

# Predicting Future Identity of English for Young Learner (EYL) Teachers: Investigating How Coursework Shapes Pre-Service Teachers' Identities and Teaching Readiness

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## Abstract

### Background:

Research on English language teacher education has largely emphasized practicum experiences in shaping professional identity and teaching readiness. However, limited attention has been given to how coursework in English for Young Learners (EYL) programs contributes to early identity formation and teaching readiness. This study seeks to investigate the influence of coursework in English for Young Learners (EYL) programs on the professional identity and perceived teaching preparation of pre-service teachers.,

### Methodology:

A total of 121 pre-service teachers in a university teacher-education program enrolled in EYL courses were invited to participate, and 50 of them gave their consent. This research utilised a mixed-methods framework, integrating quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were gathered through a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire and examined using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were collected using reflective journals and analysed thematically. The results from both datasets were synthesised throughout analysis to obtain a thorough comprehension of identity development and pedagogical preparedness.

### Findings:

The results demonstrate that coursework supported the formation of teacher identity ( $M = 4.17$ ) and teaching preparedness ( $M = 3.90$ ), with reflective and practice-oriented activities recognised as the most impactful elements. Qualitative data identified four principal themes: the evolution of teacher identity, the development of confidence in conjunction with classroom-related issues, the significance of interactive coursework activities, and the emergence of future-oriented goals.

### Conclusion:


The study concludes that coursework facilitates the development of instructional knowledge and serves as an initial framework for building professional identity and teaching preparedness. These findings underscore the significance of incorporating reflective and practice-oriented components in EYL teacher education. It promotes EYL teacher education by illustrating that coursework serves as an initial and formative platform for cultivating professional identity and teaching preparedness in pre-service teachers.

### Originality:

Grounded in English for Young Learners pedagogy, this study contributes to the existing literature on teacher education by emphasising coursework as a crucial initial context for identity formation in pre-service EYL teachers, substantiated by mixed-method findings from an EFL environment. It provides mixed-method evidence of how child-centered, play-based, and reflective coursework shapes identity and perceived teaching readiness in an EFL context.

**Keywords** : EYL pedagogy; pre-service teachers; professional identity; teaching readiness; coursework impact

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## INTRODUCTION

Equipping prospective educators for English for Young Learners (EYL) continues to be a significant difficulty in teacher education, especially in environments where English is instructed as a foreign language. A critical aspect of this preparation is the cultivation of pedagogical skills alongside the establishment of a professional identity for teachers, which is characterised by their self-perception in relation to beliefs, values, and roles. Teacher professional identity is defined as a dynamic, socially formed, and perpetually contested process, influenced by individuals' ideas, experiences, and relationships within particular educational contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trent, 2016). In teacher education, identity is not solely a personal perception but arises from interaction with educational information, institutional expectations, and reflective practice. This identity is particularly significant in early years learning situations, as instruction necessitates awareness of children's developmental, emotional, and educational requirements. Teaching young learners necessitates a unique professional approach defined by compassion, innovation, and adaptability, in contrast to instructing older students. Consequently, comprehending the development of this identity is crucial for enhancing teacher preparation (Wong & Liu, 2024). In EYL coursework, methodologies such as play-based pedagogy, reflective assignments, and teaching simulations offer organised opportunities for pre-service teachers to interpret their responsibilities, negotiate beliefs, and perceive themselves as future educators.

While previous research has highlighted practicum and mentorship as crucial forums for teacher identity development, less focus has been placed on coursework as an initial and formative environment for developing identity. This disparity is especially significant in EYL education, as the curriculum presents essential pedagogical principles that influence pre-service teachers' comprehension of their prospective duties (Yuan & Zhang, 2021). Although these studies offer significant insights, they frequently neglect to consider how coursework serves as an initial context for identity construction, especially prior to pre-service teachers engaging in actual classroom environments. The disparity is particularly evident in EYL learning environments, where coursework is crucial in bringing child-centered pedagogies, play-based learning, and reflective practices. This study seeks to examine the influence of EYL

coursework on the professional identity and perceived teaching preparedness of the pre-service teachers.

Pre-service teachers reportedly develop their professional identity throughout coursework, prior to entering an actual classroom (Meyer et al., 2023; Wong & Liu, 2024). Coursework encompasses more than merely assignments and lectures. When built with intention, it transforms into an environment where pre-service teachers begin to contemplate the type of educator they aspire to become. They commence navigating the intersection of theory and personal conviction, as well as idealism and pragmatic limitation (Grillia & Daskolia, 2024). This procedure is particularly crucial in EYL initiatives. Young learners are not merely diminutive adults; they possess emotional sensitivity and frequently require assistance in cultivating self-regulation abilities (Denham et al., 2021). Their inherent curiosity, coupled with brief attention spans, renders prolonged concentration difficult in early educational settings (Rothbart & Posner, 2020). To attain a sense of security and maintain engagement, they derive significant advantages from consistent routines and a structured school environment (Morrison et al., 2023). Educators who have not comprehended the emotional and pedagogical nuances of instructing this demographic frequently encounter difficulties, notwithstanding their professional credentials (Richards, 2021; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2024).

Although there is increasing interest in the development of teacher identity, the majority of research focus on practicum or mentorship, frequently neglecting the impact of coursework (Can & Karacan, 2021; Yuan & Zhang, 2021). Few have examined how coursework, especially in Early Years Learning programs, actively shapes future teachers' self-perception. A limited number of research have investigated teacher identity development in Southeast Asian contexts, where cultural norms, classroom expectations, and multilingual realities are key factors. Nguyen and Ngo (2023) examined the negotiation of professional identity among Vietnamese pre-service teachers within institutional and community contexts, whereas Cahyono et al. (2023) analysed the practicum experiences of Indonesian EFL student teachers, emphasising the impact of sociocultural values and institutional dynamics. While these studies provide significant insights, they predominantly focus on field experiences and external variables. Conversely, the current study focuses on the internal dynamics of identity formation inside coursework, prior to pre-service teachers' entry into the classroom. This project aims to investigate coursework not merely as content transmission, but as a process of identity formation. Comprehending the role of coursework in shaping pre-service teachers' developing identities and its subsequent impact on their preparedness to instruct young learners. This study seeks to address four research questions:

1. What is the perception of pre-service EYL teachers on the formation of their professional identity through coursework?
2. In what manner does coursework affect the pre-service EYL teachers' perceived teaching preparedness?
3. Which elements of coursework are viewed as the most impactful in forming identity and confidence?

4. In what manner do pre-service EYL teachers connect their academic experiences to their prospective teaching objectives?

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Teacher identity is understood as a dynamic and socially influenced process, formed through interaction, reflection, and involvement in professional activities (Trent, 2016). In teacher education, this identity typically begins to form early, frequently prior to pre-service teachers engaging in actual classroom environments. Coursework is essential in this initial growth. Pre-service teachers engage with pedagogical concepts and begin to situate themselves within the profession through structured learning experiences, including talks, reflection exercises, and pedagogical simulations. In EYL contexts, coursework is generally structured around child-centered, play-based, and developmentally suitable pedagogy, establishing certain standards for effective teaching of young learners. This study employs a constructivist perspective, perceiving learning and identity as actively produced through engagement and reflection (Granja, 2015; Lindqvist & Forsberg, 2023). Constructivism is especially pertinent in comprehending how pre-service teachers perceive their coursework experiences and utilise them to develop their nascent identities. Instead of passively absorbing knowledge, students actively generate meaning, negotiate values, and envision their future responsibilities as educators (Olusegun, 2015; Yuan & Zhang, 2021). From a constructivist viewpoint, identity evolves when pre-service teachers actively create meaning through reflection, interpret pedagogical experiences, and negotiate their responsibilities within educational contexts.

In this concept, coursework establishes the context, reflective activities serve as mechanisms, and identity development arises as the outcome, which later impacts teaching preparedness. Reflection assignments, teaching simulations, and pedagogical debates enable students to negotiate meaning and establish linkages between theory and practice. Such activities facilitate the transition of prospective teachers from students to educators. This study defines coursework as an implementation of English for Young Learners (EYL) pedagogy, highlighting developmental suitability, emotional support, and play-based interaction as essential components of early language instruction. It posits that the way pre-service teachers interact with their courses affects their self-perception as future professionals. This study defines coursework as an organised learning environment where pre-service teachers interact with pedagogical knowledge and professional practices. In this setting, reflective and practice-oriented activities serve as mediational processes that allow learners to actively build meaning, understand experiences, and negotiate professional positions. Through these procedures, pre-service teachers cultivate a nascent professional identity, defined by the development of beliefs, values, and self-perceptions as educators. The development of identity correlates with heightened confidence, as individuals acquire a more defined understanding of their competence and role orientation. Confidence subsequently influences perceived teaching readiness, especially for pedagogical decision-making and classroom involvement. The suggested framework presents coursework, reflective engagement, identity development, confidence, and teaching readiness as sequential and interconnected elements within a constructivist model of teacher development. Figure 1 below depicts the theoretical framework.

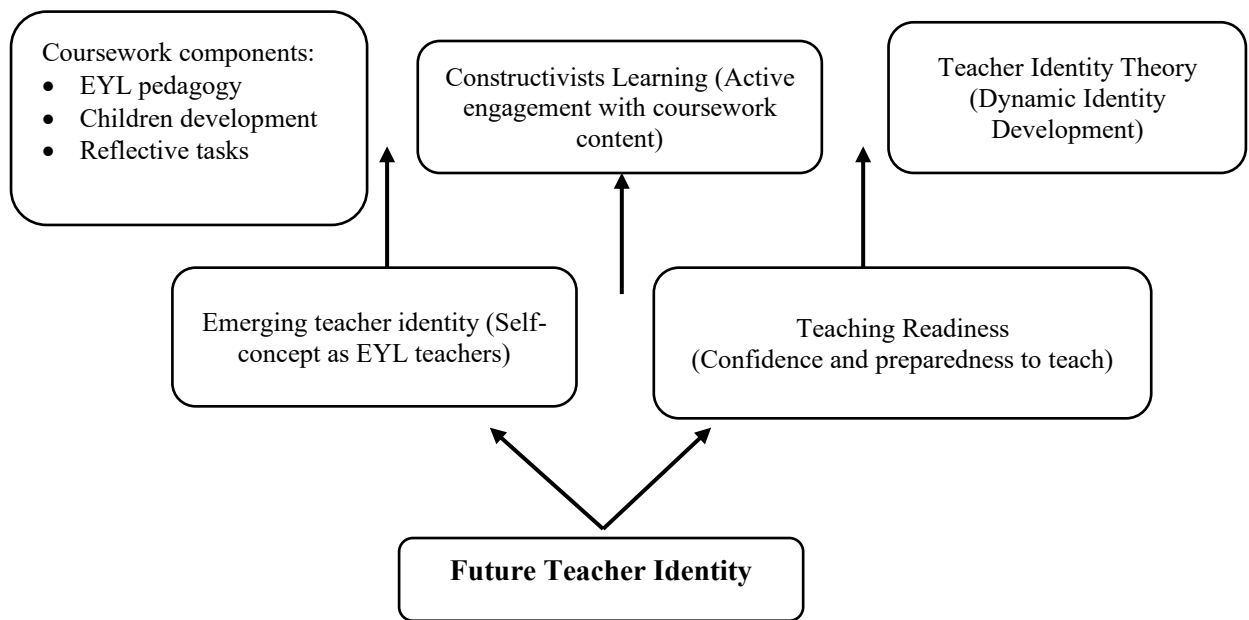


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to examine pre-service teachers' views on their prospective identity as English teachers for Young Learners (EYL). The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher, informed by pertinent literature on teacher identity and teaching preparedness, and tailored to the Early Years Learning setting. The quantitative aspect of the study comprises a standardised Likert-scale questionnaire intended to assess beliefs, self-efficacy, obstacles, and identity orientation. The qualitative component employs reflective journal entries, enabling participants to engage in profound contemplation over their developing roles as future educators. The study seeks to offer an exhaustive perspective on the influence of coursework on pre-service teachers' identities and classroom preparedness by amalgamating the two data collection methodologies.

### *Participants and Sampling*

The subjects of this study are pre-service English teachers enrolled in an undergraduated English Education program in Indonesia where they took an EYL course. This cohort was chosen through purposive sampling due to their extensive training in ideas, methods, and activities specifically designed for instructing young learners in English. During their investigations, they have examined the fundamental traits of proficient EYL educators, including adaptability, inventiveness, patience, and cultural responsiveness. These students are neutrally participants for the study, having attained both academic knowledge and practical insights in the domain of EYL, enabling them to critically reflect on their professional identities. A total of 121 students were enrolled in the course: 31 females and 19 males. They

were aged 20 to 22 years. Out of the 121 enrolled students, 50 voluntarily participating in the study and completed both instruments. Participation was wholly voluntary, and all participants filled in informed consent forms. The study complied with ethical standards, safeguarding participant confidentiality, autonomy, and the freedom to withdraw at any point without repercussions.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Alongside the questionnaire, qualitative data were obtained through reflective journal entries. Participants were directed to articulate their reflections on their learning experiences and their anticipated roles as EYL teachers. The reflective journals offered participants an opportunity to contemplate their developing identities and articulate ideas regarding their skills, problems, and objectives in teaching young learners. Each participant submitted a guided reflective entry addressing a series of semi-structured prompts intended to provoke reflections on their learning experiences, the development of professional identity, and preparedness to instruct young learners. The reflection was conducted as a singular task instead of a longitudinal series over several weeks. All journal entries were supplied electronically and anonymised before analysis to maintain participant confidentiality. Examples of prompts for the reflective journals include: *“Think about how this course has impacted your comprehension of the role of an English teacher for young learners.”* *Has your viewpoint evolved? Describe the type of Early Years Language teacher you aim to become.* *“What attributes do you believe you now possess, and which areas require additional development?”* *“What do you identify as your strengths and weaknesses in teaching young learners?”* and *“Do you foresee yourself teaching young learners in the future?”* *What will your classroom resemble?* “The diary entries were provided digitally and anonymised to safeguard participants' confidentiality.

In addition to the questionnaire, qualitative data were gathered through reflective journal entries conducted at the end of the course.

### ***Quantitative Data Collection: Questionnaire***

Data for the quantitative analysis were collected via a Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 20 items categorized into four dimensions: Teacher Identity (6 items), Teaching Readiness (6 items), Impactful Coursework Component (4 items), and Future Aspirations (4 items). The questionnaire was developed by the researchers by utilizing relevant literature on teacher professional identity, self-efficacy, and early years language teaching (e.g. [Beijaard et al., 2000](#); [Yuan & Zhang, 2021](#); [Timošćuk & Ugaste, 2024](#)). Cronbach's alpha was computed for each subscale, indicating robust internal consistency ( $\alpha > 0.80$ ). Examples of questionnaire items include: *“I assert that instructing English to young learners necessitates unique strategies in contrast to older students.”* *“I am confident in utilising interactive activities, such as songs and games, to engage young learners in English.”* *“Managing the behaviour of young learners in an English language classroom poses a considerable challenge.”* and *“I envision myself as an innovative and compassionate educator of English for young learners in the future.”* (Identity). This instrument was subjected to a pilot test and expert evaluation to ascertain its validity and reliability. The pilot test involved 20 pre-service English teachers, who were excluded from the primary study sample. The pilot sought to evaluate the clarity of

instructions, item comprehensibility, and overall organization of the instrument. Minor modifications were made following the piloting to enhance phrasing and eliminate ambiguity.

### *Data Analysis*

The Likert-scale questionnaire responses were analysed utilising SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to encapsulate answers. A correlational analysis was performed to examine the correlations among pre-service teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, obstacles, and identity orientation. The internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, revealing strong reliability for all measures ( $\alpha > 0.80$ ). The reflective journal data were analysed with theme analysis, adhering to the paradigm established (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Identified key themes encompassed: evolving perspectives of professional identity as EYL educators, strengths and limitations in instructing young learners, projected problems and techniques for mitigation, and future aspirations for advancing a teaching career in EYL. The qualitative findings were subsequently amalgamated with the quantitative data to furnish a more comprehensive insight of how participants are shaping their identities as prospective EYL teachers.

## FINDINGS

### *Findings from survey*

This study reveals that coursework significantly influences the development of pre-service EYL teachers' professional identity and their preparation for teaching. The quantitative results reveal predominantly favourable attitudes about identity, preparedness, coursework experience, and future objectives, while qualitative data offer profound insights into students' evolving self-perceptions as prospective teachers. The findings indicate that coursework functions as both a platform for knowledge acquisition and a formative environment for the development of professional identity and future-oriented thinking.

The survey data were analysed to examine item-level responses, internal consistency (reliability), and inter-domain correlations. A 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to elucidate how coursework aids pre-service teachers in cultivating their professional identity and teaching preparedness. As in Table 2, the factors were categorised into four domains: Teacher Identity, Teaching Readiness, Impactful Coursework Components, and Future Aspirations. Responses across all dimensions typically indicated a strong engagement with the coursework and its assessed significance for future teaching. Students concurred that the curriculum facilitated their development as both learners and nascent professionals. The aggregate mean scores across domains were as follows: Teacher Identity ( $M = 4.17$ ), Teaching Readiness ( $M = 3.90$ ), Impactful Coursework Components ( $M = 4.11$ ), and Future Aspirations ( $M = 4.08$ ) reflect predominantly favourable opinions across all categories.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics per Domain

| Domain           | Item | Mean | SD   | Domain             | Item | Mean | SD   |
|------------------|------|------|------|--------------------|------|------|------|
| Teacher Identity | Q1   | 4.68 | 0.52 | Teaching Readiness | Q11  | 4.04 | 1.04 |
| Teacher Identity | Q2   | 3.89 | 0.76 | Teaching Readiness | Q12  | 3.53 | 1.14 |

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|                    |     |      |      |                                 |     |      |      |
|--------------------|-----|------|------|---------------------------------|-----|------|------|
| Teacher Identity   | Q3  | 4.32 | 0.59 | Impactful Coursework Components | Q13 | 3.81 | 1.26 |
| Teacher Identity   | Q4  | 4.02 | 0.82 | Impactful Coursework Components | Q14 | 3.96 | 0.88 |
| Teacher Identity   | Q5  | 4.17 | 0.70 | Impactful Coursework Components | Q15 | 3.98 | 0.99 |
| Teacher Identity   | Q6  | 3.96 | 0.81 | Impactful Coursework Components | Q16 | 4.17 | 0.92 |
| Teaching Readiness | Q7  | 4.32 | 0.59 | Impactful Coursework Components | Q17 | 4.32 | 0.78 |
| Teaching Readiness | Q8  | 4.02 | 0.64 | Impactful Coursework Components | Q18 | 4.43 | 0.83 |
| Teaching Readiness | Q9  | 3.94 | 0.92 | Future Aspirations              | Q19 | 3.91 | 0.95 |
| Teaching Readiness | Q10 | 3.85 | 1.04 | Future Aspirations              | Q20 | 4.26 | 0.92 |

The Teacher Identity domain exhibited moderately high ratings overall, with students indicating that the curriculum influenced their self-perception as prospective instructors. Nonetheless, internal reliability was somewhat beneath the standard criterion (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.66), indicating inconsistency in students' interpretations of the identity-related items. Notwithstanding this, pupils often concurred with assertions regarding their aspiration to be innovative, compassionate, and accountable educators for young learners. This trend is corroborated by qualitative data, wherein participants articulated how coursework influenced their self-perceptions as prospective educators.

In the area of Teaching Readiness, students expressed a modest level of confidence in their capacity to implement their acquired knowledge (mean = 3.9). Items pertaining to lesson design and comprehension of young learners received higher scores, whereas confidence in classroom management and emotional readiness exhibited greater variability. The internal consistency for this domain was robust ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ), signifying dependable results. This area emphasises that although students perceive themselves as intellectually prepared, they recognise the disparity between theory and practice (Hammack et al., 2024; Setyaningrum et al., 2022). Students expressed unequivocal appreciation for the impactful components of the coursework. The domain had a reliability score of  $\alpha = 0.77$ , with students regularly evaluating practical coursework activities such as storytelling, creative media, and reflective tasks as the most beneficial. These practical components were regarded as both beneficial and memorable, reflecting the themes of connection and confidence shown in the reflective data. The highest dependability was observed in the Future Aspirations domain ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), which assessed students' emerging perceptions of their future as EYL teachers. The majority of students concurred or strongly concurred that their courses impacted their vision of future classrooms, informed their objectives, and inspired them to pursue further education post-graduation. This domain exhibited the highest overall average, indicating that the program significantly impacts

both current preparedness and long-term professional aspirations. Alongside the descriptive data, a correlation analysis was performed to examine the interrelations among these areas, as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix Between Domains

|                                 | Teacher Identity | Teaching Readiness | Impactful Coursework Components | Future Aspirations |
|---------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Teacher Identity                | 1                | 0.41               | 0.66                            | 0.58               |
| Teaching Readiness              | 0.41             | 1                  | 0.40                            | 0.32               |
| Impactful Coursework Components | 0.66             | 0.40               | 1                               | 0.90               |
| Future Aspirations              | 0.58             | 0.32               | 0.90                            | 1                  |

A notable discovery was a robust positive connection between Impactful Coursework Components and Future Aspirations ( $r = 0.90$ ). This suggests that an increased valuation of the coursework by students correlates with a heightened perception of its importance to their future teaching careers. Moderate relationships were noted between Teacher Identity and both Impactful Coursework ( $r = 0.66$ ) and Future Aspirations ( $r = 0.58$ ), indicating that identity formation is intricately linked to the significance students attribute to their learning experiences (Ahmad & Shah, 2022). The correlation between Teaching Readiness and other categories was notably less yet remained positive, potentially indicating that emotional and classroom preparedness evolve in more personalised or experiential manners. The quantitative findings substantiate the function of coursework as both a medium for information acquisition (Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2018) and a context in which identity (Xu et al., 2022), confidence (Kemaloglu-Er & Sahin, 2022), and vision (Hammack et al., 2024) commence development.

### *Findings from Reflective Journals*

The word cloud presented below (Figure 2), derived from the reflective diaries, encapsulates the common terminology and priorities that surfaced throughout their experiences, underscoring the significance of coursework in their progression toward becoming EYL teachers.

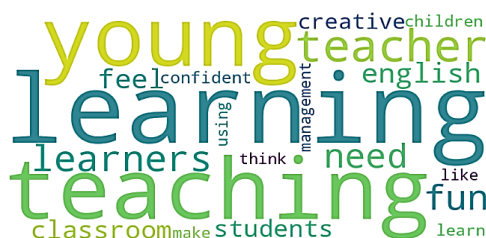


Figure 2: Word Cloud from Reflective Journals

Terms such as teaching, learning, youth, learners, and educator are heavily featured, underscoring the significance of these concepts in their observations. Many students were evidently contemplating the implications of instructing young learners and how their courses influenced their comprehension of that responsibility. Other prevalent terms such as English, fun, methods, and classroom indicate that they were also starting to envision the use of their

acquired knowledge in actual teaching contexts. The examination of 50 reflective journal entries uncovered four principal themes that respond to the research questions. These themes offer a profound understanding of how students perceive and interpret their academic experiences within the framework of EYL education, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Identified themes from reflective journals

| Themes                            | %  | Description   | Sample Reflection   | Aligned Research Question                              |
|-----------------------------------|----|---|---|--|
| Evolving Teacher Identity         | 90 | Pre-service teachers developed a clearer sense of who they want to be as educators, emphasizing care, creativity, and character-building. | I hope to be a teacher who inspires students not only academically but personally         | RQ1: Identity development through coursework           |
| Teaching Readiness and Confidence | 80 | Participants expressed growing confidence in theory but noted emotional and practical challenges related to classroom readiness.          | I'm confident in what I've learned, but nervous about how I will manage a real classroom  | RQ2: Coursework and teaching readiness                 |
| Impactful Coursework Components   | 76 | Child development courses, creative media, storytelling, and reflective tasks were frequently cited as transformative.                    | Using games and stories really helped me see how young learners engage                    | RQ3: Most influential coursework components            |
| Aspirations and Future Practice   | 84 | Students connected their learning to future plans, describing long-term goals, training interests, and visions of their classroom roles.  | After graduating, I want to join workshops and improve my speaking skills to teach better | RQ4: Connection between coursework and future teaching |

### ***Evolving Teacher Identity***

For numerous pre-service teachers, this seminar signified the commencement of their self-identification as educators. Percentages represent the percentage of participants whose comments were categorised under each theme. Concerning research question 1, about 90% of students articulated how the coursework influenced their developing identity in the classroom. These insights disclosed aspirations to become compassionate, creative, and emotionally supportive educators; identities that students had not previously envisioned, as illustrated in the passages below.

*"I hope to be a teacher who inspires students not only academically but personally."* (Student 1).

*"I want to be a teacher who is patient and can adapt to children's needs."* (Student 7).

*"Being a teacher isn't just about explaining. I want to guide children and help them feel safe."* (Student 10).

These reflections indicate a transformation in perspective, wherein students contemplate not only the content they will impart but also the identities they will embody for their prospective learners (Jackson & Rowe, 2023; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2024).

### ***Teaching Readiness and Confidence***

Although students possessed substantial theoretical knowledge, about 80% expressed apprehensions regarding their ability to navigate real classroom dynamics. Their reflections underscored genuine concerns regarding attention spans, behaviour management, and rapport building with young learners. A multitude of pupils expressed

feelings of both exhilaration and uncertainty. These candid acknowledgements indicate that teaching readiness encompasses not only topic mastery but also emotional preparedness and self-confidence, as illustrated in the following passages.

*"I'm confident in what I've learned, but nervous about how I'll manage a real classroom."*  
(Student 12)

*"Sometimes I doubt myself, but I think teaching practice will help me grow."* (Student 16)

*"Planning lessons is easier than imagining how to get 20 kids to listen."* (Student 18)

### ***Impactful Coursework Components***

Approximately 76% of students identified particular course components, such as storytelling, games, and child development education, as pivotal moments of comprehension. These features embody fundamental EYL pedagogical ideas, wherein play-based activities and attentiveness to children's developmental and emotional requirements are pivotal to effective language acquisition and the creation of teacher identity. The activities were both entertaining and significant learning experiences that enabled students to envision effective and engaging teaching methods. Through these activities, students started to perceive themselves as facilitators of engaging, interactive learning environments (Patanduk et al., 2024), rather than mere deliverers of lessons (Malik et al., 2022) as illustrated below.

*"Using games and stories really helped me see how young learners engage."* (Student 20)

*"I learned that creativity in teaching is not optional—it's essential for kids."* (Student 24)

*"Telling stories in class made me realize I could teach English in a fun way."* (Student 25)

### ***Aspirations and Future Practice***

Regarding research question 4, around 84% of students envisioned vibrant classrooms, personal development objectives, and career ambitions. This course enabled students to articulate a more defined vision of their desired teaching careers. These ambitions were concrete, grounded in academic experiences that ignited motivation and purpose.

*"After graduating, I want to join workshops and improve my speaking skills to teach better."*  
(Student 29)

*"I already imagine my classroom with colors, books, and fun English songs."* (Student 33)

*"This course made me realize I want to keep learning and growing as a teacher."* (Student 38)

These forward-looking views demonstrate that coursework transcends mere knowledge transfer. It fosters identity, direction, and agency in pre-service educators (Wong & Liu, 2024).

## **DISCUSSION**

This study illustrates that coursework serves as an important initial platform for cultivating professional identity and teaching preparedness in pre-service EYL teachers. The findings indicate that participation in reflective, child-centered, and practice-oriented coursework enabled participants to perceive themselves as prospective EYL teachers while concurrently enhancing their confidence and awareness of teaching issues. These findings complement prior research that highlights practicum as the principal locus of identity

development (Yuan & Zhang, 2021), by indicating that coursework also plays a significant early role..

The combined quantitative and qualitative data provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of coursework in the development of pre-service EYL teachers. The qualitative findings enhance the quantitative results by demonstrating how students perceive their experiences and transform them into developing professional identities. Quantitative data indicated widespread consensus regarding the impact of coursework across all categories, however qualitative data offered depth and subtlety to those figures. The emergent themes from the journals indicated that identity construction is profoundly integrated into students' academic experiences (Can & Karacan, 2021), rather than being confined solely to field practice. Coursework elements like reflective writing, storytelling, and developmental psychology function as catalysts for significant self-discovery and educational advancement. The findings corroborate the theoretical framework of the study, which integrates teacher identity theory with constructivist learning concepts. Evidence indicates that when students actively engage in their curriculum through reflection, peer interaction, and practical application, they start to internalise a professional identity that is both adaptive and aspirational (Simonite, 2003; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2024). They expressed a desire to be compassionate, motivating, and innovative educators. These comments were specific; they were personal and optimistic, rooted on the emotions and thoughts elicited by the coursework (Jackson & Rowe, 2023). Although numerous students remain apprehensive over specific elements of classroom preparedness, their anticipatory reflections demonstrate a robust dedication to continuous learning and self-enhancement.

The domain most closely associated with identity was Impactful Coursework Components. This domain was scored positively and dependably ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) and shown a substantial association with Future Aspirations ( $r = 0.90$ ). Students not only appreciated creative modules such as storytelling and child psychology, but they also internalised them. They envisioned employing these technologies in their prospective courses (Love et al., 2023). The reflective diaries corroborated this pattern, as students frequently associated particular coursework activities with their aspirations as instructors (Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2018). Notably, although Teaching Readiness received favourable evaluations, students candidly expressed the forthcoming hurdles in both survey and journal formats. The relationship between readiness and identity was moderate ( $r = 0.41$ ), indicating that confidence and identity may not consistently evolve concurrently. The students' readiness to confront their worries while simultaneously expressing a desire for growth (Li et al., 2021) signifies a dynamic identity in development. Coursework is perceived as exceeding just academic preparation (Hammack et al., 2024). It is an environment where individuals commence the formation of their values, envision their futures, and assume responsibility for the type of educator they aspire to become, serving as a significant preliminary context.

The findings of this study align closely with Teacher Identity Theory, which conceptualises identity as a dynamic, socially formed phenomenon influenced by ideas, experiences, and relationships (Grillia & Daskolia, 2024). Pre-service teachers start to internalise fundamental principles (Çetinkaya, 2024) such as passion for the job and empathy

for pupils prior to engaging in formal classroom practice. Our findings indicate that students envision themselves as compassionate, creative, and purposeful educators, translating this theory into real experience. Simultaneously, Constructivist Learning Theory underscores the importance of active, reflective, and contextually enriched learning. [Behera \(2025\)](#) emphasised that effective teacher development entails collaborative, reflective activities in which learners co-create meaning and agency. Our research indicates that modules centred on storytelling, play-based learning, and reflection not only conveyed content but also facilitated students' internalisation of the teaching experience, thereby influencing both identity and engagement. Students, while contemplating their future practice and expressing their uncertainties and ambitions, were manifesting a developing professional identity ([Can & Karacan, 2021](#)). This corresponds with constructivist theories of knowledge and identity, which co-evolve through significant participation, and the teacher identity theory's acknowledgement that identity arises during these reflective and participatory instances ([Neandar, 2025](#)). Integrating these theoretical concepts elucidates why meticulously crafted coursework serves not merely as a training environment or a venue for acquiring material knowledge, but as developmental and formative spaces where pre-service EYL instructors commence the journey of self-discovery and aspiration.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study determined that coursework in English for Young Learners (EYL) significantly influences the development of emerging identities and preparedness of pre-service teachers. By integrating reflective activities, practical modules, and personal involvement with child-centered education, students started to perceive themselves not merely as learners but as prospective instructors. The research indicated that identity construction commences prior to formal classroom engagement, influenced by experiential activities such as storytelling and innovative pedagogical approaches that students deemed transformative and motivating. Although students indicated robust academic readiness, some individuals also articulated a necessity for more emotional and practical assistance, particularly for classroom management. These results indicate that teacher preparation programs must deliberately construct coursework that integrates theory with substantial reflection, promotes forward-thinking, and progressively equips students for the complex reality of instructing young learners.

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### **DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI**

The authors employed QuillBolt to facilitate language editing and enhance grammatical accuracy during the creation of this publication. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript and thoroughly examined and edited the material produced by these tools.

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