



The Teacher Identity Construction Journey of a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant

Bir Fulbright Yabancı Dil Öğretim Asistanının Öğretmen Kimliği Oluşum Süreci

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Abstract

Teacher identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct which is shaped by personal experiences, belief systems, and institutional contexts. This study explores the identity formation of a beginner language teacher who worked as a Turkish Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) in the United States. The research adopted a narrative inquiry method, and the data were obtained through observation notes and reflective journals. The paper provides insight into how the novice teacher navigated linguistic, cultural, and institutional challenges in the U.S. context. The research is grounded in Kelchtermans' (1993) framework, which conceptualises teacher identity through five dimensions: namely, self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, and future perspective. The findings highlight the way professional identity evolved in response to lived experiences, revealing processes of emotional adjustment, pedagogical growth, and intercultural negotiation. This study emphasises the significance of personal experience in promoting reflective practice, resilience, and a deeper understanding of teaching as an inherently personal and intercultural act.

Keywords: *professional teacher identity, professional development, intercultural teaching, narrative inquiry, Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA).*

Öz

Öğretmen kimliği, kişisel deneyimler, inanç sistemleri ve kurumsal bağlamlar tarafından şekillenen dinamik ve çok boyutlu bir yapıdır. Bu çalışma, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde Fulbright Türkçe Yabancı Dil Asistanı (FLTA) olarak görev yapan yeni bir dil öğretmenin kimlik oluşum sürecini incelemektedir. Araştırmada anlatı araştırması (narrative inquiry) yöntemi benimsenmiş ve veriler gözlem notları ile yansıtıcı günlükler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Makale, yeni başlayan bir öğretmenin ABD bağlamında karşılaştığı dilsel, kültürel ve kurumsal zorluklarla nasıl başa çıktığına dair bir bakış sunmaktadır. Araştırma, öğretmen kimliğini beş boyutta kavramsallaştıran Kelchtermans (1993)'in çerçevesine dayanmaktadır: öz-imge, özsaygı, görev algısı, mesleki motivasyon ve geleceğe bakış. Bulgular, öğretmen kimliğinin yaşantılara bağlı olarak nasıl evrildiğini ortaya koyarak duygusal uyum, pedagojik gelişim ve kültürlerarası müzakere süreçlerini gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu çalışma, kişisel deneyimin yansıtıcı uygulama, dayanıklılık ve öğretmenliğin özünde kişisel ve kültürlerarası bir eylem olduğunu kavrama açısından taşıdığı önemi vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *profesyonel öğretmen kimliği, mesleki gelişim, kültürlerarası öğretim, anlatı araştırması, Yabancı Dil Öğretim Asistanı (FLTA).*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, “professional teacher identity” as a concept has gained significant attention in the field of language teaching and learning. Especially in the last two decades, rather than viewing teacher identity as a source of conflict (Norton & Toohey, 2011), there has been a shift toward an understanding that emphasizes the central role of teacher

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identity (Pillen et al., 2013; Pennington & Richards, 2016) in terms of cognitive and social development of teachers both as individuals and professional resources (Olsen, 2015; Alsup, 2006). In line with this shift, the importance placed on the concept of a positive “professional identity” has increased as it is associated with self-esteem, self-efficacy and improved classroom practices (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Accordingly, fields such as applied linguistics, foreign language teaching and learning have witnessed a growing body of research exploring professional identity development and its complexities, mostly focusing on and providing insights into language and social processes (Kayi-Aydar, 2014; 2015).

Professional teacher identity is defined as the process of merging personal values, beliefs and norms with institutional demands, values and standards (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). It goes hand in hand with teacher development, both of which are regarded as key outcomes of lifelong learning (Kelchtermans, 1993). External factors, along with personal norms and beliefs, which shape a teacher’s identity, include a temporal dimension in that “teachers think and act in one moment” (Kelchtermans, 1993). That is, teachers construct meaning through interaction with their environment. This understanding reinforces the idea that teachers are not merely passive sources of theory or knowledge (Abednia, 2012), but valuable professionals with a strong sense of identity and purpose. Concurrent with this idea, teacher identity is seen as dynamic and context-dependent, evolving through ongoing experiences in both personal and professional spheres. Teachers continuously reconstruct their identity in ways that influence their pedagogical choices and professional growth as they reflect on their practice and engage with the teaching environment. Thus, professionalism takes shape in teachers’ actions in practice (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014).

When reflecting on practice and drawing on experiences, teachers often rely on methods such as storytelling as a way of making sense of their professional journey, which is well supported by the narrative inquiry research method. As a qualitative research method, narrative inquiry focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and personal stories as a form of data and a means of understanding. Since narrative is the basic mode of thought (Hardy, 1968), it provides a valuable framework through which models of identity can be explored and critically examined. Herein, narrative inquiry distinguishes itself from traditional storytelling as it is more experiential and open-ended (Conle et al., 2000). Since the late 1980s, narratives have been used in both written and oral discourses (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), and have become an essential means of constructing curriculum, particularly in pre-service teacher education. As such, the use of narrative inquiry offers a powerful lens to analyse identity development in educational contexts.

Approaching teacher professionalism and development in a conscious and systematic way implies an acknowledgement of the context-dependent nature of teacher identity (Biesta, 2004). In this regard, Kelchtermans’ personal interpretative framework (1993) constitutes the belief that narratives act as indicators of development and identity when (re)constructing professionalism. This framework refers to the collection of thoughts that shape how teachers interpret their professional roles, view their professional environments and respond to the nature of their occupations. It is formed through professional growth and development and shaped by the aforementioned personal characteristics, social interactions and environmental factors.

Kelchtermans’ dynamic framework is composed of two dimensions, namely, the professional self and the subjective educational theory. The professional self can be retrospective, involving reflection on past experiences, or prospective, referring to expectations for future development. Retrospective self includes four components: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation and task perception. Respectively, self-image refers to how teachers describe themselves or how they think others would describe them, often guiding their professional behaviour. Self-esteem, which might be defined as the evaluation of self by the teacher, might be related to self-image, as the perception of self plays a key role in shaping confidence. Job motivation is strongly influenced by self-esteem and refers to the drives that lead teachers to continue in their profession. Finally, task perception refers to how teachers understand and define their professional roles, that is, how they conceptualise the nature and purpose of their work. Prospective self or future perspective, on the other hand, focuses on the future aspirations of a teacher along with the expectations for development. The second major field on the framework is the subjective educational theory, which refers to an individual’s knowledge and beliefs about the profession as a teacher, guiding their implementation of the job. Overall, Kelchtermans asserts that the personal interpretative framework shapes how teachers make sense of their professional experiences and should be grounded in narrative data (Kelchtermans, 1993; 2009).

Accordingly, this study adopts the narrative inquiry method to explore the experiences of a Turkish Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) in the United States during the 2024 – 2025 academic year. The paper focuses on how intercultural teaching experiences and personal reflections shape professional teacher identity. The analysis is guided by Kelchtermans’ framework to conceptualise the teacher identity through different dimensions. The following section focuses on the existing literature on teacher identity, narrative inquiry in education, and the influence of intercultural experience on professional development.

2. Literature

Teaching is increasingly viewed as a dynamic rather than a static process (Chong, Ling & Chuan, 2011), as both students and teachers are individuals with constantly changing needs and evolving identities (Nias, 1996). Although some researchers have concluded that a universally accepted definition for teacher identities cannot be established (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004), many others emphasise that teacher identities are multifaceted and cannot be explained through a single perspective. Within these multifaceted perspectives, certain recurring themes emerge such as the understanding of identity being continuous, socially constructed, and varying (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

The majority of studies focus on the interplay between teachers' personal and professional characteristics, which lie at the core of their professional identity development. For example, Cooper and Olson's (1996) study highlights a range of factors that influence a teacher's potential identity, spanning from historical to psychological dimensions. In line with this, Sutherland et al. (2010) argue that professional identity is a sub-dimension of personal identity. Thus, due to the need for constant personal presence during teaching, conflicts which occur between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional (Pillen et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2008) might be resolved by means of adopting a professional identity perspective. Similarly, Reynolds' study (2020) underlines the dynamic nature of teacher identity, stating that even seemingly small experiences, such as sabbaticals, can influence who the teacher "becomes." Moving beyond the traditional view of development as a linear process, a more holistic approach to help teachers understand and reflect on their identity development is suggested (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Similar to this idea, Richardson and Watt (2005) emphasise that familial situations and responsibilities are also important factors in the development of teacher identity.

In line with Kelchtermans' personal interpretative framework, a substantial body of research has focused on the (re)construction of teacher identity, emphasising that identity is open to interpretation. To exemplify, Day et al. (2007) identified several factors that can influence and shape a teacher's professional development, including the level of intimacy with students, student attitudes, and the teacher's subject of interest. Similarly, the way pre-service teachers form their professional identities through reflective practice was investigated (Beltman et al., 2015), and an interwovenness between personal experiences and professional expectations emerged. Further, in order to highlight the multifaceted nature of teacher identity, Davey (2010) examined the development of teacher identity by exploring the challenges and transformations teachers experienced while pursuing academic aspirations.

Recent research continues to emphasise the multi-dimensional and context-specific nature of identity development (Xu, 2025; Aktekin & Çelebi, 2020). Wang and Mason (2023), for example, utilised the "Identity Triangle Model" in order to underline that the personal-professional dichotomy is insufficient. Rather, socio-cultural and globalised contexts also play a huge role in a teacher's development. In line with this idea, another research concluded that professional teacher development is also stage-dependent in that reflection and contextual challenges may also affect teachers from different stages of the job (Yağan et al., 2022). Moreover, the development of professional teacher identity has gained increasing significance, particularly as recent studies emphasise the roles of reflective practice (Yazan & Lindahl, 2020; Dimitrieska, 2024; Yazan, 2022) and multimodal teaching strategies (Zhou et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2021).

Overall, in all fields of education, the acknowledgement of the complex and dynamic nature of professional teacher identity underlines the importance of reflection and negotiation throughout a teacher's career (Fleet, 2021). In the field of language teaching, however, professional teacher identity takes on additional layers of complexity since language teachers are constantly dealing with different linguistic and cultural contexts. As language teachers navigate cultural differences, learner expectations, and pedagogical ideologies, they may face a range of professional conflicts, and thus, exploring their professional identities requires attention (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Abendroth-Timmer & Hennig, 2014; Barkhuizen, 2016; Martel & Wang, 2014). Thus, critical interrogation is essential when examining language teacher identity (Trochim, 1989). Similarly, investigating the interplay between reflection, ideal self, and identity found that engagement with other stakeholders in teaching and learning experiences, along with reflection on those interactions, is integral for teacher identity development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010).

Given the complex and personal nature of teacher identity, research methods that allow for contextualised exploration are valuable when reporting on professional development and identity. Among these, narrative inquiry stands out as a particularly effective approach (Aslan, 2016). Through personal experiences, it becomes possible to report how professional identities are constructed, challenged, and altered over time (Taşdemir, 2021). Cattley (2007), for example, highlighted the vital role of narrative inquiry by likening it to a form of "therapy" and emphasising its reflective nature. Likewise, another study found narrative inquiry to be a valuable method, since it acknowledges that identities are "not formed in isolation" (Kahveci, 2021).

Taking all of these methodological intricacies into account, this paper adopts the narrative inquiry method to explore how my professional teacher identity has been shaped throughout the Fulbright FLTA experience in the United States.

By drawing on quotations from personal narratives, the study aims to reflect the interplay between personal development, cultural experiences, and evolving professional identities. Through this lens, the paper seeks to offer an experience-based understanding of identity development in the context of language teaching. This study also extends existing research on Kelchtermans' personal interpretative framework by examining its applicability to an early-career teacher operating in an intercultural context. While much of the literature focuses on teachers within their native cultural and educational systems, this case highlights how identity evolves when an early-career teacher is operating in a culturally diverse environment.

3. Method

3.1. Context

This study was conducted within the scope of the Fulbright FLTA Program, in which I participated as a recent graduate of an English Language Teaching (ELT) program in Türkiye. I was placed at a private university in the United States, where I taught introductory-level Turkish to undergraduate students. The university offered a supportive and multicultural environment, which gave me the chance to teach language while also encouraging intercultural exchange. As an FLTA, my job description extended beyond language teaching as it also included the role of a cultural ambassador. I was responsible for organising extracurricular activities and cultural events that introduced students to Turkish traditions and perspectives.

I worked under the supervision of two faculty members from whom I received regular guidance in two semesters. During my time in the program, I also audited several graduate-level courses from phonetics to film studies, which further contributed to my academic and professional development. The institutional culture, the expectations placed upon me by the program, and the dynamic relationships with both students and colleagues played an important role in shaping my professional identity. These external factors became key influences in my evolving understanding of what it means to be a teacher. In addition, given the autoethnographic nature of this study, my positionality as both participant and researcher influenced the collection, interpretation, and presentation of narrative data.

3.2. Research Design

This study adopts a narrative inquiry design within a narrative-biographical framework to explore my journey as a language teacher. Narrative inquiry was chosen as it enables the systematic exploration of teachers' lived experiences and personal meanings, emphasising the interpretative nature of professional identity formation. Thus, my professional development was examined through the lens of Kelchtermans' (1993, 2009) personal interpretative framework. This design allows for a holistic understanding of how professional growth occurs through reflection on experience, interpretation, and reconstruction of self as a teacher.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The data for this study were drawn from reflective writings conducted during my time as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) in the United States, where I taught university-level Turkish courses at a private university. These reflective narratives (n=32) documented my experiences with teaching practices while also highlighting the intercultural encounters and my self-perceptions as a language teacher. The reflections were guided by the 14 questions proposed in Kelchtermans' (2009) framework, which focus on delving into teachers' perceptions of themselves and their work. The reflective narratives were prepared bearing in mind the 14 guiding questions proposed in Kelchtermans' (2009) study.

3.4. Data Analysis

The reflective narratives were coded and analysed in alignment with the five components of professional self-understanding, namely, self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective. Each narrative was read multiple times to gain familiarity again. Then, emerging patterns were identified, and themes reflecting the manifestation of these dimensions in my teaching journey were spotted. Afterwards, in close engagement with the data, coding and categorisation were conducted manually. The analysis focused not only on what happened but on how experiences were interpreted and how these interpretations contributed to the ongoing construction of my professional identity. In addition to feedback from program mentors, the validity was enhanced by means of continuous reflection and revisiting early entries to ensure interpretation consistency.

Through this methodological lens, the study aims to present an experience-based account of professional identity construction by means of offering insight into how personal and cultural dimensions interact in shaping the professional self of a language teacher working in an intercultural setting.

4. Findings

In this section, an analysis of the data is presented in light of Kelchtermans' personal interpretative framework, guided by the 14 questions he proposed to explore the dimensions of professional self-understanding. The analysis is supported by excerpts from the journal and retrospective observation notes I kept during my time as an FLTA. Table 1 below illustrates how the 14 questions from the personal interpretative framework were operationalised within the study, showing their alignment with specific dimensions and providing example excerpts drawn from the reflective narratives.

Table 1

Operationalisation of Kelchtermans' Guiding Questions

Guiding Question	Dimension	Excerpt
1. What comments do you usually receive from students, parents, or colleagues about you and your role as a teacher?	Self-image	"... and the students often tell me they appreciate my patience and explanations, which makes me feel seen as supportive."
2. How do you define or describe yourself as a teacher?	Self-image	"... but I see myself as more of a facilitator..."
3. How well do you think you are doing your job as a teacher?	Self-esteem	"Sometimes I worry I am not fully addressing their needs, but I guess it will always feel like that."
4. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?	Self-esteem	"Maybe I am good at engaging the learners." "... but I think I might need to manage the timing better..."
5. What do your students like about your teaching?	Self-esteem	"... and they laughed about how I used that story to link it to the class."
6. What are your main responsibilities as a teacher?	Task Perception	"... but at the same time, it is about preparing lessons, constantly being present and reflecting for the future, as well."
7. What must you do to be a proper teacher?	Task Perception	"..., and they all have different purposes, so I need to try and address all of their needs..."
8. What are the essential tasks you need to perform to have the justified feeling that you are doing well?	Task Perception	"... which is because I feel like I have done my job when they participate in the classes and ask more questions."
9. What do you consider legitimate duties to perform?	Task Perception	"..., and I reminded them my office hours. I need to allocate time to give feedback and talk about the effectiveness of the classes with the learners."
10. What do you refuse as a part of your job?	Task Perception	"... so, we decided to assign a role-playing activity to avoid plagiarism. My responsibility is to facilitate, not to do the work for them."
11. What's the main motive behind your choice to be a teacher?	Job Motivation	"I really wanted to share my passion for languages and help them experience cultural connection."
12. Which people, experiences, or events in your past influenced your decision to be a teacher?	Job Motivation	"... and the study abroad experiences made me realize the power of teaching."
13. Where do you see yourself as a teacher in 10 years' time?	Future Perspectives	"... I don't think I'll stop learning how to teach."
14. In what ways do you think you will change in 10 years' time?	Future Perspectives	"... I'll still be reflecting, still adapting. Maybe in a different role, but surely with the same curiosity"

4.1. Self-Image

In Kelchtermans' framework, the first dimension is self-image, which refers to how one describes oneself or how one believes others perceive oneself. My responses to the first two questions under the self-image dimension revealed a predominantly positive perception of myself as a teacher. During my time as an FLTA, I often interpreted both my own teaching practices and the feedback I received from others as affirming:

"I don't always feel confident, but when students ask for my opinion on things that are not necessarily about language, I realize they see me as more than just an instructor..." (Oct 3rd, 2024)

... Then, I went to my supervisor and said that I didn't feel confident about teaching that Thursday. I feel like I messed up the Turkish locatives in class. But she said that it had actually gone really well, and that I might feel that way because it was a challenging concept for the students. She assured me I had done an amazing job, which I guess must be true... (Sep 12th, 2024)

"... Sometimes students linger after class. Not to ask questions, but just to chat. I take it as a sign that they feel comfortable in my classroom..." (Nov 7th, 2024)

"... I'm not the loudest on the sixth floor, but I've noticed that when something needs to be done calmly or with care, people ask me..." (March 19th, 2025)

In terms of self-image, Kelchtermans' questions mainly focus on how others regard the teacher and how the teacher views themselves. From the quotations, it can be seen that my self-image as a teacher was largely shaped by personal qualities, such as my patience and approachability. The quotations illuminate how my self-image as a teacher is shaped by my own internal uncertainties and by the external feedback I received from students and colleagues. I have come to realise that my perception often contrasts with how others experience my teaching. Students' casual conversations after class and their willingness to seek my guidance beyond language instruction suggest that they see me as approachable, patient, and trustworthy. These moments serve as affirmation that I am creating a space where learners feel safe, heard, and respected. In turn, these experiences gradually reshape my self-perception, helping me view myself as a teacher who fosters comfort and support in the classroom.

4.2. Self-Esteem

The second dimension is self-esteem, which encompasses the "evaluative component of self" (Kelchtermans, 2009). There were three questions in the framework that focused on self-esteem: how well the teachers think they are performing in their profession, strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and what students appreciate about the teaching. I often associated my self-esteem with external factors such as the students, the subject being taught, and whether or not I felt prepared. Additionally, the recurring adjectives from the students' perspective were mostly "calm, casual, relaxed, and fun," as reflected in my quotes:

... and also he (the student) told me that he and his friends appreciated me being patient at all times during class and office hours. He joked about me being so calm and relaxed during the class, and he said it felt like I was just having a casual conversation rather than teaching what would be a boring subject. (March 7th, 2025)

I sometimes worry that I let the class get a bit too off-track during discussions, like today with the food discussion. But I guess one of my strengths is connecting with students on a personal level, so it might be normal for discussions to be a bit long. ... and she (the student) also says it is fun to learn with me because I always start from what they know to teach something new... (March 25th, 2025)

Regarding self-esteem, it can be concluded that my self-perception as a teacher is influenced by both internal doubts and external affirmations. Despite moments of self-doubt, like worrying about discussions veering off track, I have recognised that these interactions also reflect my strength in building personal connections with students. The feedback that my students find it enjoyable to learn with me because I start from what they know reinforces my idea that my teaching style is appreciated for its relatability and student-centred approach. This also highlights the relationship between self-esteem and the feedback loop created by student-teacher interactions.

4.3. Task Perception

The third theme of the framework is task perception, which refers to a teacher's conceptualisation of teaching as a profession. There were 5 questions in the framework about task perception, mainly focusing on the responsibilities of a teacher. In my reflections, there were some recurring themes such as flexibility, raising cultural awareness, and being well-prepared. My understanding of teaching extended beyond language instruction. I implemented lessons that immersed students in cultural experiences, blending language practice with the exploration of Turkish traditions. As an FLTA, this approach was also part of my role as a cultural ambassador. Altogether, I came to see teaching as a dynamic profession requiring not only pedagogical skills but also emotional presence, cultural sensitivity, and the capacity to create meaningful interactions:

Today we celebrated October 29th... .. We cooked together with the students and served kısır (bulgur-based salad) and Türk kahvesi (Turkish coffee) to the guests. I knew they had made great progress, but I guess I didn't realize just how well they could communicate in Turkish. They made a real effort to speak with our guests from Türkiye, and they really enjoyed it.... .. and they asked many questions about our traditions, like Türk kahvesi falı (Turkish coffee cup reading).and it was also great to see them engage in real interactions outside the classroom setting.” (Oct 29th, 2024)

... At the end of the lesson, though, the students started asking unexpected questions about Turkish idioms, and I had a final activity prepared but I realized I could shift gears and incorporate that into our lesson. It wasn't what I had prepared, but I guess I successfully adapted it. ... and they seemed so engaged that I didn't want to stop and move on with what I had originally prepared.. (April 8th, 2025)

It might be suggested, pertaining to task perception, that the reflections point to a sense of responsibility for creating meaningful, engaging, and inclusive experiences through organising cultural events and adapting lessons based on student needs. Teaching was not perceived as a rigid task but as a dynamic role requiring preparation, empathy, and cultural awareness. It can be argued that this understanding is associated with the outcomes of self-esteem, as feeling effective in these broader responsibilities might have contributed positively to my sense of professional development. That is, moments of success or struggle in fulfilling perceived teaching duties directly influenced my sense of competence.

4.4. Job motivation

The fourth component of the framework is job motivation, referring to the motives to choose teaching as an occupation. In the framework, there were two questions focusing on past experiences and the drives behind choosing teaching as a profession. Based on my reflections, it might be suggested that my motivation stemmed from personal experiences and emotional fulfilment. The sense of purpose I felt when witnessing students' progress and engagement reaffirmed my decision and revealed that my motivation was constantly reinforced by everyday classroom moments:

... and watching them (the students) use Turkish to talk with the guests reminded me why I'm doing this... .. There are moments where I lose my confidence but I always try to control my emotions... .. teaching a language for me is definitely about empowering communication. (Oct 29th, 2024)

At the karaoke event, I realized everyone was really trying their best to pronounce the words accurately... .., and they genuinely seemed to be having fun. ... I remember how I used to memorize rock song lyrics when I was a kid and explain them to my friends. That was definitely one of my first motivations to learn English. ... so maybe I can come up with new events and activities that will spark the same kind of motivation in my students. (April 16th, 2025)

As discussed above, the data reveal that my motivation for teaching is shaped by my personal experiences of learning another language and by the everyday moments in the classroom. These experiences foster a sense of empathy toward my students, as I recognise the challenges and positive moments that come with language learning. Besides, as Kelchtermans (2009) highlights, emotional labour and vulnerability are integral to teacher identity, and these notions have also surfaced strongly in my reflections. Navigating intercultural challenges often requires managing feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt, revealing that professional growth is deeply intertwined with emotional experience.

4.5. *Future perspectives*

The final dimension refers to teachers' future expectations and highlights the non-static nature of teaching. It explores how teachers envision their professional lives in the next decade. In my reflections, this was often tied to ideas of ongoing learning, adaptability, and the desire to expand my impact:

Being part of this program made me realize that I enjoy mentoring students, not just teaching them grammar. ... I don't think I'll stop learning how to teach. ... I'll still be reflecting, still adapting. Maybe in a different role, but surely with the same curiosity. (May 7th, 2025)

Since the components of the personal interpretative framework are all related, it might be concluded that my identity formation has been a dynamic process. My reflections suggest that the way I perceive myself as a teacher is constantly informed by classroom interactions, emotional experiences, and cultural exchanges. The sense of accomplishment I get from students' engagement and progress influences my self-esteem. At the same time, my task perception expands as I take on responsibilities beyond academic instruction, such as cultural ambassadorship and emotional support. My motivation to teach continues to support my creativity and finally, my vision for the future as a teacher is not fixed but rather shaped by the belief that teaching is a dynamic, lifelong process of development.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach to examine my journey as a novice language teacher in the United States through the FLTA program. Focusing on the development of my professional teacher identity within Kelchtermans' framework (2009), the findings of this study underscore the complexity of professional teacher identity. The interconnectedness of the framework's components demonstrates that teacher identity is not static but continuously redefined throughout a teacher's career (Kahveci, 2021; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). In line with this, the data reveals that my teacher identity has been shaped by a combination of personal reflections, student interactions, and cultural exchanges that have enhanced both my professional and personal growth. The findings of this study are also in line with previous research (e.g. Apercho et al., 2023; Kahveci, 2021; Kıvrak & Gürsoy, 2025), concluding that teacher identities are constantly being reshaped. More specifically, they support the idea that teacher identity is not a fixed construct, but it evolves over time by means of a teacher's personal experiences, environmental factors and contextual cues (Barkhuizen, 2016).

Similar to earlier studies, this research highlights the significance of reflective practice in language teaching, especially for novice teachers. Through journals and reflective narratives, teachers might find opportunities to (re)evaluate their beliefs, roles and values pertaining to the teaching profession. Thus, teaching identity is closely linked to ongoing reflection where experience and context act as meaningful sources (Clandinin et al., 2000). Consistent with Kelchtermans' (2009) framework, my reflections illustrate that professional self-understanding is dynamic, shaped by ongoing interpretation and interaction. In addition, similar to Day et al. (2007) and Beltman et al. (2015), the results highlight how emotional engagement, contextual factors, and reflective practice can influence teachers' evolving self-concepts. Furthermore, this research emphasises the integral value of intercultural competence in (re)forming professional teaching identity. Since language education goes beyond merely structural instruction and involves addressing the critical social and cultural dimensions of language (Bozkurt & Zehir Topkaya, 2025), it is necessary to adopt a reflective approach that considers identities, experiences, and intercultural contexts.

Overall, this study has emphasised the significance of reflective practice, intercultural competence, and resilience in shaping teacher identity. It highlights the importance of incorporating reflective practices into teacher education programs, particularly in intercultural contexts. The findings may also offer insights for EFL education in Türkiye as they suggest that reflective practice and narrative inquiry support teachers in navigating professional identity. Future research could explore how teacher identity is influenced by different teaching environments and cultural settings, expanding on the role of personal experiences in shaping teaching practices. Additionally, a longitudinal approach could provide deeper insights into the long-term development of teacher identity, particularly for language teachers working in multicultural and diverse settings. By understanding the complexities of teacher identity, we can better support the professional growth of educators and promote more inclusive, adaptive, and effective teaching practices. Last but not least, the value of the findings lies in their analytical and contextual transferability in that educators may draw parallels between the experiences described here and similar contexts in teacher education.

6. Contribution Declaration

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7. Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

8. Supporter and Grant Declaration (If exists)

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