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Research Article

Pre-Service Language Teachers and Practitioner Research: Investigating Professional Role Identity Formation

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Abstract: Emerging from a practitioner research course aimed at equipping pre-service language teachers with research skills, this study aimed to explore perceptions of research engagement and professional role identities constructed through it. Employing narrative inquiry as the research methodology and focusing on one of the research groups formed, we analyzed the written and oral narratives of two pre-service language teachers engaged in Exploratory Practice, a prominent form of practitioner research. Our findings indicated that the participants viewed their involvement in practitioner research positively and benefited from it both personally and professionally, achieving a transformative shift from a singular student-focused perspective to a more complex dual viewpoint that also embraces aspects of a teacher's perspective. Among the various professional role identities that language teachers enact, our participants emphasized the roles of 'care provider' and 'motivator' over more traditional role identities such as 'presenter' and 'manager'. In addition, the roles of 'learner' and 'researcher', when combined, were found to be more dominant than the role of 'knowledgeable', signifying an inquiry and growth mindset. We conclude that a course design requiring active research engagement and reflection on teacher identity offers significant benefits for language teacher education and, therefore, should be included in the curricula of such programs.

Keywords: *pre-service language teachers, practitioner research, research engagement, professional role identities, teacher education*

INTRODUCTION

Practitioner research has gained significant acknowledgment as a valuable tool for teachers to enhance their teaching practices and professional development. However, despite the growing recognition that various forms of practitioner research have received, their implementation remains relatively infrequent (Borg, 2017). Among various factors, Borg (2017) identifies 'identity-related barriers' as a key reason for their limited uptake and argues that if teachers do not see teacher research as part of who they are, even if they have enough knowledge and skills, it is unlikely that they will engage in research activities. Therefore, incorporating an academic research skills course into the curricula of language teacher education (LTE) programs without establishing a clear link between research engagement and language teacher identity (LTI) might not yield the intended results. The theoretical concern behind the current study pertains to such a missed opportunity and the promising potential of a practitioner research course with a further focus on LTI to encourage research engagement among language teachers.

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Danielewicz (2001) views becoming a teacher as an identity-forming process by the individual and the others, such as teacher educators. However, there remains a paucity of evidence on whether teacher educators could ascribe researcher identities to future language teachers or, more importantly, whether those identities will be embraced and claimed by these teachers themselves. Although previous studies (Akyel, 2015; Trent, 2010, 2012) have shown that teachers are more likely to view conducting research as part of teaching after engaging in research, they also reveal that teachers have reservations about continuing these activities in their professional practice by adopting a teacher-researcher identity. In this respect, this study will contribute to the existing discourse about the possibility of assisting pre-service teachers in the process of becoming teacher-researchers by answering the following research questions:

(1) How do pre-service language teachers perceive their lived experiences of practitioner research engagement?
(2) How do pre-service language teachers construct their LTI through practitioner research engagement?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Exploratory Practice

Exploratory Practice (EP) emerged in the early 1990s through the work of Dick Allwright and his partner language teachers and teacher educators (Allwright, 2003). It is a form of practitioner research in which "learners as well as teachers are encouraged to investigate their own learning/teaching practices, while concurrently practicing the target language" (Hanks, 2017, p. 2). In EP, the priority is on 'puzzles' (a term replacing 'research questions') related to language learning and teaching, and it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena subject to these puzzles, which will improve the quality of life in the classroom (Hanks & Dikilitaş, 2018). In line with the other forms of practitioner research methods, e.g., reflective practice and action research, EP views education as a social process, aims to empower teachers, includes elements of reflection, and claims that "the arena for research should be the classrooms and the pedagogic practices of practitioners" (Hanks, 2017, p. 3). However, EP also differs from other research methods in that it emphasizes the importance of the agency of learners as well as teachers (Hanks, 2017), prioritizes understanding over solutions by focusing on 'why' instead of 'how to' (Allwright, 2005; Miller, 2009), and recommends that the inquiry undertaken is integrated into classroom practices (Miller & Cunha, 2019). By doing these, it aims to "minimize the burden" of already overloaded teachers and, therefore, "make it a continuous enterprise" (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260, original emphases).

Constructing Language Teacher Identities

Although the importance of LTIs is widely recognized today, there was a long period in ELT history when language teachers were seen as passive technicians who were supposed to apply certain methodologies for learning to take place (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This shift in perspective took place in the 1990s, with more scholars arguing that "issues of education should be addressed first and foremost in terms of identities and modes of belonging and only secondarily in terms of skills and information" (Wenger, 1998, p. 263). Thanks to classroom-based research, teachers, who represent a multitude of social and cultural roles and identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997) and bring their whole identities intrinsically to the classroom (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020), were recognized as critical components of language classrooms (Tsui, 2007; Varghese et al., 2005). When LTI emerged as an object of research, how identity was conceptualized had already shifted from a psychological process to a contextualized social process in line with the sociocultural turn (Miller, 2009). Much of the recent literature on LTI since then has embraced this new understanding of identity as "multiple, shifting, and in conflict" (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22) and "fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 419). It is "an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 135) that is "constructed, maintained, and negotiated to a

significant extent through language and discourse" (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 23). We also draw upon these widely accepted conceptualizations in the field when seeking to take a snapshot of our participants' "dynamic and everchanging" (Yazan, 2018, p. 25) LTIs constructed in the process of their research engagement. Theoretically, we adopt Barkhuizen and Mendieta's (2020) framework (Figure 1), which acknowledges various aspects of the personal and professional identities of teachers and situates their LTI in an institutional and community context first and a macro-sociocultural and ideological context next.

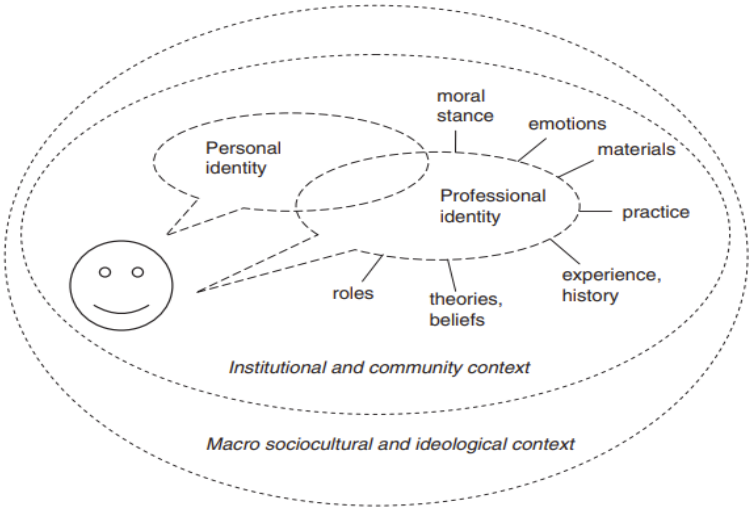

Figure 1. Barkhuizen and Mendieta's (2020, p. 5) facets of language teacher professional identity

In this study, however, we focus on the pre-service language teachers' professional role identity (PRI), "a finer-grained entity than one's larger identity, which is composed of the amalgam of role identities that reflect the multiple roles one fills in life" (Martel, 2017, p. 89). Similarly, Farrell (2011) describes teacher role identity as "the configuration of interpretations that language teachers attach to themselves, as related to the different roles they enact and the different professional activities that they participate in as well as how others see these roles and activities" (p. 91). Collecting data from three Canadian college teachers through group discussions and interviews, Farrell (2011) identified 16 role identities grouped under three major categories: (1) teacher as manager, (2) teacher as acculturator, and (3) teacher as professional. Since then, various other studies have used his framework and/or taxonomy to investigate the role identities of university instructors of EFL (Aghaei et al., 2020; Butler, 2024; Moritani & Iwai, 2019; Yesilbursa, 2012; Yi & Meng, 2022), university instructors of ESOL (Fowler, 2017), university instructors of EAP (Atai et al., 2018), and in-service teachers of EFL (Rahimi & Bigdeli, 2014; Sahragard & Sadeghi, 2017). The present study also employs Farrell's (2011) taxonomy in its exploration of pre-service EFL teachers' PRI construction, which appears to have received scant attention in this line of research.

METHODOLOGY

We adopted a qualitative approach by employing narrative inquiry, a methodology that has been well-established since Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) seminal work. Exploring the lived experiences of research engagement and how identities develop throughout these experiences, this study required a methodology that could capture the complexities of both phenomena and narrative inquiry offered an effective way of doing so (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2016). As noted by Creswell and Poth (2016), "narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals" (p.71), which makes it an optimal approach for exploring the lived experiences of research engagement. Additionally, researchers interested in identity exploration are so captivated by narrative inquiry that identity has become "the single most frequently mentioned theme in narrative studies of teaching and learning" (Barkhuizen et al., 2013, p. 12). Considering these insights, we employed narrative inquiry to gain a

detailed understanding of pre-service language teachers' research engagement and identity development.

The Setting

Both researchers of the present study work as teacher educators at the LTE program under investigation in Türkiye. Pre-service English language teachers in this four-year program take a general theoretical course titled 'Research Methods in Education' in their second year, which focuses more on academic research. However, the majority of the graduates are employed as K-12 teachers of English, not as academicians/researchers. Therefore, as suggested by Dikilitaş and Bostancıoğlu (2019), we believed that pre-service teachers in our program needed to learn about practitioner research and, more importantly, get a chance to put the theoretical information they were presented with into practice by conducting a research project of their own. With this in mind, we designed a new research course following Dikilitaş and Bostancıoğlu's (2019) specialized book titled 'Inquiry and Research Skills for Language Teachers' for the third-year pre-service language teachers of English who have already taken the Research Methods in Education course in their second year. Offering a structural course design based on the argument that research should be a fundamental component of LTE programs, this book effectively met our course and research objectives.

The practitioner research course, taught by the first researcher, comprised 14 weeks of instruction, with two contact hours per week. Designed to develop the research competencies essential for pre-service language teachers, the course consisted of five modules (see Appendix A for the contents). Following the first module on the concept of research through an EP lens, pre-service teachers learned about puzzles, a term replacing 'research questions' of academic research, and were asked to form groups of two or three to discuss and develop their own puzzles. Collaborative inquiry was preferred to individual inquiry in line with the third principle of EP, 'involve everyone' (Hanks, 2017). Thus, 12 groups were formed, and each group decided on a puzzle to investigate together. This instruction-followed-by-practice pattern continued throughout the course with modules on data collection, data analysis, and tying it together on a research poster. Supervision was provided to each group individually during practice weeks. As for the requirements of this course, pre-service teachers were asked to submit their data collection instruments, the data they gathered, and their analysis of that data as well as write five narratives to offer insights into their research journey and LTI construction during this process (see Appendix B for the weekly coursework and Appendix C for the written narrative prompts). These components collectively constituted their midterm assessment. Additionally, at the end of the term, they were expected to present the research project they conducted on a poster, which included an abstract and four sections, namely introduction, methodology, findings and discussion (see Appendix D for an example). This poster served as their final assessment. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation approach was adopted, incorporating both process and outcome dimensions

Data Collection

When the course ended, employing purposeful sampling and privatizing depth over breadth, we contacted the two members of one of the research groups, Alex and Horus (pseudonyms). Both participants had taken the practitioner research course this study investigated in their third year with the rest of their cohort and decided to work together when asked to form research groups and choose a puzzle in line with EP (Hanks, 2017). To prevent potential bias, we did not seek their consent to participate in this study until the course was completed. They were chosen based on the topic of their collaborative research project, the intricate relationship of teachers with students experiencing problems in their personal lives, considering its close links to the multifaceted nature of LTIs. Alex and Horus both agreed to the use of the research poster (see Appendix D) and the narratives they had already produced as part of their course requirements and to take part in an additional series of interviews designed for the present study (see Appendix E for the interview questions). The written narratives and the research poster submitted as coursework had been produced in English and were retained in their original form without any language corrections to preserve the authentic voice and

intent of the narratives. On the other hand, the interviews, which took approximately one hour each, were conducted in the language choice of the participants, Turkish. The Zoom recordings were later transcribed, translated into English, and checked by the researchers multiple times to maintain data consistency. Therefore, as demonstrated by Figure 2, the empirical data for this investigation consisted of the written narratives generated throughout the research course, the research poster produced at the end of it, and the oral narratives from a series of three semi-structured phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2019). Collecting data from multiple sources, we aimed to achieve data triangulation and prevent researchers' bias (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

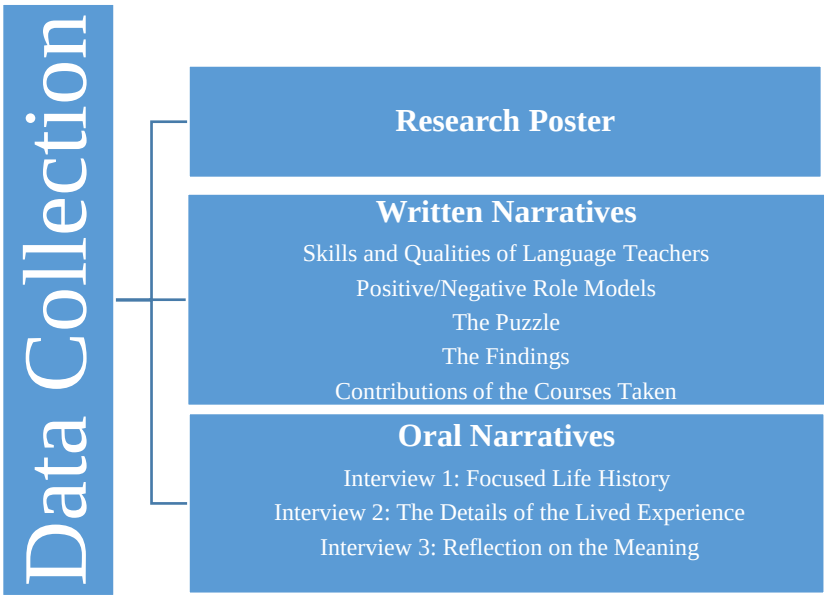

Figure 2. Multiple Sources of Data Collected for the Study

Data Analysis

We first formed brief life histories of our participants, offering valuable data in its own right (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and providing essential context to enhance our understanding of the data (Flores & Day, 2006). An inductive, data-driven thematic analysis was conducted for the data collected in response to the first research question addressing the pre-service teachers' perceptions of practitioner research engagement. For the second research question, a deductive approach was employed to analyze the data using the taxonomy of teacher role identities proposed by Farrell (2011) However, because of the various contextual differences, especially considering that Farrell's (2011) taxonomy was developed based on data from experienced teachers working at a language course, the role identities identified by this taxonomy did not align adequately with the participants in our study. For example, while some role identities, such as the vendor, never showed up in our data, others that were absent in Farrell's (2011) study, such as the mentor, were evident in ours. Therefore, this taxonomy was adopted as an initial framework and subsequently adapted in response to insights gained from the first round of data analysis conducted by both researchers. After finalizing the taxonomy, a second round of analysis was conducted by the first researcher to reach findings regarding the construction of the LTIs and, more specifically, the PRIs of our participants. With the issues highlighted above, we attempted to ensure analytical depth and consistency of our analysis developed from the data, revisited and refined via multiple rounds of re-reading by the first researcher and shaped by the feedback from the second researcher on emerging categories. We believed that such a collaborative engagement helped challenge potential bias and contributed to the refinement of the results. In addition, we enhanced the trustworthiness of our analysis by incorporating data triangulation across multiple sources of written narratives and interviews.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Life Histories of Alex and Horus

In his oral and written narratives, Alex explicitly described himself as "a bit lazy" and not very attentive to schoolwork. English classes were always challenging in primary school, and he continued to struggle with it in middle school, too. However, a positive change in his perspective occurred in high school, thanks to a dedicated English language teacher who told him that he had "a gift in English". Dissatisfied with his math and science teachers, he decided to pursue a language major in high school and be an English language teacher. He did well in his university entrance exam and was able to get a place in the English Language Teaching department. He initially faced difficulties in productive language skills during the first term of the preparatory school, and later came the one-and-a-half-year period of online courses, which he found less engaging during the COVID-19 pandemic. He felt more connected during face-to-face education in the second year of university, but his classes were still mostly theoretical. His expectation of more practice-oriented courses was finally met in his third year, allowing the application of theoretical knowledge acquired in his first and second years. He was in his fourth and final year of university and was gaining valuable teaching experience from his practicum when the interviews were conducted.

On the other hand, Horus had a successful academic start, ranking first in school until the sixth grade, when a change in the curriculum and the impact of puberty led to a decline in interest and academic performance. Despite excelling in math and history, English became a challenging subject mostly due to the teachers he described as aggressive and ineffective. High school marked another period of disinterest until meeting an inspiring teacher of English who motivated a great change. Intensive English study in the language department with him and private tutoring resulted in significant improvement and led to success in getting a place in a university. However, university life away from family posed new challenges, impacting his daily routines and finances. This, unfortunately, resulted in psychological problems and concentration issues at preparatory school. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, he returned to his hometown, which made these challenges disappear, but online education led to another decline in academic interest. There was a gradual recovery after starting face-to-face education in the second year, but he noticed a mismatch between university education and the practical skills needed for teaching in schools, which created doubts about the overall utility of the education he received. After completing his third year, he participated in the Work & Travel program in the USA and decided to take a 2-year break from university to improve his language skills. He was still in the USA working as a delivery driver when the interviews were conducted.

Perceptions of Practitioner Research Engagement

Regarding their research engagement, the first theme recurring in their narratives was personal relevance. First of all, the data collected revealed that both Alex and Horus already had an investigative stance characterized by a strong desire to seek knowledge, explore new ideas, and understand the world even before taking the research course aiming to promote it (Dikilitaş & Bostancıoğlu, 2019). Despite differences in earlier life experiences, a common thread that indicated a curiosity-driven inquiry mindset was found to be running through their narratives:

> I love research and self-development, I love to learn new information every day. I have a great curiosity about this… so it can be from podcasts, it can be from scientists or TEDx Talks, it can be from different places. (Horus, Interview 1)

> There were some names in the books I read that pushed me to learn and be curious, but not in school. One of them was a theoretical physicist Richard Feynman. I tried to resemble his character… His curiosity about everything made me so excited. (Alex, Interview 1)

As can be seen, both Alex and Horus mentioned enjoying acquiring knowledge across a broad range of subjects and engaging in continuous self-education, demonstrating skills in managing one's own learning (Candy, 1991). Horus also mentioned that they usually engaged in intellectual discussions with each other, and he particularly enjoyed sharing what he learned during stimulating conversations. Therefore, it can be said that research engagement was personally relevant to their inquiry mindset, which was characterized by their love of learning and deep and genuine curiosity about the world around them. Secondly, the theme of personal relevance emerged in the reasons why they chose to explore their particular puzzle question: how teachers should approach students experiencing problems in school due to challenges in their personal lives. For instance, Alex and Horus both consistently referred to the connection between their puzzle and past lives:

> When we were creating the project, we created it by taking examples from our own lives… When I was creating this puzzle, I remembered a friend of mine from high school. (Alex, Interview 2)

> So I think that's why we chose this puzzle in your class at some point. Because I can understand the situation of those students very well. (Horus, Interview 1)

In addition to their past, the participants believed that their research engagement had personal relevance to their future selves as teachers. "Classroom life is a complex system that requires research work" (Xu, 2016, p. 121) and, as acknowledged by our participants, research projects during pre-service years can prepare them for it by providing the knowledge and the skills needed.

> [Thanks to this project] I may even find a solution to make use of in my teaching career hopefully. (Horus, Interview 2)

> I can use the knowledge I gained in this project in my own teaching life. (Alex, Interview 2)

Achieving personal relevance was obviously in alignment with the pre-established objectives of this research course designed for practitioners (Allwright, 2005); however, it is noteworthy that the participants have gained awareness of the transferability of the knowledge and skills they acquired during the practitioner research course to their future careers as teachers, thereby reinforcing the intended outcomes. Our analysis suggested that concepts clustered within the first theme of personal relevance significantly contributed to the emergence of the desired outcomes of our research course, which we grouped within our second theme, personal and professional benefits. Among these benefits observed were its contributions to the participants' critical thinking, interpretation, and deep reflection abilities, which were especially salient in Horus's responses.

> This course also gave us the ability to look critically. I think it was a really useful course. I really think it added to our ability to interpret some things… see more clearly, see more statistically. (Horus, Interview 2)

> This would not have even occurred to me without this course. This course also gave me this chance. I was able to concentrate on the topic in my mind. (Horus, Interview 2)

By giving "space to think" (Trent, 2010, p. 163), research engagement provided opportunities for reflection and becoming more reflective, which was also reported as a benefit of research engagement by Akyel (2015), is an important asset for teachers (Farrell, 2011). In addition, Alex appreciated the chance to learn how to conduct a research project during his pre-service years, which was highlighted by his experiences in the practicum.

> When I was doing my practicum, our mentor teacher, was carrying out projects such as Tübitak or Erasmus. We normally did not have the opportunity to produce and execute such a

> long-term project, except for the one in your course… if we had come out of the university without having learned anything like this, I think we would have a very difficult time in our own teaching experience. (Alex, Interview 2)

Seeing that teacher projects carried significance in his practicum school as well, he could develop another layer of appreciation for the opportunity of conducting one afforded by the research course. This finding supports previous research (Akyel, 2015; Trent, 2012) that revealed the importance of the school contexts in strengthening (or weakening) the possibilities of such activities for teachers. Notably, he made further references to research as an activity broadening the horizons of teachers, and therefore contributing to their students and also their colleagues, when shared.

> I think that teachers should first improve themselves with this research information and in this way, the effect on students' language learning will increase. (Alex, Interview 3)

> …Teachers should be able to do research among themselves and explain to each other. I think they should be involved in this kind of research so that their horizons are broadened. (Alex, Interview 3)

As stated above, Alex considered dissemination of the findings to be an integral part of research and also voiced his willingness to continue running joint research projects and sharing findings just like they did as pre-service teachers. However, acknowledging certain challenges that come with that, he stated that he was not sure about how often he would be able to have energy for it. It is important to note that although confidently expressing the benefits of their research engagement, both participants also made references to the difficulties they experienced, especially during data collection/analysis, and the help they needed to seek from their classmates or the instructor to overcome them. Earlier studies (Akyel, 2015; Trent, 2010, 2012) have also reported similar findings revealing the challenges pre-service teachers had to face and the reservations they had about their future engagement with research as full-time teachers. In general, however, for our participants, the benefits far outweighed the challenges, and although not very frequently, teachers could still get involved in small-scale research projects.

Finally, we identified another significant benefit that emerged when the narratives Alex and Horus wrote on the reasons why they chose their puzzle and their research poster were compared. In their narratives written at the very beginning of their research journey, it was clear that our participants looked at their puzzle through the lens of a student and conveyed their dissatisfaction with teachers' neglect, authoritarian behavior, and focus on teaching content over fostering a supportive and caring learning environment.

> At this point, the problematic ones are the teachers and their attitudes. Fossilized old teachers who do not care about their students' feelings and ages blame their students for not understanding and attending their lessons and threaten them to make them listen to their lessons. Thus, a student who has a problem on that day or who has a problem with the teacher does not want to join or attend to their lessons. Later on, they are treated as being lazy or ignorant because blaming it on students is easier than caring about those students' problems for many teachers… Instead of losing a student by ignoring his or her problems, a teacher should try his or her best to take that student back and get his or her love instead of hate. (Horus, Narrative 3)

> When I was in high school, I saw that many teachers of mine never cared about students who had problems. Some of those students were sleeping, some couldn't give their attention to lessons and these were not a problem for teachers. I believe that they think their only job is to teach whatever they can before time runs out and go home… If teachers should have tried to help him maybe, tried to talk to him, he could have been a more successful person in life. (Alex, Narrative 3)

However, when they shared their research in the research poster in the end, a shift in perspective was apparent. The initial standpoint, considering teachers as the primary cause and/or sole responsible party, transformed into a more balanced and realistic viewpoint:

> Many ideas point out that it's not exactly somebody's fault or duty to help students to be more successful and involved in the lessons; everyone should take part to overcome them. (Horus and Alex, Research Poster)

When asked about this shift in perspective during the second interview, Alex and Horus reflected on the complexities of classroom management and teacher responsibilities. Their responses illustrated their understanding of the constraints teachers could face in addressing individual student needs. Alex highlighted the practical limitations that prevent teachers from offering individualized attention to each student. Horus's response underlined an awareness of the division of labor within educational settings, acknowledging that while teachers play an essential role in student well-being, their ability to address psychological challenges is constrained by structural factors, which might be solved by collaboration.

> So you can't pay special attention to each student. You don't have enough time. For example, when I was studying, the teachers would try to take care of the students, but the time was not enough. So we were saying, how can that be? I mean, he can take care of everyone, I thought he had enough time, but then, you realize that it is very difficult. (Alex, Interview 2)

> Some of them [their participants] did not see it as their job. I mean, "is it my job if the child's psychology is disturbed", but they did not say this with bad intention, of course, because they rightly thought that we would not have time to devote to each student. They said we need to cooperate. I think they have a lot of justification in their own way. (Horus, Interview 3)

Although their research revealed that teachers' involvement in the lives of the students who experienced problems was still expected and needed, they were able to acknowledge the complex dynamics of the situation thanks to their research project. Therefore, it led to a transformative process, allowing for a more comprehensive view of contributing factors and acknowledging the shared responsibility for outcomes and the need for collaboration. By reflecting on the opinions of their participants, who put themselves in the shoes of teachers, Alex and Horus could achieve a more realistic, dual perspective from the eyes of both students and teachers as another key benefit of their research engagement. With this, they also portrayed the multiple, dynamic, and shifting (Varghese et al., 2005; Yazan, 2018) nature of LTIs and the identity negotiations teachers navigate throughout their careers.

LTI Construction

An important facet of teachers' professional identity is the roles and associated functions they perform as teachers (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020; Burns & Richards, 2009). Interrelated with their personal identities, the role identities that reflect the multiple roles teachers fill in their professional lives are constructed and reconstructed at different times and in different contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004) on a continuum of ready-made roles and individually-created ones (Farrell, 2011). In a similar vein, the analysis of the data collected to address the second research question supported the notion that certain role identities might be foregrounded or backgrounded depending on the context (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020). In other words, within the context of this study exploring practitioner research engagement on a specific research project its participants carried out, certain role identities that could be dominant in other contexts did not emerge, and some others that might not be typically salient elsewhere did emerge in our study. Figure 3 below presents a breakdown of PRIs as identified and mentioned by Alex and Horus, suggesting that their conceptualization of role identities is strongly

rooted in emotional and motivational dimensions of teaching over a predominant focus on instructional roles.

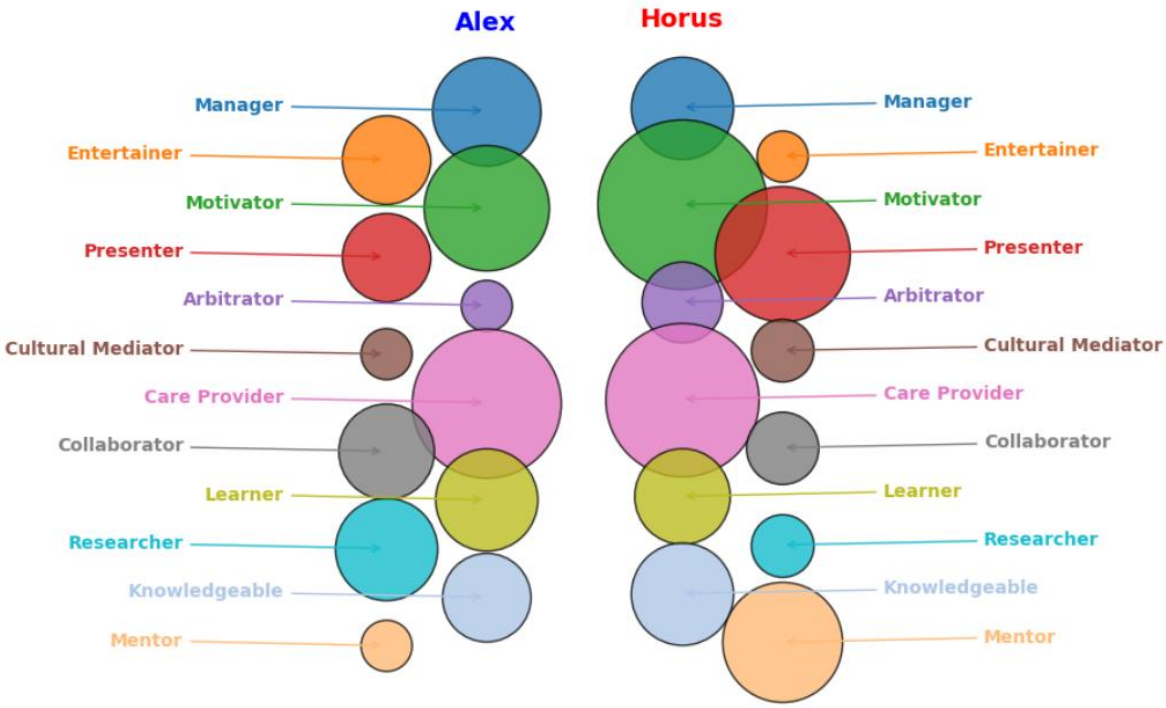

Figure 3. Role Identities of Alex and Horus

Since the research project Alex and Horus conducted focused on their puzzle regarding the relationship of teachers with students experiencing various problems in their lives, the core role identity they chose to explore was that of a 'care provider'. As discussed earlier, Alex and Horus first started by complaining about "fossilized old teachers who do not care about their students' feelings and ages" and teachers who "think their only job is to teach whatever they can before time runs out and go home" when they were designing their puzzles. Therefore, the fact that it was also one of the most common role identities our participants referred to in their narratives was expected (see Figure 3). We outline the general characteristics of this role identity guiding our analysis as follows: A teacher cast in the role of a care provider is likely to emphasize individualized support and emotional well-being both within and outside the classroom by nurturing the personal and emotional development of students, creating a supportive and empathetic learning environment. Similar to the teachers in Flores and Day's (2006) study, both Alex and Horus put great emphasis on the care provider role of teachers and stated that the care expected from a teacher could even be similar to that of a parent or sibling:

> It was about the importance of the teacher's care and attention, which we ourselves saw in the schools where we went on practicum. Because students see teachers like a parent. (Alex, Interview 2)

> I really loved English, and this was largely thanks to the teacher's attitude towards me. I mean, we became like brothers, that's how protective he was. (Horus, Interview 1)

This PRI was also identified in Aghaei et al. (2020), Butler (2024), and Yesilbursa's (2012) data, where she labeled it as 'nurturer'. A teacher's care contributes to creating a positive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and appreciated. In such an environment, students are more likely to engage actively in their learning, and this way, teachers can make a lasting impact on their students' lives and pave the way for their success both inside and outside the classroom. Talking about a friend who had family problems and also suffered financially as a student, Alex

shared his ideas on the difference he thought teachers' care could have made in his friend's life as follows:

> What I want to point out is if teachers should have tried to help him maybe, tried to talk to him, he could have been a more successful person in life. (Alex, Narrative 3)

The second most common PRI that our participants referred to was the 'motivator', which frequently appeared in other studies as well, such as Aghaei et al. (2020), Butler (2024), Moritani and Iwai (2019), Rahimi and Bigdeli (2014), and Yesilbursa (2012). This role identity shares common ground with the role of 'care provider' in their focus on enhancing student engagement. While the 'care provider' attends to the emotional needs of students, the 'motivator' encourages active participation in learning activities, and both contribute to overall student engagement and holistic development. Since both Alex and Horus met an English teacher in high school who literally changed their lives by motivating them to learn English and eventually become English teachers, the 'motivator' was identified to be a key role identity that they frequently referred to in their narratives.

> My English classes in middle school were very bad… and I really didn't like English class. Then when I went to high school, this situation changed… I decided to become a language teacher with the help of my English teacher, he told me that I have a gift in learning English and teaching it to others (Alex, Narrative 2)

> The teacher said I see potential in you, but you've never tried hard…So I evolved into a completely different person. Maybe he really had a great influence on me and I loved English very much, thanks to him I loved it very much and I tried incredibly hard in English. (Horus, Narrative 2)

With this lived experience in their backgrounds, both participants believed in the power of motivation and placed more importance on it than the traditionally more prominent roles for teachers, the 'presenter' of information or the 'manager' of the classroom. Horus expressed this notion clearly in the following words:

> Teaching techniques don't have to be great, at least not for me. I need to be motivated at some point; I know myself. I mean, if I am motivated, I can do it. (Horus, Interview 1)

The 'learner' and the 'researcher' are other closely related role identities that our participants mentioned more frequently (when combined) than another conventionally established role identity for teachers, the 'knowledgeable'. We highlight this comparison, which signifies a shift towards life-long learning since we acknowledge that they are intertwined and encompass each other (although we made a distinction between them for this study focusing on practitioner research engagement). In our analysis, we attributed the 'researcher' identity exclusively when participants directly referenced engagement with practitioner research. On the other hand, we categorized it as a reference to the 'learner' identity when research was discussed as a learning activity involving books or other resources. As discussed earlier, both Alex and Horus had a curiosity-driven inquiry mindset fueled by their love of learning and enjoyed learning about various topics. Horus also mentioned his satisfaction when sharing what he learned with others as the most important thing he loved about being a teacher.

> When I learn information randomly, I should definitely go and share it with someone. If I keep it to myself, I feel like I have learned it for nothing. I mean, let others learn it too, let them be surprised by this information as I was surprised by it. It was a little bit like that, of course. I mean, my love for research is incredible. (Horus, Interview 3)

The 'learner' is indeed a common PRI that was identified in many other studies, such as Aghaei et al. (2020), Atai et al. (2018), Fowler (2017), Rahimi and Bigdeli (2014), and Sahragard and

Sadeghi (2017). The 'researcher', however, appeared relatively less frequently in the related literature; for example, in Atai et al. (2018), participants referred to the benefits of teachers conducting needs analysis, and in Aghaei et al. (2020), one participant was observed to be conducting action research to overcome a problem. For Alex, the sources of information for teachers were more varied, including students, research activities, or other teachers' research activities:

> I definitely think they continue to do so [learn]… since teachers are always together with students who have different perspectives and different ideas, they always add something to themselves by evaluating their perspectives and ideas…. I think that teachers should first improve themselves with research information and in this way, the effect on students' language learning will increase… I think about running research projects on students like this or with students in my own class or at the school where I work, I mean, I even think that I will still be in touch with some of my classmates at the moment and I am thinking about sharing data with them or carrying out joint projects with them. (Alex, Interview 3)

As in the words of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), "[t]he emphasis here is … making classrooms sites for inquiry—that is, learning how to teach and improve one's teaching by collecting and analyzing the "data" of daily life in schools" (p. 17). Here, Alex also referred to the 'collaborator' identity teachers when mentioning conducting research not only on students but also 'with' students, which EP puts great emphasis on (Hanks, 2017). In addition, as they did in the practitioner research course, he considered partnering with other teachers on joint research projects and sharing their data with other colleagues in the future, further enacting the role of the 'collaborator'. This PRI, also observed in Sahragard and Sadeghi (2017), suggests that teachers learn from and with others through collaboration. Although we cannot deny that teachers are expected to be knowledgeable, valuing the 'learner', 'researcher', and 'collaborator' roles promotes a growth mindset among teachers. Thus, whether it be thanks to students, research activities of one's own, or other colleagues, "[t]o teach is to learn" (la Velle, 2024, p. 367).

Although less common than the role identities discussed above, some other roles that teachers are typically expected to fulfil were emergent in the narratives of our participants, such as the role of 'entertainer' when referring to the drawbacks of boring classes, as in Rahimi and Bigdeli (2014), Sahragard and Sadeghi (2017), Moritani and Iwai (2019), and Yesilbursa (2012); 'arbitrator' when mentioning the feedback teachers give, as in Sahragard and Sadeghi (2017), and 'cultural mediator' when discussing the need to include target culture in language instruction as in Aghaei et al. (2020). However, there existed an additional role identity warranting further discussion since it very distinctively emerged in the narratives of one participant. Horus described his role identity, which he called the 'mentor', as the dominant role identity in a way that encompassed all the other roles he embraced.

> I mean, I was sure that I could succeed in teaching English, but after a while I felt like my talent started to shift to mentoring…because I can't agree with the part that when you teach children, you are an English teacher and you will only teach English. I am their teacher. I will teach them life. Not just English. I think that's the way it should be…, I have to teach life to those children. I should also be able to pass on my own experiences. I think I should be able to touch their perspectives. (Horus, Interview 3)

Even if it appeared only twice, Alex also had a similar notion attributing the role of a mentor to teachers:

> Because as a teacher, we will not only teach content matter in our own field and our teaching process is to support students in every field, that is, to support them in every field, to teach and educate in every field. (Alex, Interview 3)

This perspective highlights a fundamental aspect of teaching that extends beyond the subject matter itself, and indeed, nothing gets left out when aiming to teach about life or educate and be a role model in every field (Flores & Day, 2006). The reason why Horus adopted such a role identity could be the teacher who had made such a big impact on his life with the way he lived his life and 'become an idol' for him. In essence, it is a known fact that teachers often mirror aspects of the educators who left a lasting impression on them (Flores & Day, 2006). Upon entering LTE, they bring with them their personal journey through the school system, making their own learning history feel directly pertinent to their new role (Britzman, 2003). Horus's approach to teaching English transcends the boundaries of language instruction to enable a holistic educational experience that nurtures students' minds, hearts, and souls by embodying characteristics or approaches similar to those of his own past teacher. Therefore, it can be concluded that whether consciously or unconsciously, these influences shape how teachers construct their LTIs and execute their role identities.

CONCLUSION

Characterization of LTI development during pre-service years is fundamental to our increased understanding of the fluid nature of LTIs, which we critically need in order to be able to effectively support the identity construction of pre-service teachers (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). By creating opportunities for them to consider research engagement as part of their identity during this period, teacher educators can help to make their future research activities possible and sustainable (Borg, 2017). With this in mind, in this study, we explored the integration of a research course into an LTE program with a further focus on LTI construction. Since "identities are constructed in and through narrative" (Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 656), we employed narratives "both as a research tool and as a learning tool for [pre-service] teachers to make sense of, and lead, their own ongoing learning experiences" (Yazan, 2018, p. 5) and captured these processes in real-time, revealing how identity construction is shaped by reflection, interaction, and hands-on research experiences.

We demonstrated that, with a chance to engage in a self-selected research project and reflect upon their experiences, our participants underwent a transformative shift in perspective of teacher roles, transitioning from a unidimensional student viewpoint to a more nuanced dual perspective that incorporates elements of a teacher's standpoint as well. In addition, acknowledging the contributions of research as an activity that cultivates critical thinking and reflection and appreciating the unique opportunity to carry out a personally relevant project during pre-service years, our participants were found to have positive perceptions of their research engagement. Both participants acknowledged the importance and utility of practitioner research and expressed a willingness to undertake research projects in the future, embracing 'the researcher' as part of their PRI. The findings of this study also emphasized other multifaceted role identities of teachers, encompassing elements of care, motivation, life-long learning, and mentorship. Teachers, in the eyes of our participants, extend beyond the traditional role of imparting knowledge and play a crucial part in shaping students' overall experiences and perceptions. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the challenge associated with fulfilling all these diverse and crucial roles expected of teachers. In this respect, enacting the role of the 'collaborator' more frequently and establishing cooperative relationships with students, their families, and fellow educators emerges as a strategic approach to navigating these multifaceted responsibilities.

Although the findings of this study are specific to a time and place, taken together, they highlight the significance of engaging in practitioner research and identity work during pre-service years and suggest that such practitioner research courses should be integrated into the curriculum of LTE programs. Theoretical courses on research methods with little attention to practitioner research and no chances for hands-on applications risk leaving future teachers underprepared to conduct meaningful, context-driven inquiries within their classrooms. Furthermore, pre-service teachers may struggle to view research as integral to their professional practice, which could significantly diminish their likelihood of engaging in research throughout their careers. Therefore, in line with our contention that "the overall aim of a teacher education program is best conceived as the development of professional identity" (van Huizen et al., 2005, p. 275), we advocate for the integration of practitioner

research courses with an identity approach into LTE programs. Future research can build upon these insights by examining similar interventions across different LTE programs and cultural settings, further validating the applicability of our conclusions.

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Ethical Statement: This research has been conducted in compliance with the institutional regulations of Erciyes University, as outlined in the ethical permission document dated 27/12/2022 (Application No: 569)

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Appendix A

The Contents of Modules

Module 1	Research & EP	What is Research? Who are the Researchers? Why do we Need a Research Course? Differences between Academic Research and Pre-service Teacher Research Key Characteristics of Qualitative and Quantitative Research The Kind of Knowledge Pre-service Teachers Can Discover Developing Reflectivity Exploratory Practice
Module 2	Puzzles	Puzzles vs. Research Problems Sources of Puzzles (Puzzles about the Self, Puzzles about the Others)' (Challenges, Achievements) Defining and Revising Puzzles (The What, The Who, The How, the Other Issues -Ethics, Cost, Review of Literature) Sample Puzzles

Module 3	Data Generation	Types of Data Generation Tools 1. Questionnaires (close/open-ended) 2. Interviews (structured / semi-structured / unstructured) 3. Observation (participant/non-participant) Samples of Data Generation Tools Principles of Data Generation (Validity, Reliability, Credibility, Trustworthiness, Ethics)
Module 4	Data Analysis	Qualitative Data Analysis Steps of Thematic Analysis Samples Quantitative Data Analysis Types of Quantitative Data Analysis Samples Using Digital Tools in Managing Your Data Set
Module 5	Tying it Together	Relating the Results to the Puzzle Question Interpreting the Results Producing a Written Report (Title, Abstract, Introduction, Methodology, Results/Discussion, Conclusion)

Appendix B

Weekly Coursework

Weeks	**In-Class Activities**	**Assignment**
1	Syllabus Introduction to Module 1	Written Narrative (1)
2	Module 1	Written Narrative (2)
3	Module 2 Discussion on puzzle ideas	Forming research groups Forming puzzle questions
4	Module 2 Continued Supervision for puzzles	Finalizing puzzle questions Written Narrative (3)
5	Module 3	Choosing methodology
6	Module 3 Continued Supervision for methodology	Data generation
7	Midterm Week	Data generation
8	Module 3 Continued Supervision for data generation	Data generation
9	Module 4	Data generation

10	Module 4 Continued Supervision for data analysis	Data analysis
11	Module 4 Continued Supervision for data analysis	Data analysis
12	Module 5	Data analysis Written Narrative (4)
13	Module 5 Continued	Research poster Written Narrative (5)
14	Supervision for posters Conclusion	Research poster

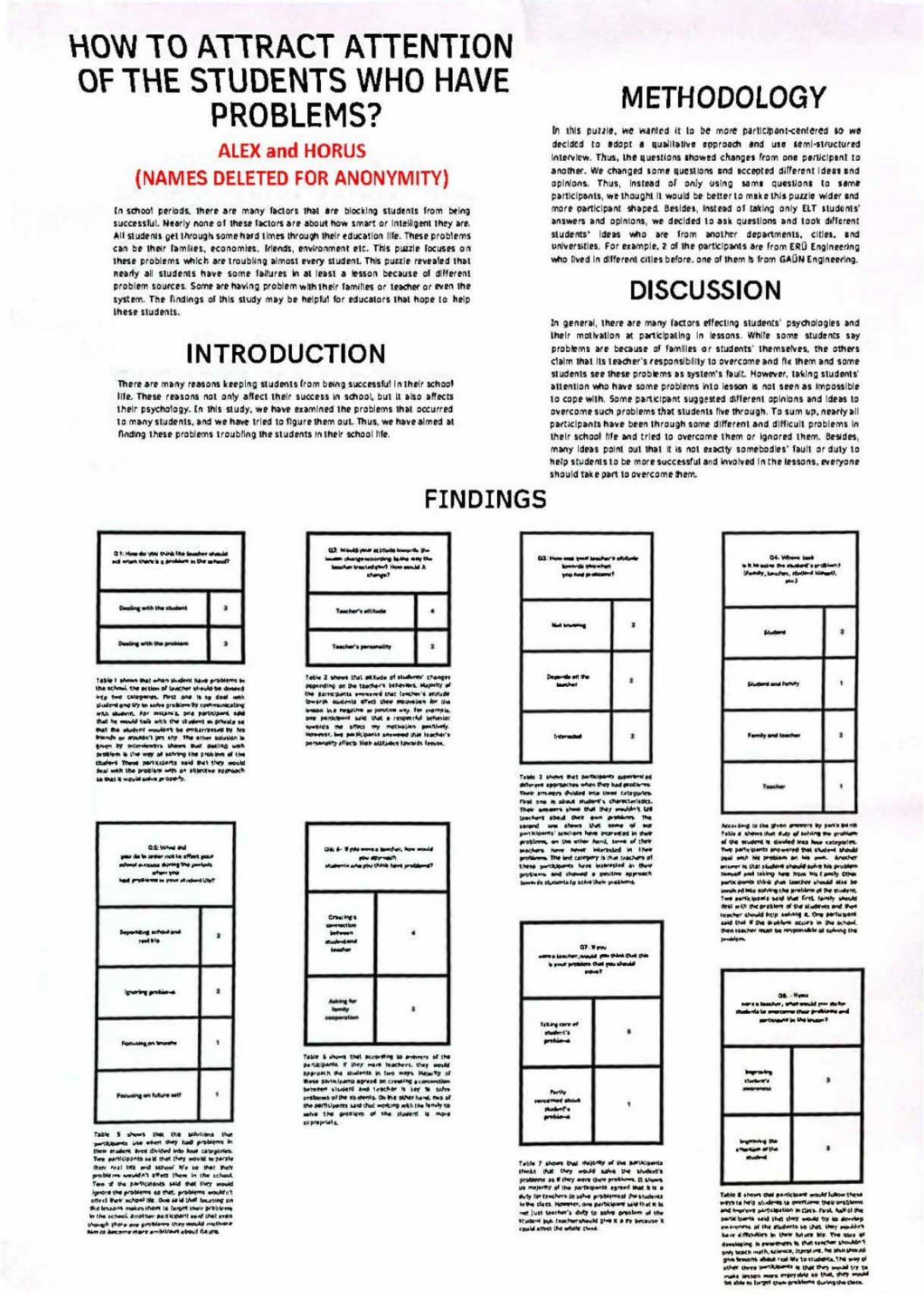
Appendix C

Written Narrative Prompts

Written Narrative 1	Who is a language teacher in your opinion? What do language teachers do? What skills/qualities do/ should they have?
Written Narrative 2	Did you have language teachers who were positive or negative models for you? What did they do?
Written Narrative 3	Why did you choose this puzzle and how did you create it?
Written Narrative 4	How was your data analysis process? What findings did you reach as a result of your research? Were these the results you expected?
Written Narrative 5	What are the contributions of the courses you have taken or are currently taking to your development as a language teacher?

Appendix D

Research Poster



HOW TO ATTRACT ATTENTION OF THE STUDENTS WHO HAVE PROBLEMS?

ALEX and HORUS

(NAMES DELETED FOR ANONYMITY)

In school periods, there are many factors that are blocking students from being successful. Nearly none of these factors are about how smart or intelligent they are. All students get through some hard times through their education life. These problems can be their families, economies, friends, environment etc. This puzzle focuses on these problems which are troubling almost every student. This puzzle revealed that nearly all students have some failures in at least a lesson because of different problem sources. Some are having problem with their families or teacher or even the system. The findings of this study may be helpful for educators that hope to help these students.

INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons keeping students from being successful in their school life. These reasons not only affect their success in school, but it also affects their psychology. In this study, we have examined the problems that occurred to many students, and we have tried to figure them out. Thus, we have aimed at finding these problems troubling the students in their school life.

METHODOLOGY

In this puzzle, we wanted it to be more participant-centered so we decided to adopt a qualitative approach and use semi-structured interview. Thus, the questions showed changes from one participant to another. We changed some questions and accepted different ideas and opinions. Thus, instead of only using same questions to same participants, we thought it would be better to make this puzzle wider and more participant shaped. Besides, instead of taking only ELT students' answers and opinions, we decided to ask questions and took different students' ideas who are from another departments, cities, and universities. For example, 2 of the participants are from ERÜ Engineering who lived in different cities before. one of them is from GAÜN Engineering.

DISCUSSION

In general, there are many factors effecting students' psychologies and their motivation at participating in lessons. While some students say problems are because of families or students' themselves, the others claim that its teacher's responsibility to overcome and fix them and some students see these problems as system's fault. However, taking students' attention who have some problems into lesson is not seen as impossible to cope with. Some participant suggested different opinions and ideas to overcome such problems that students live through. To sum up, nearly all participants have been through some different and difficult problems in their school life and tried to overcome them or ignored them. Besides, many ideas point out that it is not exactly somebodies' fault or duty to help students to be more successful and involved in the lessons, everyone should take part to overcome them.

FINDINGS

Q1: How do you think the teacher should act when there is a problem in the school?

Dealing with the student	3
Dealing with the problem	3

Table 1 shows that when student have problems in the school, the action of teacher should be divided into two categories. First one is to deal with student and try to solve problem by communicating with student. For instance, one participant said that he would talk with the student in private so that the student wouldn't be embarrassed by his friends or wouldn't get shy. The other solution is given by interviewers shows that dealing with problem is the way of solving the problem of the student. Three participants said that they would deal with the problem with an objective approach so that it would solve properly.

Q2: Would your attitude towards the lesson change according to the way the teacher treated you? How would it change?

Teacher's attitude	4
Teacher's personality	2

Table 2 shows that attitude of students' changes depending on the teacher's behaviors. Majority of the participants answered that teacher's attitude towards students effect their motivation for the lesson in a negative or positive way. For example, one participant said that a respectful behavior towards me affects my motivation positively. However, two participants answered that teacher's personality affects their attitudes towards lesson.

Q3: How was your teacher's attitude towards you when you had problems?

Not knowing	2
Depends on the teacher	3
Interested	2

Table 3 shows that participants experienced different approaches when they had problems. Their answers divided into three categories. First one is about student's characteristics. Their answers show that they wouldn't tell teachers about their own problems. The second one shows that some of our participants' teachers have interested in their problems, on the other hand, some of their teachers have never interested in their problems. The last category is that teachers of these participants have interested in their problems and showed a positive approach towards students to solve their problems.

Q4: Where lies in it to solve the student's problem? (Family, teacher, student himself, etc.)

Student	2
Student and family	1
Family and teacher	2
Teacher	1

According to the given answers by participants Table 4 shows that duty of solving the problem of the student is divided into four categories. Two participants answered that student should deal with his problem on his own. Another answer is that student should solve his problem himself and taking help from his family. Other participants think that teacher should also be involved into solving the problem of the student. Two participants said that first, family should deal with the problem of the students and then teacher should help solving it. One participant said that if the problem occurs in the school, then teacher must be responsible of solving the problem.

Q5: What do you do in order not to affect your school success during the periods when you had problems in your student life?

Separating school and real life	3
Ignoring problems	2
Focusing on lessons	1
Focusing on future self	1

Table 5 shows that the solutions that participants use when they had problems in their student lives divided into four categories. Two participants said that they would separate their real life and school life so that their problems wouldn't affect them in the school. Two of the participants said that they would ignore the problems so that, problems wouldn't affect their school life. One said that focusing on the lessons makes them to forget their problems in the school. Another participant said that even though there are problems they would motivate himself to become more ambitious about future.

Q6: If you were a teacher, how would you approach students who you think have problems?

Creating a connection between student and teacher	4
Asking for family cooperation	3

Table 6 shows that according to answers of the participants if they were teachers, they would approach the students in two ways. Majority of these participants agreed on creating a connection between student and teacher is key to solve problems of the students. On the other hand, two of the participants said that working with the family to solve the problems of the student is more appropriate.

Q7: If you were a teacher, would you think that this is your problem that you should solve?

Taking care of student's problems	3
Partly concerned about student's problems	1

Table 7 shows that majority of the participants thinks that they would solve the student's problems as if they were their problems. It shows us majority of the participants agreed that it is a duty for teachers to solve problems of the students in the class. However, one participant said that it is not just teacher's duty to solve problem of the student just. teacher should give it a try because it could affect the whole class.

Q8: If you were a teacher, what would you do for students to overcome their problems and participate in the lesson?

Increasing student's awareness	3
Increasing the attention of the student	3

Table 8 shows that participant would follow these ways to help students to overcome their problems and improve participation in class. First, half of the participants said that they would try to develop awareness of the students so that they wouldn't have difficulties in their future life. The idea of developing in awareness is that teacher shouldn't only teach math, science, literature, he also should give lessons about real life to students. The way of other three participants is that they would try to make lesson more enjoyable so that, they would be able to forget their problems during the class.

Appendix E

Oral Narratives

Interview 1 Focused Life History	1. Can you provide a brief overview of your educational background with a focus on your English learning process? 2. How would you describe your overall attitude towards schooling and what were you like as a student? 3. Were there any significant events or people that had a lasting impact on you and your choices? 4. What were your initial expectations and goals when you entered your department at university?
Interview 2 Details of the Lived Experience	1. What do you remember about this research course you took? 2. What was your overall impression of it? 3. Do you think it contributed to you in any sense? 4. What do you remember about your puzzle and what you learned from it? 5. Let's now take a moment to look over the narrative you wrote on your puzzle and the poster you prepared at the end of your research to reflect on their content and implications again.
Interview 3 Reflection on the Meaning	1. How is your School Experience/Practicum going? 2. Did the way you see the teaching profession change with this experience? 3. Do you want to work as a teacher? 4. Do you think teaching can be a learning experience for the teachers as well? If so how? 5. Can a teacher be engaged in research? 6. Can you share any personal experiences or examples of practitioner (teacher) research in your school experience? 7. What types of research questions do you think are most relevant for teachers to explore in their own practice? 8. What role do you think practitioner (teacher) research plays in the professional development of teachers? What do you believe are the benefits of incorporating practitioner (teaching) research into teaching practices? 9. Do you believe that practitioner research should be a component of teacher education programs? Why or why not? 10. What kind of teacher do you want to be in the future? Can you describe him/her to me? And how close do you think you are to that teacher right now? Or are there things you need to do, things you need to acquire to get closer to that teacher you want to be? 11. If yes, what are they?