

IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN THE DIGITAL TEACHER OF ENGLISH PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the identity and attitudes towards the past, present and future of the first and second year MA students in *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization conducted at a university in Poland. During the academic year 2017/2018, a questionnaire administered to 30 pre-service teachers revealed that according to James Marcia's Identity Statuses, over 60% of the participants' identity statuses were recognized as achieved, lending support to the other studies of this kind (Yunus, Malik & Zakaria, 2012; Werbińska, 2009). Furthermore, considerable insight has been gained with regard to their time-oriented attitudes.

Keywords: Digital Teacher of English; identity; pre-service teacher

1. Introduction

The subject of this research is of particular interest to those who are keen on educating pre-service teachers in technology enhanced learning as there are more and more digital teaching specializations being established. One of them, encompassing the idea of teaching English with digital technologies, started a few years ago in a middle-sized university in Poland. *The Digital Teacher of English* programme is being suggested as a model that will help overcome the barriers towards ICT integration in language education. *The Digital Teacher of English* is a fairly innovative and widely approved specialization attracting considerable significance. Therefore, it should be highlighted that the status of this programme is new and its penetration to the profession may be faced with suspicion. Since it is a relatively new specialization addressing the issue of digitization and so there are not many graduates offering insight into its effects on their identity and attitudes, the subject of *Digital Teachers of English* identity, i.e. the extent to which the students identify themselves as digital teachers, as well as their attitudes towards the past, present and future seem as an important and intriguing area of research.

The present research aims to investigate how the *Digital Teacher of English* study programme reflects the ongoing digitalization of education and what the critical factors conducting to the recognition of this study programme are with regard to Polish and international courses of a similar kind.

2. Literature review

In establishing an identity as a teaching professional, it is critical that teacher education students come to understand their identity as a lifelong learner and consequently, their own values, attitudes and beliefs as learners.” In the digital era, being a teacher of foreign languages means flexibility and adaptability to multiple changes. This transformation contributes to the change in teacher’s professional identity, which can be defined as “the concept which describes how we perceive ourselves within our occupational context and how we communicate this to others” (Neary, 2014: 14).

The role of the teacher has changed as he/she becomes now a lot more than a mere source of knowledge, to name just a few: advisor (Morrison & Navarro, 2012), coach (Bruzewski, 2017), facilitator and leader (Allen, 2015), manager (Corbett, 2017), mentor (Zachary, 2002). Such a continuing and dynamic process (Lerseth, 2013) may be provoked by innovative technologies, which encourage the teachers to reflect upon their sense of self (Curwood, 2014; Hung & Li, 2017). For instance, depending on one’s preferences, personal and professional digital identity may overlap in some contexts (Tu, 2014).

Therefore, pre-service teacher education should “embrace new pedagogical practices that are authentic and meaningful” (Nykivist & Mukherjee, 2016: 856). For a pre-service teacher willing to learn how to do so while connecting with his/her actively participating learners, the MA programme needs to provide the necessary knowledge and skills. The study programme ought to instill in pre-service teachers awareness of technology-based education and prepare them to incorporate technology consciously and effectively in the teaching and learning process. The DTE specialization will be described in the empirical part of the paper, as the context in which the research is based.

Reviewing similar study programmes globally, it might be said there are many different programmes on digital technologies which concentrate on teaching in digital learning environments, for instance, Educational Studies and Digital Technology with a specialization in Adult Education and Digital Technology BA study programme at Ontario Tech University, Education (Knowledge Networks and Digital Innovation) MA study programme at Charles Stuart University, Digital Technologies, Communication and Education MA study programme

at the University of Edinburgh, the digital teaching and learning area of specialization for the Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University, Education Studies (Digital Learning) postgraduates studies at the University of South Australia, Digital Learning postgraduate studies at Monash University, the Digital Teacher Training Programme at University College South Denmark, TELL Consult courses which focus on Technology Enhanced Language Learning, Digital Learning Design and Assessment courses offered by the Deakin University on Futurelearn, courses and workshops in ICT in didactics offered by the Centrum Edukacji i Krecacji Cyfrowej Fabryka Przyszłości, and the Digital Teacher multimedia in teaching workshops offered by Vocational Training Institution in Katowice[1].

Yet, there are not many universities or organisations offering a study programme or course of this particular kind to future teachers of English as a foreign language specifically. Similar programmes addressing technology-led language teaching, besides the study programme researched in this article, are Digital Technologies for Language Teaching (Distance Learning) MA programme at the University of Nottingham and Language Technology and Foreign Language Teaching MA programme at Justus Liebig University along with courses organized by TELLConsult[2]. Therefore, it might be assumed there is not enough data about teachers who identify themselves as *Digital Teachers of English*.

To start with, according to Werbińska (2009: 468), there are not many studies presenting the teacher's perspective on teacher's identity, not to mention the digital teacher's one. However, there are some studies on teachers' perceptions of technology or technology use with teaching foreign languages (Krajka, 2012) that might serve as examples exhibiting teachers' positive attitudes towards technology as well as willingness to use technology generally in the classroom and, more specifically, incorporate technology into their ELT teaching. The studies exploring teachers' perceptions are particularly important as their relationship with technology integration is demonstrated (Sawyer, 2017).

Krajka's (2012) study largely adds to the evidence that teachers are positive towards teaching languages with technology. He distinguishes both positive and negative perceptions towards technology. The positive ones revolve around the possibility of creating computer-assisted, student-centred learning that is individualised and motivating by a teacher whose implementation of technologies gets more innovative with experience. The negative ones are connected with teachers' lack of computer skills or lack of confidence in using them, inadequate understanding of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, their perceived lack of necessity to use technology and their later disappointment after gaining more profound knowledge of technologies.

Krajka's (2012) study shows that pre-service teachers perceive teaching languages with technologies favourably and are inclined to incorporate them, mainly to present material, on the condition that the resources needed are accessible for them. They are able to operate new programs, design authentic materials and successfully deal with technical issues. They are self-aware of their own limitations and have rather no concerns of losing authority when asking for technical help or authoring digital materials with students. However, Krajka (2012: 260) emphasizes the need to train pre-service teachers methodologically in terms of how to "encompass different applications of technology in lessons together with sample formats and lesson plans".

Other studies on teachers' perception of teaching with technology also show that teachers find inclusion of technology into their teaching beneficial but they also show that there are aspects of their attitudes that need further improvement in order to become more favourable. The study conducted by Silviyanti & Yusuf (2015) indicates that ELT teachers are highly motivated to use technology in their teaching. Some teachers, however, although knowledgeable about the advantages of technology incorporation, are apprehensive due to the lack of adequate training and support from the workplace. Similarly to the previously mentioned study, the later research done by Boersma & Getu (2016) that focuses on the incorporation of the Internet in ELT demonstrates that teachers have positive perceptions towards technology utilization in their teaching. At the same time, it also emphasizes the need to reduce barriers connected with the lack of abovementioned training and support from the work environment. Harvil (2018), who offers an elaborate overview of English language learners' teachers towards technology use, highlights teachers' daily instructional and organizational use of variety of technologies in the classroom. Teachers observe students' engagement and work efficiency due to technologies inclusion but at the same time pinpoint the barriers faced i.e. failure or unavailability of technologies and lack of knowledge which is in line with previous studies. Finally, the most recent study (Muslem, Yusuf & Juliana, 2018) confirms all the so far mentioned conclusions while adding the fact that these perceptions are regardless of demographic factors (i.e. age, gender, degree and teaching experience). Teaching with technology is perceived as beneficial by the majority of ELT teachers but some of them might have limited opportunities and resources to be explored further.

Thus, teachers seek the opportunity to develop themselves in terms of technology inclusion, which is found beneficial and central in the 21st century (Fatimah & Santiana, 2017). However, pre-service teachers might feel some technological competences are expected from him/her. In this way, the societal expectations (Królikowska & Topij-Stempińska, 2014) are

juxtaposed with teacher's perception on his/her individual role in the educational process (Beltman, et al., 2015; Kutrowska, 2008). This may lead to professional identity tensions, especially in teachers who start their career (Pillen, 2013).

To avoid this pressure, both novice and more experienced teachers should have the opportunity to become more autonomous and reflective (Szczyrek-Boruta, 2016) so as to make their own decision on what kind of teacher they want to be. This identity orientation implies that these students should also be mentored in a positive way so as to promote their identity development and growth (Beltman, Glass et al., 2015; Yuan, 2016). To be able to guide the future teachers effectively, one should identify their motivations and influences, present identity development and career image, and naturally their future career ambitions. Lerseth (2013: 121-122) identifies the factors that are conducive to the development of teacher identity as follows: "students' past world experiences, experiences and connections with teachers and mentors, student recognition of their own identities, student knowledge of subject matter, teaching pedagogy, teacher dispositions, classroom management, and differing tensions." Lerseth (2013: 123) also claims that "the idea of "Who a teacher is" truly blends with "What a teacher does" implying that pre-service teachers' experience and actions might shape their sense of identity.

The question of identity tension and the attitudes towards the past, present, and future can be aptly summarized as follows: "We owe the phenomenon of being a unique individual to the fact that we accumulate self-images in the course of our lives. Identity is constant reminding, improving, building yourself based on what it was, is and will be in our lives" (Olszak-Krzyżanowska, 1999: 18)[3]. The research about teacher attitudes tends to include examining their attitudes towards teaching and teaching profession, finding out their actual identity as teachers as well as their representation of the teaching profession (Alkhateeb, 2013; Bhalla, Jajoo & Kalantri, 2002; Andronache et al., 2014; Morales Cortés, 2016). Whatever the attitude of teachers in the aforementioned area is, it rather does not explain their attitudes towards the past, the present and the future with regard to their identity and, by the same token, does not classify the stages of identity development.

In this article, James Marcia's Identity Statures are used as adapted by Werbińska (2009). For a psychologist, the way to shape identity through exploration and commitment Marcia (1966). Exploration means searching for answers, experimenting with possibilities, organising thoughts on one's past influences, motivations and actions. Commitment, on the other hand, has to do with engaging oneself in achieving what one aims at in the long run.

Personal identity largely depends on the outcome of the presence or lack of these experiences, resulting in four alternatives referred to as "identity statures": identity diffusion,

identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Identity diffusion is a status of a person who neither explores nor engages. His/her choices are not called into question, they are temporary and made in haste. If such an English teacher is offered better money and working conditions, he/she will rebrand himself/herself and will not return to teaching. Identity foreclosure is a status which is represented by engaged but not committed people. Driven by the external influences, such English teachers do not experiment with their choices. Such a person might become a teacher because of his/her parents' influence, someone's recommendation, yet it might happen that with time and growing teaching experience his/her status will develop into identity achievement. Identity Moratorium refers to the people who explore different possibilities without committing to any of them. The different choices they make confuse them and make it difficult for their personal identity to ultimately form. These can be pre-service teachers who are still unsure about their future career even when they are almost graduating. With their knowledge and various teaching experience, they might feel lost, encounter some initial obstacles they cannot face and give up teaching. Identity Achievement is the identity status of a person whose autonomous exploration of options leads to conscious and independent engagement. These are the teachers with passion, who made their own decision to pursue teaching profession with no fear of facing challenges. They are eagerly involved in developing their knowledge and skills (Brzezińska, 2017; Marcia, 1966; Werbińska, 2009).

Before addressing personality statuses of future *Digital Teachers of English*, two studies which focus primarily on identity statuses of English teachers should be mentioned. The research of Werbińska (2009) shows that half of young Polish teachers of English participating in the study classify their identity status as achieved, followed by identity foreclosure and identity diffusion with even results, 23% and 20%, respectively, and the least frequent identity status is the moratorium (7%). In comparison with a study on Malaysian future English teachers, the latter yielded different results. More than half of students' identity are classified as achieved (55.1%), moratorium identity is very frequently claimed (39%), and identity foreclosure (3.4%) and diffusion (2.5%) are rarely maintained. It seems that both young and pre-service English teachers are mostly identity achieved, but the division of the remaining identities is different (Yunus, Malik & Zakaria, 2012).

Based on literature review, it might be concluded that although there are studies that are connected with digital teachers' perceptions towards technology and teaching with technology, there is a gap concerning a pre-service language teacher's identity status as well as their time-oriented attitudes on programmes such as *The Digital Teacher of English* one.

3. Research

3.1. Research questions

The purpose of the research was to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What identity statuses are represented by the surveyed students in relation to Marcia's classification?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the past (motivations and influences), the present (identity development and career image) and professional future (future career ambitions)?

3.2. Participants and the research context

The participants were 30 students of MA programme *the Digital Teacher of English* at a university in Poland, both full-time and extramural. Their mean age was 24.5. There are 19 (63.3%) second year MA students and 11 (36.7%) first year MA students. Almost half of them had already been employed as teachers (46.2%), had given private lessons (25.6%), or had worked but not as a teacher (17.9%), and the remaining were full time students (10.3%). Concerning pre-service teachers' workplace, they were commonly employed in language schools and their learners are adults of different proficiency levels. Those who give private lessons, their students are of different age groups and proficiency levels.

The study is largely situated within the context of *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization and it focuses on teacher training innovation. Therefore, it should be more extensively explained as to how this study programme functions i.e. how the digital practicum is organized, how the subjects are delivered and what instructional methods are used as well as what the forms of assessment are. The digital practicum is organized into two years and four terms and the courses provided over the programme are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The syllabus of MA study programme *the Digital Teacher of English*.

| Year I | Year 2 |
|--|---|
| MA seminar | MA seminar |
| Theories of second language acquisition, learning and teaching | MALL: mobile assisted language learning |
| CALL methodology (lecture) | Instructional design and evaluation |
| Tools of a modern teacher | IT in didactic research |
| CALL: language skills online | Practicum |
| Individual differences in language learning, on- and offline | Master's defence |
| Online project work | |
| Intercultural communication, on- and offline | |
| Research methodology | |
| Practicum | |

The instruction is delivered through traditional/online lectures (flipped classroom model), e-learning, discussion class, workshops and a number of online activities such as telecollaboration, blogging, (virtual) active monitoring, as well as design of gamified language content. The instructional methods are, inter alia, cloud computing and the tutorial, task-based, expository, demonstrating, problem-solving, activating, project, and supporting autonomous learning methods. What is more, subjects such as Mobile Education and Instructional design and evaluation can be facilitated by a large, partnering corporate company, which offers internship to some of the students afterwards. The forms in which the covered material is assessed are e-learning, individual/group project, participation in discussion, tasks, written/oral exam, paper presentation/presentation, exercises at school, and field classes.

3.3. Design and procedure

Two concepts that emerge from the study conducted by Werbińska (2009) that have proved to be the most indicative of one's identity are one's views on studying a foreign language and one's views on teaching a foreign language. Because of that, the survey that would revolve around those concepts was created.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by means of an online questionnaire adapted for the purpose of this research from the identity development interview (Lerseth, 2013) and a survey of students' career aspirations, motivations and expectations (Wilson et al., 2006). The survey comprised four parts: demographic data, the past (motivations and influences), the present (identity development and career image) and the future (future career ambitions). Besides the demographic data part, every other part of the study included both close-ended and open-ended questions.

The data were collected in March and April 2018. The link to the questionnaire was shared on Facebook (author's profile, students' Facebook group, individual students, the Facebook profile of a student society). Two other lecturers also shared the link to the online questionnaire via email. Students volunteered and filled the questionnaire anonymously.

The first research question required the kind of analysis that was performed by Werbińska (2009) i.e. the careful assigning each subject's answers into one of four categories of identities while paying attention to the use of specific expressions that would confirm a given type of identity. The sample expressions that supported the decision to classify a given participant's identity are provided in the next section. The quantitative data were analysed with the statistical programmes i.e. Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

3.4. Descriptive analysis of results

3.4.1. What identity statuses are represented by the surveyed students in relation to Marcia's classification?

As each questionnaire was analysed separately with the focus on open-ended questions, the personal identity of the majority of respondents is claimed to be achieved (64%). The results are summarized in Figure 1.

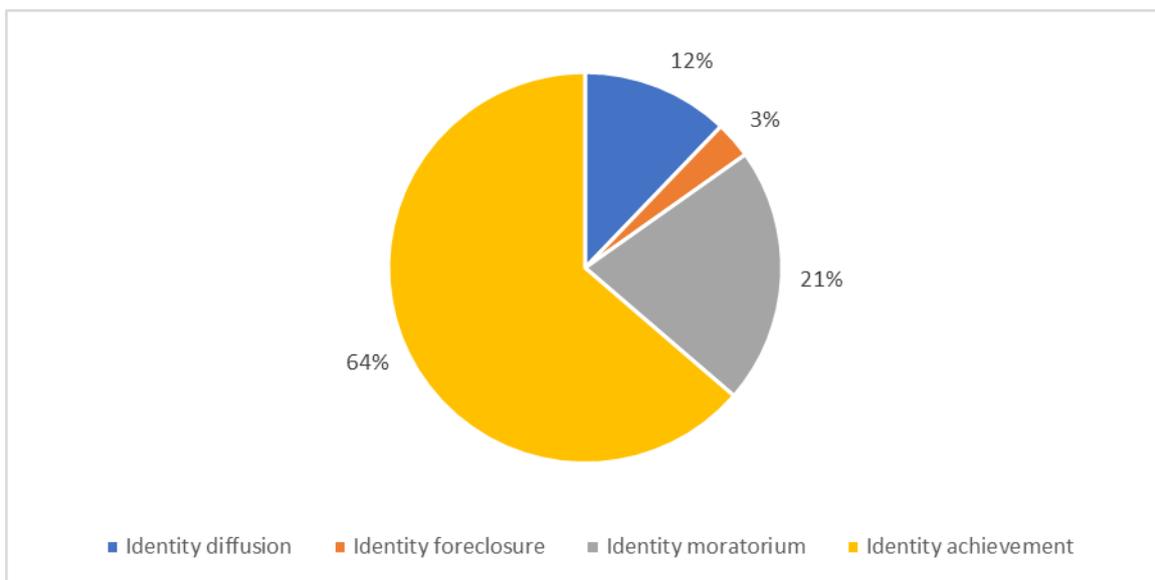


Figure 1. The respondents' identity statuses

The questions from the survey that turned out to be the most informative in terms of categorising the participants' identity statuses are listed below:

- Why did you decide on *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization?
- During your studies, did you change your perception of who *the Digital Teacher of English* is? If so, can you write what has changed in it?
- Can you cite examples where what you did as *the Digital Teacher of English* reflected who you are?
- There are turning points (positive and negative experiences) in the course of studying and teaching practice. Can you refer to them?
- Would you already call yourself *the Digital Teacher of English*?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your *Digital Teacher of English* identity and/or your attitude towards the past, present or future?

Below, there are some translated sample expressions from the questionnaire that functioned as indicators during the process of analysing each participant's answers throughout the whole survey.

Identity Achievement

- "Once a teacher, always a teacher."
- "Because I like teaching languages, it's my passion."
- "Opportunity to reach every student, adapt learning needs, promote continuous development, teach how to learn, develop internal motivation, we have the opportunity to share our passion."
- "My future is only connected with this profession."
- "Because I want to teach, I have always wanted this since I was a child."
- "I wanted to learn English better. Joy of teaching, the realisation that I help other people in learning."

On the other hand, one student did not identify himself/herself as *the Digital Teacher of English*: "I do not currently work as an English teacher. Practices in elementary, middle and high schools effectively discouraged me from doing this job. I did not feel bad about it and I think I would be a good teacher, but I just noticed that this is not a good job for me. "

Identity Moratorium

- "I still do not know where I will work, there are so many possibilities that it is too difficult to decide."
- "I practically work in a corporation, theoretically I am a digital teacher, which I consider myself to be, but I do not know how my career will go on in the future."

Identity Diffusion

- "I was here because of life mistakes. I needed a master's degree. It's because of my laziness and stupidity."
- "Because after these studies it is easy to get a job and besides, it counted as part of the internship (being employed as a teacher, you did not have to spend time on apprenticeships)."

Identity Foreclosure

- "My parents encouraged me that after such studies I would find work everywhere, in fact they were right, but do I see myself as a teacher right now? I do not think so. Maybe after graduation, if I work a bit in the profession, I will be more convinced, but so far I like it."

It was observed that some students revealed that their teachers of English inspired them to apply for English studies in the first place, but just before graduation, they fully realise they are passionate about teaching. Moreover, students do not express fear of challenges and understand the need for professional development in the future. However, despite identifying

themselves as *Digital Teachers of English*, some of them do not exclude the option of working in international companies mostly because of financial reasons.

Last but not least, the pre-service teachers were asked to whether they feel they are *Digital Teachers of English* or not. The results show 63% of the respondents identify themselves as *Digital Teachers of English*, whereas 36.7% do not identify themselves because e.g. they think there is still a lot of work ahead of them, 3.3% that in theory yes, but in practice no, which concurs well with the analysis of the open-ended questions.

3.4.2. What is the students' attitude towards the past (motivations and influences)?

In order to understand the participants' reasons for studying English, teaching speciality, and *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization, they were first asked to answer two open-ended questions, which explored this area. The responses to the question "Why did you decide to study English, teaching specialty? Why did you decide on *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization?" demonstrate that the participants chose English because of their passion for learning this foreign language, which is a tool of international communication. Teaching specialty allows the participants to achieve their teaching ambitions, and *the Digital Teacher of English* is a new and prospective specialization attracting attention as the participants are keenly interested in new technologies, discovering new methods of teaching, learning apps, learning new things, and they find new technologies enjoyable for both children and adolescents. Such conditions of studying offer good career prospects. Likewise, the responses to the second question "Why did you decide to pursue the career of an English teacher?" highlight special aptitude for learning English/foreign languages, their passion for English and teaching in general, their satisfaction from teaching, good job prospects, or the possibility to realise one's true vocation.

The further results come from closed-ended questions that are connected with the suggested reasons for studying English, going for English Studies, choosing English as a potential career, and taking up the *Digital Teacher of English* MA study programme.

Figure 2 reports that the reason related to education, for which people decide to study foreign languages (scale 1-5, where 1 – not important, 2 – slightly important, 3 – no opinion, 4- important, and 5 - very important) is definitely passion for languages (M=4.7), as it seems to confirm the data from the previously discussed open-ended questions. They rather have no opinion concerning subject teachers, not necessarily English (M=2.6). Leaflets/university website (M=2.23), opportunity to study abroad (M=2.2), participation in an open university day or career/conference days (M=1.5) are slightly important.

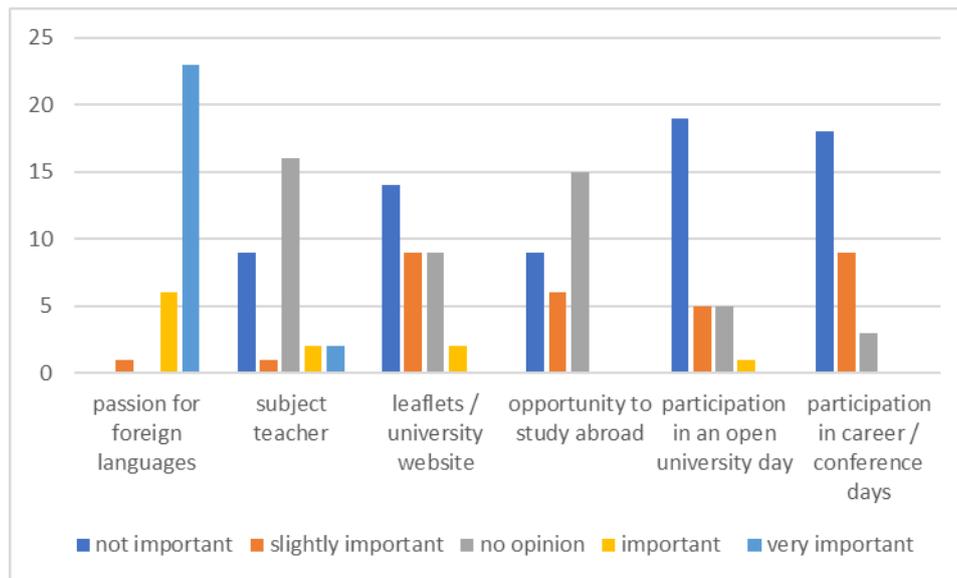


Figure 2. Reasons for studying foreign languages

As Figure 3 shows, the participants rated the influence of the personal authorities and concepts on their decision to study English (scale 1-5, where 1 – not important, 2 – slightly important, 3 – no opinion, 4- important, and 5 - very important). Similarly, the fact they are passionate about the English language ($M=4.7$), the fact that English is in their opinion a lingua franca ($M=4.3$) and the culture of English speaking countries ($M=4.2$) appear to have encouraged them to study this language the most. When it comes to an English teacher as an influencer, the answers are rather inconclusive ($M=2.7$). Finally, the participants do not consider parents ($M=1.8$), family ($M=1.8$), experience in volunteering and tutoring ($M=1.7$) or friends ($M=1.1$) as a dominant factor.

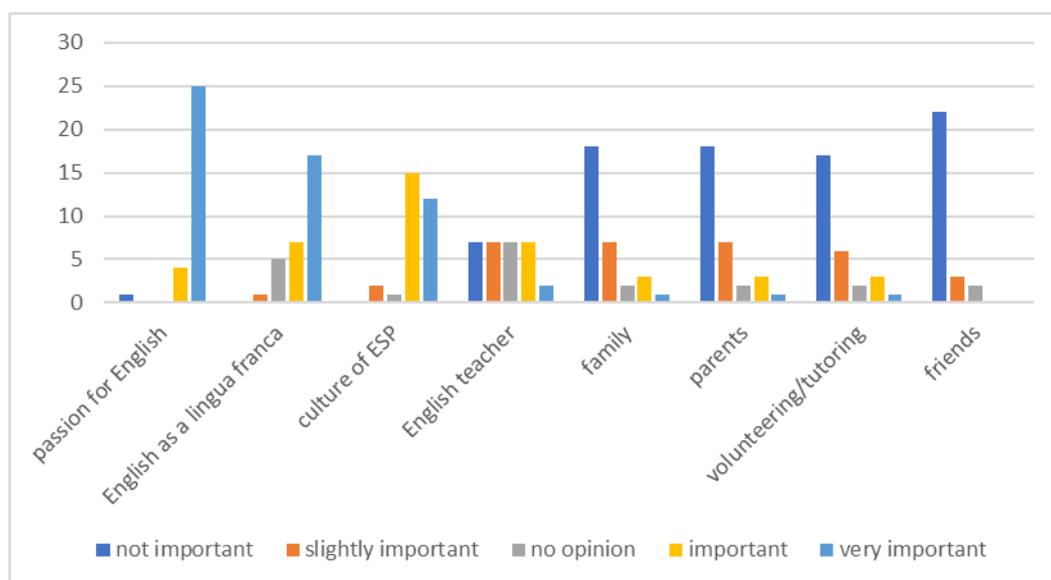


Figure 3. The influence of the personal authorities/concepts on the decision to study English

As the participants expressed their opinions on choosing foreign language studies with the focus on English (Table 2), they were asked to measure how strong the statements concerning one's reasoning when choosing English as a career were (scale 1-5, where 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – no opinion, 4- agree, and 5 – strongly agree). They strongly agree they liked English and were good at it at school (M=4.7), agree that felt passion for teaching (M=4.3) and so applied for a field of study connected with English (M=4.3), with the prospect of a profession (M=4.2) offering many job opportunities (M=4.23), in which one's works with people (M=4.2). Moreover, studying English was thought to be intellectually stimulating for the participants (M=4.1). They also agree that teaching was their destiny (M=3.8), they wanted to get a diploma (M=3.7) and a socially valuable job (M=3.5). They rather have no opinion on working in a profession respected in society (M=3.3), being interested in financial benefits (M=3.2), having a possibility for a job with flexible hours (M=2.7) or a part-time job (M=2.6). Possibly, the students did not have any opinion due to the lack of personal experience or point of reference then. They do not agree that wanted to open a business (M=2.1) or have the possibility for self-employment (M=2).

Table 2. The statements concerning one's reasoning when choosing English as a career

| Strongly agree | Agree | No opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| I liked English and was good at it at school. | | | | |
| 83% | 7% | 7% | 0% | 3% |
| I wanted to study a field of study connected with English. | | | | |
| 47% | 47% | 0% | 3% | 3% |
| I wanted to work in a profession respected in society. | | | | |
| 13% | 34% | 30% | 13% | 10% |
| I would like to have a job with good career prospects. | | | | |
| 23% | 50% | 10% | 7% | 10% |
| I thought that studying English is intellectually stimulating. | | | | |
| 47% | 33% | 13% | 0% | 7% |
| I wanted to have a socially valuable job. | | | | |
| 13% | 47% | 27% | 3% | 10% |
| I wanted to get a diploma. | | | | |
| 27% | 43% | 10% | 17% | 3% |
| I wanted to work with people. | | | | |
| 44% | 33% | 23% | 0% | 0% |
| I felt a passion for teaching. | | | | |
| 47% | 43% | 7% | 0% | 0% |
| I felt that teaching is my destiny. | | | | |
| 46% | 18% | 29% | 7% | 0% |
| I wanted to open my own business. | | | | |
| 3% | 7% | 27% | 23% | 40% |
| I wanted to have a possibility for self-employment. | | | | |
| 0% | 27% | 20% | 27% | 26% |
| I wanted to have a possibility for a part-time job. | | | | |
| 7% | 40% | 0% | 13% | 40% |

| | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| I was interested in financial benefits. | | | | |
| 20% | 27% | 27% | 6% | 20% |
| I wanted to work flexible working hours. | | | | |
| 20% | 20% | 13% | 20% | 27% |
| I wanted to have a profession in which I would always find a job. | | | | |
| 35% | 21% | 35% | 0% | 9% |

The participants decided how the suggested aspects influenced their choice of *the Digital Teacher of English* MA study programme (Figure 4), with the scale 1-5, where 1 – not important, 2 – slightly important, 3 – no opinion, 4 – important, and 5 – very important. There is not one leading factor or group of factors influencing the participants' choice: the teachers' reputation (M=3.3), recommendation (M=3.27), study programme (M=2.7) and syllabus (M=2.5). The experience of writing a BA thesis on the topic of digital learning is slightly important for the majority of the participants (M=2.1).

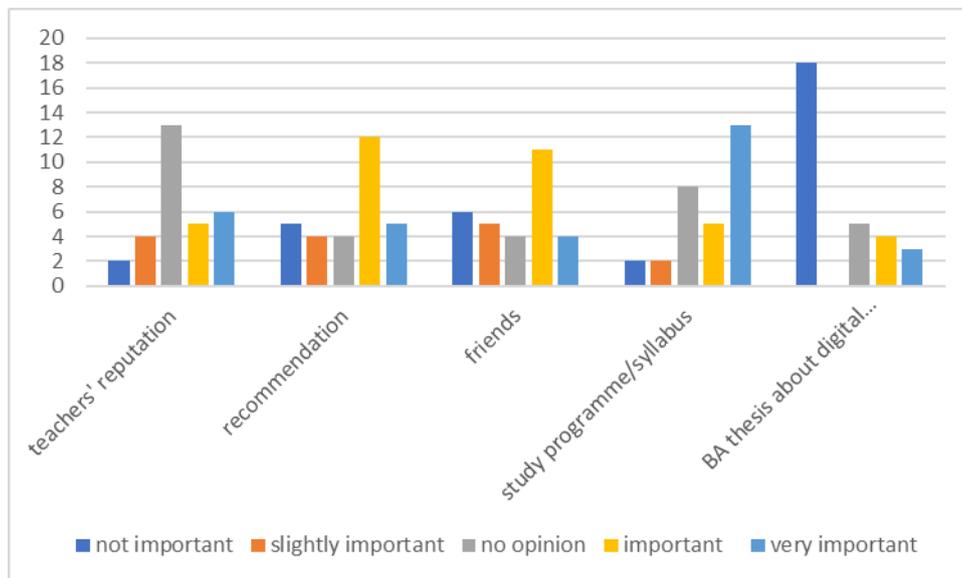


Figure 4. The factors influencing the participants' choice of MA study programme

The final results show how strong the participants' willingness to study English and become a teacher had been before they started their university. It might be assumed that both results are rather consistent as the pre-service teachers consciously applied for English studies (60% of the participants expressed their willingness to study English as very strong) with the idea of becoming a teacher in mind (43% of the respondents reached the conclusion that their willingness to become a teacher was very strong).

The closing section of this part of the research comprised open-ended questions, which investigated the examples of the respondents' favourite teachers and their distinguishable personality traits as well as those with whom the cooperation was rather difficult.

The types of positive qualities turned out to be connected with:

- one's profession: knowledge of the subject, methods of teaching adapted to the group's needs, organisation of work, good classroom atmosphere;
- work approach: being demanding and professional with a business-like attitude,
- teacher's attitude and personality traits: charisma, being approachable, charitable, friendly, helpful, humorous, just, personally committed, positive, and having passion for teaching.

The types of negative qualities proved to be connected with:

- one's profession: lack of knowledge and inability to teach, lack of organisation and preparation for the classes, lack of commitment;
- work approach, hostility, creating a stressful classroom atmosphere;
- teacher's attitude and personality traits: egocentrism, hypocrisy, inconsistency, moodiness, narcissism, and being demanding.

3.4.3. What is the students' attitude towards the present (identity development and career image of *the Digital Teacher of English*)?

First of all, second year participants felt motivated, satisfied and relieved they are about to graduate, that they are going to have a diploma and will be able to teach. 70% of students would apply for this specialization again, however, as many as 33% of the respondents thought of quitting studies due to personal issues, wrongly chosen studies or academic problems. Their attitude towards being *the Digital Teacher of English* did not change, it changed only for 22% of the participants who found the image was too idealized or that it would mean a teacher who uses digital tools only.

The participants were asked to provide examples of moments when what they were doing reflected their identity of *the Digital Teacher of English*. These were mostly moments of creative usage of digital tools or the idea of being always online for the student to help. They enumerated their positive and negative experiences during studies and school practice. What is very important here is that one of their positive experiences mentioned is the moment they realised they actually are *Digital Teachers of English*.

In Table 3 the results of the statements expressing their present attitude towards being *the Digital Teacher of English* are summarized. The findings show that the majority of the participants strongly agree that they derive satisfaction from teaching, are proud to be students of English, teaching speciality, *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization. They strongly

disagree on regretting studying at a pedagogical university in general. They do not plan further education such as postgraduate studies or PhD.

Table 3. The present attitude of the respondents towards being *the Digital Teacher of English*

| Strongly agree | Agree | No opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| I derive satisfaction from teaching | | | | |
| 50% | 36.7% | 6.7% | 3.3% | 3.3% |
| Being <i>the Digital Teacher of English</i> is the important part of who I want to be. | | | | |
| 26.7% | 40% | 26.7% | 3.3% | 3.3% |
| I am proud that I study English. | | | | |
| 40% | 40% | 13.3% | 3.3% | 3.3% |
| I am proud that I am on teaching specialty. | | | | |
| 50% | 36.7% | 6.7% | 3.3% | 3.3% |
| I am proud that I am on <i>the Digital Teacher of English</i> specialization. | | | | |
| 50% | 30% | 16.7% | 0% | 3.3% |
| I am proud that I study at this particular university. | | | | |
| 26.7% | 36.7% | 20% | 6.7% | 10% |
| I regret studying at a pedagogical university. | | | | |
| 3.3% | 6.7% | 10% | 33.3% | 46.7% |
| I am planning to go on postgraduate studies or PhD. | | | | |
| 3.3% | 3.3% | 16.7% | 23.3% | 53.3% |

Table 4 details the final results from this part of the questionnaire with the suggested values and ideals of being the digital teacher (E-Nauczyciel, <http://ecd1.pl/certyfikaty/ecd1-profile-7/>) and the extent to which the participants are faithful to them. What should be noted from these results is that the participants agree to what constitutes the digital teacher, especially in terms of passion, but they are not sure about being a digital citizen in the global world. Additionally, the open-ended question shows that with new technologies the participants also perceive the opportunity to reach every student, adapt educational needs, promote continuous development, develop internal motivation, share their passion, learn through play. Digital teaching means for them flexibility, the ability to take risks, and unlimited access to information.

Table 4. The values and ideals of being the digital teacher

| Suggested values | Very much | Somewhat | Undecided | Not really | Not at all |
|---|-----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Aiming for the autonomy of students | 66.7% | 26.7% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% |
| Readiness to take on new challenges | 66.7% | 26.7% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% |
| Being a mentor / trainer for students ("facilitator") | 66.7% | 26.7% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% |
| Engaging in professional development | 70% | 20% | 10% | 0% | 0% |
| Being a digital citizen | 33.3% | 33.3% | 33.3% | 0% | 0% |
| Involvement | 73.3% | 23.3% | 3.3% | 0% | 0% |
| Passion | 93.3% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|------|-------|-----|
| Multitasking | 56.7% | 33.3% | 10% | 0% | 0% |
| Open mind | 63.3% | 26.7% | 10% | 0% | 0% |
| Innovation | 53.3% | 40% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% |
| Cooperation | 46.7% | 46.7% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% |
| Being global | 30% | 23.3% | 20% | 16.7% | 10% |
| Balance between tradition and technology | 46.7% | 46.7% | 6.7% | 0% | 0% |

3.4.4. What is the attitude of students towards professional future (future career ambitions)?

Further results from the multiple choice question show where pre-service *Digital Teachers of English* want to apply. From Figure 6 one it can be noted that high school (56.7%), language school (60%), and international company (50%) are the most popular choices for their future workplace. If they choose to become a teacher, the school type seems to be no difference for them, whereas 20% of the participants opt for being self-employed.

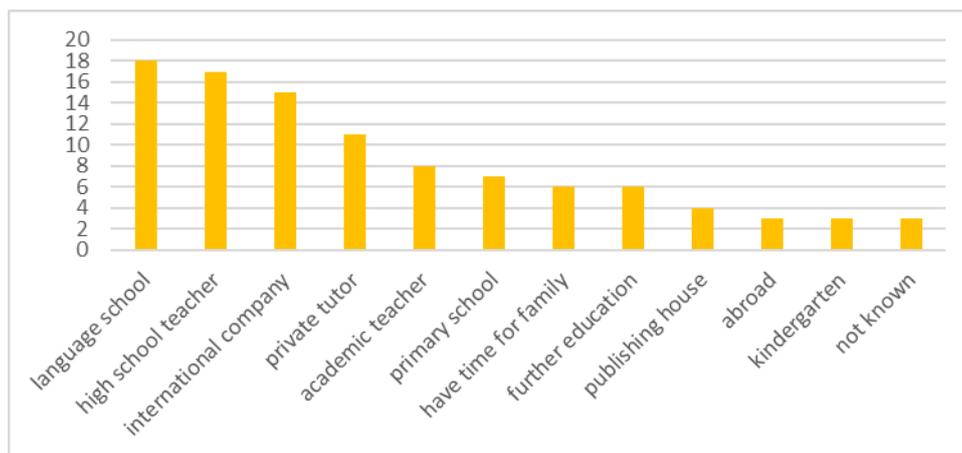


Figure 5. The future workplace

Then, the pre-service teachers were asked to decide to what extent the suggested factors prompt them to plan their future career in a given way. Figure 7 illustrates that the factor which influences participants' choice of future career path the most are teachers from the MA programme ($M=3.7$). School practice supervisors ($M=1.4$) and Erasmus experience ($M=1.3$) do not influence their planned future career. From this standpoint, it might be considered that the surveyed students are more certain which factors do not influence their choices rather than the opposite.

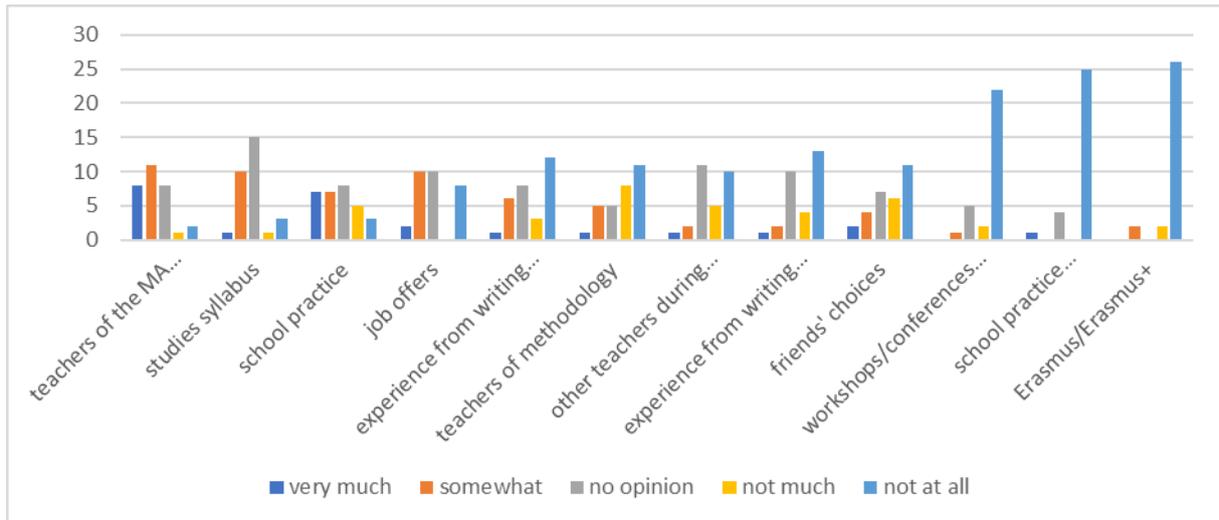


Figure 6. The factors influencing participants' choice of future career path

The final results in Table 5 explore what being a digital teacher means for the participants in the long term. According to them, there are good job opportunities due to the lack of digital teachers on the labour market, and there are opportunities for multiple interaction with the student. The participants do not seem to be sure whether they will become the part of the community of digital teachers. Such a career does not seem to represent working overtime or under time pressure, but offers variety. Career development and prospects of promotion are expected from such a stable job in the field where there is a shortage of qualified employees. They imply the opportunity to use the acquired knowledge of language and pedagogical knowledge, but still have either no opinion or agree that being digital teachers means being respected by the society in the long term, which is also reflected in the way the perceived deciding on English a career in the research question concerning their attitude towards the past.

Table 5. The attitude towards being the digital teacher in the long term

| Strongly agree | Agree | No opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| Good job opportunities due to the lack of digital teachers on the labour market. | | | | |
| 44.8% | 37.9% | 13.8% | 0% | 3.4% |
| Opportunities for multiple interaction with the student | | | | |
| 53.3% | 30% | 13.3% | 0% | 3.3% |
| The opportunity to become part of the community of digital teachers | | | | |
| 33.3% | 26.7% | 30% | 6.7% | 3.3% |
| Working under time pressure | | | | |
| 3.3% | 3.3% | 26.7% | 30% | 36.7% |
| Working overtime | | | | |
| 11.1% | 5.6% | 27.8% | 38.9% | 16.7% |
| Variety | | | | |
| 40% | 46.7% | 6.7% | 3.3% | 3.3% |
| Opportunities for professional development | | | | |
| 37.9% | 41.4% | 13.8% | 3.4% | 3.4% |

| Opportunities for career advancement | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 16.7% | 43.3% | 16.7% | 16.7% | 6.7% |
| Having a stable job | | | | |
| 36.7% | 36.7% | 16.7% | 6.7% | 3.3% |
| Working in the field where there is a shortage of qualified employees | | | | |
| 36.7% | 40% | 13.3% | 6.7% | 3.3% |
| The opportunity to use the acquired knowledge of language and pedagogical knowledge | | | | |
| 60% | 33.3% | 3.3% | 0% | 3.3% |
| Being respected in society | | | | |
| 10% | 40% | 40% | 6.7% | 3.3% |

4. Discussion

The results of the present study go in line with Werbińska's (2009) and Yunus, Malik & Zakaria's (2012) findings i.e. more than half of the participants identify themselves as *Digital Teachers of English*. The students consciously, and almost without any external influence, continue their education and experience in the field of teaching English as a foreign language with the usage of new technologies. The participants had had the intention to study English and become teachers before they actually started. Joining this MA programme is related to many reasons, inter alia, teachers' reputation, recommendations, friends and content. The teachers should pay attention to all the information they share with their potential students as it appears to be substantial, especially when the programme is relatively new and its methodologically-oriented content should be demonstrated as there is need for such content observed (Krajka, 2012).

Nevertheless, when deciding on their future professional career, the lecturers play a fairly significant role. They are aware of what constitutes a "good" or "bad" teacher as they can critically reflect upon their life experiences. Events such as workshops, conferences, career days have little influence on their choices. It would seem worth exploring to check whether these students participate in such events and how effective they are. When the students decide on their MA programme, they tend to continue their education at the same university they did their bachelor's degree. However, their experience in the process of writing the BA thesis is definitely not important. The MA programme that is the subject of this study is considered satisfactory by the participants and most of the participants would choose it again. However, it is observed that some of the participants believe that the image of *the Digital Teacher of English* is too idealized or that it means a teacher who uses digital tools only. This finding is in line with Krajka's (2012) observation that some teachers might perceive teaching with technologies after being trained to incorporate them as not so innovative as they thought it would be, that the "wow factor" would lose effect, or that they have an inadequate perception

of digital teaching. They do not plan further education after graduation. The studied group exhibit their willingness to work with people, but are not sure what being a digital citizen means for them and how it corresponds with the identity of the digital teacher.

It has been demonstrated that besides educational opportunities, pre-service teachers take into consideration other places of work like international companies. The role of the teacher should be here to prompt his/her students to do what they are truly passionate about to reach self-satisfaction. Passion for learning and teaching English have been exhibited by the participants on different occasions. They would like to share their passion of the use of technology with other students, which is considered a real asset. This finding is in line with the studies from the literature review as they similarly show the positive perception towards Computer-Assisted Language Learning (Boersma & Getu, 2016; Harvil, 2018; Krajka, 2012; Muslem, Yusuf, & Juliana, 2018; Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2015).

As the lecturers from the MA programme are supposed to guide the orientation of the students' decisions, they should encourage and introduce them to join the community of digital teachers. The pre-service teachers might not be aware of the existence of such a community, but as it has been enumerated in the literature review, there are many digital teaching programmes whose graduates form a large group of digital educators. The results confirmed in two instances that the participants are not convinced that their future job would be respected in society. Again, their lectures might reassure them that over time they will earn and experience respect from their students, parents, and the fellow teachers.

The investigation has shown that despite the studied group's positive perceptions towards Computer-Assisted Language Teaching, the values and ideals of the digital teacher should be stated and reflected upon more definitely during the participants' studies. It has also appeared that the opinion on status of the digital teacher and the status of the teacher are interconnected. A general understanding of what encompasses the identity of the digital teacher for the group studied is observed and the attitude towards the character of this profession, *inter alia* opportunities and variety it provides, is positive. However, the concepts e.g. 'being a digital citizen' and 'being global' might not be understood and/or identified as the qualities that the digital teacher exhibits. Furthermore, in the participants' view society does not have a high opinion of the digital teacher. This might be attributed to the general opinion about the status of the teaching profession as it being not ranked notably highly (Dolton et al., 2018). Such a perception is common not only among the Polish participants of this study but the teachers in most of European countries (European Union, 2013) or the United States (PDK International, 2019).

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the study explored the identity and attitudes of a group of students that attend *the Digital Teacher of English* specialization. Their identity statuses, according to James Marcia's classification, are mostly achieved, which means that after a period of self-exploration, they ultimately achieved their identity as Digital Teachers of English. They are motivated towards applying for a specialization that actively educates in the area of computer-assisted language learning. The majority of the participants would choose the same specialization again.

The participants identify the aspects of their teaching practice that lead to their positive perception of Computer-Assisted Language Learning such as the variety of possibilities that technology offers and the learner-centred communication that they experience. In the future, they expect to find many job offers where they can interact with students on many levels.

The findings might be extrapolated to form the basis for planning a study programme of a similar kind, attracting students to attend such programme, lecturers' role, and finally, encourage graduates to develop their careers in the direction of digital learning. Future educators willing to open a studying programme of a similar kind should put particular emphasis on teachers' reputation, recommendations and its syllabus. The lecturers, who were found to be the most influential in terms of having an impact of the participants' future career path, should act as role models that throughout the programme continue to encourage them to invest their time in career development in digital teaching further after they graduate. Timing seems to be vital as further education, at least in the formal setting. These role models should address the aspects of the digital teacher profession's identity and make them aware of the teacher's image created by society in general (European Union, 2013). Current international events such as workshops, conferences, or career days as well as the experience of studying abroad on an exchange programme do not influence *Digital Teachers of English'* decision to develop in this area after graduation. Perhaps further research might answer the question if and how such events might build e.g. communities of digital teachers from the start of their professional career. Last but not least, there should more platforms available and those already existing should be popularized more widely for those who wish to identify or identify as digital teachers to connect, share experiences, and support one another as participation in professional educational groups facilitates their professional development (Hung & Li, 2017).

Due to practical constraints, the major limitations of the study are the small sample and possibly the lack of control group. Therefore, given the small sample size, caution must be exercised. Future research might be performed on another group taking an MA programme of regular English language teaching as comparing those two groups might give some answer to

the extent to which the focused treatment of the *Digital Teacher of English* specialization actually results in identity changes. Alternatively, another study might explore the same students when starting the specialization and graduating from it or two groups of students (one from the specialization and one outside it, e.g., from the regular English studies ELT department). Despite the limitations of this research, its exploratory nature sheds light on better understanding of pre-service teachers' identity and their attitudes before and during their studies on the *Digital Teacher of English* specialization while sharing their perceptions for their future as well.

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Notes

[1]

<https://education.ontariotechu.ca/undergraduate/bachelor-of-arts-estd-adult-education-and-digital-technology.php>

<https://study.csu.edu.au/courses/teaching-education/master-education-knowledge-networks-digital-innovation>

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate/degrees/index.php?r=site/view&id=106>

<https://global.k-state.edu/education/curriculum-and-instruction/digital-teaching-and-learning>

<https://study.unisa.edu.au/degrees/graduate-diploma-in-education-studies-digital-learning>

<http://www.monash.edu/pubs/2018handbooks/aos/digital-learning>

<https://www.ucsyd.dk/digital-teacher>

<http://www.tellconsult.eu/>

<https://www.futurelearn.com/programs/digital-learning-design-and-assessment>

<https://fabrykaprzyszlosci.pl/szkolenia-i-oferty/szkolenia-tik-w-dydaktyce>

<http://www.szkoly.katowice.zdz.pl/cyfrowy-nauczyciel-multimedia-w-nauczaniu> (access: 24.02.2020)

[2]

[https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/pgstudy/course/taught/digital-technologies-for-language-teaching-\(distance-learning\)-ma](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/pgstudy/course/taught/digital-technologies-for-language-teaching-(distance-learning)-ma)

<https://www.uni-giessen.de/study/courses/master/langtech>

<http://www.tellconsult.eu/> (access: 24.02.2020)

[3] The original in Polish: „Fenomen bycia jednostką niepowtarzalną zawdzięczamy temu, że w toku życia kumulujemy obrazy siebie. Tożsamość to ciągle przypominanie, ulepszanie, konstruowanie siebie na podstawie tego co było, jest i będzie w naszym życiu”.

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