

The Role of Social-Emotional Learning in Pre-Service Teachers' Identity

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Abstract: This study explores how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) supports the development of teacher identities among pre-service teachers (PSTs). SEL, encompassing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, is vital for shaping teachers who are knowledgeable, emotionally resilient, and empathetic. This research emphasizes the transition of PSTs from theoretical learning to practical teaching, where they discover their strengths, face challenges, and build initial teacher identities. Using a qualitative research design, the study involves interviews, observations, and self-reflective reports from 72 PSTs in English Department, IAIN Ponorogo, Indonesia. The findings reveal that SEL significantly influences teachers' ability to manage stress, build positive relationships, and make informed decisions, creating more inclusive and compassionate classroom environments. SEL also aids in aligning teachers' values with Islamic principles, fostering a deeper sense of professional purpose. The study highlights gaps in traditional teacher training programs, often neglecting the social-emotional aspects critical for effective teaching. By integrating SEL into pre-service, educational institutions can develop teachers better equipped to navigate the emotional demands of the profession and inspire student learning. The insights gained are intended to inform improvements in teacher education programs, ensuring that teachers can sustain their passion and effectiveness throughout their careers while creating nurturing learning environments that align with Islamic values.

Keywords: teacher identity, pre-service teacher, SEL.

Introduction

Education plays a vital role in the formation and development of society. Education serves as a medium for transferring knowledge and plays a vital role in shaping individuals' values, beliefs, and character. In this ecosystem, teachers are important agents who facilitate learning, guide students, and help shape their character and morals. However, teacher identity is not only determined by their role as educators; it is closely related to their personal growth, emotional resilience, and interactions in the educational environment. For pre-service teachers, cultivating a strong sense of teacher identity is critical because it influences their ability to teach effectively, manage their classrooms, and be role models. In this

context, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a key approach to supporting teacher identity development (Newman & Dusenbury, 2015).

SEL provides teachers with self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills. Integrating SEL into the training and development of pre-service teachers (those in teacher education programs) is essential to developing a strong teacher identity aligned with Islamic educational principles and values (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

One of the significant challenges in the modern educational context is the lack of emotional skills among teachers, which often leads to negative classroom environments. Examples of harsh disciplinary actions, lack of empathy, and inability

to communicate effectively with students are all too common. Such behaviors can create a toxic learning environment, leading to emotional distress among students, decreased motivation, and stunted academic growth. This is especially problematic in Islamic institutions, where the values of compassion and empathy are fundamental. By examining how SEL can shape teacher identity, this study aims to demonstrate how SEL training can enhance teachers' emotional skills, enabling them to create supportive and nurturing classroom environments, which are critical to the overall development of students.

The role of teachers has evolved significantly over the years. Today, teachers are expected to deliver academic content and serve as mentors and role models who guide students through their social and emotional development. This shift requires teachers to adapt to varying student needs, new learning technologies, and changing curricula. Pre-service teachers, who are still learning, face significant stress and identity confusion. Without the right social-emotional skills, many teachers struggle to maintain confidence in their professional roles. This research is important because it explores how SEL can help teachers build resilience and confidence so they are better equipped to navigate the complexities of their profession.

Traditional teacher education programs often emphasize academic knowledge and pedagogical techniques but neglect the social-emotional aspects critical to effective teaching. Many preservice teachers enter the profession without adequate training to manage their emotions or foster positive relationships with students. This research is important because it highlights gaps in teacher training programs and provides evidence for the need to integrate SEL into pre-service training. In doing so, this research supports the development of teachers who are not only knowledgeable but also emotionally competent and socially aware, which directly impacts their ability to connect with students and inspire learning.

Teachers' mental and emotional well-being has a direct impact on their effectiveness in the classroom. High levels of stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout are common among teachers, in part

due to the emotional demands of the profession (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022). This issue is particularly relevant in Islamic educational institutions, where teachers are often expected to serve as moral and spiritual guides in addition to their teaching responsibilities. SEL provides strategies for stress management and emotional resilience, which can help teachers cope with the pressures of their roles. Examining the impact of SEL on teacher well-being and job satisfaction is important because it can lead to recommendations for better support systems in schools, thereby reducing burnout rates and helping teachers maintain positive attitudes toward their profession.

For teachers in Islamic educational institutions, building a strong teacher identity involves aligning their personal values and professional practices with Islamic principles. This requires academic knowledge of Islamic teachings and the ability to embody values such as compassion, patience, honesty, and self-control in everyday student interactions. SEL can serve as a framework to help teachers internalize these values, thereby strengthening their professional identities in ways that are consistent with their religious and cultural contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004). This research is important because it examines how SEL can be tailored to meet the unique needs of teachers in Islamic institutions, offering insight into how SEL can support the development of authentic and spiritually aligned teacher identities.

Students in Islamic institutions often come from diverse backgrounds with varying social, emotional, and cultural needs. Teachers play a critical role in creating classroom environments that are inclusive and supportive of these differences. However, many teachers lack the skills to meet students' emotional needs effectively. This lack of skills can lead to isolation and disengagement among students. SEL training can help teachers become more culturally responsive and better equipped to support student diversity, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional safety for all students. This research is important because it explores how SEL can help teachers create more inclusive and respectful learning environments

aligned with Islamic educational values, thereby improving student learning outcomes.

While SEL principles—such as empathy, self-discipline, and collaboration—are universally valued, there is a need to adapt these principles to fit the cultural and spiritual context of Islamic education. Teachers in Islamic institutions must integrate SEL into their teaching practices to align with Islamic ethics and moral teachings. This study is significant because it investigates the implementation of SEL in Islamic settings. It provides a framework for implementing SEL effectively while respecting and enhancing the religious values central to these institutions to develop their teachers' identity.

This study is needed to address how the SEL of pre-service teachers in Islamic institutions develop their identity. By focusing on how SEL can support the development of a strong teacher identity, this study aims to provide new insight into the pre-service teachers so it can be a practical solution to enhance teacher training, improve classroom environments, and align educational practices with Islamic values. The findings of this study have the potential to inform policy changes in teacher education programs and contribute to the development of more compassionate, effective, and spiritually grounded education systems. This research eagerly to investigate how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) can develop pre-service teachers' identities in Islamic institutions.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Research designs help us understand what steps to take to answer research questions when performing studies. Research design is a plan or technique for data gathering and analysis methods (Cresswell, 2010). A qualitative research design is employed to determine the answers to the study questions. Rich, in-depth results are typically obtained through qualitative approaches (Ary et al., 2018). A descriptive qualitative approach is adopted in this study as it uses words rather than numbers to collect data. Since descriptive data collection is used to gather the data, the researcher

employed descriptive qualitative analysis to assess the pre-service language usage.

This study used a qualitative approach related to the customary traits of this kind of research, which involves gathering a comprehensive understanding of a particular issue without resorting to numerical analysis. It fits well with a few other SEL research that included a qualitative methodology and a variety of instruments, including interviews (Blewitt et al., 2021), observation (Thomas, 2021) and self-reflective reports (Martinson & Damberg, 2017). Additionally, the teachers experienced the subject of the study in a natural context during this study. Three methods were used to apply reflexivity: (1) making notes during the interview about concepts and remarks made by the participants; (2) drafting a memo as soon as feasible following the interview; and (3) developing and revising the researcher's subjective statement regularly. The participants of this study were 72 pre-service teachers in the 7th semester of the English Department IAIN Ponorogo. The pre-service teachers were the students who had teaching experience in schools. Before their internship, there was a microteaching course where they had to perform their teaching abilities. Thus, they comprehend teaching teaching-learning process. They taught English in some schools in Ponorogo, including junior high schools and senior high schools.

Data Collection

The data in this study was gathered through observation, interview, and self-reflection. The observation was done during the teaching-learning process. It was for the pre-service teachers. It was used to portray the subjects vividly. It helped the researchers to gather more data on how the teachers interact with the students and others. Moreover, this study also employed an interview. It was gathered to find out the implementation of SEL principles: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Furthermore, the study incorporated self-reflection as a key component, allowing participants to engage in a deep, introspective process.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The researchers used thematic analysis to interpret the data thematically. The thematic analysis was considered to be matched to the aim of the research which was to bridge the gap. The steps include familiarising data, generating initial codes, determining themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Based on each participant's responses, the result of coding leads to several initial codes in each aspect and main themes (A.M.B.Braun, 2021). Therefore, the themes can possibly answer the gaps in the teachers' identity of the pre-service teachers. The thematic analysis was used to identify the themes of the data collected and also to use the themes to interpret the data or issue of the discussion. Also, a good thematic analysis is provided with interpretations and the sense of it (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results and Discussion

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Developing Pre-Service Teachers' Identities

Self-awareness in PSTs is closely tied to their experiences in real school settings during teaching practice. This experience allows them to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and teaching style. PSTs reflect on their behavior, teaching methods, and interactions with students and colleagues, which helps them identify characteristics they wish to develop further. For instance, they might realize they are more suited to a patient, encouraging approach, or need to become more assertive in classroom management.

This dimension of self-awareness is crucial for PSTs because it forms the foundation of their teaching identity. By reflecting on what works well and what needs improvement, they understand their personal and professional values as future educators. Such reflection helps them envision their roles in the classroom and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. Recognizing these strengths and areas for growth is essential for PSTs to build confidence and clarity in their teaching approach.

Self-management is demonstrated through PSTs' ability to navigate challenges and adapt to new situations in the school environment. Problem-solving skills are particularly highlighted during their teaching practicum, where they must find solutions to classroom management issues, adjust lesson plans, or address unexpected situations that arise during instruction.

For example, PSTs may encounter behavioral issues with students, technical problems with teaching aids, or difficulty managing time during lessons. Effective problem-solving requires them to remain calm under pressure, analyze the situation, and apply suitable strategies to ensure learning continues smoothly. Developing these skills is crucial for their ability to handle the diverse challenges of teaching. It also prepares them for more complex problem-solving in their future roles, fostering a sense of autonomy and resilience.

Social awareness in PSTs involves understanding and responding to the needs and emotions of others in the school environment. It includes building positive relationships with mentors, students, and other school teachers. The practicum allows PSTs to observe the dynamics of school culture and learn how to engage with different stakeholders.

This social awareness aspect is particularly important as it teaches PSTs to be empathetic and responsive. For example, they learn how to read students' emotions and adjust their teaching approach to meet their needs better. Additionally, building rapport with mentors enables PSTs to receive constructive feedback and incorporate it into their teaching practice. This supportive relationship helps them grow professionally and learn from experienced teachers.

Developing social awareness also allows PSTs to appreciate their students' and colleagues' diverse backgrounds and perspectives. This understanding is essential for creating an inclusive classroom environment where every student feels valued and understood. Forming and maintaining positive relationships with students and teachers is a crucial aspect of PSTs' identity development. Building effective relationships in the school setting allows PSTs to establish a learning environment where students feel comfortable and engaged. Positive

relationships with students are foundational for classroom management and facilitate a culture of mutual respect and trust.

Relationship-building skills also extend to interactions with other teachers, especially those who can serve as mentors (*guru pamong*). PSTs learn to collaborate with colleagues, seek advice, and participate in the broader school community. This ability to work well with others helps PSTs feel more integrated into the school environment and strengthens their sense of belonging as future educators. Such relationships are essential for personal growth and professional networking, which can provide support and opportunities for continued learning throughout their careers. Maintaining these relationships helps PSTs navigate the complexities of the school environment and enhances their effectiveness as teachers.

Responsible decision-making is the ability of PSTs to make choices that are ethical, considerate of others, and aligned with professional standards. During their practicum, PSTs face numerous situations that require them to make decisions about lesson planning, classroom management, and student engagement. Making responsible decisions means that PSTs consider the impact of their actions on students' learning and well-being. For example, they must decide how to address disruptive behavior in a way that maintains a positive classroom environment while ensuring that the individual student's needs are met. Additionally, PSTs are often faced with decisions about integrating technology into their lessons, choosing methods that enhance learning without overwhelming students.

This aspect of SEL encourages PSTs to think critically about their actions' implications and develop a reflective approach to their decision-making process. It teaches them to balance their personal beliefs with the expectations of the teaching profession, leading to ethical and thoughtful practices in their classrooms. The integration of these SEL dimensions in PSTs' development is vital for their transition into effective and reflective educators. Each dimension contributes to a holistic understanding of their role in the classroom.

By developing these competencies, PSTs are better prepared for the complexities of the teaching profession. They can manage the immediate demands of the classroom and continue to grow and adapt throughout their careers. Therefore, focusing on SEL in teacher training programs is critical in ensuring that PSTs enter the teaching field with the skills, confidence, and self-awareness needed to thrive as educators.

Moreover, based on the interview and self-reflection, it was found out that the PSTs showed self-awareness before, during, and after their teaching practice. Most identified their initial teacher characteristics and how they evolved through the experience. However, some struggled to define their future roles due to uncertainties, indicating the need for further guidance in self-reflection. This self-awareness included critical incidents, which could be positive or negative, affecting their professional identity. For instance, PSTs recognized their strengths and weaknesses related to teaching, which varied according to their experiences and skills. They also noted their approach to technology, with descriptors like "informative," "creative," and "innovative," reflecting their awareness of technology's role in teaching.

It also revealed that PSTs developed social awareness by building communication with mentors, students, and school teachers during their practicum. Through semi-structured interviews and manual coding, PSTs' experiences with verbal and online communication, empathy, and recognizing others' feelings were explored. Positive interactions included effective communication and supportive school environments, while challenges like communication barriers and limited technology skills highlighted areas for improvement.

PSTs shared their strategies for adapting to the school environment and managing new experiences. This adaptation involved maintaining classroom dynamics and handling the pressures of a new teaching setting. Key self-management skills include understanding personal strengths, building self-confidence, problem-solving, time management, and managing stress effectively. These skills were essential in helping PSTs navigate the complexities of teaching.

Building relationships, particularly with supervising teachers, was crucial for PSTs. The positive impact of mentorship was frequently mentioned, with many acknowledging that guidance from these experienced teachers helped shape their teaching methods. Some PSTs faced challenges initiating contact or communicating effectively with stakeholders, but many tried to develop meaningful relationships, understanding that these interactions could directly influence their teaching quality.

PSTs also reflected on their teaching experiences to decide their future teaching practices. Two main themes emerged from this reflection: technology and pedagogical development. The PSTs identified areas for improvement, such as integrating technology into their teaching and seeking new learning resources. The reflections highlighted their awareness of the evolving demands of the teaching profession and their commitment to growth.

Overall, the study shows how SEL supports PSTs in developing a deeper understanding of themselves as future educators, their role in the classroom, and their capacity to navigate the social dynamics of teaching. The insights gained from these aspects can help inform future training and development programs for pre-service teachers.

Discussion

The study of the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) development in Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) reveals essential insights into how SEL components shape the professional identities of educators at different stages of their careers. This discussion delves into the commonalities and distinctions between these two groups, emphasizing the implications for teacher training, professional development, and the broader teaching practice.

PSTs share a foundational focus on the same SEL components: Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. This commonality indicates that these elements are critical across different teaching stages, reinforcing that social-emotional competencies are not just preparatory skills but essential throughout an educator's career. The focus on these components

suggests a need for applicable SEL frameworks across all stages of professional development, allowing educators to build and refine these skills over time.

For PSTs, these SEL components serve as a foundation as they transition from theory to practice, helping them to understand their strengths, manage classroom dynamics, and build relationships with mentors and students. These skills are tools for continuous improvement, enabling them to adapt to changes in the educational environment, manage long-term relationships, and make informed decisions that impact their teaching practice. This continuity underscores the importance of SEL as a lifelong learning process in teaching.

Reflection is central to SEL development in both groups, emphasizing the role of self-reflection in professional growth. For PSTs, reflection serves as a means of bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. It allows them to assess their initial perceptions of teaching and adjust these based on their early experiences in the classroom. This reflective process is crucial in helping PSTs form their identities as teachers and in deciding whether to pursue teaching as a long-term career.

Reflection involves evaluating past experiences to refine their teaching practices and adapt to new challenges. It helps them assess what strategies have been effective and identify areas for improvement. However, despite the experience gap between PSTs, both groups struggle with self-reflection to some degree. The need for structured guidance in reflection suggests that while reflection is a valuable skill, it does not necessarily develop automatically with experience. Therefore, teacher training programs must provide strategies for effective self-reflection, helping educators gain deeper insights into their practices at all stages.

The findings highlight differences in self-awareness between PSTs, largely reflecting their respective stages of professional development. PSTs are in the process of forming their professional identity. They often are uncertain about their future roles, requiring guidance to articulate their strengths and career aspirations fully. A more exploratory approach to self-

awareness characterizes this stage as they learn to navigate the challenges of classroom teaching for the first time.

PSTs recognize the importance of social awareness in building effective communication and relationships within the school environment. For PSTs, social awareness often involves learning how to interact with mentors, students, and colleagues for the first time and navigating the norms and dynamics of the school community. Their social awareness is more focused on learning how to respond to new social cues and understanding the expectations of various stakeholders in the school.

Self-management skills are critical for both PSTs as they navigate the demands of teaching. PSTs focus on adapting to the immediate challenges of managing a classroom for the first time, learning how to handle stress, balance their responsibilities, and maintain classroom dynamics. Their self-management is often reactive, dealing with the unpredictability of a new teaching environment.

Relationship skills play a significant role in the professional development of both PSTs. For PSTs, building a strong relationship with mentors is crucial, as these mentors provide guidance and feedback that shape their early teaching practices. These relationships are often the bridge that helps PSTs transition into confident and effective educators.

Responsible decision-making is a critical outcome of SEL for PSTs, but it manifests differently. For PSTs, decision-making is forward-looking, focusing on aspirations and goals for their future teaching careers. Their decisions often involve integrating technology and seeking new resources to enhance their teaching skills, reflecting their eagerness to innovate and grow.

The discussion of SEL in developing PSTs' identities highlights the continuity of social-emotional competencies across the teaching career while acknowledging each stage's unique needs. The findings suggest that SEL development should be a lifelong journey for educators, with tailored support that addresses the specific challenges and growth opportunities for novice and experienced teachers. By doing so, teacher training programs and professional development initiatives can ensure that educators are equipped to teach

effectively and grow personally and professionally within a dynamic educational environment.

This study emphasizes how important SEL is to the development of aspiring English teachers. The recruitment, preparation, and retention of teacher candidates had been impacted by social and emotional competency in their longitudinal study (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022). Furthermore, SEL has to be acknowledged and supported at the collegiate and university levels as an essential component of teacher preparation initiatives (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This study shows that teachers' emotional expressions, grounded in the social and emotional learning framework, are the source of SEL's contribution to their sense of self. One additional approach to investigate how PSTs have unintentionally formed their values is to adjust guided prompts so that they must reflect aloud about the values of their teaching experiences. Modifying guided prompts to make the PSTs think aloud about values in their teaching experiences is one of the alternative ways to explore that PSTs unconsciously have developed their SEL. However, it is not purposefully designed and inserted in the curriculum. Focusing on teacher identity dynamic and self-awareness before and after teaching practice is the relevant aspect that gives us visible expression from PSTs. In this case, technological and pedagogical related contribution are emphasized in teacher identity changes during teaching practice.

The participants' voices indicate that feelings of enthusiasm and nervousness are commonly associated with new society's appearance in school-based teaching practice, especially in teaching performance. Their changing beliefs about determining their identity as teachers before and after teaching practice are the next result of those feelings. Upon commencing their practice, the majority of them declared themselves to be positive-emotional types, such as upbeat, understanding, supportive, relaxed yet focused, rigorous, and able to organize feedback while instructing actual students.

However, the participants said that they wanted to become more experienced teachers after their teaching practice. A small number of them stated that they felt inadequate during the exercise, which

made them feel depressed and inclined to be somewhat strict and dictatorial. There were several reasons for these adjustments. A teacher's identity might shift based on how their past and present routes meet with the many experiences they have during their practicum (Melo et al., 2021). Mentor support at school aided in the creation of pre-service teachers' professional identities. This highlights the significant role that school mentors have in the identity shift in pedagogical content.

Mentor support at field schools assisted in developing pre-service teachers' professional identities, indicating that the role of school mentors also plays a significant part in the identity shift in pedagogical content (Zhao, 2021). Moreover, developing their professional identities during field teaching practice fueled pre-service teachers' heightened professional dedication.

Given the learning environment, technology integration can be linked to this study's emotional and social learning. According to the findings, most participants positively defined their identities as teachers, such as by being creative with their English classroom activities. A single member expressed dissatisfaction about their lackluster experience utilizing a technological platform. Regarding technological literacy, PST must be innovative to thrive in any educational setting, especially during an emergency remote teaching session.

PSTs shouldn't be burdened by the flexibility to employ technology in online and offline classroom activities. As a result, it is imperative to update and optimize the use of technology for educational objectives. In order to manage and promote successful SEL programs in diverse and multicultural contexts, the relevant stakeholders must consider the needs and backgrounds of the learners, families, and communities served when it comes to policies and practices linked to SEL curricula (Hayashi et al., 2022). Furthermore, a contributing aspect to the study's findings is the absence of information concerning SEL in teacher preparation programs. Murano et al. (2019) also express concern about this, noting that integrating SEL into pre-service teacher education programs conveys the importance of SEL and supports the idea that SEL instruction is essential for teachers.

Conclusions

In brief, SEL makes a contribution in two folds: educational and technological aspects. The findings relate to how pre-service teachers create their professional identities in the context of implementing teacher professional development. It is crucial to recommend that programs for preparing teachers incorporate the five SLE concepts within the curriculum. Furthermore, having a solid understanding of SEL can help pre-service teachers become more adaptable to changing classroom environments and develop empathy for peers, mentors, instructors, and other stakeholders.

To learn more about the development of SEL in pre-service teachers, it is advised that future researchers carry out additional studies with a different context and a larger sample size. This study has yielded data about SEL exploration within teacher identity. Furthermore, relating technology integration and literacy to the development of SEL will facilitate further debate for the subsequent study.

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