

# Pre-service EFL Teachers' Professional Identity Construction Experiences in a Dual Diploma Program\*

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## Abstract

This case study explores how pre-service EFL teachers of an undergraduate dual diploma program describe their professional identities after spending a year in their partner university in the United States and experiencing practice teaching in Turkey. Participants were six pre-service teachers in one of the dual diploma programs in Turkey. As a case study, the data were obtained through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, document reviews and focus group interviews. The results suggest that dual diploma programs make great contributions to prospective teachers' personal growth in terms of broadening their worldviews, improving their personal skills, enriching their perceptions about cultural differences, providing new perspectives about Turkish and American education systems, providing travelling opportunities, and giving them a chance to meet people from all over the world in a multi-cultural environment. However, as a result of having insufficient feedback, doing very few teaching practices and experiencing the undesired realities of the teaching profession, pre-service teachers are not willing to pursue teaching as a career.

*Keywords:* dual diploma program, pre-service EFL teacher, study abroad, practicum, professional identity construction.

## Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki bir Uluslararası Ortak Lisans Programı'na kayıtlı bir grup İngilizce Öğretmenliği son sınıf öğrencisinin, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki üniversitelerinde geçirdikleri bir takvim senesi ve tamamladıkları uluslararası ve yerel öğretmenlik deneyiminin ardından mesleki kimliklerini ve eğitim uygulamalarını nasıl şekillendirdiklerini incelemektedir.

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Türkiye'deki bir devlet üniversitesinin, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki bir üniversiteye bağlı kampüs ile yürüttüğü İngilizce Öğretmenliği (TEFL) & Liberal Studies çift diploma programında son sınıf öğrencisi olan altı katılımcı ile yürütülen bu çalışmada, veriler, yarı-yapılandırılmış yüz yüze görüşmeler, sınıf-içi gözlemler, döküman incelemesi ve odak grup görüşmeleri aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre, bu programın, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarına, kişisel gelişimlerine yardımcı olmak, dünya görüşlerini genişletmek, farklı iki ülkenin eğitim sistemleri hakkında fikir sahibi olmak, çok kültürlü bir ortamda yeni insanlarla bir araya gelmek, kültür farklılıklarına karşı farkındalık kazanabilmek, kendi kişisel becerilerine dair öz farkındalık kazanmak ve bu becerileri geliştirmek, çok kültürlü eğitim sistemini desteklemek ve seyahat etmek açılarından katkı sağladığı görülmüştür. Öte yandan, öğretmenliğe başlamadan önceki en önemli adımlardan biri olarak görülen okul deneyimi ve saha çalışması derslerinin, katılımcıların beklentisini karşılamaması nedeniyle, mesleki kimlik oluşturmada ve öğretmenlik mesleğine dair algı geliştirmede etkin olamadıkları sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Deneyimsizlikten kaynaklanan mesleki yetersizlik hissiyatı sebebiyle, katılımcıların mesleki öz benliklerini oluşturmada güçlük çektikleri görülmüştür

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* çift diploma programı, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmeni, yurtdışı eğitim, okul deneyimi, mesleki kimlik

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## Introduction

In the last decade, teachers' professional identity formation has come into prominence in order to understand what teachers personally desire and what they find in the reality. Therefore, professional identity, which is a multifaceted concept, including social, psychological and cultural factors, has been studied as a separate research domain (Sachs, 2005). Therefore, examining teachers' professional identity formation is important in order to understand what teachers personally desire and what they find in the reality (Lamote & Engels, 2010). Teacher professional identity construction is a process affected by various factors, such as teachers' personal identities, subject knowledge and significant others. In this context, Sugrue (1997) states that there is a need for teachers to be active in the process of professional identity construction. According to him, every teacher experiences a unique process involving self-awareness of the approaches and ways of doing things as a teacher. He adds that during this process teachers develop their own theories, which are shaped by immediate family, significant others, apprenticeship of observation, atypical teaching episodes, policy context and cultural archetypes. From this point of view, it is clear that forming the self as pre-service teacher is a complex and multi-layered process, since a pre-service

teacher could identify himself/herself within several group identities, including a student of a mentor teacher or a supervisor, teacher, social committee member or part-time staff member. (Friesen & Besley, 2013).

Student teachers are open to undergo a shift in identity during the process of becoming a teacher since they experience classroom realities and have interactions with school, parents and their future colleagues. Examining experiences of pre-service teachers is significant for teacher educators and researchers due to the fact that identity cannot be taught or acquired because it is innate, and the only source of change is experience (Oruç, 2013). According to Ten Dam and Blom (2006), teachers start to construct their professional identities during the practicum by experiencing educational contexts and their realities.

Based on the literature about the effect of practicum experiences on pre-service teachers' professional identity formation, the studies on international education experiences for student teachers lead to deeper understanding on the issue. Attending study abroad programs is an opportunity for a student teacher to challenge his or her pre-existing conceptions of culturally different others and examine personal and professional beliefs in-depth. A study conducted by Pence and Macgillivray (2008) demonstrates that international fieldwork experiences enhance the personal growth and cross-cultural competency of student teachers. In a similar vein, Willard-Holt (2001) finds that engagement with other cultures provides teachers with an expanded worldview and transforms them into a more flexible and compassionate professional. She indicates that international fieldwork experiences make student teachers “less prone to prejudge students based on cultural background, linguistic differences, or even learning disability” (p.515).

In the last five decades, various institutions and committees in the world have offered dual diploma programs and international education experiences (Baker & Giacchino-Baker, 2000). Beginning from 1990s, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education has provided the great availability of teacher education fieldwork experiences, which is “a way of preparing teachers to understand diversity” (p. 4). According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), international fieldwork experiences “offer prospective teachers their only opportunity to build a contextualized understanding of

culturally responsive teaching by getting them out of the university classroom and into schools and communities” (p.137). They state that the aim here is providing pre-service teachers a context in which they may have opportunities to work with various cultural groups and “become more knowledgeable of and sensitive to values, lifestyles, and cultures other than their own” (p.137).

Having an international fieldwork experience enables student teachers to undergo a shift in their pre-existing beliefs on being and becoming a teacher since such experiences challenge their former ideas about different educational contexts, school types, personal worldview, professional changes and teaching practices. Moreover, international fieldwork experiences make teacher candidates think critically about their own professional identity by challenging them “to go beyond their own perspectives” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.137). In the same study, the researchers draw attention to the importance of the student teachers' international fieldwork experience opportunities by defining those prospective teachers as “who have high degrees of socio-cultural consciousness and affirming attitudes toward diverse students, are actively engaged in working toward equity and social justice, and practice culturally responsive teaching in their own classrooms” (ibid., p.148). By looking at these claims, it is clear that international fieldwork experiences and study abroad programs are very crucial to provide teacher candidates to increase self-confidence, respect for differences, and personal and professional growth. On the other hand, they may bring forth certain negative impacts, including culture shock, financial problems, language barriers, and emotional emptiness. In parallel, Smith (2013) asserts that study abroad programs are very beneficial for having opportunities to travel, learning new languages, experiencing different cultures, expanding worldviews, and creating future job opportunities. Moreover, it is highlighted that students experience the negative aspects of these programs, including financial costs, culture shock, separation from family, friends and significant others, and language barriers. To address these issues, this study presents an investigation to understand how pre-service EFL teachers of a dual diploma program shape and describe their professional identities in a state university in Turkey. This study may reveal important results regarding identity changes that pre-service EFL teachers undergo after experiencing international and local practice teaching contexts.

This study aims to take a wider perspective on the identity construction of pre-service EFL teachers by investigating their professional identity perceptions after spending a year as international students in the United States. In addition, this study tries to investigate how the practice teaching experience in Turkey reshape their pre-existing perceptions about professional identity and the teaching profession. To achieve these aims, this study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers about an international fieldwork experience and practice teaching?
2. What are the impacts of overseas education on pre-service EFL teacher professional identity development?

### **Review of Literature**

Focusing on the identity narratives of the two teachers in their induction period of the teaching profession, Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) conducted a study in order to understand the factors that shaped and re-shaped their initial professional identities. One of the teacher participants had a difficult and painful beginning while the other participant went through an easy transition period. The data were collected through reflective essays, interviews over their first year in the profession. The researcher concluded that although both of the teachers were trained in the same teacher education program, their initial identities showed different patterns depending on their previous perceptions about the teaching profession, which allowed them to reconstruct and deconstruct their teacher selves. Flores and Day (2006) conducted a longitudinal research study examining professional identities of novice teachers and the ways their identities were constructed and reconstructed in progress of time. In their study, the researchers identified three main factors influencing the formation and reformation of teacher identities: Prior influences, initial teacher training and teaching practice, and contexts of teaching. Under the scope of prior influences as pupils, past teachers were perceived as the main contributors to their perceptions of teaching and their choice of

profession. Regarding the initial teacher training and teaching practice, it was shown that most of the teachers were motivated by the extrinsic factors such as the influence of significant others and career opportunities. Only two of them stated that they wanted to become a teacher because of their desire to teach and work with children. Besides, they suggested that pre-service teacher education did not make any remarkable effect on their perceptions of themselves, and they reported the program did not prepare them adequately for the challenges emerging in classroom and school settings. Finally, the study concluded that there were strong relationships between personal biography and the social context in shaping and re-shaping the professional identity of teachers.

Kabilan (2013) explored six Malaysian student teachers' international teaching experiences in Maldives over six weeks by employing questionnaires and reflective journals. He found five major benefits of international practicum experience for student teachers: (1) confidence in speaking and communication; (2) teaching confidence skills; (3) interpersonal skills; (4) new world views of education and culture; (5) adapting to new working cultures. Similarly, Cushner and Mahon (2002) investigated the impact of international student teaching experience on personal and professional development of novice teachers. Their study showed that overseas teaching experience helped them develop personal, professional and global perspectives. The participants generally became more sensitive to the integration of cultural components into the classrooms as a different dimension from a student teaching experience. Another study was conducted by Chan and Parr (2012) in order to explore student teachers' experiences South African context. The student teachers in their study had both challenges and dilemmas over the course of international practicum. They encountered different people, cultures, and practices. The study concluded that "[International] practicum being genuinely powerful and beneficial in promoting student teachers' evolving intercultural identity" (p.16). Finally, Cantalini-Williams and Tessaro (2011) studied the perceptions of student teachers after they completed international teaching practicum in Italy. Regarding the benefits of international practicum experience, the following themes emerged in their study: (1) language challenges and barriers; (2) awareness of cultural literacy and comparative education; (3) resourcefulness and resilience; (4) employment interest in international opportunities. Besides, the researchers concluded that student

teachers' professional development was associated with adequate preparation, faculty support and involvement in the experience.

Given that the practicum is acknowledged as a significant component of teacher education, Yazan (2015) explored ESOL learning experiences of ESOL teacher candidates in practicum and the effect of these experiences on their development. After conducting in-depth interviews with five teachers, the researcher reached five major findings regarding the ways the teaching practicum influenced participants' professional learning. Firstly, it was noted that teaching practicum facilitated navigating in the school culture and understanding the dynamics of this context. They interacted and acted within this community and developed insights into labor division at public schools and how these schools were operated. Secondly, it was found that teaching practicum enabled them to establish relationships in the teacher community. Finally, the study contended that teaching practicum paved the way for teacher candidates to integrate theory into practice. They stated that they had opportunities to "contextualize their teacher knowledge" (p. 187). Emphasizing the importance of practicum, Armutcu and Yaman (2010) conducted a study with 37 student teachers. They found that practicum allowed student teacher to have firsthand experience of the classroom realities. Another remarkable finding of the study was that during the process of negotiating the meaning of their experiences and shaping their set of beliefs and values, reflection played a crucial role, and it enabled them to question and to correct their existing beliefs. There are also other research studies carried out in order to explore the importance of practicum experiences in the literature. Addleman, Nava, Cevallos, Brazo, and Dixon (2014) examined cultural immersion fieldwork experiences of 24 prospective teachers through reflections, discussions, and workshops. The study reveals that during short-term immersion experience, teacher candidates benefitted from transformative learning; however, they reported that they often suffered from the shame and embarrassment of alienation.

As integrating intercultural learning into student teacher training becomes increasingly important, Walters, Garii, and Walters (2009) conducted a study discussing how prospective teachers challenge their perceptions of their professional self through international fieldwork experiences. According to the study, well-designed international

fieldwork experiences can help to train globally aware and culturally sensitive educators and students. The study revealed that such experiences entail prospective students to develop a new perspective regarding cultural differences. In this regard, Stachowski and Sparks (2007) suggested in their study that study abroad programs provide prospective teachers with intellectual growth, personal development and global mindedness. They added that international fieldwork experiences are good opportunities for prospective teachers to develop cultural awareness and a broader understanding of their professional roles as well. As student teacher exchange programs come into prominence in teacher education area, Barr (1995) conducted a study with six student teachers in New Zealand, who took part in an international student teacher exchange program in the United States. Three participants were interviewed and the study revealed that study abroad experiences provide student teachers with a more satisfactory background, which enable them to integrate what they had already experienced in local schools with the experiences they gained in the host country. Moreover, Barr's (1995) study showed that overseas teaching experience made student teachers clarify their views of education and made criticisms on what they previously experienced in New Zealand. One of the participants recommends the program by saying: "Being in a different educational setting really opens up your eyes. It makes you question your own beliefs" (p.13). The other participant appreciates the program by stating: "I learned so much- meeting new people, going to their university, talking about schools, meeting other teachers, seeing different ways of organizing classrooms. The whole experience was really worthwhile" (p.13).

### **Methodology**

This study was designed as a case study in order to illustrate a big picture extracted from incidents of a group of participants sharing the same entity (Yin, 2003). In other words, a case study provides readers with an understanding on how a specific group of people can reflect the whole idea in a period of time with their narrations, thoughts, attitudes and actions.



## **Participants**

Six pre-service EFL teachers in a dual diploma program in Liberal Studies & English Language Teaching were the participants in this qualitative case study. There were 12 registered pre-service teachers in the program; however, of these 12 students, only half of them had repeat courses neither in Turkey nor in the United States at the time when the study was conducted. In addition, these six students were regular students of the program, which means they went to the USA at the end of their second year and spent one year at a university campus in the United States with having fieldwork experience, and then returned to Turkey to complete the program as senior year students. All participants were female Turkish citizens, and their ages were between 22-26 years.

## **Context of the Study**

Dual Diploma Program in Liberal Studies and Teaching English as a Foreign Language is a four-year program includes full-time enrolment for six semesters in Turkey, and two semesters and two summer terms in the United States. While students spend their first, second and fourth years in Turkey, third-year students study in the United States, where they also attend two summer sessions. The program is comprised of compulsory courses related to English language teaching and elective courses in psychology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics and literature. In addition, dual diploma program students must attend an international fieldwork experience which provides them with teaching experience in one of the middle or high schools in the United States. The students also take an intensive practice teaching course in Turkey. After the students meet all the requirements at both institutions, they are awarded Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching in Turkey and Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in the United States.

## **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

The data were obtained by means of multiple data collection tools, including semi-structured interviews, observations, focus group interviews, and document analysis. At the beginning of the semester, semi-structured interviews were conducted

with each participant to explore their backgrounds, academic lives, future plans and perceptions on the teaching profession. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. After completing the interview sessions, classroom observations were done in English Language Teaching courses throughout the semester in order to gain a better understanding about their perceptions about teaching and their experiences in the United States. Detailed notes describing their reactions, attitudes, and conversations with the instructors and classmates were kept. The participants were observed for 12 weeks in the semester and each observation lasted approximately 120 minutes.

In the second semester, the researcher observed pre-service teachers in practice teaching course due to the fact that pre-service teachers shared their real classroom experiences through class discussions and reflective tasks, which enabled the researcher to explore their understandings of themselves as prospective teachers. The participants were observed for 14 weeks in the second semester and each observation lasted approximately 90 minutes. The second semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of the semester to gain insights into the process the participants experienced starting from their first participation as a student teacher at in the United States to their last teaching practice in Turkey. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

In the second semester, two focus group interview sessions were done in order to develop an understanding of the impacts of study abroad experiences on pre-service teachers' teaching career and their expectations regarding practicum in Turkey. Each focus group interview session was lasted approximately 40 minutes. Finally, weekly reflective journals of participants were collected and reviewed in order to demonstrate the clarity of findings generated as a result of interviews and observations. Reflective journals were not specifically produced for this study since all of them were written in the scope of practice teaching course.

In this study, all questions for semi-structured and focus group interviews were prepared by the researcher in parallel to the aim of the study. First, all questions were reviewed by another researcher, who is a graduate of the same dual diploma program. After that, two teacher educators read and reviewed the questions before conducting the

interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded after taking consent of the participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, the researcher collected data by making use of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, classroom observations, and document reviews. Since the data were gathered from four different data collection tools, the data analysis of this study is comprised of several steps. For the sake of following an order, the staging suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) for qualitative data analysis was employed in this study. First of all, all transcripts were read, and all responses were grouped according to interview questions and research questions respectively. After reading transcripts, the most salient statements were identified by marking and labeling. Then, descriptive codes were presented by adding little inferences and interpretations. Lastly, pattern codes were provided to show how many times the same codes were used by the participants repeatedly throughout the study.

For the analysis of reflective journals of participants, all journals were read every week and significant statements were marked in order to report them according to the topics assigned by the course instructor. For the analysis of classroom observations, the field notes were read, and interpretations were written down on the margins. Then, the significant incidents were grouped under subheadings and each subheading was supported through quotations of participants captured during the observations.

### **Establishment of Trustworthiness**

To ensure that results and interpretations gathered from a qualitative study are trustworthy, certain measures should be taken (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One of the strategies used in the study to ensure the trustworthiness was prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. Another strategy used in this study was triangulation which was ensured via using multiple data collection tools and multiple investigators. Trustworthiness was also enhanced through member checking in order to verify the data for accuracy and agreement. The researcher took the data and analyses back to the six participants to check whether there were any disagreements on the

interpretations. In addition, all data were read and coded twice in order to ensure the intra-reliability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to address the ethical implications, the proposal of the research was sent to the Human Subject Ethics Committee of the University. After getting permission, the researcher gave informed consent forms to the participants in order to provide them with necessary information about the aim of the study, timing and procedures. In addition, the consent form included information that participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted. Additionally, the potential risks and benefits of the study were explained in the consent form. In order to ensure the anonymity of the study, pseudonyms were given to every participant (i.e., Beatrice, Irmak, Defne, Jane, Emily, Derin). All the participants are Turkish citizens; however, three of them preferred non-Turkish pseudonyms.

### **Findings**

In this study, the relevant data were collected through four data collection tools. The data collection tools used in this study are semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group interviews and document reviews. The findings are reported in accordance with the research questions of this study.

*Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers about an international fieldwork experience and practice teaching?*

Theme 1: Necessity and Usefulness of an International Fieldwork Experience

It was found that an international fieldwork experience helps students develop a better understanding about the teaching profession. As one of the most significant benefits of fieldwork experiences, observing real classroom settings and becoming a part of an authentic teaching community provide student teachers with an integration of content knowledge, observation and interpretation, and theory. Considering the positive effects of fieldwork experience on increasing self- confidence, Jane said:

*In the United States, we had fieldwork experience as a part of our course. It was too short to have enough experience of course, but we saw a real classroom and observed students. It provided us self-confidence to live such an experience in an American school for the first time. As a result of my very short observation sessions in the United States, I understood that a teacher should be calm, flexible and patient while dealing with problematic students.*

Regarding the effectiveness of the fieldwork experience, one of the participants, Defne, defined her fieldwork experience as a ‘turning point’ on her teaching adventure. According to her, having such an experience gave her an opportunity to compare Turkish schools and American schools. However, she complained about the procedure and duration of this experience:

*I could find fieldwork experience very beneficial if it had been long enough. I had a chance to see a real American school and compare it with our schools. That was all. I did a very short teaching during one of the sessions at the cooperating school in New York; however, I realized that I could teach something! I felt that I love teaching. I define this experience as a turning point in my life since it was my first teaching experience Even this short experience provided me self-confidence in teaching in an international school.*

In line with Defne’s thoughts, Derin indicated that the duration of fieldwork experience should be changed to be utilized in a more effective way. Furthermore, Derin drew attention to the clash between theory and practice in the teaching profession. She suggested that the fieldwork experience should have been longer:

*Doing microteachings and being in a real classroom are different. I did a very short teaching in New York. After this experience, I realized that I have teaching skills! We visited two classes in the United States, but it was very short. Therefore, we could not develop sense of belonging. We were just guests.*

Theme 2: Changing perceptions of pre-service teachers about the teaching profession in Turkey after practice teaching

Before practicum, all of the participants mentioned their concerns about classroom management problems, having no teaching experience, and being unconfident in grading and assessing processes. At the end of the practicum, it is remarkable to see that most of their concerns came true during the semester. In spite of the fact that all of the six participants expected to do more teaching practices and being entirely involved in the school community, they thought that they did not accomplish them thoroughly. The issue of student teachers lacking enough teaching practices,

constructive feedback and motivation might resulted in no remarkable awareness about their teaching selves and developing misconceptions about teaching profession. One of the participants, Beatrice indicated that practice teaching is a very important step to enter the teaching profession. In addition, she stated that her thoughts about the teaching profession and her 'teaching self' have not been evolved during the practicum precisely as a result of lack of teaching experience and the incidents that showed her the stability of the profession. She said:

*We visited a cooperating school for twelve times with no profound teaching practice and administrative duty. In fact, I taught only once. In my opinion, apart from teaching practices, being motivated is crucial for a teacher-to-be before entering the profession and practicum is the key point to motivate teacher candidates. If you aren't be motivated and feel yourself incompetent at the end of your practicum experience, you won't be willing to enter the profession. I don't think that I was motivated positively and received enough feedback to love my future profession. Moreover, I saw that teaching is a highly stable act, you know, same course books, same students, same topics every semester.*

From a different perspective, Defne and Jane drew attention to the fact that they experienced certain classroom realities by virtue of teaching practicum in Turkey. Both participants shared their memories about classroom management problems they suffered during their teaching practices. Not surprisingly, both of them implied that this problem might stem from being inexperienced. According to Jane, having practicum experience in Turkey is beneficial for her since she is planning to pursue teaching as a career after the graduation. She emphasized that practicum is entirely different from her fieldwork experience in the United States in terms of making contribution to her professional identity:

*What I observed here during my practicum is teaching is one of the challenging professions in the world because of its draining nature. Secondly, classroom realities are totally different from theories we learnt in methodology courses. Thirdly, the major motivation to pursue teaching enthusiastically is seeing your students' joy, respect, and feel their love. When the first time I have had a classroom full of silence, it was time to congratulate myself. I said to me: You are going to be a real teacher, Jane. You are perfect!*

Classroom management is one of the biggest challenges for pre-service teachers. According to Emily, teaching practicum plays a strategic role in their professional

identity in terms of experiencing classroom realities, becoming a part of a real teaching community and the need for receiving enough feedback from mentor teachers and supervisors:

*At first, teaching seemed to me easy. I always wanted to be a teacher because I felt that I could do this job. While graduating this department, I can say that teaching is not as easy as we imagine. For instance, I really suffered from classroom management problems. If you can't provide a calm classroom atmosphere, you can't teach even a word. The thing that I'd like to criticize in practice teaching that we didn't receive enough feedback to fix our mistakes. Therefore, I still don't know what type of a teacher I am.*

While the last three vignettes mostly indicate the impact of practicum experience on perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers about the teaching profession and the clash between theory and practice, Derin emphasized that practicum showed her undesired realities of the teaching profession in Turkey. She summarized her thoughts on being a teacher in Turkey with the following vignette:

*Teaching means 'routine', 'low income' and 'no occupational prestige' in Turkey. Before practicum, I was neutral towards the teaching profession but after the practicum, I decided that teaching is not for me. Kids are so sweet, being with them for two or three days is fine but I can't do this job in the rest of my life to earn just a little money. I observed that teachers deal with boring paperwork, problematic classrooms and students who have a low English proficiency. I know that I don't want to be a part of this system.*

The critical reflections coming from the participants illustrate a general framework of how pre-service EFL teachers in a dual diploma program perceive the teaching profession in Turkey. According to them, teaching is underestimated by both insiders and outsiders in Turkey. One of the participants, Irmak, summarized her thoughts in a concise way with these words:

*I have to confess that after completing practicum, I thought that I have to admit what other people think about teachers in Turkey. Unfortunately, I observed that only a few teachers seek better for their students, while most of them are very happy in this boring routine! But being a good teacher requires more than following a course book or a curriculum. If you try to be a more 'intellectual' teacher, you will be questioned like 'What are you doing? Does it exist in our national curriculum?' So, I can't be bounded by a strict system.*

*Research Question 2: What are the impacts of overseas education on pre-service EFL teacher professional identity development?*

### Theme 3: Self- discovery

Jane implied that she chose this department since she loves being with children and has an interest in English language. She added that in her high school years studying with her classmates before exams and transmitting her knowledge to them was a great satisfaction for her. She said that she felt herself as a very important person while teaching:

*I always wanted to be a teacher especially at the high school, but I realized that subject matter you teach is very important when you become a teacher. I realized that I felt very happy while teaching English. Why I love teaching? Let me think... I love children. Besides, when I came to this department, some of our instructors told me that I was born to be a teacher. Hearing such things from them is wonderful.*

During her self-discovery process, like Jane, Defne praised for her good teaching skills and was encouraged to be a teacher by her instructors in the department. She felt like teaching is a suitable profession for her because she thought that teaching requires patience, determination and calmness. She stressed her teaching skills:

*I think that I will be a good teacher because I am very patient and most of the people around me always say that teaching is the best job for me. Both of my parents are English language teachers. I have observed them many years. I know the meaning of being a good teacher thanks for their contributions. So, I realized my intention of being an English language teacher.*

As it was previously mentioned by Defne, influence of other people played a crucial role in their decision to choose teaching as a career. While three of the participants reported that they came to this department with the aim of being a teacher, the rest of the participants implied that their decisions on being a teacher were shaped unconsciously because of the impact of other people who took place in enrolling in a dual diploma program. For instance, one of the participants, Beatrice, stated that she was left with no choice during university preferences process since her preference form was filled in by her family while she was studying at a language school in Italy. She shared her feelings about this process:



*At the very beginning of my first year at high school, I decided to change my division and according to our school principal's guidance, I was transferred to Foreign Languages division. Am I regretful about my decision? Absolutely! After my family heard that I got enough score to enter this dual diploma program, they filled in my preference form when I was in Italy. They called me to ask my decision and I accepted their offer just because studying in the United States seemed very appealing for me. You know we will have two diplomas at the end of the year. These are the advantages of this program. I came here to benefit from these advantages, not to become a teacher.*

Likewise, Defne and Jane have been influenced by their families to enroll in an overseas education program. For instance, Jane stated that she was planning to study at a different university, but she had changed her mind after her father investigated this program. She said that her parents were the decision-makers since they had positive thoughts about the department:

*One day, my father saw this program on a brochure. He told me about the program. When I heard that this program provides living in the United States for a year and studying at two different universities, it helped me make my decision. In my opinion, an English language teacher should live in an English-speaking country at least a couple of months in order to be exposed the daily speech and experience the culture. That's why; I find this program very valuable for prospective teachers.*

#### Theme 4: Personal Growth

As all of the participants spent a year at in the United States and had a chance to have an overseas education experience, they stated that they felt the change in their worldviews and self-improvement. They especially highlighted the fact that study abroad is a unique opportunity providing students bi-cultural experience, fluency in English, and a broader perspective enriched by a wide range of elective courses. In addition, they implied that living abroad taught them many things, such as a new sense of freedom, being patient, sometimes experiencing alienation, and developing new personal skills while handling struggles they faced in daily routines and campus life. One of the participants, Beatrice, indicated that study abroad experience was the hardest but most beautiful part of her life:

*At first, it was a little bit hard for me because you I was very far away from my home. But then, I realized that the United States was my second home. You*

*know, we've been exposed to American culture since we were kids. We watched their cartoons, we ate hamburgers, we wore their sneakers, we addicted to Hollywood movies... Therefore, I began to feel myself comfortable there day by day. Besides, studying in New York, seeing professors from a variety of countries, spending time with Chinese, Portuguese, Mexican classmates were wonderful. I took great elective courses according to my personal interests. They helped me to improve my intellectuality. So glad I had such an experience.*

As it is articulated clearly by one of the participants, Emily, cultural richness is the most important value provided by the overseas experience. Additionally, she thought that living in an English-speaking country is very important for a language professional. She expressed her thoughts as:

*It's very important to live in an English-speaking country for an English language teacher. Cultural richness is the key feature of a good language teacher. If you experience different cultures, you'll learn different things to teach your students in addition to language. AI experienced living alone in the United States. It was very important for me because this experience helped me get on my feet.*

According to the participants, offering a wide range of elective courses from multiple disciplines is one of the major advantages of a dual diploma program. They indicated that these courses provided them with awareness about the importance of being intellectually equipped as prospective English language teachers. For instance, Irmak shared her pleasure about taking courses according to her personal interests and felt herself more competent in cultural awareness:

*When I was in the United States, I was really shocked because the university offered us thousands of elective courses. A teacher is responsible of providing students new perspectives. Therefore, these elective courses may help us to raise more intellectual students. If you ask me about the daily life... I mean, I cannot say that it was very hard for me to adapt the American culture because it was not very different from our daily routines in Turkey. It was very important that we lived in an English-speaking country as prospective English language teachers.*

Similar to Irmak, Jane drew attention to the richness of the content of the elective courses offered in the United States. According to her, elective courses made great contributions to their intellectual profundity. She asserted that a dual diploma program improves students both personally and professionally:

*You can take Ceramics course if you are interested in arts or Crime and Society course if you are fond of detective stories. This is the richness of studying in a dual diploma program. These courses prompt you to think on a big scale. English isn't the only thing that you should teach your students. You have to be culturally competent. I can clearly say that studying in a dual diploma program makes you improve yourself both as an individual and a teacher.*

Defne thought that an overseas education provides teachers with both personal and professional growth. She indicated that she could design more effective and enjoyable lessons thanks to the courses she took in the United States. She said:

*If you have knowledge about literature, theatre, photography or world history, you can prepare more enjoyable and informative lessons for your students. For instance, I took Theatre course in the United States and we visited Broadway as part of this course. Then, we wrote a reflection paper on this play. We discussed theatre plays in the course. It was amazing! I learnt a lot. I can use these plays in my English lessons in the future.*

For all of the participants, being a graduate of a dual diploma program is a great advantage in terms of developing new worldviews of education and culture, being aware of the differences between Turkish and American education systems, travelling in a new society and meeting people from various cultures, experiencing personal change, and being more mature. The other participant, Derin, drew attention to the fact that study abroad experience provided her with socialization opportunities in terms of spending time with peers and instructors coming from various cultures. She thought that a teacher should have intellectual profundity and be aware of that teaching is not transferring the content but raising good people. She explained her thoughts:

*You take different courses from professors having interesting point of views. My understanding of being a teacher is not teaching only vocabulary or simple present tense but trying to give them what I have 'collected' until today. What I am trying to say by saying 'collection' is what I've learnt from my family, my peers, and my instructors about both English language and life.*

In addition, Jane felt herself very lucky as an international student. She expressed that she had a chance to compare Turkish and American education systems thanks to this program. She summarized advantages of attending dual diploma program as a graduate-to-be as follows:

*I can say that I feel myself very lucky to be a part of a dual diploma program. I become more mature because I lived in the United States for a year without my family. I experienced the American culture, met different people from various countries, being more fluent in English, and last but not least, having chance to observe and compare the Turkish and American education systems as a prospective teacher. I took interesting and content-rich elective courses in New York.*

#### Theme 5: Changing future plans

It is surprising that two of the participants were not willing to choose teaching as a profession after graduation. This is because these two participants chose this department as a result of living conditions, while the rest of them stated that teaching was their dream job. For instance, Beatrice stated that being a teacher brings along great responsibilities and it is not very easy to accomplish for her. She explained herself as:

*My plans changed. I am not planning to become a teacher in the future because I believe that teaching is more than teaching the lesson, but also educating students. You should do it with love and patience. If you don't love this job, you can't achieve this aim.*

Beatrice shared her plans on working at management field or pursuing a post-graduate degree on business administration. She thought that she could be a preferable job applicant for global companies because she can speak English, Italian and French, and has good communication skills. She underscored her strengths as:

*I want to work for global companies. I am willing to work in an area that I can use all the foreign languages I know. Besides, I like communicating with people. When I think about my personal skills, Public Relations department sounds like a good decision to me.*

In a similar vein, Irmak planned to pursue a master's degree in psychology or gender studies according to her academic interests. She aimed to use her academic background in Liberal Studies program. While she was sharing her future plans, she stated:

*I could not see myself as a middle school or a high school teacher- it does not match with my personality. I decided to continue my career as an academician. I want my students to listen to me with full attention and take their own*

*responsibilities. In other words, I don't want to become a mother of 20-30 students.*

On the other hand, Defne, Emily and Jane were eager to choose teaching as a career. Even one of the participants, namely Jane, who previously decided to be an academician, changed her mind after attending fieldwork in the United States. After working with children, she realized that she loved children and decided to be an English language teacher. One of the participants, Beatrice, appreciated the dual diploma program and shared her future plans in the following vignette:

*Receiving two diplomas provide us enough background to seek job opportunities in different areas. For me, using the language every day in an English- speaking country, and living in an unprejudiced and open-minded community make a positive impact on me. By means of spending a year with people from all over the world, I am planning to work in global companies, not teaching. I know that this faculty will give me a 'teacher identity' but I have no patience to deal with the students to earn too little money, unfortunately.*

Similar to Beatrice, Derin, complained about the fact that teaching is not seen as a prestigious job in Turkey, which leads her to be in search of creating job alternatives after the graduation. In addition, she stated that low-income is one of the major problems in the teaching profession in Turkey. She indicated that she was planning to use her Liberal Studies diploma in the future:

*In our country, teaching is not a prestigious job. You know, everybody says 'If you can't be a doctor or a lawyer, at least be a teacher.' Being a teacher brings financial problems in our country, unfortunately. I may earn much money by creating alternatives with my Liberal Arts diploma. In short, I'm about to graduate from this department with no intention of being a teacher.*

## **Discussion**

All participants indicated that despite of the insufficient duration and procedure of a two-day long international fieldwork experience, it was beneficial for them to experience the school environment in an American school that made contributions to their professional development in terms of broadening their views about teaching in multicultural classrooms. Additionally, they reported that an international fieldwork experience provided them with teaching contexts in which they could gain self-

confidence, learn adaptability and respect to others. As the participants of this study reported that an international fieldwork experience gave them opportunity to see a new workplace in the United States and widen their views about real classroom and the teaching community, it is in line with Kabilan's (2013) study in terms of having new worldviews and adapting to new working cultures as the major benefits of international practicum experiences for prospective teachers.

In this study, all participants indicated that they found an international fieldwork experience beneficial in terms of gaining more confidence in their intercultural competence, teaching practices, and dealing with different situations that provide them with self-confidence and adaptability. This finding is in line with the findings of studies conducted by Chan and Parr (2012), Cantalini-Williams and Tessaro (2011), and Cushner and Mahon (2002). A similar result was reported by Walters, Garii, and Walters's (2009) study, which concluded that international fieldwork experiences provide prospective teachers with the chance to develop a new perspective about cultural differences. In contrast to Walters et al.'s (2009) study, this study found that fieldwork experience had no significant impact on their sense of teaching profession and teacher images in their minds due to the fact that the fieldwork experience was too short to feel immersed to the teaching community.

Another significant finding of this study is that the practicum experience offered an opportunity to notice the clash between theory and practice. According to the participants, their perceptions about teaching and the role of a teacher have changed after experiencing classroom realities during practicum. They stated that theories they learnt about teaching during their undergraduate education were 'prescriptions' which do not match all type of classrooms. On the other hand, while the prospective teachers initially believed that teaching profession is one of the admirable jobs in the world, after practicum, they began to think that teaching was not appealing, because of its draining nature and low- status. Thus, their positive beliefs on teaching profession showed a changing pattern and turned into negative beliefs. Therefore, some of the participants stated that they did not want to become a teacher because of the undesired realities of the profession in Turkey. Considering that this is a dual diploma program, having two

diplomas was a great chance to seek job opportunities in different areas. These findings are in line with the findings revealed in Yazan's (2015), Armutcu and Yaman's (2010), Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2013), and Flores and Day's (2006) studies.

This study found that the overseas experience of pre-service EFL teachers had an influence on their perception of professional identity as prospective teachers. This occurred as a result of their engagement in multicultural environment, increased English language fluency, experiencing cultural richness and broadening horizons with the help of various elective courses from different disciplines. In addition, the participants pointed out that this experience helped them learn being patient, feel a sense of freedom, deal with alienation and improve personal skills. The participants highlighted that studying in a multicultural environment helps them raise awareness of multi-layered nature of classrooms, including students from diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, which is supported by the findings of Stachowski and Sparks (2007), and Barr (1995).

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study put forth that spending a year in the United States made a great contribution to pre-service EFL teachers' personal growth in terms of broadening their worldviews, improving their personal skills, making contributions to their perceptions about education and culture, providing new perspectives about differences between the Turkish and American education systems, providing travelling opportunities, and giving them a chance to meet new people from all over the world in a multicultural environment. As a great advantage of having overseas education, participants felt themselves more versatile, open-minded, respectful to differences, and intellectually developed as dual diploma program graduates. As the results showed, taking courses from variety of disciplines was found to be beneficial, since they believed that having intellectual profundity is one of the main necessities to be a good teacher, apart from being fluent in English, innovative, enthusiastic, motivated, patient, and eager to raise human beings for future generations. All these findings are in line with the findings provided by Walters et al. (2009).

Considering that this is a dual diploma program, having two diplomas was perceived as a great chance to seek job opportunities in different areas. However, it was criticized that the procedure and the duration of fieldwork experience in the United States was not effective for pre-service teachers to gain awareness about the teaching profession and their teaching selves. In that sense, the urgent need for providing more teaching practice courses is one of the major results of this current study. This study also shed light on the fact that completing teaching practicum in Turkey has not significantly changed participants' perceptions about their teaching selves as a result of a lack of having enough feedback and motivation from their mentor teachers. On the other hand, it was emphasized by two participants that the fact that teachers deal with unnecessary paperwork, problematic classrooms, difficult students, demanding parents and a strict national curriculum by doing a low-status, highly stable and low- paid job in Turkey, they were not willing to pursue teaching as a career. In this sense, dual diploma program administrators should make an attempt to redesign the curriculum to make improvements in teaching practices in real classroom settings before graduation. It is very important that pre-service teachers are provided with enough teaching practices, motivation, support and constructive feedback to make them well-prepared and confident before entering the profession.

This study was conducted with a small group of pre-service EFL teachers in a dual diploma program. So, conducting this study in different universities may provide researchers with deeper understanding about the current situation of dual diploma programs. Further research could explore program graduates in order to understand what factors influence their decisions to pursue teaching as a career or seeking job alternatives in different fields. Tracing program graduates in their workplaces and making in-depth interviews with them may provide researchers with an understanding about outcomes of the program.



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