students' professional development through institutional culture, academic support systems, mentoring structures, and educational policies. When these elements function systematically, they contribute positively to students' perceptions of themselves as future professionals.

One of the important management mechanisms in teacher education is mentoring. Mentorship provides opportunities for professional guidance, emotional support, and practical adaptation. Experienced educators help pre-service teachers understand professional roles, overcome uncertainty, and integrate theoretical knowledge with practical experiences. Effective mentoring systems therefore serve as important tools for strengthening professional identity.

Another significant component is institutional support. Universities that provide collaborative learning environments, student-centered approaches, professional communities, and opportunities for self-development create stronger foundations for identity construction. Supportive institutional environments help students establish meaningful relationships with their future profession and increase their sense of belonging.

Monitoring and assessment systems also contribute to identity development. Traditional educational assessment frequently focuses on academic achievement and knowledge acquisition; however, identity development requires broader indicators that include motivation, reflective ability, professional engagement, and self-perception. Consequently, educational management systems should incorporate monitoring mechanisms capable of assessing students' professional growth comprehensively.

In recent years, individualized educational trajectories have received increasing attention within educational management research. Students differ in learning styles, professional aspirations, personal experiences, and developmental needs. Therefore, standardized approaches may not effectively support professional identity development for all learners. Individualized pathways allow educational institutions to respond more effectively to students' needs and encourage active participation in professional development processes.

Furthermore, digital technologies and modern management systems create additional opportunities for supporting professional identity formation. Digital portfolios, reflective platforms, online mentoring systems, and educational analytics tools may facilitate continuous monitoring and professional self-reflection among pre-service teachers.

Despite these developments, many teacher education institutions still lack systematic management approaches specifically designed to support professional identity development. Existing educational practices often prioritize competency acquisition while paying limited attention to identity-related dimensions. As a result, professional identity development remains insufficiently integrated into educational management systems.

Therefore, the development of innovative management technologies aimed at strengthening professional identity among pre-service primary school teachers represents an important direction for future research and educational practice.

The analysis of theoretical and empirical studies indicates that professional identity development among pre-service primary school teachers remains a multidimensional and complex issue. Existing literature suggests that professional identity is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by institutional, pedagogical, and managerial factors. Despite the increasing attention given to teacher preparation, several challenges continue to affect the formation of professional identity within higher education institutions.

One of the major problems concerns insufficient professional motivation among students. In many cases, students enter teacher education programs due to external circumstances rather than strong professional commitment. Consequently, they may experience difficulties in perceiving teaching as a long-term professional pathway. Weak intrinsic motivation may negatively affect their engagement, confidence, and professional aspirations.

Another challenge involves the gap between theoretical preparation and practical teaching experiences. Although higher education institutions provide substantial pedagogical knowledge, students frequently encounter difficulties when applying theoretical concepts in real educational settings. During teaching practice, discrepancies between expectations and actual classroom experiences may create uncertainty regarding professional roles and self-perception.

Reflective practice also remains insufficiently integrated into many teacher education programs. Reflection enables students to critically examine their learning experiences and professional development. However, limited opportunities for structured reflection may prevent future teachers from developing a deeper understanding of their professional identity.

Additionally, mentorship systems within teacher education institutions often demonstrate varying levels of effectiveness. Some students receive continuous professional guidance and support, while others experience limited interaction with mentors and supervisors. Such inconsistencies may influence students' confidence and professional adaptation processes.

Institutional support represents another important factor affecting identity development. Educational environments that lack collaborative learning cultures, professional communities, and student-centered approaches may reduce students’ opportunities to actively engage with their future professional roles.

The findings suggest that these challenges cannot be addressed solely through pedagogical interventions. Instead, they require systematic educational management approaches capable of integrating developmental, motivational, and organizational mechanisms.

For clearer interpretation, the identified challenges and corresponding educational responses may be summarized as follows:

Identified challenges	Pedagogical perspective	Management perspective
Weak professional motivation	Interactive learning methods and reflective activities	Monitoring systems and motivational support
Gap between theory and practice	Practice-oriented teaching approaches	Strengthening school–university partnerships
Limited reflective practice	Reflective journals and self-assessment	Structured reflection programs
Insufficient mentoring	Individual pedagogical guidance	Institutional mentoring systems
Weak institutional support	Collaborative learning activities	Student-centered management strategies

The comparative analysis demonstrates that pedagogical interventions alone are insufficient for strengthening professional identity among pre-service primary school teachers. Management mechanisms create the organizational conditions necessary for sustainable professional development. Therefore, professional identity should be considered a strategically managed educational process rather than an exclusively individual phenomenon.

The findings further indicate the necessity of developing innovative management technologies that integrate mentoring, monitoring, institutional support, reflective practices, and individualized developmental pathways into teacher education systems.

**Conclusion.** The present study has analyzed the problem of professional identity among pre-service primary school teachers from both pedagogical and management perspectives. The findings indicate that professional identity is a complex, multidimensional construct influenced by psychological, pedagogical, social, and institutional factors. While traditional approaches in teacher education primarily focus on knowledge acquisition and pedagogical skills, they are not sufficient to ensure the sustainable development of professional identity.

The study highlights that pre-service teachers often face challenges such as weak professional motivation, a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical experience, insufficient reflective practice, inconsistent mentoring systems, and limited institutional support.

These challenges negatively affect their self-perception as future professionals and may reduce their long-term commitment to the teaching profession.

From a pedagogical perspective, professional identity can be strengthened through interactive learning methods, reflective activities, and practice-oriented education. However, the study emphasizes that pedagogical approaches alone are not sufficient. From a management perspective, educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping professional identity through structured mentoring systems, monitoring mechanisms, institutional support, and individualized learning trajectories.

The integration of pedagogical and management approaches suggests that professional identity development should be understood as a managed educational process rather than a purely individual psychological phenomenon. This requires the design and implementation of innovative management technologies that systematically support students' professional growth.

Therefore, future research should focus on developing comprehensive management technologies aimed at strengthening professional identity among pre-service teachers. Such technologies may include digital monitoring systems, adaptive mentoring models, reflective learning platforms, and individualized professional development pathways.

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