

EFL STUDENT-TEACHERS' IMAGINED IDENTITY AND INVESTMENT IN TEACHING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	29/7/2024	Discovering an imagined identity and investment in teaching competency development of English as a Foreign Language student-teachers has gradually become one of the most significant issues in English language teaching field. The study aims to unravel imagined identity and the extent of investment in developing teaching competency of English as a Foreign Language student-teachers at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Questionnaires were utilized to collect data from 96 English as a Foreign Language student-teachers. The findings revealed that to construct an imagined identity, they should improve English language proficiency, practice English language teaching reflections, develop teacher professional identity, accumulate English language teaching experiences, and acquire specialized knowledge and discourse in English language teaching. In addition, the findings also indicated that the four components, namely skills, knowledge, attitudes of English language teaching, and English language skills should all be invested in developing the teaching competency of English as a Foreign Language student-teachers.
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KEYWORDS

EFL student-teacher
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BẢN NGÃ TƯỢNG TƯỢNG VÀ SỰ ĐẦU TƯ VÀO VIỆC PHÁT TRIỂN NĂNG LỰC GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH CỦA GIÁO SINH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	29/7/2024	Khám phá bản ngã tưởng tượng và sự đầu tư vào việc phát triển năng lực giảng dạy của giáo sinh đã dần trở thành một trong những vấn đề quan trọng nhất trong lĩnh vực giảng dạy tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích làm sáng tỏ bản ngã tưởng tượng và mức độ đầu tư vào việc phát triển năng lực giảng dạy tiếng Anh của giáo sinh tại một trường Đại học ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam. Bảng câu hỏi đã được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu từ 96 giáo sinh. Kết quả đã tiết lộ rằng để xây dựng bản ngã tưởng tượng, họ nên cải thiện trình độ tiếng Anh, luyện tập chiêm nghiệm trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh, phát triển bản sắc nghề nghiệp của giáo viên, tích lũy các kinh nghiệm trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh, tiếp thu kiến thức chuyên ngành và diễn ngôn trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh. Ngoài ra, kết quả nghiên cứu cũng đã chỉ ra rằng bốn thành phần bao gồm kỹ năng, kiến thức, thái độ giảng dạy tiếng Anh và kỹ năng tiếng Anh đều nên được đầu tư vào việc phát triển năng lực giảng dạy tiếng Anh của giáo sinh.
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TỪ KHÓA

Giáo sinh
Bản ngã tưởng tượng
Đầu tư
Năng lực giảng dạy
Giảng dạy tiếng Anh

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1. Introduction

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, it is significant to examine the roles of student-teachers' imagined identity and their investment in teaching competency (TC) development. According to [1], imagined identity refers to an identity developed within oneself when envisioning relationships between individuals and other people, as well as communities beyond their common interactions. Moreover, imagined identity facilitates learners' realizations of who they might be and which communities they belong to [2]. Interestingly, Goktepe and Kunt [3] recognized that when student-teachers were confronted with a real-world classroom, their imagined identity could be shifted. It is because the transformation from being a student to becoming a teacher is a daily process full of changes, adaptations, and, on occasion, unforeseen experiences [4]. In terms of investment, it encompasses goals, commitment, practical aspects, and multiple identities that contribute to the success of the language learning process [5]. In addition, Darwin and Norton [6] claimed that investment is beneficial for developing language education policy by demonstrating how classroom activities reflect a more extensive relationship of power. They [6] also stated that investment is established based on the intersection of three elements, including identity, capital, and ideology. As an integral part of the English language teaching (ELT) methodology training program, TC is highly emphasized in the EFL context [7]. As [8] defined, TC refers to knowledge, attitudes, and teaching skills that teachers use to engage students in learning. In the same vein, it plays a significant role in structuring English language teachers' capacity and ensuring the success of teaching tasks [9].

Several prior studies have been conducted on imagined identity, investment, and the TC of EFL student-teachers. In terms of EFL student-teachers' imagined identity and investment, Teng [10] demonstrated learners' identity flux inside and across distinct communities. They also pinpointed that learners' identity affected their investment in English learning and vice versa. In addition, Nguyen Xuan Nghia [11] showed that his imagined identity had an impact on how his educational and professional identities were constructed and that he made significant investments in language acquisition. With respect to the TC, Ghufroon *et al.* [12] mentioned several components, such as personal desires, teaching pedagogical knowledge, and ELT skills, to evaluate the competency of pre-service English language teachers. Moreover, scholars [13], [14] discovered that knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the ELT field were identified as the main components that played significant parts in the growth of their TC. It can be seen that most previous studies focused on the interaction of imagined identity and investment, as well as TC's notions and components. Nevertheless, there has been relatively little study focused on the construction of imagined identity and the extent of investment in developing TC of EFL student-teachers. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate EFL student-teachers' imagined identity and investment in developing TC in the context of the university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is university EFL student-teachers' imagined identity?
2. To what extent do university EFL student-teachers invest in their teaching competency development?

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research context and participant

The research was carried out at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The ELT major program at this university focused on four main subjects: Theories of TESOL (3 credits), Techniques for TESOL (3 credits), English Teaching Practice (3 credits), and Teaching English to Young Learners (3 credits). The research participants were 96 EFL student-teachers. A majority of them had teaching experience (82.3%); only 17.7% of the remaining students had no experience. Additionally, three main categories were used to clarify the number of teaching years, including under 1 year (64.6%), 1 - 2 years (22.9%), and over 2 years (12.5%). Furthermore, the participants tended to be in

charge of teaching assistants (44.8%), followed by tutors (25.0%), part-time teachers (24%), and full-time teachers (6.3%). Regarding reasons why they became EFL teachers, the highest reason was passion (45.8%), while family's career orientation and other reasons were 27.1% in each category.

2.2. Research instrument

The closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. The questionnaire was separated into three parts: part I focused on participants' personal information; part II regarding imagined identity adapted from the studies of [15], [16], and part III related to investment in TC development was redesigned based on the study of [17]. Especially, the five-point Likert scale was applied to measure the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). In terms of EFL student-teachers' imagined identity includes five sub-variables: Improve English language proficiency (5 items), Acquire ELT specialized knowledge and discourse (5 items), Practice ELT reflections (5 items), Accumulate ELT experiences (5 items), and Develop teacher professional identity (5 items). For investment in TC development, there were four sub-variables: English language skills (4 items), ELT attitudes (5 items), ELT knowledge (7 items), and ELT skills (9 items). A Cronbach's alpha proved the reliability of the questionnaire was comparatively high ($\alpha = .94$).

2.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis

For the data collection, all items were translated into Vietnamese before being delivered to participants. Participants were explained the main keywords before taking the questionnaires. The questionnaires could be completed in 15-20 minutes. Regarding the data analysis procedures, SPSS software version 27.0. was applied to analyze a descriptive statistic. The interval M scores of imagined identity questionnaire were interpreted as 1-1.80: strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60: disagree; 2.61-3.40: neutral; 3.41-4.20: agree; 4.21-5.00: strongly agree. Similarly, the interval M scores of investment in TC development questionnaire were interpreted as 1-1.80: very low; 1.81-2.60: low; 2.61-3.40: average; 3.41-4.20: high; 4.21-5.00: very high.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. EFL student-teachers' imagined identity

EFL student-teachers' imagined identity in terms of improving English language skills

As seen in Table 1, a majority of EFL student-teachers strongly agreed that improving English language proficiency motivated ELT (Item 4: M=4.54; SD=.59). Besides, EFL student-teachers also thought that they could find a well-paid teaching job (Item 2: M=4.53; SD=.63) and express ideas/opinions confidently in ELT classes (Item 5: M=4.51; SD=.56). Also, participants admitted that they could imagine themselves as proficient English language users whenever they think of their future careers (Item 1: M=4.34; SD=.73). Moreover, the participants believed that EFL teachers must serve as role models for their students, so having a native accent item also received a high degree of agreement (Item 3: M=4.29; SD=.76). It could be understood that EFL student-teachers had a strong desire to improve their English language proficiency.

Table 1. *Improving English language skills*

Items	N= 96	
	M	SD
1. Whenever I think of my future career, I can imagine myself as a proficient English language user.	4.34	.73
2. I wish I could have a well-paid teaching job, thanks to my high proficiency level in English.	4.53	.63
3. I wish I could have a native-like accent because I perceive that English language teachers must be role models for their students in accent/pronunciation.	4.29	.76
4. I will feel more motivated to teach English language when I improve my English language proficiency.	4.54	.59
5. Being proficient in English enables me to express my ideas/opinions confidently during my ELT classes.	4.51	.56

EFL student-teachers' imagined identity in terms of acquiring specialized knowledge and discourse of ELT

All five items relating to acquiring specialized knowledge and discourse of ELT in Table 2 had M ranging from 3.98 to 4.56. It indicated that participants had a high degree of agreement with this sub-variable. In particular, EFL student-teachers want to apply the ELT specialized knowledge to teach their future students effectively (Item 10: M=4.56; SD=.55). In addition, those with specialized knowledge not only connect with social platforms suitable for their level of education (Item 6: M=4.21; SD=.76), but it also helps them recognize meaningful personal changes after learning ELT (Item 8: M=4.21; SD=.73). The participants also showed their desire to join in pedagogical issues' workshops/conferences (Item 7: M=4.17; SD=.69). Interestingly, they expected to own an extensive collection of supplementary teaching materials aside from course books (Item 9: M=3.98; SD=.87).

Table 2. *Acquiring specialized knowledge and discourse of ELT*

Items	N= 96	
	M	SD
6. By acquiring specialized knowledge in ELT, I will be able to access social networks that are appropriate for my educational level.	4.21	.76
7. To keep up with innovations in teaching English language, I would like to participate in workshops/conferences on pedagogical issues.	4.17	.69
8. For me, it is meaningful to talk about personal changes after learning ELT.	4.21	.73
9. I can imagine myself as an English language teacher who owns an extensive collection of supplementary teaching materials aside from course books.	3.98	.87
10. I wish I could use ELT specialized knowledge effectively to teach my students in the future.	4.56	.55

EFL student-teachers' imagined identity in terms of practicing ELT reflections

The results in Table 3 showed that most EFL student-teachers expected to apply ELT reflections to assess their future lessons (Item 14: M=4.35; SD=.66) and their teaching competency would develop by practicing ELT reflections (Item 15: M=4.28; SD=.76). The participants also demonstrated a high interest in the changing of personality, thoughts, and so on, after practicing in ELT reflections (Item 12: M=4.35; SD=.61). Furthermore, they have shown that the model of their ideal teachers which encourages them to participate in ELT reflections and helps them to develop a secure and solid knowledge base (Item 13: M=4.29; SD=.66 & Item 11: M=4.33; SD=.67).

Table 3. *Practicing ELT reflections*

Items	N= 96	
	M	SD
11. Practicing ELT reflections helps me to develop a secure and solid knowledge base.	4.33	.67
12. I perceive that by practicing more in ELT reflections, I may change as a person (e.g., in personality, and thoughts).	4.35	.61
13. The model of my ideal teacher encourages me to participate in ELT reflections and do my best in ELT learning.	4.29	.66
14. I wish I could apply ELT reflections to assess my lessons in the future.	4.35	.66
15. I perceive that by practicing ELT reflections, my teaching competency will develop.	4.28	.76

EFL student-teachers' imagined identity in terms of accumulating ELT experiences

As presented in Table 4, a large number of participants hoped to improve their TC through accumulating ELT experiences (Item 17: M=4.53; SD =.58), which enabled them to become highly educated English language teachers (Item 20: M=4.33; SD=.66). In addition, they agreed that accumulating ELT experiences made them feel comfortable doing ELT demonstrations (Item 16: M=3.81; SD=.96). As for future teaching tasks, EFL student-teachers expected to be able to handle more challenging ELT tasks and adopt various strategies to facilitate students' learning processes (Item 18: M=4.42; SD=.62 & Item 19: M=4.13; SD=.86).

Table 4. *Accumulating ELT experiences*

Items	N= 96	
	M	SD
16. Currently, I feel comfortable doing ELT demonstrations in front of my teachers and classmates.	3.81	.96
17. I am eager to accumulate ELT experiences so that I can improve my teaching competency.	4.53	.58
18. I perceive that if I try to accumulate ELT experiences, I will be capable to handle more challenging teaching tasks that are beyond my current capability.	4.42	.62
19. I can imagine myself as a creative English language teacher who can adopt various strategies to facilitate students' learning process.	4.13	.86
20. I perceive that accumulating ELT experiences can help me join the ranks of well-educated, professionally trained English language teachers.	4.33	.66

EFL student-teachers' imagined identity in terms of developing teacher professional identity

Table 5 shows the results of EFL student-teachers' desire to develop teacher professional identity. Most participants strongly believed in becoming English language teachers who create various learning opportunities in their classes (Item 24: M=4.46; SD=.59). Moreover, participants' answers highlighted that they would create relevant lesson plans and use ELT methodologies effectively in teaching their students thanks to developing teacher professional identity (Item 23: M= 4.38; SD=.68 & Item 25: M=4.38; SD=.66). Interestingly, studying to become English language teachers enabled them to create new thoughts (Item 21: M=4.31; SD=.68). Also, they expected to be English language teachers in a real context (Item 22: M=4.09; SD=.85).

Table 5. *Developing teacher professional identity*

Items	N= 96	
	M	SD
21. Studying to become an English language teacher enables me to create new thoughts.	4.31	.68
22. I can imagine myself being an English language teacher in a real context.	4.09	.85
23. If I have a teacher professional identity, I will create relevant lesson plans for my students' learning styles.	4.38	.68
24. I wish I could become an English language teacher who creates various learning opportunities in my classes.	4.46	.59
25. I can imagine myself using ELT methodologies effectively to teach my students.	4.38	.66

3.1.2. EFL student-teachers' investment in TC development

EFL student-teachers' investment in TC development in terms of investment in English language skills

In terms of investment in English language skills, the data in Table 6 indicated which skills they intended to invest in. The participants developed speaking skills (Item 3: M=3.95; SD=.91) and listening skills (Item 1: M=3.82; SD=.76) regularly. Nevertheless, they showed less investment in developing reading skills (Item 2: M=3.55; SD=.73) and writing skills (Item 4: M=3.40; SD=.92). The total mean scores for developing four skills were from 3.40 to 3.95, which meant that participants were aware of the significance of mastering good English language skills in ELT.

Table 6. *English language skills*

I invest in my English language skills by ...	N= 96	
	M	SD
1. developing my listening skills regularly.	4.31	.68
2. developing my reading skills regularly.	4.09	.85
3. developing my speaking skills regularly.	4.38	.68
4. developing my writing skills regularly.	4.38	.66

EFL student-teachers' investment in TC development in terms of investment in ELT attitudes

The results in Table 7 revealed that looking for ELT information (Item 5: M=3.76; SD=.80) and reading interesting facts about ETL jobs (Item 6: M=3.83; SD=.86) were crucial in investing

in ELT attitudes. Besides, participating in social networks for English language teachers was one of the things they always did (Item 7: $M=3.52$; $SD=.96$). More interestingly, participants tried to enhance positive ELT attitudes by talking to their teachers and friends who were devoted and loved ELT jobs (Item 9: $M=3.75$; $SD=.98$ & Item 8: $M=3.57$; $SD=1.06$).

Table 7. *ELT attitudes*

I invest in my ELT attitudes by ...	N= 96	
	M	SD
5. looking for information about ELT.	3.76	.80
6. reading interesting facts about ELT jobs.	3.83	.86
7. participating in social networks for English language teachers.	3.52	.96
8. talking to friends who love ELT jobs.	3.57	1.06
9. talking to English language teachers who are devoted to their teaching.	3.75	.98

EFL student-teachers' investment in TC development in terms of investment in ELT knowledge

The investment in ELT knowledge was described in Table 8, participants believed that they could invest in their ELT knowledge by doing the exercises/assignments seriously (Item 15: $M=4.07$; $SD=.65$), focusing intently on the ELT lessons (Item 12: $M=3.87$; $SD=.75$), taking part actively in ELT learning activities (Item 14: $M=3.82$; $SD=.80$). Additionally, they tried to participate in all ELT workshops organized by their university (Item 16: $M=3.72$; $SD=.99$) and discuss actively in their ELT classes (Item 13: $M=3.52$; $SD=.91$). At last, reading materials relating to ELT techniques/approaches (Item 11: $M=3.52$; $SD=.76$) and ELT theories (Item 10: $M=3.38$; $SD=.89$) were also two ways to invest in ELT knowledge.

Table 8. *ELT knowledge*

I invest in my ELT knowledge by ...	N= 96	
	M	SD
10. reading materials of ELT theories.	3.38	.89
11. reading materials of ELT techniques/approaches.	3.52	.76
12. paying close attention to the ELT lessons.	3.87	.75
13. participating in discussions actively in ELT classes.	3.52	.91
14. getting engaged in learning activities actively in ELT classes.	3.82	.80
15. doing the exercises/assignments seriously in ELT classes.	4.07	.65
16. participating in all ELT workshops organized by my university.	3.72	.99

EFL student-teachers' investment in TC development in terms of investment in ELT skills

Table 9. *ELT skills*

I invest in my ELT skills by ...	N= 96	
	M	SD
17. observing ELT classes.	3.93	.82
18. watching clips of ELT classes.	3.61	.87
19. practicing teaching English language individually.	3.82	.92
20. practicing teaching English language with my peers.	3.54	.93
21. asking my peers to give comments on my teaching demonstrations.	3.70	.94
22. giving comments on my peers' teaching demonstrations.	3.56	.96
23. self-evaluating my teaching demonstration.	3.74	.97
24. participating in teaching practicum seriously.	4.25	.64
25. working as a tutor/teaching assistant/part-time teacher/full time at an English language center/school to learn teaching experiences.	4.09	.90

As can be seen in Table 9, participants joined the teaching practicum seriously and were in charge of various teaching positions in a real context (Item 24: $M=4.35$; $SD=.64$ and Item 25: $M=4.09$; $SD=.90$) to invest in their ELT skills. Besides, they could invest in ELT skills by observing classes (Item 17: $M=3.93$; $SD=.82$) and watching teaching clips (Item 18: $M=3.61$; $SD=.87$). Those mentioned data pointed out that practicing teaching individually or with peers

was a condition for developing TC (Item 19: $M=3.82$; $SD=.92$; Item 20: $M=3.54$; $SD=.93$). Also, participants showed their frequencies in self-evaluating their teaching (Item 23: $M=3.74$; $SD=.97$), asking for comments from peers (Item 21: $M=3.70$; $SD=.94$), and giving peers comments (Item 22: $M=3.56$; $SD=.96$).

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. EFL student-teachers' imagined identity

The study results indicated that five elements might be beneficial in the process of constructing their imagined identity (improving English language proficiency, practicing ELT reflections, developing teacher professional identity, accumulating ELT experiences, and acquiring specialized ELT knowledge and discourse). It is evident that most of the participants believed that their academic status as well as their future careers could be well-achieved by their theoretical and practical knowledge of ELT ($M=4.31$; $SD=.44$). The first possible explanation for this result is that a substantial proportion of the participants in this study had teaching experience (82.3%) in the EFL context. The second explanation is that participants chose to become English language teachers mostly based on their passion (45.8%), followed by family career orientation and other reasons (27.1%). It led to the fact that EFL student-teachers could recognize the importance of imagined identity in the ELT context. The results of the current study, to some extent, confirmed the conclusions of several previous studies [18] - [20]. In short, EFL student-teachers could have a vision of what types of teachers they might hope to become in the future by constructing their imagined identity.

3.2.2. EFL student-teachers' investment in TC development

The study results confirmed that a majority of EFL student-teachers agreed with investment in TC development, consisting of investing in English language skills, ELT attitudes, ELT knowledge, and ELT skills. According to the data derived from the survey, it was disclosed that a vast majority of participants only moderately invested in developing their TC ($M=3.71$; $SD=.53$). The initial source of these phenomena could be the fact that more than half of the participants were taught English in under one year (64.6%). It is apparent that they have not fully dedicated themselves to developing the TC. Another explanation for this might be that most participants were in charge of EFL teaching assistants (44.8%) instead of EFL tutors (25%), EFL part-time teachers (24%), and EFL full-time teachers (6.3%); thus, the distinction in responsibilities prevented EFL student-teachers from investing greatly in their TC development. Firstly, ELT skills were the leading component in which participants prioritized investing in developing their TC. Being skilled in ELT was not always easy, since the participants of this study focused more on ELT activities and tasks. The study by [17] reinforced the findings that EFL student-teachers dedicated themselves to a variety of hands-on activities to obtain practical experience in ELT skills. Secondly, to invest effectively in ELT knowledge, EFL student-teachers would not only actively participate in ELT workshops but also fully engage in ELT lessons and seriously complete ELT exercises. It is in line with [21], [22], who confirmed that ELT knowledge includes comprehension of teaching materials, practice repertoires and methods, and the theories that underpin them. Thirdly, the ELT attitudes of EFL student-teachers pertain to commitment, confidence, belief, and respect, necessitating them to gain as many real-life experiences as possible. These findings supported the ideas of [15], [23], who stated that having positive attitudes toward ELT can help EFL student-teachers successfully invest in their TC development. Finally, it was found that participants allocated a significantly greater amount of time to practice their speaking skills than the other skills. This finding provided the same results as the previous study implemented by [18]. Research participants may be knowledgeable that teachers seem to be providers of comprehensible input, so the more proficient EFL student-teachers are in a language, the better equipped they are to teach it in the classroom.

4. Conclusion

With respect to the imagined identity, the results have considered five elements, including improving their English language proficiency, followed by practicing ELT reflections, developing teacher professional identity, accumulating ELT experiences, and acquiring ELT specialized knowledge and discourse. In terms of the investment in TC development, four components were taken into account (ELT skills, ELT knowledge, ELT attitudes, and English language skills). Interestingly, a vast majority of participants prioritized investment in ELT knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Furthermore, they showed a high degree of investment in their English speaking and listening skills. It is evident that EFL student-teachers demonstrated their willingness to invest money, time, and effort to achieve their goals. Several implications relating to these results are recommended. Constructing an imagined identity and investing in TC development seem to be part of a long-term trajectory, so EFL student-teachers should be equipped with meaningful insights, allowing them to effectively navigate their desired identities and make impactful investments for their future. Additionally, EFL teacher-trainers should gather and preserve as many expectations of their students as they can. Besides, the school administrators should consider integrating several elements to form EFL student-teachers' imagined identity right from the very beginning of their study of the ELT methodology major.

This small-scale study is subject to several limitations. This study was conducted in a single context with only senior-year students. Thus, further research can involve more participants from more research contexts. Moreover, the study employed only one research instrument (questionnaires), so future studies can use more research instruments, such as interviews and classroom observations, to get in-depth data.

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