

Research Article

Student-Teachers' Professional Identity in the Age of Neoliberalism in an Omani Foreign Language Context: A Sociocultural Approach

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ABSTRACT

Pre-service teachers' professional identity is currently receiving a great deal of attention in the field of second/foreign language teaching. This study aims at investigating the professional identity of the student teachers in the Sultanate of Oman in the age of neoliberalism from sociocultural perspectives. The present study employed grounded theory approach to analyse the collected data to help the researchers get an in-depth understanding. Therefore, structured interviews were conducted. Concurrently, the ATLAS.ti software was utilized to facilitate the data analysis. The findings revealed that the student teachers were able to construct their professional identities, by the help of senior teachers and the supervisor during the practicum. A number of factors that appeared to impact identity construction were recognized, e.g. the practicum, the supervisor, the senior teacher and the class teacher. The results obtained from this research may contribute to the field of applied linguistics and teacher training programmes. Pedagogical implications and practical suggestions were highlighted.

1. Introduction and Background

Today, in the age of neoliberalism, the Sultanate of Oman is eager to prepare highly qualified teachers who will be able to carry out things that were not done in the past; therefore, the teacher's education has been given a special attention. The focus on education in the Sultanate of Oman has started since 1970 in order to raise the quality of education and the quantity and quality of both learners and teachers. The Sultanate of Oman might not have experienced formal education before 1970. The first education system in Oman did not become real and did not exist until the ascendancy of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to the throne as Al Mahrooqi and Denman asserted (2018). At that time HM Sultan Qaboos announced "We will provide education for our children even in the shadow of a tree", which indicates as claimed by (Barnawi, 2017) a strong commitment to let education be accessible to all Omanis. It is a challenge to train great numbers of qualified teachers and to decide what skills and knowledge they need. As a matter of fact, in neoliberalism context, teaching English has become necessary for the future of the country. Nguyen, (2019) argued that the age of neoliberalism has influenced the field of English teaching which is now seen as a commodity. She claims that competence in English language is essential for any economic advancement, for enhancing status and prestige and for transitional mobility. It is important to take neoliberalism into consideration while investigating teachers' professional developments in Oman since "... neoliberalism has unapologetically become the biggest story in Oman in the context of contemporary educational system" as claimed by Banawi (2017, P. 112). Therefore, Oman needs to train teachers and to give them the necessary skills and knowledge to help learners of English to cope with the current status of English language. Moreover, teachers should be well-equipped to deal with the curriculum that suits the neoliberalism age, as claimed by Nunan (2013), it is no use to have the best curriculum if the teachers were not prepared enough to teach. One of the important things to bear in mind during training these novice

teachers is their professional identities to see how these teachers perceive themselves and how their identities are constructed. This study aims at investigating the professional identity of the student teachers in the Sultanate of Oman in the age of neoliberalism from sociocultural perspectives.

1.1. Research Questions

The current study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- 1- How is the professional identity of the student-teacher constructed?
- 2- What are the factors that affect student-teachers' identity?
- 3- How do student-teachers perceive the school environment?
- 4- What way does the student teacher benefit from the school environment during the practicum?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Student Teacher Identity

Danielewicz (2001, P. 10) defined identity as "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and others (which includes us)". Therefore, identity is the means by which individuals are distinguished from others in social relations. Student teachers' (hereafter, may be referred to as pre-service teachers or trainee teachers) professional identity starts being constructed from the day one of the practicum. Teachers' identity plays an important role in professional development and it is central to the professional teaching as argued by Rodgers & Scott (2008). Therefore, it is essential to focus on the factors that influence their identities. According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) much recent literature that concerns teacher education focuses on the importance of identity in teacher development. They also rightly claim that pre-service teachers have to undertake a shift in identity while moving through teacher education programmes and assuming positions as teachers in the challenging schools of today. As a matter of fact, the identity shift is dynamic and it may occur throughout their career in the future when they interact with other colleagues within school environments and in the wider communities. When student teachers start teaching, they begin to construct their professional identity. As they embark teaching during the practicum they may face some problems, e.g. the methods of teaching and the knowledge of the content of what they are supposed to teach, and class management, to mention but few. These trainee teachers are supposed to be well equipped and well trained before they go to the field to teach. Singh and Richards (2006) indicated that the challenge for teacher trainers is how to shape student teachers' knowledge in the context of English teacher education course. During the practicum and onward student teachers develop their profession personalities and change their identities. In what follow the focus is on the factors that impact the identity of the student teacher.

2.2. Factors Influence Pre-service Teachers' Identity

As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) claimed teachers' identity is influenced by self, emotion, discourse and reflection. Moreover, van Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset and Beishuizen (2017) found five psychological processes involve in developing a teacher identity. These are a sense of appreciation, a sense of connectedness, a sense of competence, a sense of commitment, and imagination of prospective career trajectory. It could be noticed that the different views of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and van Lankveld et. al. (2017) complement each other. As mentioned before, a teacher identity is not a static process but a dynamic and continuous process. However, there is no consensus on how it is constructed. According to van Lankveld et. al. (2017) there are different theoretical perspectives; some emphasize the social and cultural nature of identity while others centre their emphasis on its discursive and narrative nature. This study adopts the most comprehensive approach of Rodgers & Scott's (2008). In their opinion, identity shares four basic assumptions: it depends and is based on variable contexts including social, cultural, political and historical forces. It is formed in relation with others which involve emotion. Furthermore, identity is shifting, unstable and multiple. It also involves construction and reconstruction of meaning through narratives overtime. Having mentioned all the above definitions, the researchers believe that identity is suitable to be approached from sociocultural perspective because they are of the opinion that pre-service teachers construct their identity in a social context within the school environment. It is worth mentioning as claimed by Danielewicz (2001) that "Every person is composed of multiple, often conflicting, identities, which exist in volatile states of construction or reconstruction, reformation or erosion, addition or expansion." (P. 10). These student teachers have multiple identities as students and as teachers at the same time which may make it a challenging task to transform themselves from students to teachers.

Having casted light on student teachers' identity, the section turns to the identity construction from a sociocultural perspective. The trainee teachers, according to the regulations of the University of Nizwa, are placed at different government schools in the Interior Governorate for one whole semester, twice a week.

2.3. Identity Construction within Sociocultural Perspective

During the practicum, student teachers are required not only to be familiar with the skills of teaching and knowledge of the contents they are supposed to teach, but also it means to be a teacher of language as argued by Singh and Richards (2014). Moreover, at this time, the student teachers construct their identities and transform themselves into teachers. This shift may take place in a social context within the school environment. In order to discuss the identity construction with sociocultural perspective it is advisable to use Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) and mediation. Johnson (2009) defined it as the difference between one who is able to achieve by him/herself and what they achieve working cooperatively with others or with a more able person. This way student teachers with the help of more experienced teachers can construct their professional identities. Mockler (2011) cited in Nguyen (2019) pointed out that, "an understanding of the processes by which teacher professional identity is formed and mediated is central to understanding the professional learning and development needs of teachers and advancing a richer, more transformative vision for education" (P. 517). Therefore, the interactions of pre-service teachers with each other and with class teachers during teaching practicum may impact their professional identity development. Trent (2013) argued that learning how to teach and construction of identity occur during the teaching practicum. The more experienced teachers and supervisors may provide mediation to these pre-service teachers in a systematic and sensitive way to their ZPD. These novice teacher have some ideas of teaching from their micro teaching at the university, that is to say they may not start from scratch. The feedback student teachers receive could be conceptualized as mediation. The aim could be promoting their professional career and identity through explicit information or by visiting them in class rooms during their teaching time and by providing them with the necessary information. In other words, student teachers should receive focused intervention while practicing teaching to guarantee development of the professional personality. Mediation and ZPD are concepts related to Vygotsky. The term ZPD as Chaiklin (2003:38), claimed is probably one of the most worldwide known and famous ideas relating to Vygotsky's educational works. Learners can operate in the ZPD when they get help needed to achieve learning tasks from teachers and from more capable peers. Mediation, according to Lantolf and Thorne (2006:59), is an important concept of sociocultural theory. Vygotsky, as referred to by Lantolf and Thorne (2006:59), argued "that higher forms of human mental activity are mediated by culturally constructed auxiliary means."

2.4. The B.Ed. Programme and the Practicum at the University of Nizwa

The Department of Foreign languages at the University of Nizwa has three foreign language sections; English, French and German. English section, the largest, has two majors, English Language in Education (B.Ed.) and English Language & Translation. B.Ed. students are required to complete 132 Credit Hours to graduate and then take their positions as full time teachers at the public or private schools. They are prepared to teach at basic education (Grade 1 to 10) or post-basic education (Grade 11to 12). After studying Methods of Teaching as a pre-requisite, students undertake a teaching practicum for a whole semester (almost four months, twice a week). They spend the first week observing other teachers teaching and then throughout the semester they are visited by one of the university staff and by the class teacher who works as a mentor and adviser and s/he is supposed to write a report about their performance and their punctuality collaboratively with the school principal.

2.5. Past Research that Stimulated the Current Study

Several studies have been conducted recently aiming to improve student teachers' professional identity. These studies increasingly focused on the factors that impact their identity, for example, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) claimed that teachers' identity is influenced by self, emotion, discourse and reflection. Pre-service teachers' identity is now accepted as an important aspect of novice teachers. However, as noticed by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), the literature on teacher identity has no consensus on what is meant by identity. They argue that it is challenging to reach into agreement. However, all scholars agree that it is dynamic and not fixed. Higher education institutions in Oman provide Omani schools with qualified teachers and train them to be able develop themselves and their professional identities.

Training student teachers is one of the most important components and a major requirement for graduation at the University of Nizwa. The teaching practicum as (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Huang & Waxman, 2009) cited in (Trent, 2013) believed is challenging, hard and frustrating aspects of education teaching programme. During this period, in spite of the challenges and lack of confidence and problems of managing classrooms, student teachers start developing their professional identity within school environment. Whereas many researchers have investigated pre-service and in-service teachers' identity, to the best of our knowledge, no prior research in Oman has investigated student teachers' professional identity within sociocultural approach in the age of neoliberalism. Nguyen (2019) has argued that a sociocultural theoretical perspective has the power of understanding the language teachers' learning in the age of neoliberalism. Failure to address this matter may affect negatively the education programme of training pre-service teachers at universities and education colleges in the Sultanate of Oman.

The present study addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the professional identity of pre-service teachers during the practicum. This study examines their professional identities within sociocultural approach. Moreover, it investigated how school administrations, class teachers and students viewed trainee teachers and how they perceived themselves and how they constructed their teacher identity. The context of the study is the University of Nizwa and Education schools in one of the Governorates in the Sultanate of Oman. Teachers should be trained and their knowledge and skills have to be raised in order to guarantee increase in students' achievement. In the age of neoliberalism English is needed greatly in the Sultanate of Oman in order to be part of the Global system. According to Banawi (2018), neoliberal ideology has found its way to Omani basic and post-basic education (public education) and vocational training sector.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the student teachers (pre-service teachers) used in the current study explains the main things to be studied, i.e. the key factors, the constructs and what link them with each other. Moreover, it describes the factors that may impact the construction of the professional identities and in what way they influence their professional development. As it is shown in figure 2.1 these factors are associated with the student teachers in one way or another.

Our study contributes to the literature in the field of applied linguistics in crucial ways by examining how perceived professional identities affect student teachers' future careers. Furthermore, this study may help education programme designers' insights and accordingly design programmes for prospective teachers. The present study attempts to answer research questions in 2.2.

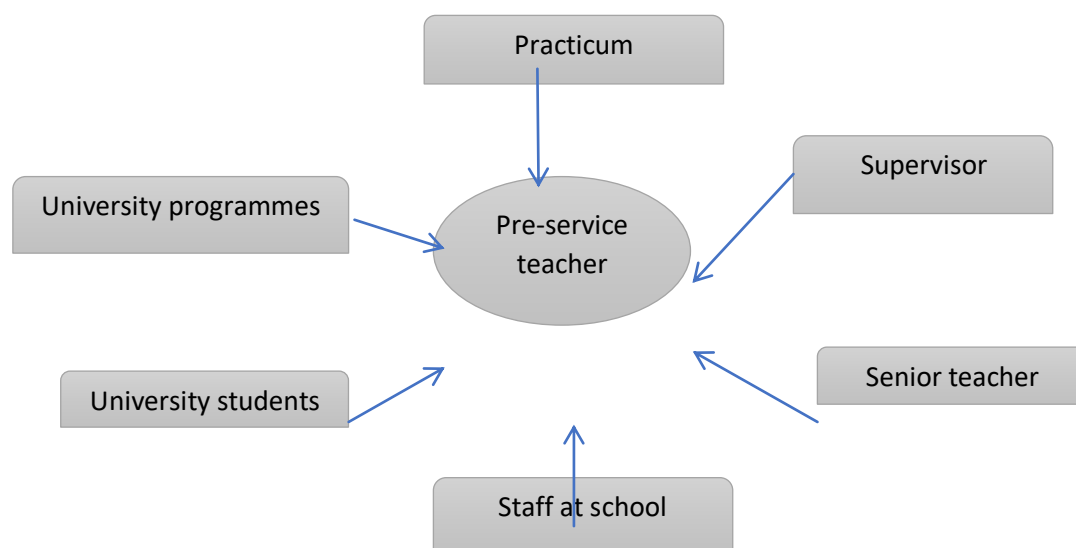


Figure 1: factors that impact on the professional identity of the pre-service teacher

Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the factors that may impact the professional identity construction of the pre-service teachers. For example, the supervisor and the senior teacher help them in managing the classroom. The university programmes prepare them to be teachers while the university students, especially those who are involved in the practicum offer help and assistance in preparing the lessons and discussing how to deal with students at school.

2.3 Theoretical Underpinnings

This study, as mentioned above, adopts the theoretical framework of sociocultural perspective to investigate the student teachers' professional identity construction in relation to personal diversity and school environment and identity change in the age of neoliberalism. One of the most important theories is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) which has been noticeable in the research of second/foreign language pedagogies. According to Wertsch (1985), SCT refers to Vygotsky and his students. Holland and Lachicotte (2007) argued that identity is an important concept in various fields such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics and other cultural studies. They also think that sociocultural research "is developing its own integrated perspectives on identity", (101). As asserted by Johnson and Golombek (2011) sociocultural theory has potential to explain the significance of teachers' professional developments during their careers and in the entire

environment. Novice teachers learn how to teach from the more experienced teachers and from their own teaching. Therefore, Vygotsky's theory about how students learn may be true and applicable to the student teachers and can explain the social origin of mental functions and how social external forms interact and become internalized as psychological tools for thinking. Thus sociocultural theory is justifiable to use in order to understand the students teachers identity changes and their professional developments.

When discussing about teachers, it should be borne in mind the new role of the teachers at present where a teacher is seen as a facilitator rather than a knower who is expected to impart and transmit the information s/he know to students who wait for him/her passively. This paper claims that social interaction, school environment and student teachers characters play significant mediating role in developing student teachers professional identities. Johnson (2009) claimed that teachers construct knowledge and beliefs through their daily thinking, talking, and interacting culturally in the communities they practice and participate as both learners and teachers. According to her, the three types of tools human beings use in order to mediate their activities are: cultural artifacts and activities, concepts and social relations. All these tools may be available for the student teachers in the school environments.

3. Methodology

This study is based on a grounded theory and it includes the research design, participants, data collection and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This section introduces the discussion of the methodological approach and the research design that best suits to examine the research questions. Constructivist grounded theory is proposed to answer the research questions and to retain deep insight into the professional identity of the novice teachers. Charmaz (2006) believed that grounded theory is a group of principles and practices not merely prescriptions or readymade packages. According to the same author, the focus of the grounded theory is on the discovery of the development of the buried theory. The researchers adopted the constructivist grounded theory, because as suggested by Charmaz (2006), it considers the researchers as active agents who involve in constructing their own knowledge from the data they collected and analysed. This method is justifiable because it enables the researcher to identify any problems or hindrances at the beginning of implementation.

3.2 Participants

The four student teachers from the University of Nizwa who participated in the practicum completed more than 120 credit hours. The participants were selected because they were specialized in TEFL. They are in their early twenties in the final year of their Bachelor Degree (B.Ed.). They are considered novice teachers because all of them have no experience in teaching except for macro teaching at the university. However, they brought with them to the practicum some prior experiences and backgrounds of teaching which already had started shaping their professional identity. They gained these experiences from the educational programmes, for example, Foundations of Education, Second Language Acquisition and Methods of Teaching at the university and also from the micro teaching.

3.3 Data Collection

The source of data collection was structured interview (see Appendix). Data collection took place a short time before the end of the spring semester 2019/2020. The interviews were conducted with the participants while they were engaged in the practicum. The English medium was mainly used throughout the interview except with one participant who preferred the native language. The interview was conducted with each of the student teachers individually. The aim of the interviews was to achieve an in-depth interpretation of how they constructed their identities as future teachers. The interviews were audio-taped and took between 20 to 30 minutes. The researchers did their best not to influence the participants so as not to focus on what they thought to be professionally preferable responses. Then the interviews were transcribed and analysed independently and categorized.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is unlike quantitative data analysis because they are made up of words. The former requires in-depth analysis and deep interpretation. The researchers followed a rigorous method by using a Grounded Theory approach to generate theories that may support the rich data collected from the trainee teachers. As a matter of fact, the grounded theory approach basically is linked with the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967). As asserted by Denscombe (2010), grounded theory is an approach which is committed to generating theories rather than testing them. Therefore, it is safe to say, grounded theory approach is a bottom-up strategy because it enables researchers to develop perspectives and insights which remain hidden. Charmaz (2006) claimed that grounded theory is composed of principles and practices and these are not prescriptions or readymade packages. According to her, the researchers should bear in their minds that the focus of the grounded theory is on discovery of the hidden theory.

The researchers used ATLAS.ti software, which is part of the genre of computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). It is worth mentioning that ATLAS.ti is a tool which makes it easy for the researchers to carry out efficiently wearisome tasks, but the analysis is done by the researchers.

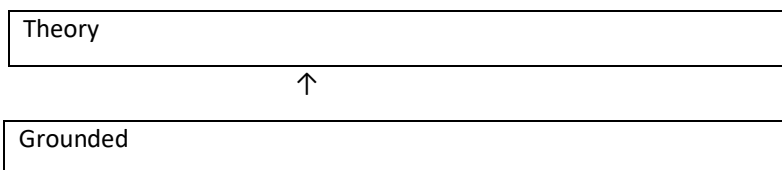


Figure 2: bottom-up approach of grounded theory.

Figure 2 shows how the grounded theory is hidden is a bottom-up approach. It comes out like a mushroom and the researchers' role is to discover it.

3.4.1 Open Coding

According to Friese (2012:64) "In ATLAS.ti open coding simply means creating a new code. It is done in four steps. First the researcher opens the project that was created, then loads the documents and selects a text segment and finally selects the option Open Coding. Therefore, the programme facilitates the task, however, the researchers do the operation.

3.4.2 Axial Coding

This is the second stage of coding. At this stage, coding should be more focused and the researcher starts to "build up a dense texture of relationships around the 'axis' of the category being focused upon," (Strauss, 1987:64).

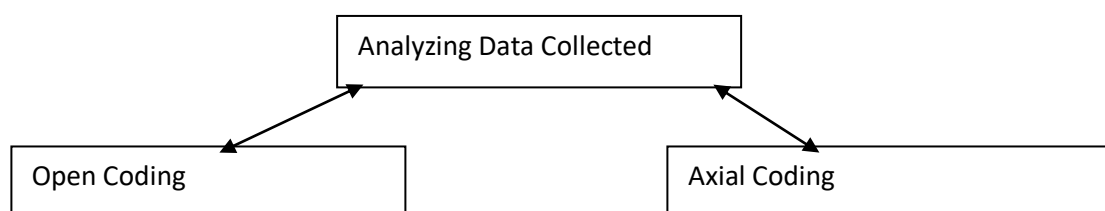


Figure 3 shows data analysis.

As Figure 3 illustrates, analyzing the data is not a linear process but it is recursive. In other words, the researcher moves from open coding to axial coding back and forth.

4. Findings and Discussion

When the researchers started analysing the data, they focused on the factors that may have their impact on the professional identity construction. Moreover, they were interested in knowing how their student teachers perceived themselves, or how they identified themselves, for example, as students or as teachers? As Danielewicz (2001, P. 10) argued, "Identity is our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and others (which includes us)". Therefore, the researchers started by discussing the factors that they supposed would impact their professional identity. Another focus was given to school environment because it was thought to play a very important part in the social context. The researchers argue that context has a particular impact on shaping the professional identity of the pre-service teachers.

4.1 Factors Impact the construction of the Identity of Pre-service teacher and how it is constructed.

The findings revealed how these students teachers construct their identities and the factors that affect them. In addition to that they disclose how they perceive the school environment and how they construct their professional identities in a social way.

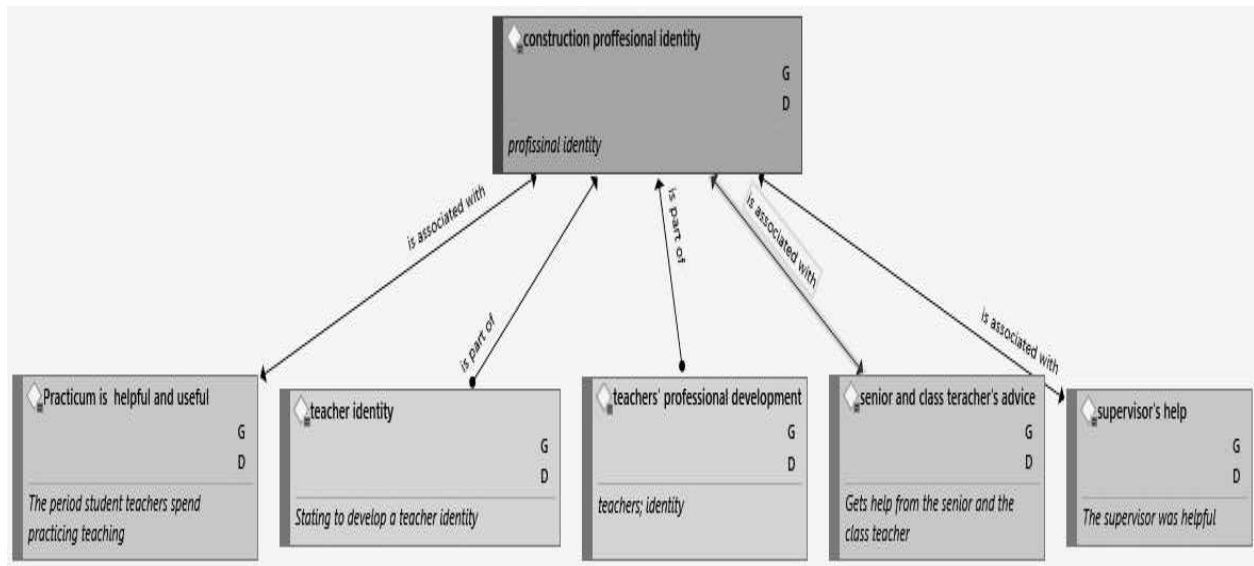


Figure 4: axial coding of pre-service teachers identity construction and the factors that influence it.

Figure 4 clearly shows how the identity of the pre-service teacher constructed and it points out the factors that play important roles in the process of the identity construction.

Almost all of the participants expressed their proudness and happiness of being teachers which supports Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argument that identity is impacted by self-emotion, discourse and reflection. As one of the participants mentioned proudly, “Teachers are unique and they should be different from all other professionals. They are responsible from rearing up a generation, therefore they should be well trained and be knowledgeable.” They stated that they wanted to develop themselves as future teachers by reading and attending conferences held in the field of teaching, as asserted by one of them, “I think I can develop my career by interaction with teachers in the field and by attending conferences and of course by reading a lot in the field and by practice”. This may also go in line with what has been mentioned above that teacher’s identity is not a static process but dynamic and ongoing process. To be a teacher, some of them said, one needs to be responsible and respect their students. The factors that may affect the way they construct their professional identity are illustrated by Figure 3.4.3.

4.2. Student Teacher and School Environment

At this stage the focus of the researchers was how the school environment influenced their professional development and the existence of mediating agents in the interaction between the pre-service teachers and the more experienced ones. One of the participants expressed this mediation clearly, “I gained a lot of experience, not only in teaching but also in how to deal with other people and in how to control yourself and in how to strike a balance between your personal judgment and others”.

As a matter of fact the trainee teachers who participated in this study registered in the education programme on their own will because they realized that teaching in the age of neoliberalism is needed and they could be employed immediately after graduation. The data analysed illustrated that the student teachers were happy and proud of being teachers. They showed they spent a good time at the schools they worked at during the practicum. They were treated well by the staff of the schools, their relations with the administrators and the teachers were good and so with the students. At the beginning, some of them mentioned that they faced some difficulties in controlling the class; however, they overcome these problems by the help of the class teacher and the senior teacher. One of the participants stated that “At the beginning, class management was difficult especially I was assigned to teach Grade 2 but by the time being I was able to overcome that problem by the help of the class teacher”. The social context and collaboration within the school staff helped these student teachers construct their professional identities and be able to undertake a shift in identity and transform themselves into teachers. Moreover, the interaction of pre-service teachers with each other and with the experienced teachers at school may have helped them construct their identities better. One of the participants stated that, “I used to discuss my lessons, before I prepare them, with my class mates who were involved in the practicum and with the experienced teachers at school however, I depended mainly on my own views since I knew my students better. Moreover, I followed the outlines of the teacher’s Guide Book.

Sometimes the senior teacher corrected or offered some modifications to my lesson plan” This participant discussed how the student teachers benefited from each other and from more experienced teachers.

The participants interviewed believed that they learnt a lot from the staff at school and from their classmates and above all from the supervisor and the senior teacher. All these have been reflected on their identity construction.

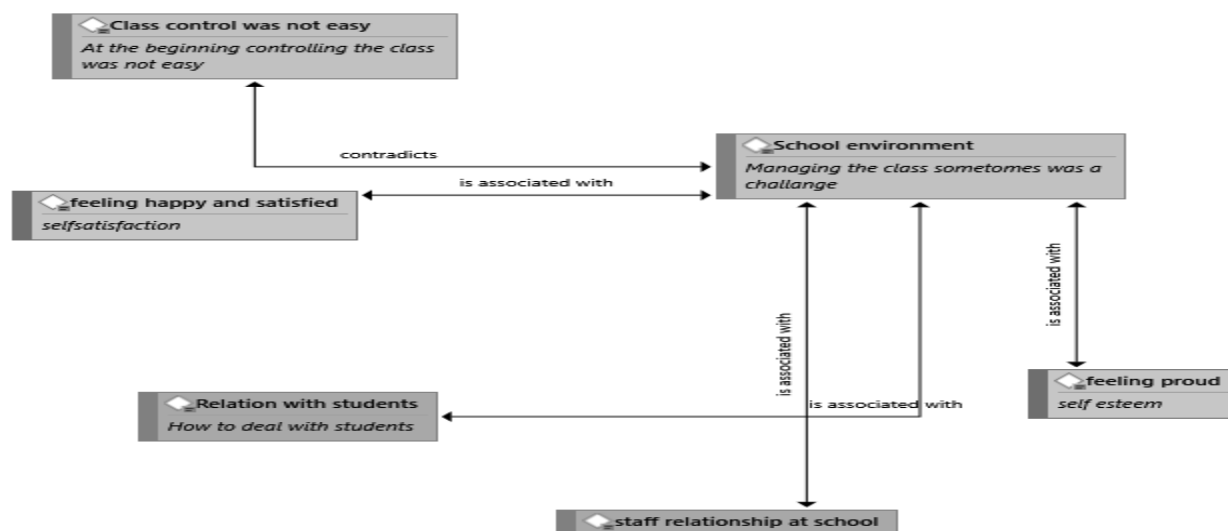


Figure 5: axial coding of how student teachers feel during the practicum at Schools

Figure 5 shows how the student teachers feel at school. As many of them stated, they felt proud and happy of being teachers. As soon as they stepped to schools, they forgot that they were students and this feeling helped them constructed their identity.

4.3. The Practicum Period

During the practicum student teachers spend one whole semester at schools. They practiced teaching at different levels (Grade 1 to grade 12). They are placed randomly at different schools by the training coordinators. At the time they are visited by the supervisor, who is a university staff and mainly specialized in Applied Linguistics and the senior teacher at the school. Moreover, the class teacher visits them regularly offering any help needed. As reported by the participants, the practicum period was beneficial and useful. The practicum period seemed to help them in constructing their professional identities.

In this study, the student teachers viewed the practicum period as a fruitful and useful experience which helped them develop their identities personally and professionally, e.g. “I gained a lot of experience, for example how to deal with students and how to cope with the regulations of the school. In short, the practicum was a good practical period,” said one of the participants. As they perceived, the school environment helped them understand the nature of teaching and they learnt a lot from the supervisor’s feedback and from the observations of the class and the senior teacher. Also they achieved a lot of punctuality, school regulations and disciplines at work from the administration during the practicum. The researchers can say with confidence that for the participants of the study, the practicum was perceived as a means that paved their way to their career and their future professional world. During the practicum, as the data from the interviews revealed, the student teachers were able to understand who they were and how they were distinguished from others in social relations.

This study indicates the importance of the social context in building the professional identity of new teachers. It also shed light on the importance of mediation in transforming student teachers to teachers. Moreover, the study emphasizes the significant role the educational practicum plays in shaping trainee teachers professional identity.

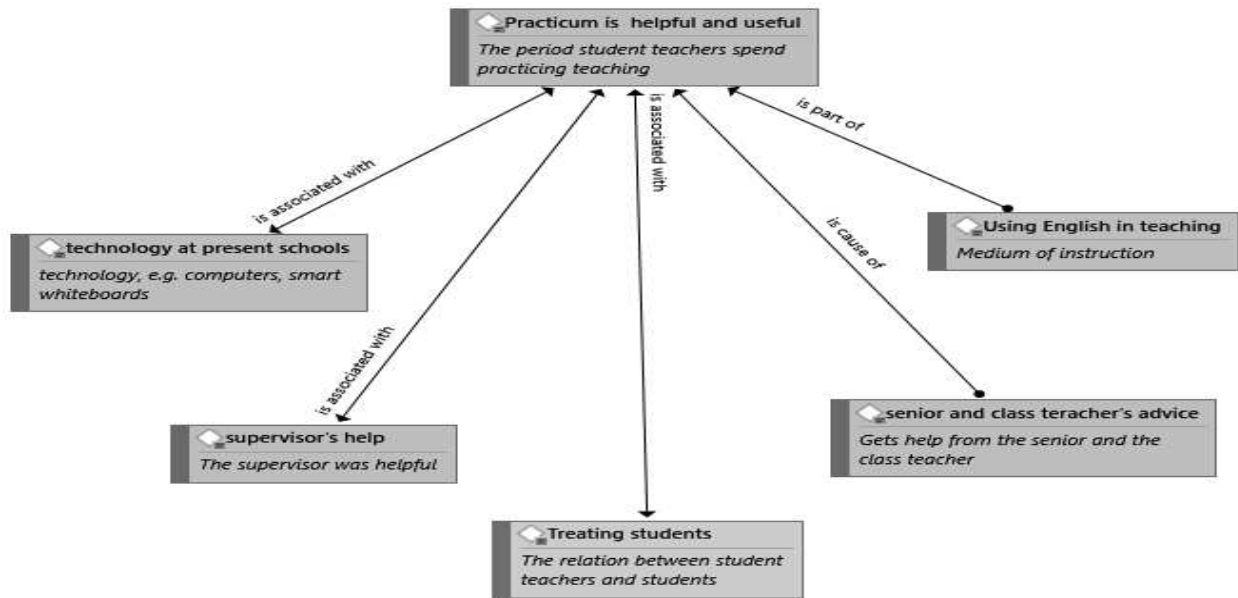


Figure 6: Axial Coding Depicts the Practicum Period at Schools and what they Learned.

Scrutinizing Figure 6 reveals what the pre-service teachers learned at schools by the help of the supervisor, class teacher and the senior teacher. Moreover, they learned from the administrative staff how to behave at school and how to be punctual. They also learnt about the school regulations.

To sum up, the study shows how the student teachers developed their identities after spending a whole semester at school practicing teaching. It reveals the factors that helped in building their identities. In fact, the contact with school teachers and students in the class rooms strengthened their identities and their teaching experience.

5. Limitations of the Study

While this article adds significant contributions to the field of teaching practicum, it is not without limitations. One of the most obvious limitations of this research is the absence of the school administrations. Moreover, students at schools were not involved. Another limitation was that the focus was only on trainee teachers of English language and did not include other specialties

6. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

This section presents a summary of the main findings of the research. This will be followed by a reflection of educational implications for educators programme designers and teacher trainers. The primary objectives of the current study were to investigate the professional identity of the student teacher within sociocultural perspective in the age of neoliberalism in Oman and to explore the factors that affect the construction of their identity. Moreover, the study aimed at investigating how these pre-service teachers perceive the school environment and in what way they benefit from the environment during the practicum. The study was conducted at a university in the Sultanate of Oman. A qualitative approach was adopted to collect the data by means of participant interviews at the end of the spring semester (2019/20),

A preliminary finding from this research study was that the education practicum was perceived by the student teachers in a positive way. It helped them to develop their professional identity. Being in a real situation of work hinted them to learn their role in the future. They realized the importance of the quality teaching and learning for Oman and for the Omanis. In the line with the previous studies, this research proved that the teacher identity is dynamic and not stable. The participants reported that they opt for developing themselves by more reading, attending seminars and conferences in the field and by exchanging knowledge and experiences with other teachers, especially with the more experienced ones.

To sum up, this study employed a sociocultural approach to understand the role of the social context in shaping the professional identity of pre-service teachers. The participants explained and discussed how they utilized from the practicum and from the more experienced teachers.

6.1 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The results of the study have established that the educational practicum is useful and beneficial and plays a vital role in constructing student teachers' professional identities. The findings also have confirmed that the educational programmes at the university are important and so is the micro teaching. The findings also have cast light on the role of the supervisor's visits and the importance of his/her feedback, besides the regular visits of the senior and the class teacher. What has been noticed in the current study is that some students are assigned to teach certain level against their own will, e.g. lower levels (Grade 1, for example). It was found that the participants prefer medium levels, that is to say Grades 3 up to 10. They prefer to exclude Grades 1, 2, 3, 11 and 12 at the practicum period.

The researchers recommend that the educational practicum should cover the whole semester with a full timetable rather than being twice a week. They also recommend that these student teachers should not be assigned to teach the beginners, nor the final year students. It is worth mentioning the willingness of the participants to be teachers may have helped to construct their professional identity and to interact positively with school teachers and with the supervisor. Moreover, the good relationship with their students increased their motivation.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. *In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a teacher?*
2. *Tell me how do you perceive yourself during the practicum?*
3. *How do you feel about working as a teacher during practicum?*
4. *In what way do you think the practicum helps you construct your identity as a prospective teacher?*
5. *Do you prepare your lesson alone or in cooperation with others who are participating in the practicum?*
6. *Tell me about your relationship with your peers and the administrators?*
7. *Tell me about your relationship with your students?*
8. *How do you look at your students?*
9. *What are the challenges and difficulties that you face in the real classrooms regarding the teaching practicum and the subject areas?*
10. *In what way the supervisor's observations help you learn about the teaching strategies?*
11. *How can you describe your experience working at schools now?*
12. *In what way do you think what you are studying at the university develops you professionally and commit you to the teaching profession's values and ethics?*
13. *Tell me to what extent what you are studying at the university helps you in your teaching in applying the pedagogical knowledge.*
14. *In what way you could use a variety of modern information resources and supporting technologies?*
15. *How can you develop yourself as successful teacher?*
16. *What have you learnt from the practicum as a prospective teacher?*



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