The construction of teacher identity: A study of pre-service EFL teachers' discourse in Khulna

Hasan Shaikh[1*], Md. Shahjahan Kabir[2]

[1,2]Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh
e-mail: *[1]hasanshaikhrampal@gmail.com , [2]drkabir.ku@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

Teacher identity is not learned rather it is authored not from manuals, nor methods, but through language, experience, and the delicate art of narrating oneself into being. Professional identity development of 15 pre-service EFL instructors is investigated in this paper. The data were collected through semi-structured interview and interpreted based on positioning theory. The findings of this study demonstrate that participants positioned themselves reflexively as empathetic change agents motivated by social injustices and personal struggles. They resisted traditional grammar-based roles, adopting communicative, student-centered pedagogy. Identity was fluid, developed through classroom practice, mentoring, and social determinants such as class and gender. Strategic language use became salient in self-presentation. Several aspired to future roles as reformers or tech-integrated educators, but some were doubtful because of systemic constraints. Such doubtful responders vacillate between conformity and resistance, exercising agency in reflexive resistance to interactive positioning by peers, managers, and symbolic power of English in Bangladesh. Rather than a linear trajectory, identity is envisioned here as a dynamic dance of self within discourse—contradictory, shifting, and morally invested. Ultimately, this research affirms identity not as a credentialing product in the EFL settings in Bangladesh, but as an ongoing tale being told throughout one's life in tension with other individuals, contexts, and possibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, teacher identity has been on the educational research agenda with the perception that teaching is not a technical profession but a very personal, social, and political pursuit(Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, where instructors will likely teach within more than a single sociocultural and ideological context, identity negotiation and construction are even more complicated and multidimensional(Varghese et al., 2005). This research thus explores how pre-service EFL instructors in Khulna, Bangladesh, negotiate and construct their professional identities in personal narratives. Whereas teacher preparation programs take up pedagogical skill and content knowledge, this study places at center stage the narrative lives of prospective teachers as they struggle to build meaning regarding who they are and who they are becoming in their sociopolitical and institutional worlds.

Importance of the teacher identity is that it significantly affects professional development, classroom practice, and teaching decisions. Identity not only determines how teachers view their job but also addresses how they handle adversity relate to pupils, and construct their professional futures(Mockler, 2011). In EFL contexts, where language learning is implicated in cultural presuppositions, national language policy, and global language hierarchies, identity construction is a space of negotiation and struggle. Teachers need to negotiate institutionally driven pressure, learners' aspirations, as well as their own changing beliefs and values(Norton, 2013). As it is, scholars have placed emphasis on narrative use in teacher identity studies, theorizing teachers' narratives about themselves as not just reflective but constitutive of their identities. Narrative research allows researchers to gaze into the inner worlds of teachers such as hopes and fears, aspirations and struggles, and observe the large discourses that make up these worlds. For prospective teachers, narrative is an identity-building tool in the sense that they utilize it to fashion comprehensible identities out of former lives, present training, and still-to-be-written futures. Their stories often manifest strains among idealized visions of teaching and the reality of pedagogic practice, among institutional rhetoric and human values, and among local cultural expectations and international forces(G. P. Barkhuizen, 2017).

Against this backdrop of identity negotiation and narrative construction, English continues to be a language of power and mobility, associated with modernity, global reach, and elite identity(Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). It is, nevertheless, widely perceived as an external threat to local languages and values. Pre-service teachers in Khulna have to negotiate this duality, balancing their professional identities as English language teachers with their cultural and linguistic identities. For many, teaching English is not an intellectual or professional decision but socioeconomic in nature regarding desires for better employment and social respect. These motivations influence their investment in English and their trajectory towards the teaching career(See et al., 2022).

Finally, this study uses a local yet global oriented approach to teacher identity scholarship. It recognizes that despite identity making being secluded in certain specific context like Khulna, it is also determined by transnational flows of language teaching discourses, teacher professionalism and education restructuring of neoliberal policy reforms. There is an impact on the ideologies of pre-service teachers about their future and their vision of practice due to the collaborative of standards, online learning space, and English language teaching, which are spread throughout the world(Block, 2015). Nevertheless, previous studies have explored different aspects of teacher's identity (Bowen et al., 2021; Fox & Wilson, 2015; Lai et al., 2016; Loh & Liew, 2016) their reactions to those pressures mediated by local constraints, possibilities and histories have never been explored. By giving voice to Bangladeshi pre-service EFL teachers, in the vanguard, the research paper intends to project the manner through which global/local forces collaborate to co-constitute teacher identity terrain.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher identity is a much demanded construct in research, fueled by a general recognition of identity as complex, contextual, and discursively negotiated. Teacher identity is not a stable essence but a dynamic, developing composite of beliefs, experiences, values, and professional aspirations conditioned by social, institutional, and ideological contingencies(Wong & Liu, 2024). In EFL teaching contexts, identity construction is similarly exacerbated by the overlap of global language ideologies, postcolonial legacies, and local teaching realities. One of the bases of research on teacher identity has been, nevertheless, the move from essentialist to

constructivist accounts of identity. Initial identity theories were likely to consider identity as an internal psychological set of traits or properties that teachers carry with them into classrooms (El-Soussi, 2025). However, constructivist and post structuralist approaches have become more and more doubting of this knowledge, in which identity is produced in a social and performative way, through discourse (Cap, 2019). Identity in such views is continuously being constructed and deconstructed in negotiation with students, fellow students, institutional culture and the wider sociopolitical ideologies. The vision of teacher education as not only a location where skills are acquired but also identity constructed has also been required by the change(Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).

Narrative offers a means of understanding the identity formation process that is riddled with contradiction and complexity. Narratives constitute identity, more than mere representations of experience(Hayes, 2017). Teachers make meaning, describe and negotiate their positions in schools through narrative. An increasing body of literature has shown in what ways narratives shed light on pre-service teachers' identity trajectories. For example, Tsui (2007) employed narrative inquiry to trace Hong Kong pre-service English teachers' identity construction and uncovered how their prior schooling, teacher education discourse, and practicum influenced their professional imaginaries. Yazan (2017) explored U.S. TESOL pre-service teachers' identity narratives and brought to the forefront the fluidity and multiplicity of their developing identities with a focus on race, ethnicity, and linguistic background.

Pre-service teacher identity is such a rich site to undertake inquiry because it is a liminal professional development phase wherein individuals are in the process of transitioning from student to teacher, mediating their beliefs, capabilities, and nascent professional selves. Numerous researchers have depicted the volatility inherent in pre-service teacher identity, insofar as it is a process of negotiating personal histories and values with institutional and mainstream pedagogical ideologies(Hong, 2010; Trent, 2011). Yet, teacher identity in Bangladesh has been researched largely within the context of in-service teachers and policy reform. Hamid and Honan (2012) for instance, analyzed the influence of English-in-Education policies on rural teachers to show how top-down reform does not account for the lived experiences and agency of the teachers. Similarly, Erling et al. (2012) highlighted the socio-economic conditions that surround English language learning and teaching in Bangladesh, and how teacher identity is wrapped up in issues of class, access, and aspiration. Moreover, intersectionality of identity in the sense of how aspects like gender, class, religion, and language come together to influence teacher identities is a very new area of study in Bangladesh. Additional international studies have also shown how intersectional identities shape teacher positioning and professional confidence. For example, Kubota and Lin (2009) emphasized a need to pay attention to the ideological investment of teaching English, particularly in postcolonial settings, where the role of English teacher typically carries ambivalent identities that are both empowering and assimilative agents.

Another relevant aspect of identity construction relates to pre-service teachers' affective and emotional lives. Teaching is not only a cognitive and pedagogical enterprise; it is also an emotional labor, including joy, anxiety, fear, and hope(Frenzel et al., 2021). Emotional experiences in teacher education like inadequacy, excitement, or marginalization can play a critical role in how pre-service teachers view themselves and whether they persist with the career. In EFL settings, where teachers might be concerned about their own language proficiency or their entitlement to teach English, imposter syndrome or stress could be

particularly prominent(Kanno & Stuart, 2011). These affective aspects are, nevertheless, undertheorized in identity studies, specifically in non-Western settings.

There is also an additional complication of identity construction through institutional power relations in teacher education programs. A number of researchers have defined how such programs with hierarchical structures in terms of authority relationships between the supervisors and the trainees, standardized curriculum, and limited chances of critical reflection can limit identity development(Clarke, 2009). It has been demonstrated that pre-service teachers are taught to act in compliance rather than actual identity exploration. In the majority of cases, the hegemonic discourses of being a good teacher such as being able to speak English fluently (Sya'idah & Rohmana, 2023), being able to manage the classroom, being able to adhere to certain pedagogical methods, etc. prevail over other forms of identity discourses that rest on the local knowledge or personal experience. These pressures are quite possibly most intense in South Asian settings, where even teacher training itself is also subject to narrow bureaucratic and exam-oriented models.

After reviewing and analyzing the above literatures, it has been revealed that while research on teacher identity is established, little attention has been given to the specific discursive processes through which pre-service EFL teachers in Bangladesh construct their professional selves. Consequently, an investigation focusing on the narratives generated within the context of Khulna remains absent. This study aims to address this gap. Its point of departure is to analyze how pre-service EFL teachers in Khulna negotiate and articulate their emerging identities through their own discourse. Moving beyond the traditional focus of teacher education on pedagogical skills, this research places central importance on the personal narratives of these prospective teachers as they navigate the complex process of meaning-making, grappling with who they are and aspire to become within their specific institutional and sociopolitical landscapes.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this study, positioning theory by Davies and Harré (1990) is employed to examine how pre-service EFL teachers in Khulna articulate and negotiate their professional identities through narrative. Positioning theory provides a very enlightening conceptual framework to analyze the discursive processes through which individuals are constituted as particular kinds of persons, teachers, learners, agents, or subordinates, within specific social situations. Unlike the traditional role theory, it foregrounds the plurality, fluidity, and relational character of selfhood and allows for a more complex analysis of how speakers locate themselves and others in discourse, and how such locations make certain identities possible while constraining others.

Davies and Harré (1990) point out that identity is not an object which stays constant, but rather created and reproduced in the discourse. Consistent with an immanentist perspective on language, they emphasize that social and psychological realities are produced through actual language use (la parole) rather than through abstract linguistic structures (la langue). Accordingly, identity is not determined by pre-existing social positions but is constructed in discursive practice, as individuals assume, reject, or negotiate subject positions within shared or contested narratives. This theoretical orientation allows for more dynamic and agentic conceptualization of identity, which is extremely sensitive to poststructuralist theory and feminist theory of subjectivity.

In applying this theory to the context of pre-service EFL teachers in Khulna, the present study theorizes teacher identity not as a fixed competencies or traits but as a dynamic process of

discursive self-positioning. The participants constructed their sense of being "teachers" through narratives of their experiences, aspirations, challenges, and institutional encounters. Each narrative thus becomes a site in which subject positions are negotiated—shaped both by wider discourses of pedagogy, language, authority, gender, and professionalism, and by the participants' own interpretive agency.

A central analytical distinction here is that between interactive and reflexive positioning. Interactive positioning occurs when one participant positions another within a discourse, whereas reflexive positioning involves individuals positioning themselves (Davies & Harré, 1990). Within teacher education, supervisors, peers, and institutional structures often interactively position pre-service teachers according to hierarchical and prescriptive expectations of teacher competence. In response, these pre-service teachers reflexively accept, modify, or resist such imposed positions, thereby actively shaping their professional identities.

One of the key strengths of positioning theory is its capacity to analyze contradiction as a generative aspect of identity. Davies and Harré (1990) note that individuals often experience themselves as contradictory beings, pulled between incompatible positions within or across storylines. In teacher education, such contradictions may arise when a pre-service teacher identifies both with the nurturing, student-centered facilitator and the authoritative, examination-oriented instructor demanded by institutional expectations. These contradictions do not indicate identity confusion or failure; rather, they are integral to identity formation, reflection, and transformation. The very experience of contradiction enables the reflexive awareness through which identity remains always in process.

Consequently, positioning theory serves as the most appropriate theoretical lens for this study, as it treats narratives not merely as carriers of information but as discursive performances through which multiple subjectivities are assigned, negotiated, and at times resisted. By examining both reflexive and interactive positioning within these narratives, the study uncovers the diverse and often contradictory ways in which teacher identities are constructed in the context of Khulna.

3. METHOD

This qualitative study employed purposive sampling to select 15 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in the ELT program at Khulna University, all of whom were undertaking their teaching practicum during data collection. These participants were chosen for their potential to provide rich, reflective narratives on teacher identity formation in a practicum context. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in English, with occasional code-switching to Bangla. Before conducting the interview process, all participants were cleared about the nature and scope of the study, and were assured that their data would be only used for academic purpose anonymously. Questions were open-ended, encouraging participants to share stories about key moments, challenges, and self-perceptions as emerging teachers. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. Data analysis was conducted using NVivo, allowing for thematic coding and organization. The analysis was framed by positioning theory by (Davies & Harré, 1990) focusing on interactive positioning and reflexive positioning.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Personal and Professional Background

The analysis illustrates that most participants narrated deeply personal and affective journeys into EFL teaching. Their stories were suffused with passion for language, empathy for

learners, and a desire for social upliftment. For instance, Participant 3 noted: "I noticed the gap in English education in rural Bangladesh. I wanted to bridge that divide". Here, the participant reflexively positions herself as a socially conscious change agent, rooted in the narrative of educational inequality. This is not merely a personal identity claim; it emerges against a backdrop of structural disparities in Bangladesh's education system where, Hamid and Honan (2012) claim, rural schools often lack trained English teachers. Likewise, Participant 2 stated: "Inspired by my own struggles, I became an EFL teacher to help students navigate this journey". This expression echoes what Barkhuizen (2017) describes as the narrative construction of identity through autobiographical reasoning, where past experiences serve as legitimizing forces for current professional choices.

Several narratives highlight how English is positioned as a gatekeeper of opportunity in Bangladeshi society. As Participant 1 phrased it: "English opens doors to global opportunities". Such positioning aligns with global discourses of English as capital (Ali et al., 2023), yet the participants reflexively reframe this dominant narrative by grounding it in local responsibility like to not merely teach English, but to enable students' agency. This tension, between global aspirations and local belonging, illustrates what Norton (2013) refers to as investment in language learning and teaching: the idea that identity is always situated within a desire for recognition and access. Here, participants positioned themselves as simultaneously global citizens and local servants.

4.2 Perceptions of Teaching and Identity

To the query of how they see themselves as EFL teachers, participant accounts revealed a move away from the conventional, examination-driven roles and toward more interactive, human-centered visions. Participant 6 saw the EFL teacher as "a developer of critical thinking", whereas Participant 4 underscored "a motivator in overcoming language barriers". These reflexive positionings suggest a move away from passive reproduction of grammar teaching and toward a more transformative pedagogy. This transformation goes against the typical interactive positioning prevalent in most Bangladeshi classrooms, where teachers become limited by a narrow textbook-defined identity.

Rather, the participants position themselves as facilitators of communicative competence, critical thinking, and empowerment of students. As Participant 9 succinctly said, "It's not just teaching grammar. It's helping students learn with confidence". These emergent teacher identities align with international ELT discourses promoting communicative language teaching (CLT) but are distinctive in being shaped by the practice of working within the confines of examination-driven, resource-poor school systems. Therefore, "teachers should more often require students to provide full sentence answers, rather than quickly accepting single-noun answers"a(An et al., 2021). Some of the participants recognized this discrepancy between the reality of institutionalization and idealization. Namely, Participant 15 demonstrates that "we are teaching grammar of the language and not the language". In a reflexive-interactive system of teacher education with an organizational structure that is still influenced by traditional ideologies of language, it is argued, positionality marks the discursive problem of becoming. Moreover, the arrival of digital technologies was considered to be revolutionary process. Participant 5 mentioned a shift towards "facilitating digital learning", which suggested a reconsideration of the role of teacher in terms of technological progress. Yet this also presented challenges, which are most acute in low-resource settings, which continues to be a structural fact, preventing these idealized roles.

These accounts also depict the displacement of identity of the English teacher who was the English learner. The case of participant 7 was quite stereotypical: the person began to learn the language himself, he could not be a fluent speaker... once he had conquered the issue, he began to see that he wanted to help other participants. The case is an autobiographical account that is a classic representation of reflexive repositioning wherein past crises become occasions to change into explanatory accounts of skills and nurturing. Nonetheless, some of the participants showed ambivalence over whether they were legitimate or ready. Participant 15 said: "I thought I couldn't give my 100% to my students. There was lacking. I think I need more training". This narrative captures interactive positioning where institutional demands, mentors, or even peer-comparison may position the trainee as *not yet enough*, creating a sense of deficit. The "inconsistency of identity between perceived lower status in the school and strong belief of being equal to other colleagues motivate to seek professional development to change this situation" (Wu, 2023, p. 6). As Davies and Harré (1990) argue, such positioning is never neutral; it shapes the range of subjectivities that are available or denied to individuals in interaction.

The internalization of these positions is not always passive. Several participants narrated their determination to evolve. Participant 10 said: "What was once focused on fixed grammar rules now includes continuous adaptation. It means learning every day". This enactment of the lifelong learner subject position reflects an agentive repositioning that contests static, exam-bound views of teaching. It also resonates with Tsui (2007) who observed that language teachers often oscillate between conflicting roles like expert, learner, guide as they grow into their profession.

Despite their novice status, many participants voiced aspirations to influence broader educational or societal contexts. Participant 5 saw themselves as "a changemaker in the future," while Participant 9 envisioned their future role as "a social contributor". These forward-facing narratives suggest identity is not only a retrospective sense of self but also a projection of imagined subject positions. For instance, Participant 13 positioned themselves as someone who would "build a generation who can present themselves in front of the world". Here, the teacher identity is imbued with nationalism and globalism, merging the interactive discourse of nation-building with the reflexive narrative of empowerment.

4.3 Influences on Teacher Identity

Mentorship was a recurring influence. Participant 12 cited a teacher-parent: "I grew up in a household where education was valued sincerely. It could have given me the desire to walk in her footsteps. This can be seen as one of those instances of intergenerational positioning, whereby teacher identity is reproduced and reinculcated via the family legacy. Similarly, the mentors too were models, the teaching concept which affected these respondents. However, there were also reports of a strong sense of structural issues. Participant 15 complained: "Economic advantage is not sufficient... to all EFL teachers in my surroundings". The matter of structural positioning in this case is synonymous with professional identity. The process of constructing selves within the discourses of pedagogy and passion also involves the teachers as they are also exposed to the material discourses of labor devaluation, which thrives especially within the education systems of South Asia.

In spite of these constraints, participants repeatedly positioned themselves as hopeful, adaptable, and committed. Participant 6 noted: "My journey began with a simple wish to help students unlock their potential". This theme of transformative potential, both personal and

collective, runs through the narratives and illustrates how identity construction is as much about resistance and reimagining as it is about conformity.

When asked about the moments that made them feel more or less like a teacher during their practicum, many participants in this study narrated stories that reflected shifts in self-perception through specific classroom experiences. Participant 1 vividly recalled the pride and empowerment they felt during their first solo lesson. This moment of standing in front of a class and seeing the impact of their teaching helped position them reflexively as capable, confident, and legitimate teachers. Similarly, Participant 2 described how a student's gratitude served as powerful interactive positioning; the learner, through verbal affirmation, positioned the trainee as a real teacher. These moments echo what Davies and Harré (1990) describe as the discursive co-construction of self: the self is not a pre-formed entity but emerges through relational acts of recognition and affirmation. Participant 3 highlighted a more complex trajectory: struggling with classroom management initially triggered self-doubt, a reflexive positioning of inadequacy. However, over time, they repositioned themselves through growth and mastery, which aligns with Trent's (2011) findings that identity is often forged in tension and contradiction. Participant 4, meanwhile, demonstrated metalinguistic awareness in distinguishing between formal and informal registers in English. Their self-reported change in linguistic behavior according to audience and context indicates a high level of reflexive positioning that exceeds pedagogical competence and borders on performative identity in the EFL setting(Butler, 2021).

The location of observation also developed. The description of witnessing an experienced teacher given by participant 5 serves as evidence of the power of the vicarious positioning: witnessing another successful inhabit, the teacher position creates an empty discourse space in which one desires to be. Participant 6, in turn, described the gloomy scenario of failure and affective consequences in a very bleak image. One of the lessons that failed to work taught them to position themselves temporarily as ineffective, an act of discursivity based on disorientation of students. However, the story concludes in self-reclamation, demonstrating Davies and Harré's (1990) concept that repositioning is continually available in narrative space. In the case of Participant 7, the process of distinction and responsiveness to the needs of students was going to be primary events that establish identity. Being able to be sensitive to students, they placed themselves reflexively as competent and empathetic, which is supported by the Hong's (2010) study as associated with the characteristic of successful identity building in teacher flexibility. Participant 8 was very descriptive regarding the transformational aspect of integrating technology, and they identified themselves as a progressive, modern teacher.

Some of the participants put in consideration feedback and mentorship. Participant 9 added that constructive criticism at the beginning destabilized their self-concept but it later helped them establish confidence in the profession. This balancing between repositioning and destabilization has its mirror in one of the ultimate tensions of the development of the educator identity. Participant 10 made student achievement their measure of the success of teaching in the area, placing themselves in outcomes. This statement proves extremely interactive forms of positioning by which the achievement of the students will become discursively symptomatic of the achievement of the teachers. Participant 11, in its turn, was not interactive in terms of reflexive positioning. Their refusal to work as a teacher in the monstrosity of structures serves the purpose of Harré and Langenhove (2003) to shun the role of discursiveness because of the incompatibility with the realities or values. Participant 12 was however, ratified in his or her position by active engagement based on the fact that the agency and the affective engagement can intervene strongly between the reflexive positioning.

The impacts of extrinsic contexts, for instance, part-time teaching or tutoring (Participant 14), are suggestive of how identity is not only formed within institutional boundaries, but also across different social fields. This is aligned with Beauchamp and Thomas' (2011) observation that teacher identity is developed from a range of dissimilar experiences across contexts.

4.4 Challenges and Identity Negotiation

Respondents with the expression of conflicts on identity displayed professional obligations, which tended with conflicting personal facts or perceptions. According to participant 1, she shared how difficult it is to be both friendly and strict because that is what the dilemma of humanistic teaching morals and institutional scripts has expressed. Such struggles align with Clarke's (2009) contention that teacher identity is an ethico-political negotiation of conflicting duties. Participants 2 and 5 displayed tensions due to stiffness in the curriculum and changing methodologies. They indicate interactive positioning by the system as implementers, not innovators, beginning reflexive examination of relevance and ability. Participant 3 was faced with incongruity in managing conflicting student expectations, whereas Participant 4 faced the ideological issue in teaching English. This was reiterated by Kubota and Lin (2009)citing that language teachers negotiate the nationalist and globalist discourses together. Participants 6 and 10 demonstrated how material constraints such as limited resources, disengaged learners, or structural constraints affect interactive and reflexive positioning. They positioned themselves as constrained and struggling, a narrative consistent with Barkhuizen's (2017) finding that teachers resort to creating hybrid identities in order to cope with contextual constraints. Gender discrimination, to which Participants 12 and 14 belonged, demonstrated how sociocultural positioning has a strong effect on identity.

Likewise, as participants struggled with negotiating professional and personal selves, they largely portrayed new ways of balancing their values with those of the institution. Participant 1 talked about the blending of creativity within tight structures, and Participant 5 talked about the blending of new and old practices. These are strategies of strategic positioning, establishing teacher agency amidst structural limitations. Participant 4's emphasis on inclusion despite what each thinks is an act of ethical reflexive positioning, a deliberate discursive practice to ensure fairness and inclusion take place. This is consistent with Mockler's (2011) argument that ethical awareness is the foundation of identity construction. Participant 7's narration, founded on honesty and benevolence, is one ethical dimension of teacher identity that is possibly not aligned with policy but has a nascent part to play in the self-presentation of legitimacy. Participant 13's complaint on the social underestimation of EFL teachers demonstrates another positioning: symbolically excluded but well qualified. Their identities are not only constructed in classroom discussion but also in opposition to wider discourses in society that downgrade teaching. Participant 15's sensitivity to language register demonstrates a very high degree of awareness of how linguistic choices index identity across contexts. Their register-shifting capacity is less a linguistic competence than a type of discursive negotiation, confirming Davies and Harré's (1990) conjecture that language use is integral to identity positioning.

4.5 Role of Language and Discourse

One of the most dominant themes to surface from the stories was the conscious and tactical utilization of language as a space for performing the teacher self. Because, "identity is not a static or fixed notion, but rather a dynamic and ongoing process that is affected by a range of internal and external factors"(Wu, 2022). Almost all of the participants discussed how they

changed their way of speaking, for example, simplifying terminology, changing tone, or invoking local culture to perform an authoritative and intelligible identity. This conscious linguistic practice functioned as a form of reflexive positioning, where participants attempted to embody the subject position of the competent and caring EFL teacher. Participant 3 articulated this duality explicitly: "My tone is respectful yet friendly… so that students see me as both a guide and a mentor". This aligns with the broader literature on language teacher identity that highlights how novice teachers perform hybrid roles, especially in EFL contexts where authority and empathy must coexist(Trent, 2011). The participants' effort to "use clear and simple language" (Participant 15) or "adjust my speech depending on the audience" (Participant 4) demonstrates how language is not merely a tool for instruction but a site of identity negotiation. These enactments reflect what Davies and Harré (1990) describe as the discursive production of selves, wherein positioning occurs through everyday speech acts.

What is notable is how several participants talked about register-switching in order to transition between institutional hierarchies and peer friendships. For instance, Participant 14 explained, "I carefully use different register, as if people know I'm something". This self-presentational tactic is employed as a way of claiming legitimacy in academic settings traditionally dominated by senior faculty and English-proficient peers. However, there were also references to constraints on such performative positioning. Participant 9 explained, "I always try to use formal language regardless of medium", a strict subscription to language conventions perhaps culled from entrenched linguistic hierarchies. In this case, institutional and social discourse such as the canonization of Standard English placed interactive positioning on the speaker, limiting their agency to alignment with a normative teacher identity coded around correctness rather than creativity. This refers to the research is other context where "the overload of teaching occupied the teacher's time at the expense of doing research, which caused the tension between what the pre-service teacher could actually do and what she intended to achieve"(Ilyin et al., 2025; Wu, 2022).

In addition to linguistic action, the participants' repeated self-descriptors also provided ample data on the developing discursive formations utilized for negotiation of their professional selves. The research identified a common frequency of reference to roles as facilitator, mentor, guide, lifelong learner, caring individual, and adaptive practitioner. These descriptors were not randomly selected rather these are the subject positions that participants found both possible and justifiable within the narrative regime of teacher education in Bangladesh. For instance, Participant 1 stated, "I consider myself a teacher who guides students towards learning instead of delivering information", thereby situating themselves within the framework of contemporary progressive pedagogy. This reflexive positioning is a move away from the conventional chalk-and-talk teacher persona that continues to dominate numerous Bangladeshi classrooms.

However, inconsistencies and silences were present as well. For example, Participant 7 plainly answered, "No, I don't", in response to questions regarding recurring themes in their self-description. This absence of articulated identity may point to an uncertainty in positioning, indicative of the fragile in-betweenness that defines the pre-service experience. Identity is not always a coherent, stable narrative but a shifting configuration shaped by available discourses. Participants like 7 and 15, who expressed uncertainty or ambiguity, remind us that not all pre-service teachers feel able or authorized to narrate themselves confidently into the role of the teacher. Interestingly, several participants introduced gendered and cultural tensions in their narratives. Participant 13 noted, "If I suggest any recurring theme, that would be the prejudice of criticizing a teacher based on his or her sexes". This comment suggests that the act of being

positioned (or mispositioned) is not solely linguistic but is also mediated by social categories like gender where female teachers struggle to assert authority in classrooms dominated by patriarchal norms. Here, interactive positioning by students or society as less authoritative constrains the identity of pre-service teachers, particularly women teachers.

4.6 Future Aspirations and Reflections

When asked to envision their professional identities in the years ahead, participants crafted forward-looking narratives centered on growth, adaptability, technological integration, and student-centeredness. These future-oriented discourses reflect a combination of reflexive positioning (how participants project themselves into future subject positions) and aspirational alignment with dominant educational ideologies. For instance, Participant 1 anticipated becoming a "more student-centered educator", while Participant 6 hoped to be a "research-driven educator". Such statements demonstrate hypothetical identities that individuals aspire to inhabit, often influenced by institutional discourses and global pedagogical trends. Participants' references to AI tools, globalization, and digital collaboration (Participants 2, 9, 10) situate their identity projects within a transnational frame. However, the degree of certainty in these projected identities varied. Participant 15 conceded, "I am not sure about that. It is still unclear and uncertain to me". This ambivalence can perhaps be a sign of the discursive uncertainty experienced by pre-service teachers working in an educational system which is modernizing at a fast pace but is nevertheless highly traditional.

The participants also turned to the role of socioeconomic and linguistic stratification in their future aspirations. Because, "social capital plays a mediating role by explaining the relationship between a supportive learning climate in internship schools and pre-service teachers' performance"(Civís et al., 2019). Participant 7 envisioned themselves as an "advocate for language accessibility", whereas Participant 13 predicted a professional "boom" as a result of increasing demand for English in Bangladesh. Such projections suggest appreciation of symbolic capital gained in the case of English instruction in the country, and a desire to identify their selves with its increasing prestige. However, this type of capital is also unevenly distributed, as less-advantaged or rural teachers may not have the same exposure to resources or praise.

5. CONCLUSION

Teacher identity not only is a result of formal course work or practicum training rather it is a lived, told, and negotiated construction, and this occurs in the first phase of professional preparation. Using narrative inquiry and positioning theory, the research reveals how pre-service EFL teachers in Khulna construct their emerging professional selves through language, storytelling, and imagined futures. Through these narratives, participants positioned themselves within, against, and sometimes beyond dominant discourses of pedagogy, English language teaching, and professionalism in Bangladesh.

Two findings emerged namely, first, language functions as a key tool of self-positioning. Participants used register-shifting, storytelling, and performative discourse strategies not only to teach but to claim legitimacy as developing educators. However, this agency was uneven, shaped by institutional constraints, linguistic norms, and social hierarchies. Second, participants' imagined futures highlighted both aspiration and limitation. While they envisioned themselves as technologically capable, student-centered, and globally connected teachers, these desires were tempered by structural challenges such as limited resources, cultural expectations,

and institutional rigidity. This tension reflects the broader complexities of identity formation in resource-constrained and postcolonial contexts.

The study's small sample and reliance on self-reported narratives limit the generalizability of findings. Future research should triangulate interview data with classroom observations, practicum documents, or peer reflections to better capture how identity is enacted in practice. Overall, the findings underscore the need for teacher education programs to move beyond technical training and incorporate structured identity reflection. Linguistic flexibility, including strategic use of English and Bangla, should be recognized as a legitimate identity performance rather than a deficiency. Institutions must also strengthen emotional and structural support for pre-service teachers, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. Teacher identity, as shown in this study, is not merely an academic construct but has real implications for pedagogical practice, student learning, and the transformation of educational systems.

References

Ali, Md. M., Hamid, M. O., & Hardy, I. (2023). Construction of English language skills as human capital and ELT as development aid in Bangladesh. *Globalizations*, *20*(7), 1163–1179. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2023.2171619

An, J., Macaro, E., & Childs, A. (2021). Classroom interaction in EMI high schools: Do teachers who are native speakers of English make a difference? *System*, *98*, 102482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102482

Barkhuizen, G. P. (Ed.). (2017). *Reflections on language teacher identity research*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315643465

Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2011). New teachers' identity shifts at the boundary of teacher education and initial practice. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *50*(1), 6–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2011.04.003

Block, D. (2015). Social Class in Applied Linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *35*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000221

Bowen, N. E. J. A., Satienchayakorn, N., Teedaaksornsakul, M., & Thomas, N. (2021). Legitimising teacher identity: Investment and agency from an ecological perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *108*, 103519. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103519

Butler, J. (2021). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative* (Routledge Classics edition). Routledge Classics.

Civís, M., Diaz-Gibson, J., López, S., & Moolenaar, N. (2019). Collaborative and innovative climates in pre-service teacher programs: The role of social capital. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *98*, 224–236. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.08.019

Clarke, M. (2009). The ethico-politics of teacher identity. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *41*(2), 185–200. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00420.x

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *20*(1), 43–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x

El-Soussi, A. (2025). Teacher identity continuum: A framework for teacher identity shifts online. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, *8*, 100411. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100411

Erling, E., Seargeant, P., Solly, M., Chowdhury, Q. H., & Rahman, S. (2012). *Attitudes to English as a language for international development in rural Bangladesh.* http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/attitudes-english-a-language-international-development-rural-bangladesh

Fox, A. R. C., & Wilson, E. G. (2015). Networking and the development of professionals: Beginning teachers building social capital. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *47*, 93–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.12.004

Frenzel, A. C., Daniels, L., & Burić, I. (2021). Teacher emotions in the classroom and their implications for students. *Educational Psychologist*, *56*(4), 250–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2021.1985501

Hamid, M. O., & Baldauf, R. B. (2008). Will CLT bail out the bogged down ELT in Bangladesh? *English Today*, *24*(3), 16–24. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078408000254

Hamid, M. O., & Honan, E. (2012). Communicative English in the primary classroom: Implications for English-in-education policy and practice in Bangladesh. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *25*(2), 139–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2012.678854

Harré, R., & Van Langenhove, L. (Eds.). (2003). *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (Digital pr). Blackwell.

Hayes, D. (2017). Narratives of identity: Reflections on English language teachers, teaching, and educational opportunity. In G. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315643465

Hong, J. Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(8), 1530–1543. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.003

Ilyin, M., Ismiatun, F., & Widowati, D. R. (2025). Adaptation and instructional strategies of Indonesian pre-service teachers teaching non-English subjects in Thai classrooms. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning (JETLE)*, *6*(2), 113–124. https://doi.org/10.18860/jetle.v6i2.31649

Kanno, Y., & Stuart, C. (2011). Learning to become a second language teacher: Identities-in-practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, *95*(2), 236–252. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01178.x

Kubota, R., & Lin, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice*. Routledge.

Lai, C., Li, Z., & Gong, Y. (2016). Teacher agency and professional learning in cross-cultural teaching contexts: Accounts of Chinese teachers from international schools in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *54*, 12–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.007

Loh, C. E., & Liew, W. M. (2016). Voices from the ground: The emotional labour of English teachers' work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *55*, 267–278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.016

Mockler, N. (2011). Beyond 'what works': Understanding teacher identity as a practical and political tool. *Teachers and Teaching*, *17*(5), 517–528. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.602059

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd edition). Multilingual Matters.

See, B. H., Munthe, E., Ross, S. A., Hitt, L., & El Soufi, N. (2022). Who becomes a teacher and why? *Review of Education*, *10*(3), e3377. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3377

Sya'idah, I. M., & Rohmana, W. I. M. (2023). Exploring Psychological Well-being of Indonesian Pre-service English Teachers as Non-native Speakers. *GUIDENA: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, Psikologi, Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, *13*(4), 801. https://doi.org/10.24127/gdn.v13i4.8906

Trent, J. (2011). 'Four years on, I'm ready to teach': Teacher education and the construction of teacher identities. *Teachers and Teaching*, *17*(5), 529–543. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.602207

Tsui, A. B. M. (2007). Complexities of Identity Formation: A Narrative Inquiry of an EFL Teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, *41*(4), 657–680. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00098.x

Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *4*(1), 21–44. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2

Wong, C. Y. E., & Liu, W. C. (2024). Development of teacher professional identity: Perspectives from self-determination theory. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2371981

Wu, X. (2022). A longitudinal study of EFL teacher agency and sustainable identity development: A positioning theory perspective. *Sustainability*, *15*(1), 48. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010048

Yazan, B. (2017). "It just made me look at language in a different way:" ESOL teacher candidates' identity negotiation through teacher education coursework. *Linguistics and Education*, *40*, 38–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.06.002