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Situated Learning and Teacher Identity: Insights From Malaysian TESL Pre-Service Teachers' Practicum Experience

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Annotation. This study discussed Malaysian TESL pre-service teachers' (PSTs) identity development during practicum. Using Situated Learning Theory (SLT) as a theoretical lens, the semi-structured interviews with 18 PSTs identified family support, culturally sensitive mentoring and reflective practices as important social and cultural factors in TESL-PSTs' identity formation. The study discussed practical implications for improving teacher education programmes in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

Keywords: *development of teacher identity, pre-service TESL education, situated learning theory, Malaysian teacher education, practicum experiences.*

Introduction

Teachers' professional identity is variable and susceptible to personal accounts, organisational conditions, and sociocultural influences (Barkhuizen, 2017; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). Pre-service teachers (PSTs) build their identities beyond learning to teach; they are expected to resolve the tension between professional responsibilities and personal values that guide their beliefs in teaching (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018;

Canrinus et al., 2012; Flores, 2020; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). One of the challenges in this process is the constant need to adapt classroom practice to realities and learn from ongoing interactions with students, mentors, peers, and the broader educational environment.

In Malaysia, the professional identity of PSTs is moulded by religion, nationalism and family expectations (Abas, 2015; Al-Saggaf et al., 2020). These elements impact individual choices and create tension between personal beliefs and professional commitments. (Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Masry & Alzaanin, 2021; Shankar, 2023). According to Ag-Ahmad et al. (2023), there is always a gap between what is learnt in theory and what is needed in actual classroom situations. PSTs who experienced 'reality shock' hinder PSTs' ability and self-confidence (Fatiha et al., 2013; Goh & Wong, 2014). To mitigate this, PSTs favour improvisation, experimentation, and observation as teaching methods (Ai et al., 2022; Maaranen & Stenberg, 2017; Masry & Saad, 2018).

Situated learning theory (SLT) provides a framework to examine teacher identity construction within this study. SLT theorised that learning involves a social practice that develops over a long period of time through active engagement in authentic contexts and communities of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; 2000). Although previous research has proven that reflection and social interaction are important in building teacher identity (Beijaard et al., 2004; Flores & Day, 2006; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005), there are only a handful of studies that examine the interaction between variables in the field of Malaysian TESL-PST using SLT.

To date, SLT has been used in a number of educational contexts, such as learning outcomes analysis (Zheng, 2010) and technology integration in teacher education (Bell et al., 2013). Ibrahim (2020) focused on the professional identity of Malaysian TESOL students during their placements in Malaysia and the Maldives, however, her work mentioned more on the CoP than on theory. Similarly, Boateng and Wittes (2025) used the same SLT to look at the identity of student teachers, but the research did not focus on the Malaysian TESL context. Given Malaysia's multi-sociocultural characteristics, such as hierarchical school relationships, collectivist philosophies, and ethnic diversity, localised research is needed to further clarify how these cultural factors shape teachers' identities in a practice-based learning environment.

This study looks at the development of Malaysian TESL teachers' professional identities during their practicum using Situated Learning Theory (SLT). The study asks the following questions:

1. How do Malaysian TESL-PSTs develop a professional identity through practicum experiences?
2. How do reflective practices and classroom engagement shape Malaysian TESL PSTs' professional identity during their practicum?
3. How do socio-cultural factors impact the development of Malaysian TESL teachers' professional identity during their practicum?

The study informs the development of teacher education programmes in Malaysia and other multicultural countries on the importance of culturally sensitive mentoring and reflective practice in preparing teachers for the classroom. This study is in line with the SDG 4 goal of quality education for the training of effective and flexible teachers to meet the diverse needs of students in multicultural schools.

Development of Teacher Identity in Teacher Education

Empirical evidence shows that identity is a process that emerges from the interplay of beliefs, practices, experiences and social interactions (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006). From this perspective, the transition from student to teacher for most novice teachers is rarely straightforward; it is a complex juggling act between aspirational ideals and practical needs in the classroom. Conflict leads to either enhancing professional development or leading to institutionalisation and routinisation (Flores & Days, 2006). Therefore, academic responses are important to prepare PSTs to develop resilience and flexibility through iterative cycles of reflection, learning, and pedagogy (Lutovac & Flores, 2021).

In this development process, reflection exercises are the basis for the teacher's distinctive personality trait. PSTs interpret the emerging role within this space and moderate the conflicting tensions between personal beliefs and institutional demands. Trent's (2013) work on Hong Kong PSTs shows that reflection helped PSTs to overcome and reconcile self-image with the position they are placed in. Similarly, Yazan (2018) identifies reflection as a personal phenomenon and a social practice which involves learning, emotions, contexts, and interaction. Ustuk and Hu (2024) extend this by examining specific methods such as narrative framing, mentoring interviews, and prompts for reflection to form an identity-oriented perspective. These studies show that reflective practice is both a cognitive and socially mediated tool for professional growth.

The process of identity formation also involves thinking about the future. Erdem (2020) illustrates 'possible self' with early identity development. His work found that hope brings a positive connotation in early development, but fear has a more limited but still important function. These self-images do not emerge in isolation; they are determined by general social and intuitive factors such as the culture of teacher education and social demands and norms of professional behaviour. Hamman et al. (2010) also point out that hopes, fears and subjective risks are part of the professional future imagined by PSTs.

Relationships with mentors, peers, and students provide a ground for the renegotiation of teacher identity (Ardi et al., 2023). Shankar (2023) found that the emotional perspective, like writing reflective journals, mentoring and guidance from mentors on identity development, increased resilience. A study by Prawiro and Amaliah (2021) also concluded that mentoring and good student feedback contribute to developing

professional self-worth. Supportive social relationships in emotional and professional terms, therefore, form the framework for identity development.

Personal and social influences and cultural and institutional factors are also factors that characterise the identity work of PSTs. In Thailand, Prabjandee (2019) shows that respect for the role of the teacher is expressed through the title 'Kru' (symbolic entity of the teacher), contributing to PSTs' feeling like real teachers. At the same time, school rules, mentor control, and emotional challenges support or limit the development of PSTs during their practicum. In Indonesia, Muhaji et al. (2023) explain that identity formation begins not only at school but also at home. The religious values and social expectations act as powerful cultural resources, while the teacher education programme provides the institutional structure for identity negotiation. These influences, referred to as social and evaluative means of identity, suggest that many PSTs view teaching as a moral duty (as a moral role model). Ai et al. (2022) note that working in Chinese rural schools provides PSTs with the opportunity to connect with the local culture. This helps them to develop a teacher identity that fits with the community they serve. All these studies point to the idea that building a teacher identity is not just about what happens in the classroom. It also stems from the culture, beliefs, and systems that surround the teacher.

In Malaysia, this process becomes complex due to the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. PSTs bring their own cultural beliefs to the practicum, and these beliefs can help or hinder their development as teachers (Masry & Alzaanin, 2021; Ghanaguru & Rao, 2013). Jong and Gao (2022) also point out that teacher education in Malaysia often provides a single, ideal image of what a teacher should be like. These considerations can make it difficult for PSTs to adapt when faced with real classrooms full of different cultures and needs. In these contexts, it becomes clear that cultural values, institutional expectations, and socio-emotional demands intersect and shape not only how PSTs see themselves, but also how they learn to embody the role of a teacher.

Theoretical Framework: Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning Theory (SLT), based on the sociocultural tradition (Vygotsky, 1980), views learning as deeply embedded in social interaction and meaningful activities. SLT sees learning as an active process that takes place in everyday activities with others (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learners become part of these communities through interaction, participation and engagement in shared practices. They gradually develop both competences and a professional identity (Wenger, 2000).

An important idea in SLT is legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). LPP describes that most newcomers play a limited role in their initial encounter; they gradually increase their involvement through support and become full participants in the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In teacher education, PSTs learn through participation in authentic school settings (Pendergast et al., 2020). Students are initially viewed as

'apprentices' (Johnston, 2015, p. 536); initially under guidance, and take on an active role when they feel ready and able to teach in the classroom and in the school. Boateng and Wittes (2025) employed SLT in science teaching to emphasise that the process of classroom placements helps PSTs to develop confidence and learn to be teachers with encouragement from their peers.

Another element of SLT is the Community of Practice (CoP). It refers to a group of people who learn through shared goals (Wenger, 2000). Shared goal is a situation when members put collaborative efforts for a mutual purpose. PSTs typically involve mentor teachers and peers who support their development through modelling, feedback and joint participation in classroom activities. These interactions help in developing identity because the students learn to position and reposition themselves in the school's professional culture (Arvaja, 2016; Trent, 2013). Participation facilitates skills acquisition and promotes a sense of belonging. PSTs can move from being mere observers to active members of the school community.

A number of studies have shown the adaptability of SLT in different educational contexts. For example, Rahmat et al. (2025) identified the positive impact when PSTs immersed themselves in and adapted to the role of teachers from their initial professional role. Cydis et al.'s (2021) study showed that PSTs who went through authentic classroom environments were better able to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, and this augmented their competence and confidence in themselves. Küçük (2021), based on Turkish science teacher research, participation in genuine and context-specific activities triggers reflection. Haatainen et al. (2024) also illustrated that participation in collaborative group work augmented the development of new professional identities among PSTs. Collectively, these studies demonstrated diverse dimensions of PST development when implementing SLT. In this study, we focus on a multilingual and multicultural setting in Malaysia. SLT thus learn their identity and belonging through a variety of socially and culturally shaped experiences during their training, not just through participation in activities.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach, in accordance with Creswell's (2007) recommendation to use qualitative research in exploring complex, context-dependent human experiences. It provides an opportunity to take a close look at how TESL-PSTs develop their professional identity during the practicum. The study is set in a Malaysian classroom where cultural and pedagogical factors play an important role in developing identity.

Participants and Sampling

Eighteen (18) PSTs who had completed their initial practicum between November 2022 and April 2023 were selected through purposive sampling and snowballing. This sampling method ensured that participants met the following criteria: (a) TESL-PSTs who had completed their initial practicum within the last six months; (b) participants had no teaching experience prior to the practicum; and (c) all participants had their placement in secondary schools in Selangor, Malaysia. TESL-PSTs were selected because English is a second language in Malaysia, and teaching tends to be influenced by students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to accommodate learners' native languages and multilingual repertoires (Wong & Yoong, 2019). For this reason, TESL-PSTs are pertinent to research on professional identity development. The participants' profiles are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Profile

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Study	School Type	Practicum Experience
WeiJean	Female	Chinese	4	Urban	Excellent
Michelle	Female	Kadazan	4	Rural	Good
Salina	Female	Malay	4	Urban	Excellent
Ashiqin	Female	Malay	3	Rural	Good
Naavya	Female	Indian	4	Urban	Excellent
Logeswary	Female	Indian	4	Rural	Good
Simran	Female	Indian	4	Urban	Excellent
Suresh	Male	Indian	4	Rural	Good
Azrul	Male	Malay	4	Urban	Excellent
Firdaus	Male	Malay	3	Rural	Good
Ahmad	Male	Malay	4	Urban	Excellent
Sithambaram	Male	Malay	4	Rural	Good
PeiYan	Female	Chinese	4	Rural	Excellent
Waihong	Male	Chinese	3	Rural	Good
Vicky	Male	Indian	4	Rural	Excellent
KokSeong	Male	Chinese	4	Rural	Good
Cheong	Male	Chinese	4	Urban	Excellent
Caleb	Male	Chinese	3	Rural	Good

The table above summarises the demographic data of the participants and the overall experience during the training. The grading of the practicum was included to contextualise the participants' achievements and experiences. Ratings were categorised

as excellent and good based on the mentors' and university lecturers' assessments. This categorisation highlights the different experiences of the participants and provides an overview of their professional development. Participants were also deliberately selected from different genders and ethnicities to represent multicultural Malaysia. Participants were placed in both urban and rural secondary schools in Selangor to allow for a diverse learning experience.

Data Collection

The 18 chosen PSTs participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews as part of the data collection process. Google Meet was used to provide scheduling flexibility and create a secure, moral environment for participants (Nehls et al., 2015). The interview questions were structured based on prior research on professional identity construction (Barkhuizen, 2017; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011; Flores, 2020), issues and support systems (Prawiro & Amaliah, 2021; Salinas & Ayala, 2018), and practicum effect on identity (Merseth et al., 2008; Serdar Tülüce & Çeçen, 2016). The interview guide had ten questions, which were streamlined to avoid repetition and stay focused. Some example questions were as follows:

1. How would you describe your professional identity as a teacher after completing your practicum?
2. Do you think family and personal experiences influence your teaching practice?
3. Do you think interactions with mentors and peers shape your teacher identity?
4. Do you think reflection plays a role in your development as a teacher during your practicum?

Data Analysis

The two-stage coding process developed by Saldaña (2015) was used in this study. The interview transcript is coded, classified and thematically analysed in two stages in order to uncover important trends in the participants' experiences. In the first cycle, preliminary codes were determined by reading the interviews line by line. This was to identify meaningful codes that reflected the PSTs' reflections on their identity development. This process assists the research to capture rich insights into the PSTs' experiences and the key events in identity development. In the second cycle, the codes from the first cycle were grouped according to similarity of purpose. These were later expanded to include broad themes that contained the essence of the discourse. For example, the codes for 'love the language' and 'support from family' were categorised under the theme 'passion and family support in career choice', while the codes for 'managing the classroom' were categorised under the theme 'mentorship as support'. The table below illustrates the coding process:

Table 2
Thematic Data Analysis

First Cycle Coding Initial observation	Second Cycle Coding	Themes
support from family love the language family members as teachers	family, passion	Passion and family support in career choice.
role to guide others be like my mentor mentor guides me facilitate student learning	mentorship	Mentorship and guidance in professional development.
check and recheck reflect on every incident met continuous reflection to improve	reflective, trial-and-error	Reflective practises and continuous improvement.
managing classroom dealing with disruptive students ill classroom behaviour high and low achiever	classroom management	Managing classroom behaviour.
need actual experience provide practical need classroom preparation skill	hands-on teaching experience	The need for more practical field experience.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

This study was conducted under strict ethical guidelines to ensure that participants' rights were respected. This includes the data being kept confidential and that the study was valid in all respects (Allen & Wiles, 2016). All participants were well informed of the purpose of the study, the research process and their rights prior to the start of the data collection. All participants were asked to provide informed consent to confirm that they understood the purpose of the study and were willing to take part. They received assurances that it was entirely voluntary and that they would not be penalised if they left the interview at any point.

Participants' identities were protected by using pseudonyms and anonymising all data in analysis and reporting. In addition, all data were securely stored in password-protected files to preserve the validity of the study results. Member checks were also carried out to ensure the reliability and validity of the study (Birt et al., 2016). Participants were given the opportunity to read and verify the interview transcripts and the initial findings in order to ensure that the information and the interpretation were as accurate as possible.

Given that this study was qualitative in nature, the researcher's possible subjectivity was taken into account. Two researchers independently coded the interview transcripts; this was done to avoid bias and to ensure an impartial interpretation of

the data. Discrepancies in the code were resolved by negotiation, and the final topics were assessed together. The iterative process increased the reliability of the data and ensured that the data accurately reflected the participants' own experiences.

Limitations

Some limitations can be drawn from the results of the study. Firstly, the purposive selection of the sample would lead to bias and thus limit the generalisability of the results. The study only includes PSTs from universities in Selangor; therefore, the regional representation may not reflect the overall experience of Malaysian PSTs. Secondly, as the practicum is considered a critical stage in career development, the study only captures outcomes from the practicum period. The study does not address how PSTs' identities evolve after this point. Future research would use a longitudinal design to track how an individual's identity changes over time.

Lastly, the study collected self-reported information via semi-structured interviews. Because of this, the methodology and findings could have subjective interpretations or recalled bias (Schmidt et al., 2023). Future studies could triangulate data sources by combining classroom observations with interview or mentor feedback. With this method, the formation of teacher identities would be better understood, and the results could be verified by a variety of sources.

Findings

A thematic analysis of Malaysian TESL-PSTs' experiences revealed five main themes: (1) passion and family support in career choice; (2) mentorship and guidance in professional development; (3) reflective practices and continuous improvement; (4) managing classroom; and (5) the need for more practical field experience. The analysis used SLT as a theoretical lens to a broader framework of identity development.

Passion and family support in career choice

The decision to become a TESL teacher in Malaysia is ascribed to a lifelong passion for the English language as well as the encouragement and family members who are educators. This theme reflects the cultural logic of collectivism and familial influence, in which respondents spoke on career decisions influenced by family expectations, legacy, and emotional support rather than personal choices. This finding demonstrated the concept of LPP in SLT. In this case, identity formation begins with active and passive observation of the immediate social environment and not just formal education. Many PSTs were instilled with a sense of familiarity and belonging to their learning communities due to early and continuous exposure to the world of teaching and growing up in homes with teachers.

'I've always loved languages and teaching. It's something that has been a part of me for as long as I can remember. I enjoy the process of learning a new language and the cultural exchange that comes with it. Teaching English allows me to show my passions, and I can help students in their journey.' (WeiJean)

'Growing up, I always found English fascinating and enjoyed reading about different cultures through literature and media. TESL seemed like the perfect fit to pursue this passion professionally.' (Michelle)

'My motivation for choosing the TESL program is from my passion for the English language, and I hope to improve my proficiency. Coming from a rural area, I noticed that many students struggled with English, and I really wanted to help. I believed that by becoming an English teacher, I could make a difference.' (PeiYan)

Family support promotes ambition, self-efficacy and resilience among the PSTs. Emotional scaffolding enables the respondents to cope with uncertainty with greater confidence. For example,

'My family has always been very supportive of my decisions. They understand my passion for languages and teaching and have always encouraged me to pursue what I love. Their support has helped me stay motivated and focused on my goals.' (WeiJean)

'My mother is an English teacher, and I like seeing her teach English. I want to follow in her footsteps.' (Logeswary)

'I was very much exposed to and influenced by my sister, who graduated in TESL. The way she expressed her experiences and told me about her study life made TESL seem interesting and something I could excel at. Her success and encouragement played a role in my decision to join the TESL program.' (Sithambaram)

Mentorship as culturally situated professional development

The transition from passive learners to independent mentors and facilitators is a pivotal turning point in the development of their professional identity. PSTs gradually take on full responsibility for lesson planning, teaching, and student assessment during the practicum after initially taking a supportive role by assisting with classroom activities and observing mentor teachers. This developmental trajectory reflects the LPP principles that PSTs begin at the margins of the teaching community and gradually work their way to the centre through active participation, observation and guided practice.

'Now I see myself as a facilitator, mentor, and lifelong learner. I believe in creating a classroom environment where students feel supported and encouraged to explore their potential. My role is not just to impart knowledge but to guide students in their learning journey.' (Suresh)

'Teaching techniques is very important for me. I want to implement innovative methods in the classroom, which in turn, motivates me to adapt and evolve as an educator.' (Ashiqin)

'I see myself as someone who can make a real impact on my students' lives. I wanna be a mentor whom students can look up to and trust, and this has become a central part of my professional identity.' (Cheong)

The educational culture in Malaysia is characterised by respect for seniority. Mentoring is therefore a culturally relevant method of socialisation and knowledge transfer and not just a pedagogical task. PSTs observe and imitate their mentors in a cultural context that portrays educators as moral role models and subject matter experts.

'My mentor gave me constructive feedback and guidance. She helped me develop a student-centered approach and reminded me of the importance of continuous professional development.' (Azrul)

'The interactions with my mentor have shaped my teaching methods and professional identity. She gave me constructive feedback, familiarized me with different teaching strategies and showed me how to conduct excellent lessons.' (Naavya)

The experiences of Azrul and Naavya illustrate the social embedding of learning through relational engagement within a culturally structured CoP. The quality of mentorship influences the course of identity development. PSTs who have mentors who are encouraging, introspective, and knowledgeable report feeling more confident, committed to their careers, and able to articulate their teaching clearly.

Reflection as a socially mediated practice

Respondents negotiate and shape their evolving profession by viewing reflection as a formal academic requirement, but it gradually evolved into a deeply personal and pedagogical exercise during the practicum.

'During microteaching, I only wrote reflections because it was required. But in school it's different (haha) I actually want to write down what happened and talk about it with my mentor. This process helps me realize what worked well and what needs to be improved.' (KoKSeong)

'The reflection part allows me to document successes and challenges, creating a foundation for continuous improvement in my teaching methods. I have begun to realize its importance, especially as a beginning teacher.' (Suresh)

'I use a journaling system to help me document all of this. At first I thought it was silly, but soon I saw some changes in my approach. They help me to critically evaluate my teaching practices and incorporate feedback to better meet the needs of my students.' (Firdaus)

Through activities such as journaling, mentoring, and peer reviews, PSTs have experienced a shift from superficial compliance to deeper engagement. The repeated practice of evaluating and adjusting illustrates the gradual internalisation of professional learning. Respondents show that reflection is not merely a solitary academic endeavour; reflection is socially mediated.

Managing classroom behaviour

Developing behaviour management skills in the classroom requires resilience, adaptability and strategic problem solving. Respondents cited this as one of the most challenging parts of the educational process and culturally responsive teaching methods are necessary due to students' diverse backgrounds, academic performance and behavioural expectations. The practicum provided a rich environment for the PSTs to test, modify, and improve their methods in real time in a classroom setting. The PSTs went beyond theoretical knowledge and gained practical skills through this localised and contextualised experience that greatly influenced their identity development.

> *'Classroom management was one of the biggest challenges I faced. I had to learn how to set clear expectations and use positive reinforcement to keep students on track. It required a lot of patience and consistency.'* (Salina)

Salina's reflections revealed that behaviour control requires more than maintaining discipline; it requires emotional regulation, consistency, and commitment to the creation of a structured learning environment. PeiYan and Vicky voiced the difficulties of working with students with behavioural problems, where traditional methods often failed:

> *'I can handle my... deal with the classroom. The classroom. It depends on the class. In the first one, I have the lower class, the lower performing class, and they're pretty... Naughty?... Not quite naughty, to be honest. VERY naughty. So it's quite hard for me to deal with them.'* (PeiYan)

> *'One of the biggest challenges I faced was managing classroom behavior and keeping students engaged. I overcome this by implementing different classroom management techniques, like setting clear expectations and using positive reinforcement.' (Vicky)*

Pei Yan and Vicky employed trial and error during their practicum. They gradually learnt about balancing authority and accessibility in the classroom. Meanwhile, mentoring facilitated Ahmad's transition. Experienced mentors provided culturally based strategies and emotional support that helped PSTs apply theoretical knowledge more effectively in practice.

> *'My mentor was fantastic. She gave me a lot of practical advice on how to handle different situations in the classroom. Her guidance helped me to develop effective teaching strategies and build confidence in my abilities.'* (Ahmad)

> *'The first thing you need to do at school is to ask if there are any teachers you can talk to... That way you will learn something new there.'* (Firdaus)

The experiences of Ahmad and Firdaus represent the Malaysian culture of collaborative learning. In addition to formal education, professional development is influenced by interpersonal relationships and collective knowledge within the school community. SLT is consistent with this type of facilitated participation, which has its roots in the cultural norms of deference to superiors and teamwork. The evolution from passive observers to self-aware practitioners integrated into a community of teachers represents a major shift in the identity development of PSTs.

The need for more practical field experience

The PSTs expressed a strong desire for more comprehensive and sustained practical teaching experiences, as the perceived gap between theory and practice was felt during the practicum. The limited duration and scope of the placements often limited opportunities to internalise core teaching skills, such as classroom management and differentiated instruction. Michelle and Azrul both emphasised this need:

> *'The teaching degree should include more practical teaching experiences. We need to spend more time in real classrooms observing and practicing teaching.'* (Michelle)

> *'We need more hands-on workshops, especially in areas like classroom management and differentiated instruction. These are skills that can't be fully developed through theory alone.'* (Azrul)

Core principle of SLT is illustrated here when respondents emphasise the need for more authentic classroom experiences where theory is put into practice. Respondents felt unprepared to assume the role of teacher without enough exposure to the actual classroom setting. Recognition of this need by the PSTs also shows their growing ability to move beyond theoretical frameworks to practical practice and their growing understanding of the complexity of teaching.

Discussion

SLT is employed as the theoretical lens to examine identity development of Malaysian TESL-PSTs during the practicum. The study confirms that identity is developed by the interaction of PSTs' beliefs, practices, and memberships within institutions and cultures in the CoP (Beijaard et al., 2004; Wenger, 1998; 2000). Practicum is a transformative experience that led to a transformative discourse on identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The progress towards the peripheral to full membership has allowed the PSTs to internalise and live out their professional role, rather than being only theorised about. In the present study, TESL-PSTs move from being apprentices to being full members of the teaching profession (Johnston, 2015; Pendergast et al., 2020).

One of the key findings of this study is the role of reflective practice in the career development of PSTs. Reflection enables PSTs to evaluate classroom pedagogy and determine strengths and weaknesses for improvement. As a result, this work solidifies the professional identity of PSTs (Flores, 2020; Singhasiri & Boonmoh, 2011; Trent, 2013; Yazan, 2018; Uştuk & Hu, 2024). Although its value for identity development is well established, this study shows that reflection alone is not enough if it is not placed in a relational and cultural context. Reflection is more than an exercise in retrospection; it is a place to reframe one's identity. Thus, the PSTs who received dialogue-based feedback from their mentors were aware of their performance and reshaped their emerging

identities. This feedback has helped PSTs reconcile personal and institutional tensions; they also envision a possible self that connects identity formation to current practices and the future (Erdem, 2020; Hamman et al., 2010).

This study provides a culturally contextual perspective on the development of Malaysian TESL-PSTs' professional identity. Identity development is shaped by the interplay of familial support and collectivist cultural orientations. Malaysia's collectivist socio-cultural has an impact on PSTs' career aspirations and identity (Muhaji et al., 2023; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). However, the findings also show that culture is an overt causal factor; family background and mutual expectations subtly support a sense of professional belonging. These experiences begin in formal teacher education and through early, informal contacts in teacher families. Such family interactions represent an initial form of LPP, as PSTs with this background reported higher levels of self-confidence and a stronger focus on the teaching role.

Besides, the variability in the quality and approach of mentoring supports the development of TESL-PSTs from peripheral observation to more active involvement in the school practice community. The mentoring engagement appeared to reflect a broader cultural dynamic within the Malaysian educational context, where educators are often viewed as custodians of wisdom and experience who are expected to pass on their knowledge and pedagogy experiences (Ligadu, 2012; Von, 2024). This culturally inflected view of mentorship is consistent with Prawiro & Amaliah (2021), who argue that the style of mentorship contributes significantly to how PSTs negotiate and construct their emerging professional identities. In the Malaysian context, PSTs were supported by mentors to gain self-confidence and a sense of belonging. These findings demonstrated that socio-cultural and institutional context in which participation takes place should be taken into account.

Malaysia's multilingual classrooms presented many TESL-PSTs with challenges that went beyond the scope of their coursework. For instance, PeiYan and Vicky, who were placed in rural or lower-performing schools, reported that they had to adapt their teaching strategies on the spot, often relying on trial-and-error methods to maintain discipline and engage students. Although the data do not specifically point to linguistic or cultural diversity as a barrier, the rural context suggests that the PSTs were learning in an environment where flexibility is crucial.

From SLT's perspective, identity is a product of action within the everyday, communally situated CoP. It helps PSTs to construct professional identities through active negotiation of classroom realities. However, standardised teacher training is not likely to prepare PSTs for the richness of complexity in inclusive classrooms. As a result, the present study cited the theory-practice gap perceived, and the respondent is seeking a more hands-on practice in classroom management and instruction differentiation. Therefore, rather than seeing this as a straightforward curriculum defect, the PSTs' trainer must reinforce the importance of situated practice in professional identity development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study contributes to the growing body of research on teacher identity development by applying Situated Learning Theory (SLT) to the Malaysian TESL-PSTs context. The results indicate that identity formation is in motion and always influenced by elements such as family support, culturally sensitive mentoring and reflective practices in Malaysia's cultural landscape. Specifically, when the guidance provided by mentors was culturally sensitive, PSTs showed successful transition from peripheral observation to active engagement in the school practice community.

In view of these results, teacher training programmes should prioritise mentoring that is culture-based and responsive to the multicultural nature of Malaysia. This includes encouraging the mentor to expose the trainee to a variety of school environments as part of their training, such as urban, rural and multilingual, and integrating cross-cultural teaching into coursework. Besides, teachers' trainers must be equipped and willing to co-construct and encourage discourse around identity negotiation. Through this immersion, PSTs would gain first-hand experience of teaching linguistic and cultural diversity; they can also adapt the learnt teaching methods to meet the needs of a diverse range of students.

Empowering both programme structures and the teacher trainers will help build a future-ready teaching workforce that is in line with the agenda of the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which calls for inclusive and equitable schooling for all.

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Situacinis mokymasis ir mokytojo tapatumas: Malaizijos būsimųjų anglų kalbos mokytojų praktikos patirties įžvalgos

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Santrauka

Šio tyrimo tikslas – atskleisti Malaizijos būsimųjų anglų kalbos, kaip antrosios užsienio kalbos (angl. *Teaching English as a second language*, *TESL*), mokytojų (angl. *Preservise teachers*, *PST*) profesinio tapatumo formavimąsi praktikos metu, taikant situacinio mokymosi teoriją (angl. *Situated learning theory*, *SLT*). Tyrime dalyvavo 18 būsimųjų anglų kalbos mokytojų.

Šis tyrimas atskleidė penkias pagrindines temas: 1) entuziazmas ir šeimos parama renkantis karjerą; 2) kultūriškai įsišaknijusi mentorystė; 3) refleksyvioji praktika ir nuolatinis tobulėjimas; 4) klasės valdymas ir 5) poreikis įgyti daugiau praktinės patirties. Būsimųjų mokytojų tapatumo formavimąsi lėmė asmeninės pažiūros, kultūriniai lūkesčiai ir aktyvus dalyvavimas praktikos bendruomenėse. Mentoriai atliko mokymo vadovų vaidmenį kultūriniame kontekste; jie formavo būsimųjų mokytojų požiūrį į savo vaidmenį ir skatino refleksiją, kuri sukėlė pasikeitimus nuo formalių reikalavimų iki prasmingo savęs auginimo. Iššūkiai klasėje, ypač kaimo ir daugiakultūrėje aplinkoje, parodė teorijos ir praktikos atotrūkį. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad mokytojų rengimo programose turėtų būti įtrauktas kultūriškai jautrus mentoriavimas ir struktūruotos refleksijos veiklos. Tokios pastangos atliepia ketvirtąjį tvaraus vystymosi tikslą, kuriuo siekiama užtikrinti kokybišką švietimą rengiant būsimuosius mokytojus, kad jie gebėtų atitikti įvairius besimokančiųjų poreikius.