# REHEARSING THE TEACHER SELF: DRAMA AND TEACHER IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN PRE-SERVICE ELT EDUCATION

# ÖĞRETMEN KİMLİĞİNİN GELİŞTİRİLMESİ: İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ EĞİTİMİNDE DRAMA VE ÖĞRETMEN KİMLİĞİNİN ŞEKİLLENMESİ



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## ABSTRACT

This study explored how pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers enact and experience different teacher selves through drama and how these experiences contribute to the negotiation and reimagining of their emerging teacher identities. Adopting a qualitative longitudinal interpretive design, the study involved 25 pre-service ELT teachers enrolled in a 14-week university-based drama course at a foundation university in Istanbul, Türkiye. Data were generated through written teacher-self reflections collected at three stages of the course and individual semi-structured interviews conducted after the course. Reflexive thematic analysis, combined with within-participant longitudinal analysis, identified three interconnected themes: trying on the teacher self, finding fit and misfit, and reimagining the future teacher self. The findings indicated that participants differed in how they related enacted teacher positions to their emerging professional selves. Some positions generated identification, whereas others prompted distance or resistance. Across the semester, participants showed varied trajectories of reconsideration, refinement, confirmation, and uncertainty rather than uniform identity change. The study conceptualises drama as a potential identity rehearsal space in which pre-service ELT teachers can temporarily enact, evaluate, and reconsider possible ways of being a teacher without being required to adopt them as part of their professional identities. The findings highlight the potential of drama for supporting exploratory and reflective identity work in pre-service ELT education.

**Keywords:** drama, teacher identity, pre-service ELT teachers, possible teacher selves, identity negotiation, identity rehearsal

## ÖZ

Bu çalışma, İngilizce Öğretmenliği (ELT) öğretmen adaylarının drama yoluyla farklı öğretmen benliklerini nasıl deneyimlediklerini ve bu deneyimlerin gelişmekte olan öğretmen kimliklerinin şekillenmesine nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu incelemektedir. Nitel boylamsal yorumlayıcı desende yürütülen araştırmaya, İstanbul'daki bir vakıf üniversitesinde 14 haftalık drama dersine katılan 25 İngilizce öğretmen adayı dâhil edilmiştir. Veriler, dersin üç farklı aşamasında toplanan yazılı öğretmen benliği yansımaları ve ders sonunda gerçekleştirilen bireysel yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Katılımcı içi boylamsal analizle desteklenen refleksif tematik analiz sonucunda üç tema belirlenmiştir: öğretmen benliğini denemek, uyum ve uyumsuzluğu keşfetmek ve gelecekteki öğretmen benliğini yeniden şekillendirmek. Bulgular, katılımcıların canlandırdıkları öğretmen rollerini farklı biçimlerde değerlendirdiklerini; bazı rollerle özdeşleşirken bazılarına karşı mesafe veya direnç geliştirdiklerini göstermiştir. Süreç boyunca yeniden değerlendirme, belirginleştirme, mevcut yönelimleri doğrulama ve belirsizlik gibi farklı örüntüler ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışma,

dramayı öğretmen adaylarının farklı öğretmen olma biçimlerini geçici olarak deneyimleyip değerlendirebildikleri ve öğretmen kimliklerini yeniden gözden geçirerek şekillendirebildikleri bir alan olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** drama, öğretmen kimliği, İngilizce öğretmen adayları, olası öğretmen benlikleri, kimlik şekillenmesi, öğretmen eğitimi



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning to teach involves more than acquiring pedagogical knowledge and instructional skills. It also involves a process of becoming in which prospective teachers develop and negotiate understandings of who they are and who they may become as teachers. Teacher identity is therefore an important dimension of teacher education because teachers' understandings of themselves are intertwined with their beliefs, experiences, professional roles, and educational contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). Rather than being a fixed attribute acquired upon entry into the profession, teacher identity is generally understood as dynamic and continuously shaped through personal, social, and professional experience.

This perspective is particularly relevant during pre-service teacher education, when prospective teachers encounter different images, expectations, and possibilities of teaching. Beijaard et al. (2004) emphasised the continuing and contextual nature of professional identity formation, while Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) identified the self, agency, emotion, reflection, discourse, and context as important dimensions of teacher identity. Becoming a teacher thus involves not only learning what teachers should know and do but also exploring possible ways of being a teacher.

A dialogical perspective provides a useful framework for understanding this process. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) conceptualised teacher identity as involving relationships between individual and social, continuous and discontinuous, and unitary and multiple dimensions. From this perspective, different positions or versions of the self may coexist, interact, or generate tensions. For pre-service teachers, these may include understandings shaped by previous experiences as learners, emerging perceptions of themselves as teachers, and imagined versions of the teachers they hope to become. Teacher education can consequently provide opportunities for these different positions to be experienced and negotiated rather than simply transmitting a predetermined professional identity.

Teacher identity is also central to language teacher education. Language teaching takes place within social and pedagogical contexts in which language, interaction, culture, and professional positioning intersect. Varghese et al. (2005) argued that understanding language teaching requires attention to the identities teachers construct and negotiate within particular contexts. Research has also highlighted the importance of imagined and multiple teacher selves. Barkhuizen (2016), for example, demonstrated how a pre-service English teacher's imagined identities developed across teacher education and subsequent professional experience, while Henry (2019) showed how language teacher identity development can involve interaction among multiple and sometimes conflicting selves. These perspectives draw attention to professional becoming as a process in which prospective teachers continually interpret and reconsider possible future selves.

Drama may offer a particularly productive context for such exploration. Through role-taking, improvisation, embodied interaction, perspective-taking, and engagement with imagined situations, participants can temporarily occupy positions different from their everyday selves. In teacher education, this experiential quality may allow prospective teachers to move beyond discussing teaching abstractly and instead explore how different teacher roles, responses, and

relationships are experienced when enacted. Drama can therefore provide opportunities to experiment with ways of being a teacher without requiring participants to commit permanently to the roles they perform.

Previous research has established meaningful connections between drama, teacher development, and professional identity. Horasan-Doğan and Cephe (2020) found that creative drama contributed to student teachers' pedagogical development and awareness of personal and professional identity. Korkut and Özmen (2023), drawing on the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity, examined the development of a drama teacher role identity among English teachers following educational drama training. In language teacher education, Uştuk (2025) used a metaxical approach to examine how pre-service language teachers engaged with teacher/learner identity tensions in dramatized settings. Together, these studies demonstrate that drama can provide meaningful conditions for identity-related reflection and professional learning.



Despite these contributions, further attention is needed to the process through which pre-service ELT teachers rehearse and negotiate possible teacher selves across sustained university-based drama experiences. Existing research has primarily examined creative pedagogy and identity construction, the development of a specific drama teacher role identity, or the exploration of teacher/learner identity tensions. Comparatively less attention has been given to how prospective ELT teachers repeatedly enact different ways of being a teacher, experience congruence or discomfort with these positions, and reconsider the teachers they imagine becoming over time. Examining this process within university-based teacher education is particularly relevant because professional identity work may begin before, and develop beyond, experiences in school practicum.

Accordingly, the present study explores how pre-service ELT teachers enact, experience, and negotiate emerging teacher selves during a sustained 14-week university-based drama experience. Rather than treating teacher identity as an outcome that drama straightforwardly develops or improves, the study examines continuity, change, tension, and reconsideration in participants' understandings of themselves as future teachers. In doing so, it considers whether drama may provide an identity rehearsal space in which prospective teachers can temporarily experience and reflect on possible ways of being a teacher. The study therefore aims to understand how drama-based experiences contribute to the negotiation and reimagining of emerging teacher identities among pre-service ELT teachers.

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How do pre-service ELT teachers enact and experience different teacher selves through drama-based activities?

RQ2. How do these drama experiences contribute to the negotiation and reimagining of their emerging teacher identities?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Teacher Identity and Possible Teacher Selves in ELT Education

Teacher identity in language education is increasingly understood as an evolving configuration of personal histories, professional aspirations, contextual expectations, and experiences of participation in teaching and learning. Rather than developing along a single or predictable trajectory, identity may involve multiple positions that become more or less salient across contexts and over time (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Pennington & Richards, 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant to pre-service teachers, whose professional

identities are still emerging as they move between their established experiences as learners and anticipated roles as teachers.

The concept of possible selves provides a useful way of understanding the future-oriented dimension of this process. Possible selves represent images of what individuals may become, would like to become, or wish to avoid becoming. Within language teacher development, Kubanyiova (2009) conceptualised these future-oriented representations in terms of ideal, ought-to, and feared language teacher selves. Such future self-guides are consequential because they can shape how teachers interpret professional learning and pedagogical possibilities. Subsequent research has shown that teachers' future self-guides can influence classroom interaction and professional development choices (Hiver, 2013; Kubanyiova, 2015).



Possible selves are especially pertinent during initial teacher education because prospective teachers are simultaneously drawing on previous experiences and imagining future professional lives. Research with prospective English teachers has shown that hopes, expectations, and feared future selves provide meaningful insight into emerging teacher identity (Aslan, 2022; Erdem, 2020). These future-oriented identities should not, however, be regarded as fixed destinations. They can be revised as prospective teachers encounter experiences that affirm, challenge, or complicate how they imagine themselves as teachers. Barkhuizen (2016), for example, demonstrated that imagined teacher identities may shift over time, while Henry (2019) showed that emerging language teacher identity can involve dynamic relations among different and sometimes conflicting selves.

This understanding aligns closely with a dialogical conception of teacher identity. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) propose that apparently contradictory dimensions of identity—such as unity and multiplicity or continuity and discontinuity—can coexist. Accordingly, identity negotiation does not necessarily imply movement from an inadequate identity toward a single, stable professional self. It may instead involve dialogue among different positions, including identities that feel desirable, imposed, uncertain, or incompatible with how an individual wishes to teach. For the present study, this perspective is particularly useful because it directs attention not only to the teacher participants hope to become but also to teacher positions they may question, resist, or reject.

### 2.2. Drama as Experiential Identity Work in Teacher Education

Drama provides distinctive conditions for exploring such positions because it involves temporary enactment rather than permanent commitment. Through improvisation, role-taking, teacher-in-role, perspective-taking, and imagined situations, participants can experience actions and relationships from positions that may differ from their habitual ways of responding. The pedagogical significance of this process lies in the relationship between action and reflection: participants can enact a position, experience its possibilities and constraints, and subsequently reconsider what that experience means to them.

Within teacher education, this experiential quality creates possibilities that differ from learning about teaching exclusively through lectures, readings, or discussion. A prospective teacher can temporarily enact alternative responses to a classroom dilemma, occupy contrasting teacher positions, or experience a situation from both teacher and learner perspectives. The value of such enactment for identity research is not that the performed role necessarily represents the participant's "real" teacher identity. Rather, the relationship between the enacted role and the participant's response to it may reveal identification, distance, uncertainty, resistance, or aspiration. Drama can therefore make different professional positions available for experiential examination.

Empirical research supports the relevance of drama to professional identity work. Horasan-Doğan and Cephe (2020) found that creative drama experiences contributed not only to student teachers' pedagogical development but also to awareness of personal and professional identities. Their findings suggest that drama can connect pedagogical experimentation with reflection on the self. Korkut and Özmen (2023) extended the relationship between drama and professional identity by examining the development of a drama teacher role identity among English teachers. Their findings illustrate how drama-related professional experience can interact with beliefs, self-perceptions, action possibilities, and contextual conditions in identity development.

Uştuk (2025) brought drama and identity even more directly together within language teacher education. Using a metaxical approach, the study placed teacher/learner identity tensions within dramatized environments and demonstrated how pre-service language teachers could explore these tensions through make-believe. Drama functioned as a setting in which tensions could be juxtaposed and reconsidered as part of professional learning and identity (re)construction. This work is particularly important because it demonstrates that dramatized experience can support identity work without requiring the situations being explored to occur in actual school classrooms.

Taken together, these studies move the discussion beyond viewing drama solely as a method for developing language skills or teaching techniques. They indicate that drama can intersect with professional identity through enactment, reflection, tension, and role experience. At the same time, they conceptualise this relationship differently: through creative pedagogy and identity awareness (Horasan-Doğan & Cephe, 2020), drama teacher role identity (Korkut & Özmen, 2023), and teacher/learner identity tensions within metaxis (Uştuk, 2025). These distinctions are important because they demonstrate that "drama and teacher identity" is not a single research construct but a relationship that can be examined through different theoretical and experiential processes.

### 2.3. From Performing Roles to Rehearsing Teacher Selves

The present study focuses specifically on the relationship between role enactment and the negotiation of possible teacher selves. This focus distinguishes performing a role from identifying with it. When a pre-service teacher enacts a particular teacher position in drama, the position may feel personally congruent, unfamiliar, uncomfortable, aspirational, or undesirable. Each response may become meaningful for identity negotiation when participants reflect on what the experience suggests about the teacher they imagine becoming.

This distinction is consistent with research showing that future teacher identities encompass both desired and undesired possibilities. Possible-selves research has demonstrated that teachers may orient themselves toward professional images they hope to realise while simultaneously responding to selves they wish to avoid (Hiver, 2013; Kubanyiova, 2009). Drama potentially adds an experiential dimension to this future-oriented identity work: instead of only describing or imagining a possible teacher self, participants can temporarily enact ways of being a teacher and reflect on the relationship between those experiences and their emerging professional self-understandings.

Such an approach also provides a different perspective from studies of identity formation during practicum. Practicum research has demonstrated that encounters with actual schools, pupils, mentors, and institutional expectations can shape or challenge pre-service language teachers' imagined identities (Henry, 2019; Kaya, 2023). University-based drama cannot reproduce the complexity or consequences of actual classroom teaching, nor is it intended to do so. Its potential lies instead in its provisional character: prospective teachers can explore

alternative professional positions before those positions carry the responsibilities and constraints associated with actual classroom practice.

This study therefore brings together three complementary ideas: teacher identity as dialogically negotiated, possible teacher selves as future-oriented professional representations, and drama as a context for temporary role enactment. The relationship among these ideas provides the conceptual basis for examining whether sustained drama participation enables pre-service ELT teachers to move between enacting a role, experiencing a response to that role, and reconsidering a possible teacher self. Rather than assuming that drama necessarily transforms teacher identity, the study examines how these processes unfold across participants and over time. The notion of identity rehearsal is consequently used as an analytical possibility: drama may create a space in which possible teacher selves can be tried out and reflected upon, while allowing for identification, rejection, continuity, uncertainty, or change.



### 2.4. Theoretical Framework: Dialogical Teacher Identity and Possible Teacher Selves

This study is primarily informed by a dialogical perspective on teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), complemented by the concept of possible teacher selves (Kubanyiova, 2009). Together, these perspectives provide a framework for examining how pre-service ELT teachers experience different ways of being a teacher and how these experiences relate to their emerging professional identities.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) conceptualise teacher identity through the interconnected dimensions of multiplicity and unity, discontinuity and continuity, and the individual and the social. From a dialogical perspective, professional identity does not require the existence of a single, internally consistent teacher self. Different self-positions may coexist and become more or less salient across situations. These positions may complement one another but may also involve uncertainty, tension, or contradiction. Identity development can therefore involve an ongoing negotiation among different positions rather than progression toward one fixed professional identity.

This perspective is particularly relevant to drama-based teacher education. When pre-service teachers enact different teacher roles, the enacted position should not automatically be interpreted as an expression of their professional identity. A participant may perform a particular way of being a teacher while simultaneously experiencing identification, distance, discomfort, curiosity, or resistance toward that position. The analytical interest of the present study therefore lies in the relationship between role enactment and participants' interpretations of the enacted self. Attention is given to how participants position themselves while performing teacher roles, how they respond to these positions, and whether particular experiences are subsequently incorporated into, questioned within, or rejected from their emerging understandings of themselves as teachers.

The concept of possible selves adds a future-oriented dimension to this framework. Possible selves encompass representations of what individuals might become, hope to become, or fear becoming. In language teacher development, Kubanyiova (2009) adapted this perspective to conceptualise ideal, ought-to, and feared language teacher selves, demonstrating its relevance to teachers' professional aspirations and development. Imagined teacher identities may likewise change as individuals encounter new professional experiences and reinterpret future possibilities (Barkhuizen, 2016). For pre-service ELT teachers, drama may therefore bring imagined possibilities into temporary experience: participants can enact ways of teaching that appear desirable, unfamiliar, externally expected, or inconsistent with the teachers they wish to become.

The two perspectives are used complementarily in this study. Dialogical teacher identity sensitises the analysis to multiplicity, positioning, tension, continuity, and negotiation among teacher selves, whereas possible teacher selves draws attention to participants' future-oriented aspirations and undesired professional possibilities. Neither framework is used to impose predetermined identity categories on the data. Instead, they function as sensitising concepts for interpreting how participants make sense of their experiences across the 14-week drama process.



Within this framework, identity rehearsal is treated as an analytical possibility rather than a predetermined outcome or an established theoretical construct. The study examines whether temporarily enacting teacher roles, reflecting on their perceived fit or misfit, and reconsidering future professional possibilities may allow drama to function as a form of identity rehearsal space for pre-service ELT teachers. Whether such a process is evident, and whether it involves continuity, change, rejection, uncertainty, or reimagining, is determined through participants' accounts rather than assumed in advance.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative longitudinal interpretive design to explore how pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers enacted, experienced, and negotiated emerging teacher selves through drama-based activities. Data were collected at different points across a 14-week university-based drama course to examine participants' experiences over time without assuming predetermined identity change (Saldaña, 2003).

### 3.2. Participants and Context

The participants were 25 pre-service ELT teachers enrolled in an undergraduate ELT programme at a foundation university in Istanbul, Türkiye, during the fall semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. All participants were registered in a 14-week elective drama course conducted at the university rather than as part of school practicum.

The course was taught by the researcher, who therefore held the dual role of teacher and researcher. Participation in the research was voluntary and separate from course assessment.

### 3.3. The 14-Week Drama Experience

The course progressed from general role exploration to increasingly teacher-focused dramatic situations. Activities included role-play, improvisation, teacher-in-role, role reversal, freeze-frame/tableaux, classroom dilemmas, critical incidents, and participant-generated scenarios.

During the early phase, participants explored teacher and learner positions through open-ended dramatic situations. The middle phase focused on teacher-related scenarios involving classroom interaction, learner support, pedagogical decisions, and alternative responses to challenging situations. In the final phase, participants engaged more extensively with participant-generated scenarios and future-oriented teacher roles.

The activities were not designed as conventional microteaching or assessments of teaching competence. Instead, they provided opportunities to enact and reflect on different ways of being a teacher.

### 3.4. Data Collection

Data were generated through written teacher-self reflections at three stages of the semester and individual semi-structured interviews following the course.

#### 3.4.1. Teacher-Self Reflections

Participants completed open-ended written reflections during the early, middle, and final stages of the course. Approximately 15–20 minutes were allocated for each reflection.

The early reflection addressed participants' initial teacher-self perceptions:

- *When you imagine yourself as a future English teacher, what kind of teacher do you see?*



- *How did taking on a teacher role during the drama activities make you feel?*
- *Were there aspects of the role that felt natural, unfamiliar, or uncomfortable? Why?*
- The mid-course reflection focused on participants' experiences of different teacher positions:
- *Which teacher roles or ways of acting have felt most like you so far? Why?*
- *Have you experienced a teacher role that did not fit the kind of teacher you want to become?*
- *Has experimenting with different teacher roles influenced how you see yourself as a future teacher? If so, how?*
- The final reflection invited participants to consider their experiences across the semester:
- *How would you now describe the teacher you imagine becoming?*
- *Which drama experiences, if any, made you reconsider how you see yourself as a future teacher?*
- *What have you discovered about the teacher you do or do not want to become?*
- *Looking back at your first reflection, what has changed, remained similar, or become more uncertain in how you see yourself as a future teacher?*

### 3.5. Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the 14-week course, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to elaborate on participants' written reflections and explore their interpretations of teacher-role enactment. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. During each interview, the researcher took contemporaneous notes to document participants' responses and key statements. Follow-up probes were used where clarification or elaboration was needed.

The core interview questions were:

1. *How did you experience yourself when taking on teacher roles during the drama activities?*
2. *Which teacher roles or ways of teaching felt most like you? Why?*
3. *Were there teacher roles that did not fit the kind of teacher you want to become? Why?*
4. *Can you describe a drama experience that made you think differently about yourself as a future English teacher?*
5. *How did trying out different teacher roles influence the kind of teacher you want to become?*
6. *How do you see yourself as a future teacher now compared with the beginning of the course?*

7. *What did drama help you discover about yourself as a future teacher?*

The questions were open-ended and focused on participants' experiences and interpretations without presupposing that drama had produced positive or linear identity change.



### 3.6. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021) in two stages. First, each participant's three reflections and interview notes were examined together through within-participant longitudinal analysis to identify patterns of continuity, change, tension, identification, resistance, and reconsideration across the semester.

Second, cross-participant reflexive thematic analysis was conducted across the complete dataset. The data were coded for patterns of shared meaning relevant to the research questions, and candidate themes were developed, reviewed, and refined against the dataset.

The concepts of dialogical teacher identity and possible teacher selves served as sensitising concepts rather than predetermined coding categories. Similarly, *identity rehearsal* was not treated as an a priori theme but was considered only if supported by patterns in the data.

### 3.7. Researcher Positionality and Trustworthiness

As the researcher also taught the course, reflexivity was maintained throughout data collection and analysis. Reflexive notes were used to document assumptions and emerging interpretations, with particular attention to critical, ambivalent, and contradictory accounts.

Trustworthiness was supported through multiple data points, the combination of written reflections and interview notes, an analytic record of coding and theme development, and attention to divergent cases. Combining within-participant longitudinal and cross-participant thematic analysis allowed individual trajectories to be considered alongside broader patterns across the dataset.

### 3.8. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained after participants were informed about the study procedures, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw without academic disadvantage. Participant identities were protected through anonymisation and the use of pseudonyms or participant codes. Research participation was kept separate from course assessment, and students were informed that their decision to participate would not affect their grades or academic standing.

## 4. FINDINGS

The analysis examined how participants experienced different teacher positions through drama and how their accounts developed across the early, middle, and final stages of the course. Within-participant longitudinal patterns were considered alongside cross-participant patterns, revealing three interconnected themes: (1) Trying on the Teacher Self: From Performing a Role to Experiencing It; (2) Finding Fit and Misfit: Negotiating the Teacher I Want to Be, and (3) Reimagining the Future Teacher Self: Drama as a Space for Identity Rehearsal.

### 4.1. Trying on the Teacher Self: From Performing a Role to Experiencing It

The first theme captured a gradual shift in how some participants experienced teacher roles during drama. In the early reflections, several participants described their initial experiences primarily in terms of performing a teacher rather than identifying with the position they enacted. Their attention was often directed toward how a teacher should speak, behave, or appear:



"At first, I felt as if I was only acting like a teacher." (P4, early reflection)

Similarly, another participant focused on performing expected teacher behaviour:

"I was more concerned about how I should speak and behave than about what kind of teacher I was." (P11, early reflection)

These accounts indicated an initial distance between the performed role and participants' developing professional self-understandings. By the middle of the course, however, some participants began to evaluate enacted teacher positions in relation to themselves:

"When I played the teacher again, I realised that being calm with the student felt natural to me." (P4, mid-course reflection)

For another participant, experimenting with a contrasting position produced a sense of distance:

"I tried a stricter teacher role, but I did not feel like myself." (P11, mid-course reflection)

These accounts illustrate the distinction between enacting a teacher position and identifying with it. A role could feel personally congruent or create discomfort and distance.

This movement was not uniform. For some participants, the distinction between acting and personally experiencing a teacher self remained evident:

"I still felt that I was acting a role rather than actually seeing myself as a teacher." (P19, mid-course reflection)

Thus, repeated role enactment did not automatically result in identification. Rather, participants differed in the extent to which enacted positions became personally meaningful, highlighting performance, identification, resistance, and continued distance as different ways of experiencing teacher roles.

### 4.2. Finding Fit and Misfit: Negotiating the Teacher I Want to Be

The second theme concerned how participants evaluated enacted teacher positions in relation to the teachers they imagined becoming. As the course progressed, particular ways of teaching were increasingly described in terms of fit and misfit.

For some participants, fit emerged through supportive and learner-centred positions:

"When I listened to the student instead of immediately correcting them, I felt comfortable in the role. I thought, this is closer to the teacher I want to be." (P7, mid-course reflection)

Another participant similarly connected an enacted position with an emerging professional preference:

"I liked being the teacher who encouraged the student to speak instead of giving the answer. It felt more like me." (P15, mid-course reflection)

Experiences of misfit were equally meaningful. Some teacher positions felt inconsistent with participants' professional aspirations:

"I could play the strict teacher, but I did not like how I felt in that role. I do not want my students to be afraid of making mistakes." (P9, mid-course reflection)

Another participant described a similar boundary:

"When I ignored the student and continued the lesson, it felt wrong to me. I realised that I do not want to become that kind of teacher." (P18, mid-course reflection)

These experiences enabled participants to articulate not only preferred teacher selves but also teacher selves they wished to avoid.



Longitudinal comparison showed that perceptions of fit and misfit could also be reconsidered. P12, for example, initially associated effective teaching with firm control:

"I think a good teacher needs to be strict so that students listen." (P12, early reflection)

By the middle of the course, this position had become less certain:

"I still think the teacher needs control, but being strict all the time did not work in the role. I felt there should be another way." (P12, mid-course reflection)

The final reflection indicated further refinement:

"Now I think I want to be clear and confident, but not strict in a way that makes students uncomfortable." (P12, final reflection)

Rather than replacing one teacher self with another, this trajectory involved reconsidering what authority might mean while retaining aspects of the participant's earlier position.

Other accounts showed greater continuity:

"At the beginning I said I wanted students to feel comfortable with me. After trying different teacher roles, I still think this is very important, but now I understand more clearly why." (P21, final reflection)

For P21, drama appeared to confirm and clarify an existing professional aspiration rather than produce a new one. Across these accounts, fit and misfit functioned as interconnected aspects of identity negotiation: participants recognised themselves in some positions, distanced themselves from others, and sometimes reconsidered previously held assumptions about the teachers they wanted—or did not want—to become.

### 4.3. Reimagining the Future Teacher Self: Drama as a Space for Identity Rehearsal

The third theme captured how repeated role enactment became connected to participants' future-oriented understandings of themselves as teachers. Comparisons between early and final reflections, supported by the final interviews, revealed trajectories of reconsideration, confirmation, and uncertainty rather than a uniform pattern of identity change.

At the beginning of the course, some participants described their future teacher selves in relatively broad terms:

"I want to be a good teacher who is friendly with students and teaches English well." (P5, early reflection)

By the final reflection, P5 articulated this future self in more differentiated terms:

"Now I think being friendly is not enough. I want students to feel comfortable, but I also want to know when to guide them and when to let them find their own way." (P5, final reflection)

The participant subsequently connected this reconsideration to experimenting with different positions:

"Trying different roles made me see that I can be supportive in different ways. I started thinking more about what kind of support I want to give as a teacher." (P5, final interview)

The initial aspiration remained, but its meaning became more elaborated through experience and reflection.

For P14, role enactment prompted more explicit reconsideration. The participant initially wrote:

"I imagine myself as a serious teacher who controls the classroom well." (P14, early reflection)

By the final interview, this position had become more nuanced:

"I still want to be confident, but I do not think I need to control everything. In some roles, when I gave students more space, the interaction felt better." (P14, final interview)

Here, elements of the initial teacher self remained while alternative experiences prompted reconsideration of how authority and learner autonomy might coexist.

Other trajectories reflected continuity rather than substantial change:

"I wanted to be a patient teacher from the beginning. After these activities, I still see myself that way. Maybe I understand better what being patient can require in different situations." (P21, final reflection)

For P21, the experience provided greater articulation of an existing professional aspiration. In contrast, some accounts reflected increased uncertainty:

"Before the course, I thought I knew what kind of teacher I wanted to be. Now I see that I may respond differently depending on the student and the situation. I am less certain, but I think more about my choices." (P23, final interview)

Such uncertainty did not necessarily represent an absence of identity negotiation. Instead, it reflected recognition that professional possibilities could vary across learners and situations.

Across these trajectories, drama provided a provisional context in which possible teacher selves could be explored without requiring participants to adopt the positions they enacted. Participants could temporarily experience a way of being a teacher and subsequently affirm, modify, reject, or remain uncertain about that possibility. This process provides the basis for conceptualising drama as an identity rehearsal space.

Identity rehearsal does not refer here to practising a predetermined ideal teacher identity. Rather, it describes a process through which possible teacher selves become available for experiential exploration: role enactment → experienced fit/misfit → reflection → negotiation or reconsideration of possible teacher selves.

The outcomes of this process varied across participants. Rehearsal could contribute to reimagining an existing teacher self, confirming an established aspiration, or complicating previously held assumptions. The longitudinal accounts therefore point not toward a single trajectory of identity development but toward change, continuity, refinement, and uncertainty as participants reconsidered the teachers they might become.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study explored how pre-service ELT teachers enacted and experienced different teacher selves through drama-based activities and how these experiences contributed to the negotiation and reimagining of their emerging teacher identities. Taken together, the findings

suggest that the significance of drama for teacher identity lies not simply in performing teacher roles but in creating opportunities to experience, evaluate, and reconsider different ways of being a teacher. Across the 14-week process, participants displayed varied trajectories of identification, resistance, refinement, confirmation, and uncertainty. These patterns support a view of teacher identity as dynamic and dialogical rather than as a stable professional self progressively acquired during teacher education (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Regarding the first research question, the findings showed that enacting teacher roles did not necessarily mean identifying with them. Early in the course, some participants experienced teacher roles primarily as performances, whereas later accounts revealed greater attention to how particular positions felt when personally inhabited. Some enacted positions appeared congruent with participants' emerging understandings of themselves, while others produced distance or discomfort. This distinction is consistent with dialogical approaches to teacher identity, according to which multiple self-positions may coexist and interact without necessarily being integrated into a single coherent professional identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Recent research similarly demonstrates that language teacher identity is constructed not only through how teachers imagine themselves but also through how professional identities are enacted and negotiated within particular experiences and contexts (Taşdemir & Seferoğlu, 2024a).

The findings extend this perspective by showing how drama may make such positioning experientially accessible during university-based teacher education. Previous research has demonstrated that creative drama can contribute to student teachers' awareness of personal and professional identities while supporting pedagogical experimentation (Horasan-Doğan & Cephe, 2020). Similarly, Uştuk (2025) found that dramatized settings enabled pre-service language teachers to encounter and explore teacher/learner identity tensions through make-believe. The present findings complement these studies by drawing attention specifically to the relationship between role enactment and perceived personal fit. What appeared consequential was not merely occupying a teacher role but evaluating whether the enacted position felt recognisable, desirable, uncomfortable, or inconsistent with the teacher the participant imagined becoming.

The second theme further demonstrated that experiences of both fit and misfit could contribute to identity negotiation. Participants' recognition of positions that felt personally congruent helped articulate preferred teacher selves, whereas uncomfortable positions sometimes clarified professional boundaries and undesirable future possibilities. This finding resonates with possible-selves perspectives, in which professional development involves not only desired future selves but also selves individuals seek to avoid (Kubanyiova, 2009). It also corresponds with research showing that language teacher identity development may involve tensions between professional ideals, actual experiences, contextual expectations, and different identity positions rather than straightforward movement toward a stable identity (Taşdemir & Seferoğlu, 2024b).

Importantly, misfit and discomfort should therefore not necessarily be interpreted as unsuccessful drama experiences. They may instead constitute productive moments of professional inquiry. Uştuk (2025) similarly showed that tensions encountered in dramatized settings can become resources for identity-related professional learning. Research beyond drama also supports the importance of tensions and multiple positions in language teacher identity development. Xing et al. (2024), drawing on dialogical self theory, demonstrated how multiple I-positions contributed to the transformation of a language teacher's professional identity over time. From this perspective, rejecting an enacted position may be as meaningful

as identifying with one because both processes require participants to locate themselves in relation to possible professional positions.

Regarding the second research question, longitudinal comparisons indicated that drama experiences were associated with different forms of identity negotiation rather than a uniform trajectory of change. Some participants reconsidered previously held assumptions, some refined existing aspirations, and others largely confirmed the teacher selves they had imagined at the beginning of the course. Increased uncertainty was also evident in some accounts. This variation is theoretically significant because it challenges an interpretation of teacher identity development as necessarily involving movement from uncertainty toward greater stability. Instead, uncertainty may accompany greater recognition of the complexity and situational nature of teaching.



This interpretation is consistent with longitudinal research on imagined and possible teacher identities. Barkhuizen (2016) demonstrated that imagined teacher identities may be renegotiated over time as prospective teachers encounter experiences that do not necessarily correspond with earlier professional imaginings. More recent longitudinal research has likewise highlighted the realignment of possible selves and professional repositioning as teachers encounter changing professional experiences and communities (Mehdizadeh et al., 2024). The present study adds a university-based drama context to this literature by suggesting that such reconsideration need not begin only when pre-service teachers enter school practicum. Structured opportunities to enact and reflect on teacher positions may initiate identity work within university coursework before sustained participation in actual school settings.

The coexistence of change and continuity is particularly important. Participants who maintained an initially preferred teacher self did not necessarily demonstrate an absence of identity negotiation. In some cases, enactment appeared to provide an experiential basis for clarifying or confirming an existing professional aspiration. This interpretation aligns with Taşdemir and Seferoğlu's (2024a) finding that language teacher identities may involve both stabilising elements and ongoing contextual negotiation. It also supports Barkhuizen's (2016) longitudinal understanding of imagined identities as continuously interpreted in relation to experience. Identity development, from this perspective, can involve confirmation and refinement as well as substantial reconsideration.

These findings provide the basis for conceptualising drama as a potential identity rehearsal space in pre-service ELT education. The concept proposed here differs from rehearsal understood as preparation for performing a predetermined model of effective teaching. Instead, identity rehearsal refers to a provisional process through which pre-service teachers can enact a possible teacher position, experience its perceived fit or misfit, reflect on that experience, and reconsider its place within their emerging professional self-understandings. The process identified in the findings can therefore be represented as role enactment, experienced fit/misfit, reflection and negotiation or reconsideration of possible teacher selves.

This conceptualisation both builds on and differs from previous drama-related teacher identity research. Horasan-Doğan and Cephe (2020) demonstrated the contribution of creative drama to student teachers' creative pedagogy and identity awareness, while Korkut and Özmen (2023) examined how educational drama training contributed to the development of a specific drama teacher role identity among in-service English teachers. Uştuk (2025), in turn, conceptualised dramatized settings through metaxis as spaces in which pre-service language teachers could juxtapose and navigate teacher/learner identity tensions. The present study shifts the analytical focus from developing a drama-related role identity or juxtaposing teacher/learner tensions to the rehearsal of possible teacher selves. In this account, the enacted

teacher role is temporary and exploratory: it can be accepted, modified, resisted, or rejected rather than becoming part of professional identity automatically.

This distinction also reinforces the relevance of possible-selves theory to drama-based teacher education. Kubanyiova (2009) demonstrated that teachers' future-oriented professional selves can function as important reference points in teacher development. In the present study, drama provided a context in which such possibilities could move, however temporarily, from imagination into embodied and relational experience. Participants were not only asked to describe the teachers they might become; they encountered versions of those possibilities through interaction and subsequently evaluated them. Drama may therefore create a bridge between imagined teacher selves and experientially explored teacher positions, while reflection enables participants to interpret what these experiences mean for their future professional selves.



The findings also have implications for the design of pre-service ELT education. Identity-oriented teacher education need not be confined to explicit discussions of professional identity or postponed until school practicum. Experiential activities that allow prospective teachers to occupy contrasting professional positions and reflect on their responses may provide additional opportunities for identity exploration. Recent work continues to demonstrate that pre-service and early-career language teacher identities are shaped through professional roles, tensions, contextual experiences, and opportunities for reflective negotiation (Dogan Ucar & Akbaş, 2025; Taşdemir & Seferoğlu, 2024b; Ye et al., 2025). Drama may complement these processes by creating a relatively provisional environment in which alternative positions can be explored before participants are required to assume sustained responsibility for an actual classroom.

At the same time, the findings do not support the conclusion that drama straightforwardly "develops" or "improves" teacher identity. Such a claim would obscure the variation evident across participants and reduce identity development to a desirable linear outcome. The value of drama may instead lie in opening possibilities for professional self-exploration. For some participants this may involve reconsideration; for others, confirmation, resistance, refinement, or even increased uncertainty. Seen from a dialogical perspective, these different trajectories are not contradictory outcomes but expressions of the multiple and evolving character of teacher identity. Drama as an identity rehearsal space is therefore best understood not as a mechanism for producing a particular kind of teacher, but as a context in which pre-service ELT teachers can explore, question, and reimagine who they might become.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined how pre-service ELT teachers experienced different teacher selves through drama and how these experiences related to their emerging professional identities. The findings showed varied patterns of identification, resistance, confirmation, reconsideration, and uncertainty, suggesting that identity negotiation did not follow a uniform or linear trajectory.

The study contributes to drama and language teacher identity research by conceptualising drama as a potential identity rehearsal space. Through temporary role enactment and reflection, participants could explore possible ways of being a teacher without being required to adopt them as part of their professional identities. Drama may therefore provide a provisional space in which pre-service ELT teachers can examine and reconsider who they might become as teachers.

This study has several limitations. First, the participants were 25 pre-service ELT teachers from a single foundation university in Istanbul, Türkiye, which limits the transferability of the

findings to other contexts. Second, the 14-week university-based course captured identity negotiation within a relatively limited period and did not examine whether participants' emerging teacher selves continued into school practicum or professional teaching.

The researcher's dual role as course instructor and researcher may also have influenced participants' responses and the interpretation of the data. In addition, interviews were documented through contemporaneous notes rather than audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, which may have limited the detail captured in participants' spoken accounts. Finally, the study focused on participants' interpretations of their experiences rather than subsequent classroom practice.



Future studies could examine the proposed concept of identity rehearsal space with larger and more diverse groups of pre-service ELT teachers across different institutional and sociocultural contexts. Longer-term longitudinal research following participants from university-based drama courses into school practicum and early-career teaching would be particularly valuable for exploring how rehearsed teacher selves are maintained, modified, or rejected over time.

Future research could also incorporate audio-recorded interviews, observations, video-stimulated recall, and practicum data to provide richer evidence of identity negotiation. Finally, examining particular drama practices, such as role reversal, teacher-in-role, improvisation, and critical incidents, could clarify how and under what conditions drama creates opportunities for the exploration of possible teacher selves.

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