

## Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Identity Formation in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper reports on a study that investigated the perception held by pre-service teachers on identity formation. The study was purely quantitative involving 522 pre-service teachers. Data was obtained through the use of a set of questionnaires. Means, standard deviations, and independent t-tests were used in analysing the data. The results show that many of the respondents highly felt that identity formation is the way they view and understand themselves as teachers. In addition, they felt that identity formation is how they are recognised as a certain kind of persons, connected not to their internal states but to their performances in society. On the other hand, many of the pre-service teachers had different perceptions about identity formation. Thus, they disagreed that identity formation is about how they talk or think about themselves, or how others talk or think about them. The study further found no statistically significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers regarding their perceptions of identity formation. It is recommended that teacher educators must formulate and implement teaching philosophies that will reflect proper identity formation of pre-service teachers. Also, teacher education institutions must liaise with the National Teaching Council to periodically review the curriculum taking into consideration the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching profession.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Identity Formation, Perceptions, Pre-Service Teachers

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers experience a transformation in their sense of self as they progress through teacher education programmes and transition into the role of teachers within the challenging educational settings. The formation of teachers' identity necessitates teachers to engage in a reflective process to develop a comprehensive perception of themselves as professionals. This involves constructing authentic and accurate perceptions of their role as teachers (Korthagen et al., 2001). The primary focus of this process involves examining the various experiences that arise from the interaction between personal factors and contextual factors in the role of being and becoming a teacher. The recognition of self-identity as a teacher entails the acknowledgement that one's efficacy and overall welfare are significantly influenced by the individuality of the teacher and their subjective interpretations of various encounters (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Schellings et al., 2023). To effectively engage and respond to the unique identities and cultures of others, it is crucial for teachers to possess a comprehensive understanding of their own identity (Duff, & Uchida, 1997). Scholars contend that the identity of teachers plays a significant role in shaping their choices pertaining to instructional methods, curriculum, interactions with students, and opportunities for professional growth (Beijaard et al., 2004; Hammerness et al., 2005). The significance of identity in teacher development has been emphasised in recent studies (Olsen, 2008; Hoban, 2007; Freese, 2006; Sachs, 2005). Moreover, it is important to note that other transformations of identity may emerge over the course of a teacher's professional trajectory, stemming from various interactions within educational institutions and wider societal contexts. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the notion of identity is multifaceted. Aspiring teachers, throughout their pre-service education and ongoing professional development, partake in a multifaceted undertaking that is shaped by a range of elements, such as personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, pedagogical training, and interactions with students and colleagues (Day & Gu, 2007; Opoku, Sang, & Liao, 2020).

The varied and dynamic part of teacher development lies in the perception of identity formation among pre-service teachers. It assumes a crucial position in not only influencing their future professional endeavours but also facilitating their personal development. According to Darling-Hammond (2006), the process of becoming a teacher encompasses more than simply gaining a skill set; it also involves the development of specific professional

dispositions and attitudes. The process of becoming a teacher entails a complex interplay between personal experiences, pedagogical training, and cultural influences. Pre-service teachers embark on a transformative process in which their self-concept evolves alongside their emerging professional identities, as supported by the notion that teacher identity is not a fixed entity but rather a continuously negotiated and constructed phenomenon (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teacher education programmes frequently shape this development. Lange (2013) opines that these programmes offer prospective teachers not just the necessary information and abilities, but also an opportunity to engage in self-reflection regarding their roles as teachers. According to Conklin and Zeichner (2005), it is important to recognise that teacher education programmes have the capacity to either validate or question the pre-existing notions held by prospective teachers regarding the essence of the teaching profession. The coursework, mentorship, field experiences, and philosophical foundations of these programmes have the potential to exert a substantial impact on the self-perception of pre-service teachers in their role as educators.

Moreover, the views of identity creation in individuals can be strongly influenced by the societal and cultural background in which they are positioned. In the context of a progressively varied and inclusive educational environment, individuals preparing to become teachers face the task of cultivating identities that are culturally responsive and promote equity (Sleeter, 2001). Teachers in multicultural classrooms are faced with the imperative task of confronting their own cultural backgrounds and biases, while simultaneously acknowledging the influence of these variables on their jobs as teachers. Also, the phenomenon of identity construction among pre-service teachers is a complex and ever-evolving process, significantly impacted by a range of factors. Gender is a crucial aspect in the process of constructing one's identity. The professional identities of pre-service teachers can be greatly influenced by society's expectations, preconceptions, and personal experiences pertaining to gender, hence shaping and developing their perceptions. According to Beijaard et al., (2004), the development of identity in pre-service teachers is a complex process that is influenced by various elements, such as societal expectations, gender norms, and personal convictions. Gender as it can shape the expectations, experiences, and self-conceptions (Colley, 2012; Clark & Dyson, 2019). According to Beijaard et al., (2004), there exists a strong connection between pre-service teachers' perceptions of professional identity and their gender, as well as the accompanying expectations. These varied perspectives have a significant influence on individuals' self-perception in their identity as teachers and the specific responsibilities they will adopt within the educational context.

Flores and Day (2006) posit that the formation of a teacher identity formation is influenced by various cultural, social, and educational factors. In some African countries, the significance of this process of identity formation is particularly common among pre-service teachers, as they prepare themselves to assume the role of teachers in environments characterised by rapid transformation. Zen et al. (2022) contend that African countries are confronted with the task of fostering professional identities among pre-service teachers that align with both local values and global standards. Moreover, it is argued that the investigation of the conceptions of identity formation among pre-service teachers in African contexts holds great importance due to the unique combination of cultural, economic, and diverse educational systems. According to Osler and Pandur (2019), the educational systems in several African countries have a dual role by facilitating personal and societal progress, as well as preserving cultural traditions and promoting community development. Pre-service teachers have the task of developing their professional identities within the intricate context of beliefs, traditions, and objectives.

The education system in Ghana is presently undergoing a substantial upheaval, which is being shaped by global shifts in education patterns, the aspirations of the younger generation, and the country's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. The objective, as delineated by UNESCO in 2015, underscores the significance of delivering comprehensive and fair high-quality education to all individuals. The importance of identity development among pre-service teachers in Ghana is particularly notable within the framework of the changing educational environment. Darling-Hammond (2006) asserts that the notion of teacher identity carries substantial significance within the realm of education. Pre-service teachers, who are now undergoing the process of becoming teachers, find themselves at a crucial point in their professional growth trajectory. The individuals are in the process of developing their professional identities as teachers, which are significantly shaped by various cultural, educational, and environmental elements. The construction of one's teacher identity is influenced by personal experiences, engagement in teacher education programmes, and the prevailing societal and cultural conventions. Comprehending these views is crucial for the ongoing enhancement of teacher preparation programmes and the development of educators who possess not only proficiency but also the ability to introspect and adjust in a constantly shifting educational environment.

The examination of identity formation among pre-service teachers in Ghana is an increasingly significant subject, yet one that is not devoid of obstacles and concerns. Ghana, similar to numerous other nations, is currently undergoing notable transformations in its educational domain, propelled by shifting social demands and global impacts (Takyi et al., 2021). The concerns about identity formation among pre-service teachers hold significant importance within this particular context. Pre-service teachers refer to individuals who are currently undergoing training to become teachers and are at an essential point in the development of their professional identities. The individual's understanding of the process of identity formation holds crucial significance not only in terms of their personal and professional growth but also in relation to the overall standard of education throughout the whole country. Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of research that especially concentrates on the experiences of pre-service teachers in Ghana with regard to their identity formation. The existing body of research mostly focuses on teacher education within the broader African context or in Western countries. Frequently, these studies lack the ability to adequately encompass the distinctive cultural and contextual elements present in Ghana, a country characterised by its specific educational system, values, and issues (Osei, 2006).

Pre-service teachers in Ghana exhibit a wide range of cultural origins and are frequently tasked with teaching in classrooms that reflect comparable diversity. What measures are being taken to ensure the cultivation of culturally relevant and inclusive identities (Gyimah & Ayinselya, 2022). The examination of these inquiries is of utmost importance for the advancement of teacher education in Ghana and, consequently, the overall standard of education in the country. It is imperative to comprehend the distinct problems and prospects encountered by pre-service teachers in Ghana as they commence their journey toward becoming teachers and cultivate their professional identities within the distinctive cultural, social, and educational context of the country. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the perceptions of pre-service teachers on identity formation, and their perception on identity formation by gender.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative approach, using the survey technique to answer the research questions. The main instrument used for this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire is used to collect basic descriptive information from a large sample (Borg et al., 1993; Sarantakos, 2004). The population for the study consisted of all final-year education students at the University of Cape Coast. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 522 final-year pre-service teachers. The final year students were chosen since they have spent most of their time in school and therefore have gotten time to study the concepts, principles, and theories of teaching and have practice teaching in a real classroom situation, and therefore, are better informed about issues in teaching. A set of questionnaires was used to obtain data from the respondents. The questionnaire based on the translation of existing scales was constructed for the most part. In addition, new scales were developed using the Likert scaling technique. Finally, items were operational elaborations of variables considered important in existing literature and research to ensure content validity. The researcher collected pre-service teachers' demographic information to determine their personal characteristics. Then, the researcher developed pre-service teachers' perceptions on the identity formation scale. The scale consisted of twelve (12) items. The scale was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Then, exploratory factor analyses were performed on the items of the self-constructed scales. The perceptions of the pre-service teachers were analysed using means and standard deviations, and an independent t-test was used to determine the differences in the perceptions of male and female respondents on their identity formation. Ethical issues were considered critical in this research. Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary. Also, respondents were assured confidentiality of the information they would provide. Respondents were first asked to indicate their consent before being allowed to take part in the study. The questionnaire clearly indicated that only those who would agree to be part of the study could complete it.

## III. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1 Findings

#### 3.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

Respondents were largely males (51.3 percent), with females accounting for 48.7 percent. The dominant age group was 20 – 25 years (71.3 percent), 26 – 30 years (23.0 percent), and while above 30 years constituted (5.7 percent). It is clear that if the pre-service teachers are able to form their identity as teachers at that early stage of their teaching profession, will be able to impact their pupils.

### 3.1.2 Exploratory Factor Analyses

The data about the identity development of pre-service teachers was collected through the use of twelve (12) statements. Principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted on the 12 items of the teacher identification scale using SPSS Version 25. Before doing principal component analysis (PCA), an evaluation was conducted to determine the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. Upon examination of the correlation matrix, it was seen that several coefficients of .3 and higher were present. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value, with a value of .943, beyond the required threshold of .6 as suggested by Kaiser (1970, 1974). Additionally, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) yielded a statistically significant result ( $p < .000$ ), providing evidence in favour of the factorability of the correlation matrix. The use of principal components analysis identified the existence of a single component with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 51.5 percent of the variance. Upon examination of the screeplot, a distinct discontinuity was observed subsequent to the first component. Based on the use of Catell's (1966) scree test, a decision was made to retain a single component for subsequent examination. The findings of Parallel Analysis provided additional evidence, as it revealed that only one component had eigenvalues that surpassed the threshold values for a randomly created data matrix of equal dimensions (12 variables  $\times$  522 respondents).

**Table 1**

*Component Matrix*

Component	
Teacher identity	
Is making sense of myself as individual, including my self-image and self- awareness as projected and understood by others	.793
Involves similarities and differences among individuals	.770
Is how I understand my relationship to the world and how that relationship is constructed across time and space	.766
Encompasses understanding of myself and others	.758
Is how I understand possibilities for the future	.738
Is my knowledge of myself, as well as others' recognition of me as a particular sort of person	.735
Is the way I view and understand myself as a teacher	.727
Is transformational, transformative, context-bound, and constructed, maintained, and negotiated	.724
Is whom I am and whom I think other people are	.675
Is how I'm being recognised as a certain 'kind of person', connected not to internal states but to my performances in society	.645
Is about how I talk or think about myself, or how others talk or think about me	.636
Is formed from my life experience	.622
% of variance explained	51.54%
Cronbach's Alpha	.912

### 3.1.3 Perceptions of pre-Service Teachers

Means and standard deviations were used to analyze the responses of pre-service teachers. In the analysis, mean values above the weighted mean of 4.1 show that the majority of the pre-service teachers agreed with the statement. In contrast, a mean value below the weighted mean value of 4.1 shows that the majority of the pre-service teachers disagreed with the statement. A summary of the responses is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2***Pre-Service Teachers' Perception of Identity Formation (N=522)*

Items Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	UN (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	MEAN	SD ( $\delta$ )
Is the way I view and understand myself as a teacher	281 (53.8)	188 (36)	29 (5.6)	18 (3.4)	6 (1.1)	4.38	.832
Is how I'm being recognised as a certain 'kind of person', connected not to internal states but to my performances in society	180 (34.5)	248 (47.5)	66 (12.6)	22 (4.2)	6 (1.1)	4.10	.857
Is about how I talk or think about myself, or how others talk or think about me	158 (30.3)	235 (45)	86 (16.5)	30 (5.7)	13 (2.5)	3.95	.993
Is formed from my life experience	184 (35.2)	234 (44.8)	52 (10)	38 (7.3)	14 (2.7)	4.03	.993
Is my knowledge of myself, as well as others' recognition of me as a particular sort of person	173 (33.1)	262 (50.2)	59 (11.3)	23 (4.4)	5 (1)	4.10	.835
Is transformational, transformative, context-bound, and constructed, maintained, and negotiated	174 (33.3)	245 (46.9)	86 (16.5)	14 (2.7)	3 (.6)	4.10	.805
Is how I understand my relationship to the world and how that relationship is constructed across time and space	171 (32.8)	255 (48.9)	70 (13.4)	20 (3.8)	6 (1.1)	4.08	.844
Is how I understand possibilities for the future	189 (36.2)	240 (46)	65 (12.5)	24 (4.6)	4 (.8)	4.12	.852
Is making sense of myself as individual, including my self-image and self- awareness as projected and understood by others	199 (38.1)	243 (46.6)	57 (10.9)	21 (4)	2 (.4)	4.18	.869
Is whom I am and whom I think other people are	157 (30.1)	229 (43.9)	83 (15.9)	45 (8.6)	8 (1.5)	3.92	.969
Encompasses understanding of myself and others	212 (40.6)	226 (43.3)	56 (10.7)	22 (4.2)	6 (1.1)	4.18	.869
Involves similarities and differences among individuals	193 (37)	230 (44.1)	67 (12.8)	23 (4.4)	9 (1.7)	4.10	.906

Strongly agree – 5, Agree – 4, Undecided – 3, Disagree – 2, Strongly disagree – 1, Weighted Mean = 4.1

The results show that many of the respondents highly felt that identity formation is the way they view and understand themselves as teachers. In addition, they felt that identity formation is how they are being recognised as certain kinds of persons, connected not to their internal states but to their performances in society. The pre-service teachers also perceived identity formation to be the knowledge of themselves, as well as how others recognise them. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers viewed identity formation as something that is constructed and maintained, transformative, transformational, context-bound, and negotiated. Moreover, they viewed identity formation as making sense of themselves as individuals, including their self-image and self- awareness as projected and understood by others. Finally, they perceived that identity formation involves similarities and differences among individuals.

On the other hand, more than half of the pre-service teachers had different perceptions about identity formation. For instance, they disagreed that identity formation is about how they talk or think about themselves, or how others talk or think about them. Also, they disagreed that identity formation occurred as part of life experience. In addition, the respondents disagreed that identity formation is how they understand their relationship to the world and how that relationship is constructed across time and space. Besides, identity formation is whom they are and whom they think other people are. This may be as a result of the context of the pre-service teachers that might have affected their perceptions.

### 3.1.4 Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers by Gender

The independent sample T-test was used to investigate the difference between males and females, as against their perceptions. Before conducting the analysis, assumptions such as normality and equality of variance were conducted.



**Table 3**  
*Results of Descriptive Statistics*

Group Statistics				
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teacher Identity	Male	268	49.55	.490
	Female	254	48.92	.435

As indicated in table 3, the mean for males regarding their identity formation was 49.55 with a standard deviation of .490, while females' mean stood at 48.92 with a standard deviation of .435. After the assumptions were satisfied, the independent t-test was conducted on the variables identified, and the result is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Independent Samples Test*

T-test for equality of means						
					95% confidence interval of the difference	
T	Df	sig. (2-tailed)	Mean	std. error	Lower difference	Upper difference
.964	520	.335	.635	.658	-.659	1.928

Source: Field Survey (2022)

It is clear that the sig. value is greater than 0.05, that is for the independent samples t-test,  $t(520) = .964$ ,  $p = 0.335 > 0.05$ . This suggested no statistically significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers regarding their perceptions on identity formation. This suggests that respondents had the same perceptions on identity formation despite the differences in their sexual orientation.

### 3.2 Discussions of Result

The results of the study indicate that individuals actively connect with their own experiences as members of various groups through their identities. From this perspective, the process of identity creation might be characterised as including psychological and cognitive understanding. Conversely, the sociological framework, encompassing dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, historical context, and cultural influences, assumes a pivotal role in comprehending the process of identity formation. According to Davey (2013), the concept of identity refers to the internalised mental models or ideas that are situated within persons (p.26). Consequently, it is possible for individuals to adopt many identities in different circumstances (Lemke, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend teachers' identity development by examining their engagement with colleagues, students, and staff members throughout their training and their real teaching. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), the decisions made by pre-service teachers to pursue a career in teaching are influenced by their previous and current experiences, as well as their encounters with educational environments.

According to Bloomfield et al. (2004), the evolution of an individual's teaching practises is intimately connected to their own ideas and perceptions about teaching, as well as influenced by the specific situations in which they teach and learn. The views held by pre-service teachers are significantly shaped by their own experiences as students and their extensive periods of observation of teachers' practises. Enrolling as a student at an educational institution may be likened to undergoing an apprenticeship in the field of education, as students are afforded enough opportunities for direct engagement with experienced teachers (Cancino et al., 2020). Weber and Greiner (2019) highlighted the importance of apprenticeship in developing the identity of novice teachers and its impact on their understanding and perspective of the teaching profession. This is in line with Mockler (2011), which identified three dimensions of teacher identity. She posits that the notion of teacher identity may be seen as a combination of three discrete domains, specifically personal experience, professional experience, and the external political context. In support with Connelly and Clandinin (1999), which claimed that pre-service teachers' decisions are shaped by both their past and present experiences, alongside their engagement with the educational setting. Over a period, the process

of cooperative learning leads to the development of practises that embody the endeavour of identity building and the corresponding social interactions.

The findings of the survey also indicated that there was no statistically significant disparity between male and female pre-service teachers in terms of their sense of identity formation. Research on teacher professional identity has yielded ambiguous results when examining the influence of gender. In contrast to the findings of the present study, previous research conducted by Guarino et al. (2006) demonstrated that female instructors exhibit higher levels of commitment, favourable views towards the teaching profession, and a greater intention to identify themselves as teachers within the profession, in comparison to their male counterparts. Similarly, the study conducted by Fresko et al. (1997) revealed that female pre-service teachers had elevated levels of work satisfaction and displayed more favourable views towards the teaching profession compared to their male counterparts. It was observed that a greater number of female pre-service teachers exhibited more aspirations to pursue a teaching as a career after graduation from school, in comparison to their male counterparts (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). In addition, Guarino et al. (2006) demonstrated that female teachers experienced higher rates of attrition compared to male teachers. The result of this study shows that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers in terms of their identity formation. This observation is consistent with Watt et al. (2007), which also reached the conclusion that gender does not have a substantial impact on an individual's level of commitment to either remain or exit the teaching profession.

Contrary to the results of this study, Spittle (2012) revealed that gender stereotypes have a significant role in shaping the process of identity formation among pre-service teachers. According to Colley (2012), there is a likelihood that female pre-service teachers may encounter societal expectations to exhibit nurturing and caring qualities in their prospective teaching positions. Conversely, male pre-service teachers may encounter preconceptions associated with authority and discipline. These prejudices have the potential to influence their self-perception in their role as teachers. Clark and Dyson (2019) concurred with the findings of Colley (2012) that the gender of pre-service teachers has the potential to impact their interactions with pupils. There may be variations in the types of connections that male and female pre-service teachers create with their students. One potential challenge faced by male pre-service instructors is the establishment of rapport with female pupils, which can be attributed to apprehensions regarding appropriate boundaries. There exist divergent expectations and attitudes among male and female pre-service teachers regarding their prospective positions within the classroom. According to Beijaard et al. (2004), there is a tendency for female pre-service teachers to have expectations related to nurturing and caregiving in the teaching profession, but male pre-service teachers may encounter challenges in meeting the societal expectations of being authoritative disciplinarians.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS & PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, pre-service teachers have varied agreements and disagreements when it comes to their perceptions about identity formation. They agreed that identity formation is the way they view and understand themselves as teachers. They also agreed that identity formation is how they are being recognised as a particular type of person, connected not to their internal states but to their performances in society. They also see identity formation as the knowledge of themselves, as well as others' recognition of them as a particular type of person. Further, pre-service teachers viewed identity formation as something that is transformational, transformative, context-bound, constructed, maintained, and negotiated. Moreover, identity formation of pre-service teachers can be seen as making sense of themselves as individuals, including their self-image and self-awareness as projected and understood by others. Finally, identity formation can be seen to include similarities and differences among individuals. On the other hand, identity formation among pre-service teachers cannot be perceived as how they talk or think about themselves, or how others talk or think about them. Also, identity formation cannot occur as part of pre-service teachers' life experience. In addition, identity formation cannot be seen as how pre-service teachers understand their relationship to the world and how that relationship is constructed across time and space. The differences in the perceptions of pre-service teachers' identity formation may be because of the context of the pre-service teachers that might have affected their perceptions. It can also be concluded that both males and females have the same perceptions towards identity formation irrespective of their sexual orientation. It is recommended that teacher educators formulate and implement teaching philosophies that will reflect proper identity formation of pre-service teachers. Also, teacher education institutions must liaise with the National Teaching Council to periodically review the curriculum taking into consideration the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching profession.

Further, coordinators of teaching practicum should liaise with cooperative supervisors to come out with measures to improve upon the teaching practicum experience of pre-service teachers to develop ideas for better identity formation. In addition, teacher educators, supervisors, and cooperating supervisors must consistently encourage the formation of teacher identity by facilitating activities for pre-service teachers that empower them to actively reflect on and critically examine their experiences and beliefs. Finally, Teacher Education Institutions should develop programmes that will help both male and female prospective teachers with the necessary tools and insights to develop their identity as teachers. Since pre-service teachers had the same perceptions on identity formation despite the differences in their sexual orientation.

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