


# Early Teacher Identity and Personality: Exploring the Links through a Mixed Method Approach

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between self-perceived personality and self-perceived teacher identity (TI). With a mixed-method approach, we collected both quantitative (N=214) and qualitative data (N=30) to examine the relationship between TI and personality traits. Quantitative data were collected using the Big Five Personality Traits and TI scales. Qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews. To analyze the quantitative data, means were compared, and correlations were calculated. Qualitative data were analyzed through an inductive content analysis in which patterns and themes were identified. The results indicate that pre-service language teachers are aware of the dynamic feature of personality in general terms; however, they are not aware of TI as a concept and its attributes. A significant relationship between self-perceived TI and self-perceived personality traits is among the results of the current study. The agreeableness and openness to new experiences personality traits are highly correlated with the TI scores.

Keywords:

Teacher identity, personality traits, pre-service teacher education, EFL teachers

## 1. Introduction

Tremendous and fast global changes over the last several decades have led to a considerable paradigm shift in education. Although the main paradigm of education was education for stability in the past, education for instability makes more sense in today's world. Schools, appearing as conservative institutions most of the time, are very likely to resist these kinds of paradigm shifts. Therefore, in the coming decades, we are likely to witness bottom-up changes rather than top-down ones (Morgan, 1992).

Like every working mechanism in nature, education has small and intricate parts that are dependent on each other. Teaching as a profession is a part of this system, and it is obvious that teachers play a crucial role in any kind of education system. It is also evident that without understanding the intricate parts of a working mechanism, it is nearly impossible to understand the mechanism itself (Swennen, 2023). Teacher identity (TI) is one of the aspects of teaching which has gained great prominence in language teaching in the last several decades, and there have been a great number of studies focusing on different aspects, including the process of TI development (Li, 2020; Lutovac & Assunção Flores, 2020; McKay, 2019), the emotional aspect (Song, 2016), the social psychological perspective (Friesen & Besley, 2013), and teacher educators' viewpoints (Giralt-Romeu et al., 2021). Regarding TI in teacher education programs, Varghese et al. (2016) argue that utmost importance should be given to TI in the process of training teachers to enable them to be aware of their own identities, critically develop new ones as teachers, and have the ability to customize them according to the teaching environment. Conducting a three-year longitudinal study with four novice English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers, Xu (2012) similarly suggests that placing perseverance

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and agency at the center of teacher education would help novice teachers avoid a reality shock resulting from dynamic and diverse teaching settings, and thus novice teachers would develop a professional identity more effectively and positively. Despite these calls, Barkhuizen (2019, p. 549) argues that TI is far from being an inextricable part of teacher education practices, being “only loosely aligned with English teacher education policies and practices.” Based on previous works, Fairley (2020) attempts to conceptualize teacher education centered on TI and offers a transformative, agentive, and advocacy-oriented education, also admitting that more research is needed for more comprehensive teacher education programs in terms of effective TI development and construction. Moreover, Kavrayici (2020) and Assunção Flores (2020) emphasize the need for further research exploring different aspects of TI with pre-service teachers in different contexts. In this way, it is believed that prospective teachers would be better supported prior to their actual teaching and become more equipped and prepared for their future experience.

Addressing the abovementioned gap, this study investigates pre-service teachers’ beliefs and expectations about TI as well as their institutions’ policy on this issue. Traditionally, teaching is viewed as conveying knowledge and learning as passively receiving what is taught. However, research indicates that teaching is much more complicated, TI is dynamic and often not rational (Song, 2016), and teachers adopt multiple roles in teaching depending on the immediate context (Barkhuizen, 2019). In line with what Stenberg et al. (2014) argue, we view initial teacher education as the starting point for building TI for pre-service teachers. We also believe that identifying what pre-service teachers think about TI and what they expect from their institution is important to support their emerging TIs and professional development. In this way, it would be possible to effectively integrate TI into teacher education programs.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Teacher Identity and Identity Construction

Teachers are regarded as having multiple roles rather than the traditionally regarded role of information provider, and thus TI has recently attracted a growing interest in teacher education. TI is a broad concept, consisting of multiple factors, so it is not easy to simply define it. However, Barkhuizen (2019, p. 540) attempts to explain it comprehensively by thematically analyzing the perceptions of 41 authors on TI as follows:

*Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical – they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material and technological world. LTIs are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storytelling. They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and back-grounded. And LTIs change, short-term and over time – discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online.*

What is highlighted in the above explanation is TI’s being multidimensional (involving teachers’ inner and outer worlds as well as ideological and historical aspects), dynamic, and hybrid, changing according to several factors, including social and material interaction. Considering such a comprehensive concept, it is not surprising that TI has attracted considerable attention among researchers in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Li, 2020).

Since identity is dynamic and constantly shaped and affected by various factors, one could argue that there is not one single way of identity formation. Barkhuizen (2019) argues that the construction of identity is an ongoing process, and identities could vary depending on contextual factors and even power relations in schools. Smith and Sparkes (2008) more specifically mention four types of viewpoints on constructing identity which are (1) psycho-social (having an individualistic focus), (2) inter-subjective (focusing on social relations), (3) a storied recourse viewpoint (culture-dominant), and (4) dialogical (communicating with others in different discourses). Similarly, Varghese (2017) explains TI from two perspectives: identity in practice and identity in discourse. The former refers to the connection between who teachers are and what they do as members of certain groups. In other words, teachers regard themselves as belonging to a professional group of language teachers. Identity in discourse pays particular attention to language, power, and situatedness. It could be argued that both identity in practice and identity in discourse are equally

important, and identity is formed in a combination of various ways based on both internal and external factors.

## 2.2. Roles of Teachers and Teacher Identity

As stated previously, unlike the traditional perspective assigning teachers to the role of information convener, a more contemporary approach suggests that there are a variety of dimensions to language teaching. In this respect, it could be argued that there is an identity shift from transmitting knowledge to facilitating student learning in various ways. According to Barkhuizen (2019), several factors should be taken into consideration regarding teaching, as it is multi-faceted. For example, teachers have several roles and associated functions in their work with learners and colleagues, including becoming teacher researchers and teachers as innovators. Their beliefs as well as moral stance are also important concepts in TI. Another important dimension of teaching is emotion, which is closely related to beliefs and morality. Taken together, it can be inferred that teaching necessitates a combination of different actions and feelings.

The dimensions affecting teaching are closely tied to teachers' roles which are possessed by teachers in many ways in the process of teaching. According to Aktekin and Celebi (2020), teachers have six main roles which are facilitator, assessor, planner, resource developer, information provider, and role model for students. They sometimes have more than one role displaying simultaneously while the dominance of these roles could change depending on the responsibility. What is common among teachers is that they try to accomplish these roles. In doing so, they get positive feedback from different stakeholders, including students, colleagues, principals, and families.

The abovementioned roles of teachers might begin to be shaped in pre-service teachers' minds from the early stages of their education, even if they do not professionally start teaching. Considering this, it would be a good practice to analyze pre-service teachers' perceptions and beliefs about these roles which are closely connected to TI.

## 2.3. Actual and designated identities

Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that the construction of identity could be viewed as a learning process and an effort to close the gap between actual identity and designated identity. Actual identity refers to "stories about the state of affairs" happening at present so they are expressed as "factual assertions" (ibid., p. 18). For instance, expressions such as "I am an English teacher" and "I am a good teacher" can be considered as actual identity. Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 18) explain the designated identity as "stories believed to have the potential to become a part of one's actual identity". It can be expressed with future tense or obligation/commitment words such as must, should, have to, etc. Representative examples could be "I want to be a good teacher" and "I will teach English through enjoyable activities".

According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), pre-service English teachers likely construct actual identities by taking into consideration their previous and current teachers' way of teaching. Based on their experiences, they are assumed to shape designated identities for their future teaching practice. Depending on whether they like their previous teachers or teaching strategies, they can take them as role models or directly adopt the strategies without making any changes. Alternatively, they can completely avoid these and construct a new identity in line with their personality traits. Considering this, it would be useful to discuss personality and its effect on the construction of teacher identity.

## 2.4. Personality

Personality is a psychological construct which, by definition, cannot be observed directly but can be analyzed and become subject to deductions through manifest behaviors (Holzman, 2022). As is usually the case with psychological constructs, personality is a complex phenomenon that can only be understood by looking at it from different perspectives. As Holzman (2022, p. 1) states,

*Personality is a characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Personality embraces moods, attitudes, and opinions and is most clearly expressed in interactions with other people. It includes behavioral characteristics, both inherent and acquired, that distinguish one person from another and that can be observed in people's relations to the environment and to the social group.*

The above quote indicates that personality is a byproduct of an interplay between environmental and inherent factors. In attempts to understand personality, several frameworks have been proposed such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers et al., 1998), 16 personality factors (Cattell & Tatsuoka, 1970), and Eysenck's three dimensions of personality (Eysenck, 1990). After some dissatisfaction with these theories as Eysenck had too few dimensions (only three) and Cattell had as many as 16 factors, McCrae and Costa (1987) identified the Big Five factors of personality (Schultz & Schultz, 2017), and this model is the most common and a globally-working framework today (Schmitt et al., 2007).

The Big Five factor is comprised of five personality traits which are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability. The openness trait is associated with inventiveness and curiosity while it contradicts consistency and cautiousness. The conscientiousness trait is linked to efficiency and being organized, and it contradicts extravagance and carelessness. Extraversion is related to being outgoing and energetic while solitary and being reserved conflict with this trait. Being friendly and compassionate are indicators of the agreeableness trait while being critical and rational contradicts it. Neuroticism manifests itself as worry, insecurity, and nervousness while resiliency and confidence are contradictory qualities for this trait (Roccas et al., 2002). But where do personality theories and studies bind with teacher education? In the related literature, it is proposed that we need more studies concerning teacher personality by using the well-established recent personality theories (Göncz, 2017; Kim et al., 2019).

Considering its multi-faceted aspect, personality could be argued to be a determinant factor in any type of profession. When we think about personality with teaching as a profession in mind, fundamental questions arise. As was mentioned before, if we want to understand teaching as a profession, we need to understand its components. Although a number of studies have been carried out to understand the relationship between personality and teaching as a profession (see Kim et al., 2019 for details), the related literature lacks studies focusing on language teachers. By considering the related literature and formal observations conducted by the research team, the following constitutes the research questions (RQs) of the current study in terms of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education.

- Are pre-service EFL teachers aware of their personality traits?
- Are pre-service EFL teachers aware of teacher identity as a concept?
- Does self-perceived teacher identity differ depending on the EFL grades?
- Is self-perceived teacher identity shaped during pre-service teacher education?
- Is there a relationship between self-perceived personality traits and self-perceived teacher identity?
- Are self-perceived personality traits factors in choosing language teaching as a profession?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Model**

In the current study, as the research team, we embraced a mixed-method approach. We aimed to see the connections between personality traits and teacher identity, and it is evident that these constructs, particularly teacher identity, are still under discussion and lack clear definitions and conceptualization (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, we believe that pure qualitative or pure quantitative approaches might not be sufficient for a better understanding of these constructs.

#### **3.2. Research Sample**

The participants of the current study are undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education at a state university in Turkey. They are majoring in EFL and studying in different grades from preparatory class to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. At the time of data collection, their ages varied between 18 and 26. In total, 230 students participated in the study, but because of some personal and technical problems on the students' side, data from 214 participants were used. About 90% of the participants were female ( $N_f=193$ ;  $N_m=21$ ).

#### **3.3. Quantitative Instruments and Procedures**

We employed the *Early Teacher Identity Measure* (ETIM) (Friesen & Besley, 2013) to find out participants' opinions about TI. This is a psychometric scale consisting of 17 items. These items are statements such as "I

enjoy helping children discover and learn” and “I have no idea what it means to be a good teacher”. The participants decided on these statements by using a Likert scale that had options ranging from Disagree (1) to Agree (5). The reliability of the ETIM was reported as acceptable since Cronbach's Alpha was found as .87 (Friesen & Besley, 2013).

Personality traits of the participants were measured using the Big Five Personality test (also known as the Five Factor Model, FFM) developed by (Goldberg Lewis, 1992), and because of practical concerns, the 50-item version of the test was used. The scale consists of statements such as “I am not interested in abstract ideas” and “I change my mood a lot”. Again, the participants responded to these statements through a Likert scale that was constructed with options like Very Inaccurate (1) and Very Accurate (5). The Cronbach's Alpha for the FFM was found as .91 which is above the commonly agreed threshold (.70) in terms of reliability (Goldberg Lewis, 1992).

These two instruments, ETIM and the Big Five Personality Scale, were administered during the fall term of 2021 in two separate sittings. The scales were in their original language, English. During the administration sessions, the proctors, who were also the researchers of the current study, provided help with the items that the participants could not understand clearly.

After the data collection procedures, the data were input into SPSS 26. During the input process, the data were cross-checked, and some participants' data were removed from the sample due to a lack of critical information and some technical problems.

### **3.4. Qualitative Instruments and Procedures**

As the qualitative data collection method, this study employed a focus group interview which is a specific type of interview based on shared experiences and ideas of participants' thinking together by challenging or sparking group members' ideas (Dörnyei, 2007). Despite being relatively new in social research, it effectively allows to uncover interviewees' personal and collective views as well as explore the researched issue from various viewpoints simultaneously (Bryman, 2012).

For the interview, participants were randomly chosen from EFL pre-service teachers who previously participated in the teacher identity and personality trait questionnaires. Including six participants from each grade, namely, preparatory year, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, this study comprised a total of 30 interviewees (22 females and 8 males). In line with Bryman's (2012) argument, the interviewer acted as a moderator or facilitator who fairly gave a chance to each interviewee so that nobody dominated the floor. The interview questions were prepared based on the questionnaire items and their initial results. A complete list of questions is attached in Appendix 1.

Following the transcription process, the interview data were analyzed using NVivo 12 which provided great convenience in terms of identifying patterns, coding, and demonstrating data visually.

### **3.5. Ethical Issues**

Ethics had the utmost importance in the process of conducting this study. The institution where the current study was conducted enforces procedures concerning research ethics, and accordingly, the research team followed these procedures required by the institution and obtained the necessary permissions to continue with the study. Permission was received from Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Rectorate Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (25.10.2021/362). Informed consent was sought from participants, and no personal information was obtained during data collection.

## **4. Findings**

Answers to the RQs of this study were sought through quantitative and qualitative ways, depending on the research instruments. Therefore, the second and fifth RQs are explained in Section 4.1 below, while the other RQs are elaborated in the Qualitative Findings section (4.2).

### **4.1. Quantitative Findings**

Quantitative analysis first aimed to find answers to the second RQ which was participants' awareness of teacher identity as a concept. To find out the differences among the groups in this respect, their mean scores were to be compared. However, the initial analysis of the ETIM scores through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov

test showed that the data were not normally distributed ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, a non-parametric test, the Kruskal-Wallis H test, was used to see the differences among the groups.

Before performing the Kruskal-Wallis H test, group mean scores and standard deviation of the mean scores were calculated; the related scores are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Means of Teacher Identity Scores Across Grades

Group	N	Mean	SD
Prep	45	47,44	10,26
First	53	46,32	12,82
Second	43	49,60	12,42
Third	34	47,03	10,58
Fourth	39	52,69	8,92
Total	214	48,49	11,36

The data shown in Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the participants are quite similar to each other. While the 1<sup>st</sup> grade participants have the lowest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 46,32$ ), the 4<sup>th</sup> participants have the highest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 52,69$ ). The figures exhibited in Table 1 indicate that the groups differ in terms of teacher identity scores. However, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to see whether these differences are statistically significant; the related results are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Kruskal-Wallis Test Results Comparing Pre-Service Teachers' Teacher Identity Scores

	Groups	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$	df	P
Teacher identity	Prep	45	98,24	8,96	4	,062
	First	53	98,42			
	Second	43	117,27			
	Third	34	96,82			
	Fourth	39	129,05			
	Total	214				

As can be seen in Table 2, the difference among the groups in terms of teacher identity scores is not statistically significant ( $H = 8,96, p > ,05$ ).

The next RQ of the current study is about the relationship between participants' self-perceived teacher identity and their self-perceived personality. To this end, a bivariate correlation calculation was performed, and the results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The Relationship Between Teacher Identity and Personality Traits

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher identity	48,49	11,36					
2. Extraversion	31,03	6,51	,11				
3. Agreeableness	38,74	5,94	,32**	,25**			
4. Conscientiousness	34,97	7,16	,07	,10	,15*		
5. Emotional stability	27,34	6,97	,117	,29**	-,04	,12	
6. Openness	36,99	4,98	,37**	,23**	,37**	,19**	-,02

In Table 3, the relationship between teacher identity and the personality scores of the participants is presented. The results show that each of the five personality traits is available among the participants to a certain extent. The agreeableness dimension with a mean score of 38,74 appears to be the dominant trait among the participants, and the Emotional Stability trait appears to be the recessive one with a mean score of 27,34. As for the relationship between the teacher identity scores and personality traits, the teacher identity scores of the participants appeared to have significantly correlated with the Agreeableness and Openness dimensions of the personality traits.

#### 4.2. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative part of the study aimed to elaborate on personality traits and teacher identity as well as the relationship between these two. Regarding the first RQ which sought answers about pre-service teachers' awareness of their personalities, participants provided various statements about their characteristics. They commonly expressed several positive traits such as being patient, easy-going, hardworking, innovative, and

humble, although some interviewees shared negative characteristics of which they were aware, including being short-tempered at times, lazy, antisocial, and indifferent. Although these are the most common self-perceived characteristics of participants who were aware of their personality traits to some extent, their level of knowing themselves was different from each other. More specifically, the analysis of their reply to the 3<sup>rd</sup> interview question indicated that participants' awareness of themselves and their characteristics were almost evenly distributed. 14 participants stated that they were mostly in the process of developing their own identity and hence they would behave unexpectedly in certain situations which were new to them. One participant (Esma) expressed her feelings as follows (all names are pseudonyms).

*I do not think that I know myself fully because there might be lots of occasions that I have never experienced before. There could be new traits of mine that are related to these unexperienced situations. I discover myself more as I live. I have lots of traits in me, but I am not aware of them now.*

On the contrary, other participants stated that they were able to predict their behaviors in most situations and hence they were aware of their characteristics. One participant from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (Melek) explained her awareness as follows.

*I am a consistent person and behave and think as I presume. For example, I cry whenever I am very angry. I am aware of how I behave towards anything in my life. Thus, I can say that I know myself well.*

In response to the question about teacher identity, almost all participants explained various characteristics of teachers and their responsibilities as professionals, regardless of their grades. The results revealed that participants expressed similar ideas about teacher identity in terms of teachers' characteristics and responsibilities at schools rather than the issues related to teacher identity in the literature. Some of these were teachers' being patient, pedagogically competent, role model, guide, honest, and valuing their students. In this regard, each interviewee explained one or a few aspects of teachers that should ideally be possessed. For instance, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader (Veli) said that "A teacher should be idealist, cheerful, understanding, and someone who contributes to their students". Similarly, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader interviewee (Derya) said, "A teacher is a guide. S/he is like our second family member who can teach lessons as well as something from daily life". From this viewpoint, it could be argued that participants associated teacher identity with the characteristics and responsibilities of teachers.

Interview results show a clear difference among participants' accounts in terms of TI construction during pre-service teacher education. More specifically, lower-grade students, particularly the ones in the preparatory class and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, were considerably more optimistic about the construction of their TI as they received the necessary training in the following years compared to higher-level students. All preparatory and 1st-grade students believed that their TI would be shaped with the help of the observation of their instructors and taking models of them. Some also argued that theoretical information gained during this process would be useful for the construction of TI. One participant from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade (Sena) shared his opinions as follows.

*We already learned something from our previous teachers such as their way of teaching, behaviors, and their way of dealing with students, etc. We are also observing our current instructors. We take lessons from these. I am an observant student. Although I admit that we need to improve it further, I have already started to construct TI.*

However, as participants' grades got higher after the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, their views regarding the construction of TI during university education changed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> graders had a mix of opinions in that four participants were in favor of gaining experience in teaching to construct TI, while two had the belief that the quality of education would be enough for it. The views became much clearer with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders who believed that university education would be insufficient for their TI to be shaped. They emphasized the importance of experience, particularly practicum experience, to feel the real atmosphere of the classroom and hence feel more like a "teacher". A related extract from a 4<sup>th</sup> grader (Meryem) is shown below.

*I do not think that I have constructed TI so far because theoretical classes help us do it to some extent. However, I believe that I have made great progress with the help of practicum, but it is still ongoing. The practicum was really beneficial. Classes from previous years did not make an obvious contribution to TI construction for me.*

Acknowledging the benefits of practicum, some also believed that they would continue to construct identity even after becoming actual teachers with the help of new experiences in the teaching profession. Ceren, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student, stated:

*I agree on the insufficiency of theoretical classes. Practicum helped a little, but I believe that we will have TI after becoming a teacher and gaining experience.*

Lower graders' being more optimistic about TI construction during pre-service education was explained by a 4<sup>th</sup> grader, Zekiye, who had similar ideas at the very beginning of university education. Her views, however, changed over the course of years, and she noticed the importance of experience for TI construction.

*When I first came here, I presumed that I would learn everything and become a competent teacher. However, this is not the case. I believe that TI could be shaped by means of practicum by interacting with students. Students' addressing us as "teachers" makes me feel good and gets me closer to this identity. Therefore, practicum should start in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.*

The fifth interview question aimed to find out the main reasons for and factors of becoming an English teacher. According to the results, participants have various motivations to become an English teacher such as family encouragement, their own teachers' guidance, pragmatic reasons (e.g., finding a job easily), and their own decisions and innate desire stemming from their characteristics. More specifically, more than half of the participants (N=17) stated that they chose this department due to external factors or recommendations from family, friends, or teachers rather than their own decisions. However, following starting to study at the department, some stated that they got accustomed to the idea of teaching language. Ceren shared her experience as follows.

*My family encouraged me to choose this field. They did not allow me to choose another path. I was also interested in English and hence I am here. I did not like the idea of teaching until recently, but I am beginning to like it.*

There were also some participants (N=13) who purposefully chose this field and stated that it was their own decision to become an English teacher. They specifically stated several reasons such as their love of English, interest in teaching, and characteristics that are suitable for teaching. In this regard, a 1<sup>st</sup> grader (Selim) said: "I think it is appropriate for my character. I love teaching kids. This is the main reason." Similarly, Mustafa from the preparatory class stated: "I usually helped my friends with their lessons, and they were very happy about it. I also think that my character is cut out for teaching, as I am always helpful." In a similar vein, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade participant (Deniz) shared her long-standing desire to become a teacher, as she decided to follow this path in the early years of her educational life.

*When I first took an English class in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade in primary school, I loved it and decided to become an English teacher. Teaching in the practicum is very exciting for me. I feel happy while teaching English. Being together with children and spending time with them are a passion for me.*

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study reveal participants' awareness of their personalities to some extent. They believe that their personalities will be shaped by new experiences. Despite the results indicating awareness of their personalities, participants are not familiar with the term TI, as it is a new concept for most of them. It is also clear that the participants confuse personality traits with TI; during interviews, their responses concerning TI almost exclusively contain remarks about general personality traits. This finding reminds us of the importance and necessity of integrating TI training into teacher education programs for effective TI development and construction, which is also voiced by several scholars (Barkhuizen, 2019; Fairley, 2020; Varghese et al., 2016; Xu, 2012).

TI scores of pre-service teachers indicate that there are no differences among grades in terms of self-perceived teacher identity. Quantitative findings show that participants who are at the beginning of their education share nearly the same perception as senior participants. However, in the qualitative data, there are instances where the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade participants who had practicum sessions make statements that could be classified as parameters of TI. This might mean that practicum sessions are opportunities to help pre-service teachers start creating TIs. This is quite in line with the effects of contextual factors on TI construction – feeling the classroom environment through social and material interaction (Barkhuizen, 2019). It is highly



likely for them to better form their TIs since they had a chance to communicate with students and actual teachers in a real teaching context (Smith & Sparkes, 2008) as well as view themselves as a part of professional language teachers (Varghese et al., 2016).

The results also indicate that there is a relationship between self-perceived TI and self-perceived personality traits of pre-service teachers. More specifically, the quantitative results show that there is a significant relationship between agreeableness and openness personality traits and the TI scores of the participants. Furthermore, by looking at the results of the qualitative data, we can argue that one factor playing an important role in choosing foreign language teaching as a profession is self-perceived personality traits.

A meta-analysis of a considerable number of studies indicates that there is a significant relationship between overall psychological characteristics and effective teaching (Kim et al., 2019). Emotional stability is the strongest correlate in the workplace in general (Alarcon et al., 2009) and also in the teaching environment (Kokkinos, 2007). Agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion are all correlates of effective teaching (Kim et al., 2019), and a match between self-perceived teacher identity and self-perceived personality looks like a good predictor of effective teaching. Therefore, it could be assumed that personality plays an important role in shaping pre-service teacher identity, and the starting point looks like creating awareness among pre-service teachers about the relationship between personality in general and its relationship with teacher identity.

As the related literature suggests, most personality traits are hereditary and static and therefore cannot be manipulated. However, agreeableness is open to certain modifications. It has been suggested that agreeableness has greater connections with the environment when compared to hereditary (Bergeman et al., 1993). In addition, seemingly fixed aspects of the personality construct have been questioned in some studies (Hudson & Roberts, 2014). What is referred to as volitional trait change by Hudson and Roberts promises some control over self-reported personality traits, as the researchers believe that self-reported personality traits might be subject to change through this model.

Results of the current study reveal that some aspects of pre-service teachers' personalities are yet to go through certain changes, although they believe that there are some patterns in the way that they behave. This belief is supported by the related literature as we have been long aware that the level of personality changes through life and the most important changes occur during young adulthood (Roberts et al., 2006). Young adulthood is the developmental period between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2006), and in Turkey, teacher education programs mostly cover this age period (Kitchen et al., 2019). As for the TI variable, the related literature suggests similar ideas. For example, according to Sachs (2005, p. 15), "...teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather, it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience". Similarly, Rodgers and Scott (2008) suggest that identity is dynamic and constructed in social contexts. The results of the current study indicate that most of the pre-service teachers aren't aware of the TI as a concept, and clearly, this is a problem. Considering that it will take many years and complicated psychological processes for teachers to create TIs (van Lankveld et al., 2017), embracing the earlier the better approach to start helping pre-service language teachers construct TIs appears to be a plausible way of preparing pre-service teachers for their profession. In the related literature, it has been suggested that even though teacher identity formation is a personal process, teacher preparation programs play an important role in this process (Alsup, 2006). The results of the current study contradict this point of view to some extent because in our study we couldn't observe any differences, neither quantitative nor qualitative, among the participants at different grades. This difference indicates that formal and theoretical education does not improve or even trigger the start of TI development. However, the only small but observable conducts that resemble the formation of TI appear among those who had practicum sessions at state schools for about 14 weeks. This is a noteworthy finding of the current study because similar findings from other research studies have the potential to help us understand the process of TI formation during pre-service teacher education, and as Beauchamp and Thomas (2009, p. 176) suggest, "Gaining a more complete understanding of identity generally and teacher identity, in particular, could enhance the ways in which teacher education programs are conceived."

van Lankveld et al. (2017) mention five psychological processes that are involved in TI development: a sense of appreciation, a sense of connectedness, a sense of competence, a sense of commitment, and imagining a

future career trajectory. We hold the belief that these processes, one way or another, are related to individual personality traits. The results of our study indicate that agreeableness and openness personality traits are significantly correlated with TI. A 25-year longitudinal study reports that agreeableness is significantly related to greater career stability (Laursen et al., 2002). Some other studies suggest that people who have a high level of agreeableness also appear to be cooperative, helpful, altruistic, honest, and selfless (Digman, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999). It is in line with the traits of highly effective teachers (Polk, 2006).

As the last point, some limitations of the current study need to be mentioned. The data of the current study from which inferences and discussions are made are self-reports of the participants. Personality research has provided us with the insight that "...self-report inventories can be distorted by the deliberate behavior of subjects who want to create the impression of positive psychological adjustment." (Schultz & Schultz, 2017, p. 231). We acknowledge that neurotic traits can be hidden deliberately in self-report studies and this manipulation might have certain effects on the results of personality research. In addition, the same group of pre-service teachers need to be observed during the program starting from the first grade to the last to make strong claims about the changes that occur in pre-service teachers in terms of TI during undergraduate programs.

## 6. Conclusion

It is now clear that, at least in our current context, there is a relationship between personality and TI. These two interrelated and dynamic constructs shape the future professional lives of pre-service teachers. However, these two constructs are more dynamic than we assume, and their formation apparently takes years. When we consider that personality development stretches into the early twenties, and TI is built on personality, teacher education programs could be regarded as opportunities to help pre-service teachers develop, complete, and maybe modify their personalities while, in due course, providing the basis on which future TIs are constructed.

## 7. References

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