THE MANAGEMENT OF SUPERVISOR-MENTOR PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT DURING PRACTICUM

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ABSTRACT

Producing highly competent teachers for the Malaysian education system is crucial to reinforce human capital in meeting global demands. Thus, ensuring preservice teachers' professional identity development during practicum is vital in achieving this aspiration. Hence, this study seeks to explore the partnership management between university supervisors and mentor teachers during practicum and how it influences the preservice teachers' professional identity development. Drawing on Pennington and Richards' (2016) construct of ESL teacher identity as the theoretical lens, a qualitative single case study was employed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted on three preservice ESL teachers from a Malaysian public university. The data findings were analysed manually using Thematic Analysis and discussed per the existing body of relevant literature. Findings reveal that the supervisor-mentor partnership during practicum helps to further enhance preservice ESL professional teachers' identity development in terms of their personal, contextual, and professional competence. The findings of this study recommend that relevant stakeholders provide more collaborative opportunities for supervisors and mentors to assist preservice teachers to develop their professional teacher identity further and become competent teachers.

Keywords: **Supervisor-Mentor Partnership Management, Practicum, Teacher Professional Identity, Preservice ESL Teachers, Supervision, Mentoring**

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the emphasis on effective English language teacher preparation has been rapidly increasing (Richards, 2023). This makes practicum experience a vital component in any ESL teacher preparation programme (Fan & de Jong, 2022; Zein & Stroupe, 2018; Zijuan & Senom, 2024). Producing highly competent ESL teachers for the Malaysian education system is crucial to reinforcing human capital in meeting global demands (Othman & Senom, 2018), and practicum is one of the approaches to address this aspiration. Practicum in Malaysia provides preservice ESL teachers with practical experiences of being a teacher in a real classroom (Ali et al., 2018), thus allowing the upgrading of quality teachers and language teaching in general.

Wright and Pu (2022) argue that preservice ESL teachers encounter many challenges during practicum, such as ineffective classroom management skills and students' poor language proficiency. Handling these obstacles exposes preservice teachers to numerous anxieties and uncertainties that could affect their teacher identity development (Nghia & Thai, 2017). Therefore, the mentor teacher and university supervisor should initiate support to alleviate the anxiety and worry of preservice ESL teachers and facilitate their teacher professional identity development during practicum. This is because mentors and supervisors are in charge of observing, guiding and evaluating preservice teachers at school throughout the practicum period (Ali et al., 2018).

Mentors play a significant role in maximising preservice teachers' practicum experience. Izadinia (2018) claims that a mentor substantially influences how preservice teachers view themselves as an ESL teacher and their capability in teaching. As important as mentored learning is to the preservice teachers' identity development in the existing literature, findings by Mutlu (2014) reveal that preservice teachers also demand more cooperation between their supervisor and mentor to guide them better. Although several studies have been conducted on exploring how preservice ESL teachers construct their professional identity during practicum (e.g., Kang & Nam-Huh, 2022; Nghia & Tai, 2017; Yazan, 2021), not many have associated it with the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership management. The relationship between supervisor and mentor is of concern to the preservice teachers as it is a crucial aspect of teachers' professional development and learning when they exchange experiences and ideas with each other (Nemtchinova, 2018). Hence, this present study will fill the gap in the existing literature by covering both supervisor and mentor involvements in teaching practicum and its influence on preservice ESL teachers' identity development.

According to the Furnished Imagination construct by Kiely and Askham (2012), teacher professional development is a combination of knowledge, procedural awareness and skills, dispositions and identity that preservice teachers take from school teachers as a readiness for work in English language teaching (ELT) context. Nevertheless, Pennington and Richards (2016) argue that teachers' knowledge, practices and dispositions are embedded within teacher identity. Hence, this study would extend Pennington and Richards' reconceptualised notion of teacher identity by looking at the development of preservice ESL teachers' identity wholly during teaching practice, emphasising supervisor-mentor partnership. As there are limited studies in Malaysia that explore the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership management during practicum on preservice ESL teachers' identity development through the construct of professional identity by Pennington and Richards (2016), it is then essential to examine its impact.

BACKGROUND

Preservice Teachers & The Teaching Practicum
Preservice teachers refer to students enrolled in a teacher education programme (Kellough & Jarolimek, 2008). In any teacher preparation programme, preservice teachers must attend a teaching practicum at school as it is considered an essential learning experience (Svojanovsky, 2017). Its purpose is to provide preservice teachers with the practical skills and knowledge of teaching in a real classroom to be effective language teachers (Al-Jaro et al., 2021). Even so, Goh and Matthews (2011) found that preservice teachers had many concerns and difficulties

adjusting themselves during practicum, which sometimes left them in fear and doubt. Ali et al. (2018) stated that this phenomenon happens for university courses do not sufficiently prepare and inform the preservice teachers of the actual classroom situations.

The most commonly expressed problem during practicum among preservice ESL teachers is anxiety about their language proficiency (Atkinson et al., 2008; Deocampo, 2020; Marav, 2022) as they need to have a certain level of communicative competence to teach English effectively (Richards, 2012, p.47). Deocampo (2020) added that mentors' low language proficiency is also a challenge to preservice teachers as it negatively affects their practicum experiences. Apart from language proficiency, poor classroom management skills, the short practicum duration, the mentors' traditional pedagogy approach to teaching and mentors' attitudes were found to be other challenges that the preservice teachers encountered during practicum (Kabilan et al., 2020). To elaborate on the last challenge, the researcher stated that the negative behaviours of mentors towards the preservice teachers include practising seniority at school and being exploitative and uncooperative. Furthermore, not receiving satisfactory feedback and support from mentors caused stress to the preservice teachers (Coskun, 2013).

Supervisor Involvement During Practicum

University supervisors influence preservice ESL teachers in shaping their teacher identity during practicum. To illustrate, in a previous study by Othman and Senom (2018), one of the participants mentioned that despite being confident with her content knowledge, she still needed assistance with classroom management. By accepting her supervisor's suggestion, she could engage students in her lessons better, thus enhancing her procedural competence identity. Studies conducted by Al-Jaro et al. (2021) and Sethusha (2020) also showed similar findings in which the received supervisory support assisted the participating preservice teachers' pedagogical practices in classroom management. Additionally, these two studies concluded that the involvement of supervisors during practicum guides preservice teachers in effectively planning and executing their lessons.

Moreover, preservice teachers have better comprehended the concepts and types of assessments suitable to be carried out in classrooms with supervision from supervisors (Sethusha, 2020). It is noteworthy that although supervisors are responsible for assessing and grading the preservice teachers, they should also provide as much feedback as possible on the preservice teachers' teaching (Al-Jaro et al., 2021). The role of feedback is fundamental to preservice teachers as it serves as a validation for their potential as an ESL teacher (Lin et al., 2019).

Mentor Involvement During Practicum

The development of teacher identity among preservice ESL teachers has long been associated with the influence of mentor teachers because of the many roles they play during practicum. The roles described by Hudson (2010) surround these five factors: personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback. Other research studies confirmed that mentors play a vital role in preservice teachers' identity development by providing constructive feedback for the preservice teachers to help them improve their teaching (Martinez Agudo, 2016; Moussaid & Zerhouni, 2017; Yirci et al., 2016).

In addition, mentors should portray positive personal attributes when mentoring preservice teachers, such as being attentive, supportive and confidence-building (Hudson, 2010). Findings by Othman and Senom (2018) revealed that participating preservice teachers who received support from their mentors were likely to consider the teaching profession after graduating due to having positive practicum experiences. On the contrary, those who had unpleasant practicum experiences with their mentor, such as getting scolded in the staff room and receiving unfavourable remarks, decided not to pursue teaching as their career. However, Phang et al. (2020) showed that mentors only play moderate roles in mentoring preservice teachers. In other words, their roles were insufficient, and Hudson (2010) regards the preservice teachers' practicum experience as less meaningful in developing their identity as teachers.

Collaboration In Practicum

According to Burns and Richards (2009), teaching was previously isolated from colleagues or fellow teachers. However, they pointed out that teacher learning could not be achieved individually, as it is a process which requires teachers to interact with others. Many forms of collaboration with different stakeholders can occur in second-language teacher education. Chan (2019) particularly emphasised establishing a close university-school partnership to solve problems and reduce the stress preservice teachers face during practicum. However, both parties must understand their roles concerning preservice teachers' learning (Burns & Richards, 2009).

An example of collaboration would be regular interactions between mentors and supervisors to enlighten mentors on guiding preservice teachers efficiently (Flores, 2019). These include discussing what is expected from the mentors, what to look for when observing preservice teachers' teaching and what kinds of feedback mentors should give, as all these affect the practicum's atmosphere (Mutlu, 2014). When the individuals collaborating know and perform their roles, they are indirectly realising the purpose of the programme (Burns & Richards, 2009). In this case, it is practicum. Othman and Senom (2018) suggested another supervisor-mentor collaboration where teacher training institutions work closely with appointed schools in choosing experienced teachers as mentors. Mutlu (2014) outlined several criteria, such as their years of experience and educational background. According to the researchers, having experienced teachers will help ensure preservice teachers fully benefit from the mentored learning and form a strong professional teacher identity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study drew on Pennington and Richards' (2016) construct of teacher identity. Based on this construct, two major areas contribute to teachers' professional identity: Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity and Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity. Five aspects construct teachers' professional identity under the Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity, which are (1) language-related identity, (2) disciplinary identity, (3) context-related identity, (4) self-knowledge and awareness and (5) student-related identity. On the other hand, Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity include (1) practiced and responsive teaching skills, (2) theorizing from practice as well as (3) membership in communities of practice and profession. In this study, these aspects of teacher identity from both foundational and advanced competences enable the exploration of the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership on preservice ESL teachers during teaching practicum.

Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity

In the first area, Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity, Pennington and Richards (2016) outlined five aspects that will shape teachers' professional identity – language-related identity, disciplinary identity, context-related identity, self-knowledge and awareness and student-related identity.

1. Language-related Identity

Pennington and Richards (2016) highlight that teachers' professional identity is influenced by their language competency and native or non-native English-speaking background.

2. Disciplinary Identity

Disciplinary identity refers to disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge that language teachers gain through formal education and experience. *Disciplinary knowledge* is the knowledge that is essential to enter the language teaching profession while *pedagogical content knowledge* is the knowledge that provides a basis for language teaching which will then be translated into a safe and stable identity as a language teacher (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

3. Context-related Identity

When it comes to teaching, it is very much dependent on the understanding of the context where the teachers are

(Pennington & Richards, 2016). A teacher's identity is relative to the location of the school, the culture of the school and community, the nature of the school and community and school administration (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

4. Self-knowledge and Awareness

The ability to notice strengths and weaknesses will influence the development of teachers' professional identity as teachers are able to optimise teaching based on this awareness.

5. Student-related Identity

To construct teachers' professional identity, teachers need to have knowledge and awareness of factors that enhance students' learning and performance.

Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity

In the second area, Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity, Pennington and Richards (2016) described that the construction of their professional identity is the result of ongoing learning and experience by the teachers in terms of practiced and responsive teaching skills, theorizing from practice and membership in communities of practice and profession.

1. Practiced and Responsive Teaching Skills

This aspect of professional identity construction refers to the ability of teachers to transfer their knowledge into practice depending on the context of their teaching.

2. Theorizing from Practice

Pennington and Richards (2016) regard this aspect of professional identity as the ability of teachers to construct theories of teaching from their own experience of teaching and learning.

3. Membership in Communities of Practice and Profession

Identity as a language teacher includes being part of a larger profession with certain standards, ethics, and accountability for performance in teaching. Through participation in this community, teachers learn new knowledge that challenges their values, beliefs and principles which will then affect the construction of their professional identity (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Hence, in the context of this study, the aspects in the two areas, Foundational Competences of Language Teacher Identity and Advanced Competences of Language Teacher Identity, based on Pennington and Richards (2016) construct of teacher professional identity, will be used to examine how preservice ESL teachers construct and negotiate with their professional identity during teaching practicum, with the support from their teacher mentors and supervisors.

Figure 1. *Pennington and Richards' (2016) Construct of Teacher Identity*
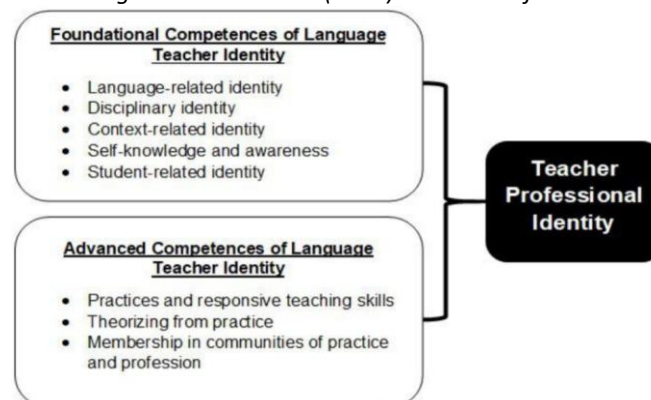
METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach as it allows a rich description of the context and the particulars of a phenomenon to gain an in-depth comprehension of the research subject (Yin, 2011). Through a qualitative approach, this study is able to thoroughly explore the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership during practicum on preservice ESL teachers' identity development in terms of their personal, contextual and professional competence.

The research design used in the study is a single case study. It provides detailed insights into the studied phenomenon within its real-world context by addressing the 'how' and 'why' questions. Case studies are beneficial for studying educational innovations, evaluating existing programmes and informing practices (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, through a case study, researchers can inform relevant stakeholders on the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership during practicum on preservice ESL teachers' identity development.

The Participants

To explore the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership during practicum on the preservice ESL teachers' identity, three B.Ed. TESL programme students (pseudonyms: Arman, Amanda, and Noor) from a public university in Malaysia were selected as the participants for the study. One of the criteria in participant selection is that the participating preservice ESL teacher had just completed their 10-week practicum component in public secondary schools near the university. This allows them to recall their practicum experience better, which results in thick and rich data. Throughout their 10-week teaching practicum in an appointed secondary school, they were guided by a school mentor and supervised by a university lecturer. They were approached and invited to take part in the study by phone. The selection of the participants is also based on convenience sampling, which Staller (2021) describes as the participants fulfilling the practical criteria, including easy accessibility, availability at a given time and willingness to participate.

Data Collection and Analysis

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, online interviews were conducted with the preservice ESL teachers used to obtain data for this study. An interview is the most appropriate method to gain insights into people's experiences of a specific phenomenon, which can contribute to in-depth data collection (Jones, 2020). This corresponds with the purpose of the study, which seeks to explore the influence of supervisor-mentor partnership during practicum on preservice ESL teachers' identity development.

Autonomy is given to the participants in deciding the time and place of the interview, provided that it is free from disruptions and noise as these will affect the data collection (McGrath et al., 2018) after the participants have given ethical consent to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were employed with several predetermined questions for the researcher to clarify or expand the participants' responses through follow-up questions (Lingard & Kennedy, 2010). The interview questions were constructed based on the literature review, conceptual framework, and research questions. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and matched with the researcher's notes immediately to avoid missing information.

To manage and analyse the data obtained in this study, Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2012) is being employed. The six phases involved are: 1) familiarising with data, 2) generating codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing reports. Although Thematic Analysis is presented as a linear process, it might move back and forth between the phases (Nowell et al., 2017).

The concept of trustworthiness is refined through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The researchers used peer debriefing and member checking to increase credibility in the present study. Biases were avoided by requesting another researcher with expertise in Second Language Teacher Education to determine whether the findings are aligned with the collected data. Additionally,

participants were given the analysis to provide feedback through member checking to ensure that the researchers did not misinterpret their words during the interviews. Moreover, transferability is achieved when the researchers clearly describe the study, the participants involved, the procedures used to gather the data, and in-depth data analysis. Consequently, other researchers can assess if the study's findings can be transferred to their context and setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Next, logical, traceable and documented research procedures help achieve dependability in the study (Tobin & Begley, 2004). This type of documentation allows other researchers to follow, audit or critique the research process. After credibility, transferability and dependability of the study have been achieved, confirmability is also indirectly established (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

FINDINGS

The findings of the study will be discussed according to the eight aspects of Pennington and Richards' (2016) construct of ESL teacher identity, namely (1) language-related identity, (2) disciplinary identity, (3) context-related identity, (4) self-knowledge and awareness and (5) student-related identity (6) practiced and responsive teaching skills, (7) theorizing from practice as well as (8) membership in communities of practice and profession. In this study, these eight aspects of ESL teacher identity from foundational and advanced competences were examined and categorized into personal, contextual, and professional competence. Additionally, the findings are discussed and situated within the existing body of relevant literature.

Preservice ESL Teachers' Personal Competence
The findings reveal that both mentor and supervisor have the capacity to support preservice ESL teachers' identity development in terms of personal competence. This study examines the construct of preservice teachers' language teacher identity with regard to personal competence through language-related identity as well as self-knowledge and awareness.

1. Language-related identity
In the present study, supervisors and mentors gave the preservice teachers flexibility in choosing their classroom instruction medium. The participants shared that their supervisor and mentor did not have issues with them teaching bilingually. This allowed them to figure out an effective way to communicate with the low-proficiency students.

> "First week, I tried to use full English. I set a rule whereby my students couldn't speak in any other languages except English. But then I learned that it was very hard for me to communicate with them."
>
> (Arman, line 36-38)

After realising that using full English in class hindered the students from speaking, Arman changed to bilingual teaching, using English and Malay, in the following weeks. In contrast, another participant was encouraged by her mentor to use more English as she tended to code-switch, and she admitted that this was one of the challenges of being bilingual. Since then, she attempted to use more English in her lessons.

> "My mentors, they encouraged me to use English, but not in the sense that I must use English entirely. They're like, why not you try to use English more."
>
> (Amanda, line 54-55)

These two instances highlight that supervisors and mentors empower preservice teachers' language identity by encouraging them to make informed decisions on their medium of instruction based on the situation's needs and ensuring that their first language is not overused while teaching.

2. Self-knowledge and awareness
This study reveals that supervisors and mentors assist preservice teachers in acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses through feedback. All participants reported that apart from self-reflection, they were able to identify

their strengths and weaknesses through the feedback given by their supervisor and mentor after they were observed.

> "My mentor and my supervisor did point out my weakness is that I get too emotionally invested, I guess, that's the word for it. When my students couldn't read, I'd freak out because what am I supposed to do? I take it personally. Of course, they did tell me to calm down."
>
> (Noor, line 103-106)

> "When my supervisor came, she didn't only give constructive criticisms but also praises. So that boosts my confidence as a teacher."
>
> (Arman, line 197-198)

Through the feedback, the participants understood what they needed to improve in the next lessons and acted accordingly. Arman added that the praises helped him gain confidence to continue his practicum.

Findings for this section reveal that supervisors and mentors share the same important roles in enhancing the preservice ESL teachers' personal competence, particularly their language-related identity, self-knowledge and awareness.

Flexibility in choosing the medium of instruction in class given by supervisors and mentors assists the preservice teachers in building their own identity as a language teacher based on their students' language proficiency. Although English is their second language, they remained confident throughout their teaching. This contradicts a study conducted by Mutlu (2014), which reported that a preservice teacher was concerned about his teaching as the students in his school spoke fluent English. There is a possibility that the participants in the present study did not have anxiety communicating with them for they were mostly low proficient. This enabled the participants to use their first language (Malay) when explaining things to aid students whose first language is also Malay, without any interdiction by supervisors or mentors.

This study also found that supervisors and mentors contribute to preservice teachers' identity development by raising their self-knowledge and awareness through feedback. The participants value this feedback as it allows them to discover their strengths and weaknesses, thus improving the quality of their teaching. Al-Jaro et al. (2021) supported this by emphasising that feedback on teaching practice is vital for preservice teachers to teach effectively. Moreover, the role of feedback in the present study enhances the participants' self-confidence as an ESL teacher. This could be one of the contributing factors as to why all the participants are currently in the education field.

Preservice ESL Teachers' Contextual Competence
The second construct of preservice teachers' language teacher identity is within contextual competence. The findings illustrate that the partnership between mentor and supervisor could support preservice ESL teachers' contextual competence. This is substantiated through the exploration of context-related identity and student-related identity.

1. Context-related identity
The findings inform that the supervisor-mentor partnership facilitated shaping the preservice teachers' context-related identity in terms of lesson planning. According to the participants, their supervisor and mentor granted them freedom to plan their lessons provided that they stick to the syllabus.

> "In terms of scheme of work, I had to follow specifically, the objectives and everything. In terms of the activities, that's up to me."
>
> (Noor, line 140-142)

This favourable condition strongly impacts the evolution of the participants' teacher identity. Noor mentioned that

on top of being able to discover her preferred teaching pedagogy, she could identify the activities that suited her students. Another participant stated that the freedom given made her more relaxed and confident as a teacher. Hence, she was able to make fun and interesting lessons, which attracted her students.

> "It definitely turns me into this fun teacher personality. Fun in terms of like very approachable, this is the teacher with new ideas, the teacher with the fun things to do, the teacher that actually makes us want to learn English."
>
> (Amanda, line 146-148)

2. Student-related identity

The engagement between the participants with their mentors assists them in gaining student knowledge and awareness. This knowledge includes understanding the students' background, culture, and proficiency level. The participants were able to discuss the students with their mentors.

In addition, Noor's and Arman's mentors provided them with the students' English past examination results, which aided them in recognising their proficiency level. With this knowledge and awareness, they could prepare appropriate lessons that catered to their students.

> "My mentor helped in giving me the grades, their UPSR and first test. That was when I realised 10 of the students failed English. All of them were below B-. That's how low the students' proficiencies were. And then she did explain all these students, they're mostly from the rural areas."
>
> (Noor, line 15-18)

> "We had the Pulse book. The context is very British. So you had to change it to suit the local context. That's why you have to understand the knowledge and the interests that they have, so you can change it."
>
> (Arman, line 152-154)

The role of supervisors is not directly seen here as they come from the university and do not have any connections with the students. However, Noor highlighted that her supervisor shared an article with her on dealing with students emotionally. This enabled her to better understand her students' actions and feelings.

> "Some students are very clingy. Like, if students are upset and it has nothing to do with you, what are you supposed to do and stuffs like that."
>
> (Noor, line 328-329)

Based on the findings, supervisors and mentors share the same roles in developing preservice teachers' context-related identity, while student-related identity is enriched more by the mentors.

Pennington and Richards (2016) assert that favouring conditions in a teaching context makes it easier for teachers to maintain high work motivation. In this study, the favouring condition refers to the freedom in lesson planning granted by the supervisors and mentors to the participants. The participants were allowed to choose their topics and activities, making their lessons interesting and relatable to the students. With this freedom, they could construct a positive teacher personality and create a relaxed classroom atmosphere. This is proven when the students regard them as the 'cool, fun and approachable teacher'.

According to the participants, having student knowledge and awareness is imperative to create quality lesson plans that cater to the students. Without it, their lessons would be utterly irrelevant. Besides that, equipping oneself with knowledge about students makes a participant more cautious in her speech and material selection, as students come from various backgrounds. Mentors are involved in this process as they are the actual English teacher. They provided the participants with the students' demographic information and proficiency level at the beginning of the practicum

so the participants knew what to expect and could plan lessons accordingly. Supervisory support is not apparent in this aspect, which corresponds with the findings from previous studies by Al-Jaro et al. (2021) and Sethusha (2020).

Preservice ESL Teachers' Professional Competence

Lastly, the present study found that the partnership between mentor and supervisor is potentially powerful in supporting preservice ESL teacher identity development within professional competence. In this study, this is examined through disciplinary identity, practiced and responsive teaching skills, theorizing from practice, and membership in communities of practice and profession.

1. Disciplinary identity

In this study, supervisors and mentors are known as the knowledge providers per disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge. Supervisors play a vital role in participants acquiring and developing their teaching styles and methods, which began even during their initial teaching training.

> "For my supervisor, since she was my lecturer, I learned a lot in the course with her, about how to teach students and all those basic fundamental things about being a teacher."
>
> (Amanda, line 200-201)

> "In terms of pedagogy, they did help. They'd suggest some things that I could do or things that they saw other people doing or what they did. So that helped me to think of what would be suitable for my students."
>
> (Noor, line 228-230)

Besides the supervisor, Noor's mentor was also involved in her learning disciplinary knowledge, which improved her teaching strategy for more effective teaching. Both her supervisor and mentor pointed out things that she missed out, such as writing the answers on the whiteboard instead of just reading them aloud since her students are of low proficiency.

One participant admitted that he received substantial assistance in acquiring the pedagogical content knowledge, preparing him for teaching. This assistance was given a week prior to the practicum, and he was able to skim all the documents and understand the content in the scheme of work (SOW), annual teaching plan (ATP), and textbook.

> "From my mentor, I think it was more on understanding the SOW and ATP. It was more on that because you don't get that exposure during simulated teaching. And also understanding the Pulse book, building lesson plans, because different schools have different ways."
>
> (Arman, line 159-161)

On the contrary, Amanda claimed that she learned the pedagogical content knowledge mostly by herself. This is because her mentor perceived she had learned a lot at university, which left her independent. Despite that, her mentors were still accommodating whenever she sought help from them.

> "Like understanding the syllabus, I don't really receive help for that matter and I don't expect to because we need to be independent as well."
>
> (Amanda, line 202-204)

2. Practiced and responsive teaching skills

The present study found that the involvement of supervisors and mentors during practicum improves the preservice teachers' classroom management in two aspects, namely time management and student engagement.

Before starting her practicum, Amanda mentioned that she did not have knowledge of how time would be at school. Her mentor, who is more experienced in school timing, shared with her some of the things that she needed to be

mindful of when conducting lessons. With this awareness, she tried to improve the way she managed her time in the classroom so she would be able to complete all the planned activities.

> "Sometimes, 10 minutes before the end of your period, there are teachers already waiting with their books outside of the classroom. So you have to be prepared for that. And my mentor warned me about this kind of thing."
>
> (Amanda, 249-251)

In addition, Amanda's supervisor influenced the way she managed her students. During the first observation, her supervisor commented on her student engagement as she noticed students were not following her lesson.

> "For the first session with my supervisor, she made it clear that I need to be more alert and aware on my students by making sure that they're doing the same thing."
>
> (Amanda, line 263-265)

She applied the comment in her next lessons, resulting to better student engagement and this was confirmed by her supervisor in the second observation.

3. Theorizing from practice

In the present study, supervisors and mentors contribute to participants changing and constructing teacher beliefs during practicum. Noor's supervisor and mentor assisted her in developing a new belief by making her understand her students better. This belief emerged from her personal experiences with her students in class, alongside accepting advice by her supervisor and mentor. There was this one time when her students were required to write a postcard explaining about Malaysia. Noor expressed her disappointment about her students' inability to write a few short sentences within the time given, although guidance was heavily provided.

> "I used to believe that my students should be at a certain level like they should at least know how to write basic sentences. That's what I expected. That's what I thought. Obviously, now it's changed."
>
> (Noor, line 316-318)

The advice given by Noor's supervisor and mentor helped her to feel less frustrated with her students' outcomes. Although it had been ingrained since her teacher training programme that students should accomplish all the learning objectives by the lesson's ending, the same could not be applied to her students. Indirectly, they taught her to lower her expectations of her students. The emphasis is on getting the students to enjoy the lessons and adapt them according to the student's level.

> "I remember my supervisor said, the only thing that I had to worry about is just getting them to like learning the lesson. She said, don't be too overwhelmed if students can't create sentences or anything, at least they're enjoying themselves."
>
> (Noor, line 43-45)

> "I remember I had to teach them perfect tense. And I consulted with my mentor. She said, don't bother doing perfect tense with the students because it's quite hard."
>
> (Noor, line 65-67)

4. Membership in communities of practice and profession

Supervisors and mentors enable the preservice ESL teachers to be members of the professional community when they willingly accept new ideas proposed by the participants. The participants regarded their supervisor and mentor as supportive of their ideas. As a novice teacher, practicum was a pleasant experience for Amanda when her supervisor and mentor acknowledged her innovative teaching ideas to promote student engagement in the

classroom. She admitted that seniority has always been a problem when the younger teachers get overshadowed by the seniors, causing them to follow what the seniors do. Fortunately, that was not the case for her.

> "They're always intrigued by the kinds of activities that I want to introduce in the class, all the games that I applied in class."

<div align="right">(Amanda, line 330-331)</div>

Another instance to this is when Noor's supervisor and mentor encouraged the after-school reading programme. She initiated the programme for her students who could not read. When they agreed, Noor felt appreciated and convinced she was doing the right thing.

> "At first, I did have doubts, like, I'm only here for three months. So if I do this, is it too much? Will other teachers think badly of me? But my mentor and supervisor said it was fine. They do see the need for it to happen."

<div align="right">(Noor, line 365-367)</div>

Findings for this section inform that supervisors and mentors have a distinct role in influencing the participants' disciplinary identity. For the other three aspects of professional competence, the roles are shared by the supervisors and mentors.

In disciplinary knowledge, supervisors and mentors enriched the participants' teaching pedagogy and strategies, similar to what Al-Jaro et al. (2021) found in their study. Pennington and Richards (2016) highlight the importance of disciplinary knowledge as it builds confidence and a foundation for a specific teacher identity.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, participants stated that they gained pedagogical content knowledge through formal education with their supervisor and teaching experience, with supervisor and mentor support. Next, the role of mentors in sharing the content knowledge with participants somewhat impacts their pedagogical content knowledge, which translates to a more stable and secure disciplinary identity as ESL teachers (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Nielsen et al. (2022) stressed that explaining the curriculum and syllabus to preservice teachers is necessary to assist them in comprehending the education system. A participant from the present study values this knowledge on the syllabus imparted by his mentor, as it was not exposed to him during his teacher training programme. Consequently, he became more prepared and confident to teach. Despite that, some participants had to learn the pedagogical content knowledge by themselves. The mentors supposed that the participants were well-equipped with the knowledge or simply because they were occupied with their work, which required the participants to be independent.

Kabilan et al. (2020). mentioned that classroom management is one of the challenges preservice teachers encounter during practicum. It is expected as they have never experienced teaching in a real classroom setting. However, the involvement of supervisors and mentors in the present study facilitates how the participants manage their time and students. This is achieved when both parties offer advice and comment on the participants' classroom management. The participants then adapt what they have been told to their teaching practice, which becomes increasingly practised and responsive (Pennington & Richards, 2016).

Furthermore, preservice teachers' engagement with supervisors and mentors during practicum contributes to constructing new teacher beliefs. Borg (2006) claimed that teachers develop a personal understanding of teaching that comprises beliefs and this teaching conception varies according to teachers' experiences and interactions which are then translated into future actions (Pennington & Richards, 2016). A participant in this study reported that her supervisor and mentor changed her classroom actions and decision-making. With her upbringing, she was perplexed that her students could not understand and spell simple words. Nonetheless, her supervisor and mentor helped her to realise that the scenario is common and that she should not worry much about achieving all the learning

objectives, similarly told to every preservice teacher. Instead, she should focus on getting the students to enjoy English. The findings inform that the participant's identity had evolved, changing her perceptions of her students and behaviour towards them.

Lastly, positive attitudes of supervisors and mentors, such as encouragement and support, enable the participants to gain membership in communities of practice and profession, which leads to a strong teacher identity. The participants felt acknowledged and accepted when their supervisor and mentor listened and accepted their proposed ideas. Contrary to findings by Mutlu (2014), some of the participants mentioned that they were not well-treated by their mentors as the mentors only viewed them as students and not real teachers. Moreover, Lilach (2020) mentioned that an inherent power imbalance is likely to occur between preservice teachers and supervisors due to their social difference, in which the supervisors may lack respect for the preservice teachers' input. These two scenarios may challenge preservice teachers to embrace themselves as a part of the school community.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study informs that the involvement of supervisors and mentors during practicum positively impacts preservice ESL teachers' identity development. This study also calls for teacher training programmes and school administrators to create more collaborative opportunities for supervisors and mentors to assist preservice teachers in developing their teacher identity further to become competent teachers. This could be done by increasing the frequency of interaction between these two stakeholders, as interactions only happened during one briefing session on practicum and the observation days in the context of this study.

Since some of the participants mentioned that they were left independent in acquiring the pedagogical content knowledge, it is suggested that supervisors communicate with the mentors on their roles and responsibilities so the preservice teachers' professional competence can be fully enhanced. Alternatively, universities could organise a short seminar and invite a professional teacher to briefly explain the school syllabus and the important documents that the preservice teachers will encounter at school, such as the scheme of work and annual teaching plan.

Moreover, as the their supervisors and mentors often raised that the participants lack effective classroom management skills, it notifies teacher training programmes that these specific skills require improvement. Therefore, revising the B. Ed TESL curriculum and including a course on classroom management would seem ideal to address this problem.

Future studies could conduct the same research in other universities that offer a TESL degree programme. By doing this, the findings can be generalised to all individuals in the target population, namely preservice ESL teachers. Future research may include observation and document analysis as another data collection method to yield more significant information. The documents can include lesson plans or reflection notes that the participants created during practicum which might be valuable to the study.

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