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## Exploring ELT Students' Professional Identity Formation through the Perspectives of Critical Incidents

Müfit Şenel\*

Ondokuz Mayıs University, TURKEY

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**Abstract:** This study aims at exploring the professional identities of six ELT students through the lens of critical incidents. For the sake of this aim, six ELT students took part in this research at an Anatolian High School in 2018-2019 spring semester. The teaching practicum process was conducted from April to mid of May 2019, once a week over six-week practicum. The main data collection of this study was the Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ). Additionally, two questions were asked to the participants to evaluate their actual and designated professional identities. The first question was answered before the practicum and the second one was answered at the end of the practicum process. The results showed that some internal and external factors influenced their professional identity. Additionally, it was found that critical incidents could be used to spot the changes in the participants' professional identity formation processes. Results of the study indicated that not only negative but also some positive critical incidents contributed to the participants' professional identity formation. As a result of the encountered incidents that influenced their formation of identities, it was observed that the actual identities of four students changed from positive to negative at the end of the process. Correspondingly, the findings of this study put forward that how the participants explored their identity formation process through the critical incidents.

**Keywords:** Professional identity, critical incident, ELT.

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### Introduction

Opportunities which are given for the advance of an individual or to become experienced in language teaching settings allude to 'teacher development'. The term 'teacher development' was portrayed by Underhill (1986, p. 1) as "the most ideal sort of educator that one actually can be". As teacher trainees or instructors, one of the numerous jobs is to furnish future or beginning educators with the vital encounters and data they have to turn into "the most ideal sort of instructor." This implies considerably more than the transmission of hypotheses, abilities, and strategies; however, to provide opportunities which will assist to inexperienced teachers with turning out to be intelligent instructors for the remainder of their professions. Additionally, to encourage teachers to turn out to be more intelligent and expository, there are many opportunities, one of which is revealing critical incidents because they give teachers a chance to explain and reflect on their either positive or negative instant experiences at classrooms.

On the other hand, professional identity of teachers has emerged as a prominent factor in all aspects of language teaching fields because it clarifies the way teachers teach, their attitudes toward innovation in education, their professional identity, etc. (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Critical incident can be defined as having assumptions and making instant decisions when people encounter with some specific, unplanned and unexpected situations. On the other hand, critical incidents are unexpected and unplanned events in the classrooms that most teachers can face. In the literature, it is possible to find several definitions and explanations about critical incident. For instance, the term critical incident was first coined by Flanagan (1954) and he used it as "direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p. 327). Some other definitions for critical incident can also be tabulated as: 'an everyday event that stands out' (Martin, 1996); 'eloquent happenings that are considered significant or memorable' (Brookfield, 1995; Woods, 1993); 'a problematic situation that presents itself as a unique

#### \* Correspondence:

Müfit Şenel, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Education, Samsun, Turkey. ✉ [mufitsenel@hotmail.com](mailto:mufitsenel@hotmail.com)



case and promotes reflection' (Schön, 1987); or 'highly charged moments and episodes that have huge consequences for personal change and development' (Sikes et al., 1985).

In 2006, Brookfield reported a new and expanded definition for critical incident as "any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurs during class, outside class or during a teacher's career but is 'vividly' remembered" (p. 84). According to one more conspicuous definition put forward by Richards and Farrell in 2005, "incidents only become critical when they are subject to conscious reflections, and when language teachers formally analyze critical incidents, they can uncover new understandings of their practice". Additionally, as suggested by McAteer et al. (2010, p. 107), "critical incident is one that challenges your own assumptions or makes you think differently".

The theory of critical incidents enables teachers to focus on their teaching experience and to find ways to strengthen their experiences by recognizing preconceptions and reflecting on the importance of unplanned incidents. If it is efficiently used by teachers, educators or teacher-trainers, it helps them improve their teaching via reflection on classroom events (Farrell, 2008; Thiel, 1999; Tripp, 1993), then all those incidents become a part of reflective teaching. Moreover, through some courses, educational programs, seminars, in-service programs, etc., teachers can be taught to think about 'what and why something happened' and 'what should be done to overcome the problems and to reach their aims' (Cruikshank & Applegate, 1981).

As described by Brookfield (2006), some advantages of using critical incident were to warn teachers before problems occur or they become sophisticated, to motivate learners to be reflective learners, to create a case for teaching diversity and build self-confidence and to suggest opportunities for teacher's development. It must be noted here that especially for prospective teachers, critical incidents require challenging situations and instant ratification before becoming experienced teachers since most of those situations are the examples of unpredictable events.

Professional identity is defined as one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978). As propounded by Luehmann (2007), professional identity may be accepted as 'professional philosophy, desires, interests, ways to behave and communicate, values and morality'. Three essential elements of professional identity can be asserted as being aware of one's own personality about a certain profession, searching for sense within the discipline concerned and being aware of one's own professional passions (Lace, 2014, as cited in Ivanova & Skara-Mincane, 2016).

Common among teacher professional identity definitions, one of the most prominent one was the notion that was defined by Beijaard et al. (2004). They defined the term professional identity as a dynamic and a continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences. They also entailed that professional development never ends and professional identity formation is not only to answer to 'Who am I at this moment?', but also to answer to 'Who do I want to become?'. They also completed that professional identity seems to be crucial for teachers that sub-identities which signify the relationship of teachers with different contexts do not dispute since they are well balanced. Furthermore, for professional identity, 'agency' is an important aspect of meaning, whereby teachers must be involved in the field of professional development. Another remarkable explanation for professional identity was given by Heled and Davidovich (2019). According to the authors, professional identity was shaped by to how the external environment (both close and remote) perceived the professional and the professional's perception of herself. They also added that professional identity had much significance both for the profession in general and for its practitioners.

Professional identity can be examined under two categories. These are actual identity and designated identity that shed light on the explanation of professional identity. According to Sfard and Prusak (2005) actual identities could be understood when people told their stories in present tense and designated identities could be recognized by the future commitments of people. As final words, professional identity brings about the development of an inexperienced teachers' professional identity from the beginning of their careers to become experienced teachers. It encircles their encouragement to teach, their enthusiasm and their dedication to teaching. Professional identity plays an important role in teacher education, shapes practices, affects teachers' motivation and self-reliance, responsibility.

Briefly, the purpose of this manuscript is to explore and analyze the professional identities of six prospective teachers at a state university in Samsun and the impact on their teaching practice through the perspectives of critical incidents. It should be useful to mention here that in Turkey, teaching practicum takes place at the eight semester's program (4<sup>th</sup> grade) of the faculties of education and approximately lasts two or three months. At university level, especially for prospective teachers at the faculties of education, it is essential to establish social interaction with students at elementary, primary or high schools because this interaction will help them improve their professional development and social identities. Teaching practicum; therefore, will provide prospective teachers a chance to experience how to deal with the possible problems they may face during the first years of their career. In the relevant literature, there are only quite a few studies surveying the teaching practicum process and its effects on Turkish EFL prospective teachers' professional identities. Therefore, this article is hoped to shed light on teacher training education at faculties of education on the importance of both internal and external factors affecting the professional identity formation process of prospective teachers.

## Literature Review

In the literature, there are many studies related with critical incident and teacher's development and identity. One study conducted by Ivanova and Skara-Mincane in 2006 on 'professional identity during teacher's practice' reported the vital role of teaching practice and reflective activities in the study process of teacher education. As a result of a research done by Serna-Gutiérrez and Mora-Pablo (2018) with transnational-student teachers in Central Mexico put forward how the participants explored their identity formation process through the critical incidents and how those incidents were directly related with the decisions they made. They also outlined that more questions and possible directions could be taken using the analysis of critical incidents. In 2017, Sudtho and Singhasiri studied with four Thai pre-service teachers during their teaching practicums and their findings showed that some internal and external factors influenced the professional identity formation process of pre-service teachers sometimes in a negative or positive way. In line with this, Kiliç and Cinkara (2019) examined the pre-service EFL teachers' identity construction process and they urged that critical incidents played important roles on English language teachers' identity. Correspondingly, one more study conducted by Mbato (2020) illustrated that critical incidents empowered pre-service teachers to check again their incidents critically and the findings highlighted that insufficient relationship between the participants and other people caused their low intrinsic motivations as teachers

Moreover, Kilgour et al., (2015) outlined that pre-service teachers need to be taught how to deal with negative past experiences affected their teaching and emotions negatively and to learn from the critical incidents. Additionally, a research titled with "Reflecting critical incident as a form of English teachers' professional development" reflected that critical incidents of the participants helped them understand their experience deeper and make it meaningful (Wijaya & Kuswandono, 2018). In 2010, Finch identified that sensitivity to critical incidents occurred in language learning and he added that the learners had to notice the importance of incidents to activate or to affect subsequent learning.

In 2011, a case study directed by Lin with undergraduate medical students in Taiwan substantiated that critical incidents increased participants' understanding of their feelings and thoughts regarding their personal lives and future professional status. Mpofu's (2019) study on "Reflecting on English student teachers' critical incidents during teaching practicum" revealed that a guidance was necessary for student teachers' professional awareness as part of their reflection practices. One more similar titled as "Reflections on Critical Incidents of EFL Teachers During Career Entry in Central Mexico" conducted by Lengeling and Pablo (2016) showed how teachers reflected upon their teaching practice and how the critical incidents helped them to analyze and evaluate their teaching process. On the other hand, Abednia (2012) examined Iranian EFL teachers' professional identity at a teacher education course and the findings substantiated that no amendments were observed in their teaching practice.

Briefly, most of the studies mentioned here focused on the benefits of critical incidents for prospective or pre-service teachers. Its contributing factor to teaching education programs and education program stakeholders were also stated in the relevant literature.

### *Purpose of the study*

In Turkey, teaching practice is a course at faculties of education which was planned for the prospective teachers to gain the characteristics required by his/her profession and to try and develop his/her knowledge and skills in a school environment and. Among these skills, to be able to develop the skills required by the teaching profession by applying teaching in different classrooms of the application school where they are sent to gain teaching experience, to be able to fully learn the education program of their fields, to comment on the textbooks and student evaluation techniques used and to be able to share and develop their experiences during teaching practices in practice schools with friends and practice instructors can be mentioned. Therefore, regarding those factors, this study seeks to investigate the attitudes, moods, feelings, emotions, and reflections of the prospective teachers about the teaching practicum course through critical incidents. Additionally, their actual and designated identifies were questioned with two open-ended questions to determine their professional identities.

## Methodology

### *Method*

For the data analysis of this research, a qualitative method was used. It consists of the written narratives using coding techniques to assign key phrases and words in order to determine themes (Bruster & Peterson, 2013). The reason for using qualitative analysis was to elucidate how participants experienced some critical incidents during their teaching practicum.

### *Participants*

Because teaching practicum groups were limited to 6 or 7 students, totally six students from English Language Teaching Department of Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Education took part in the present study voluntarily. They were all female students. Their ages ranged between 22 and 24 and they were 4th grade students. They are all at least B2 level students according to the entrance grades to the English language department. One of these

participants was from Ukraine. She was at our department as an Erasmus student under student exchange program. All participants attended an Anatolian High School in Samsun from April 2019 to May 2019 to perform their teaching practicum. Each week, they practiced a total of 4 hours to Grade 9 and Grade 10. Three students (S1, S3 and S5) taught at Grade 9 (9A and 9D) while the other three students (S2, S4 and S6) taught at Grade 10 (10A and 10B). S4 is Ukrainian and the others are Turkish.

#### *Data Collection Tool*

The Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) was developed by Brookfield (1995). As data collection instrument, its adapted and modified version by Keefer (2009) was used for this research because this simplified version was more understandable and appropriate for students. Additionally, adaptation of the CIQ may be in order in which the questionnaire could “work best across education and population levels without the need for extensive instruction, while still getting results that seem indicative of the learner statuses” (Vaughn et al., p. 50). Therefore, in order for the class members to elaborate and provide explanations, an adaptation may be needed. It was an open-ended questionnaire. There were five items and participants were asked to write their sincere responses. Those five items were also tailored.

#### *CIQ*

1. At what moment in class this week did you feel most engaged and / or least engaged?
2. What action (if any) in class this week did anybody take that you found most affirming / helpful?
3. What action (if any) in class this week did anybody take that you found most puzzling / confusing?
4. What was the most important information you learned during this week's class?
5. What about the class this six-week surprised you the most (your reaction to what went on, what someone did, or anything else that occurred to you)?

Additionally, in order to learn participants' professional identities (actual and designated) before and after the practicum section, they were asked two open-ended questions and responses were taken in written. The reasons for asking these two questions are to check and evaluate their present and future decisions before and after the teaching practicum process. Questions are:

1. What kind of teacher are you?
2. What kind of teacher will you be?

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The teaching practicum process started in April 2019 and ended in mid of May 2019. It totally continued six weeks. At the end of each week of practicum process, approximately 10-15 minutes were given to the students to write the responses of the questions mentioned in the questionnaire. They were reminded to recall both positive and negative instances they experienced in details. They were also reminded to answer those questions anonymously and hand in their answers at the end of each week. After all responses of the participants were collected by the researcher, they were listed and grouped according to the similarities of the answers in terms of incidents, ideas, thoughts, suggestions, etc. Later, the following steps were followed: 1. Reading the responses of the participants to get idea about their experiences 2. Coding the responses of the participants by grouping 3. Categorizing the responses according to themes or sub-themes and 4. Interpreting the responses by the help of some experts from the field (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

For performing those steps, firstly all responses of the participants were read by the researcher and the other three scholars from the faculty. To get relevant information and also to analyze all reflections of the participants, inductive reasoning, multiple review and coding techniques were used. Their responses were read several times because in order to determine some specific key words to clarify positive and negative critical incidents was needed careful interpretation. Some clarification was conducted to ensure the coding process. To do this, both readers analyzed each category of reflection to determine a definite fit and that all categories were distinct and separate (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Firstly, an independent coding technique was used by both readers to compare each reflection based on an analysis of the language used to determine common words, phrases, and emerging categories until they reached a consensus. Secondly, by using descriptive coding technique initial categories of participants' reflections on critical incidents were identified and subsequent reviews of all comments were used for validation.

### **Findings / Results**

At the end of the evaluation process, all answers of the participants given at the end of week were read, coded categorized and interpreted. The following results were found and displayed by tables with the responses of the participants at the end of the six-week period. Table 1 reflects the answers of the participants for the first section (the most engaged moments) of the first question.

Table 1: Categorization of the total week's responses

<b>Q1: At what moment in today's class did you feel most engaged?</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>
At the beginning stage of the lesson	✓	✓		✓		
While dealing with the facilities in the classroom		✓				
While giving instructions		✓			✓	✓
Designing the activities	✓		✓	✓		
Maintaining classroom discipline		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Trying to take their attention	✓	✓	✓			
Explaining the grammar topics		✓				✓
Controlling in-class activities	✓				✓	
While teaching vocabulary			✓	✓		
Maintaining authority	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Organizing group activities		✓			✓	
Listening to small group discussions	✓	✓	✓			✓

According to the results given at Table 1, it can be concluded that a great amount of the participants was most engaged at the moments while they were trying to maintain the classroom discipline, authority and following group discussions. Excerpts of the students that directly and clearly reflected their feelings, emotions, attitudes, etc. were selected as examples. Some are as follow:

*S2: At the beginning of the class, I was so excited, but in time I concentrated to teaching process. Classroom was so crowded, so sometimes unfortunately I lost my concentration. I spent most of my time to maintain the classroom discipline, but it was not so easy because of some bully students...I felt under pressure!*

*S4: This is my first experience as a student teacher, especially abroad, in Turkey. It was an exciting event for me and also surprising because in Ukraine we do not have crowded classes as in Samsun. Therefore, I spent most of time in class to maintain discipline. When some students learned that I was from Ukraine, they lost their discipline.*

*S1: Trying to take their attention was really difficult for me because at the beginning students never accepted me as their 'real' teacher...because they knew that they were not being evaluated by me...that's why I felt most engaged while I was trying to take their attention....*

The following table (Table 2) tabulates the participants' least engaged moments, the second section of the first question. As seen, they shared their views and they generally focused on the similar events, either while students were watching videos or PPTs. One excerpt of S5 was given as an example.

Table 2: Categorization of the total week's responses

<b>Q1: At what moment in today's class did you feel least engaged?</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>
While using slides, PPT		✓			✓	✓
While they are dealing with exercise in the coursebooks	✓		✓	✓	✓	
While students watching videos	✓	✓				✓

*S5: As we learned at our lessons at the university, I prepared some PPT presentations and slides for my students. I generally used them to teach vocabulary and to present new grammar topics. They were really focused on those materials, so I felt least engaged in class. While they were watching those videos, I could find a space to prepare myself for some unexpected situations in class if I face...*

When regarding the responses of the participants for question 2, five students reported that pair work and group work activities were most helpful actions, not only for them but also for students. Responses of the participants were displayed at Table 3.

Table 3: Categorization of the total week's responses for question 2

<b>Q2: What action (if any) did anybody take that you found most affirming / helpful?</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>
Doing assignments			✓			✓
Working in pairs or groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Asking questions		✓				✓
Giving feedback	✓		✓	✓		

S3: *Our teachers at the university frequently advised us to set up classroom before starting in class activities and they suggested us to organize students for pair work or group work activities. Designing activities for pairs and groups were really helpful because even shy students participated in class activities. However, even though some students did not want to participate in group work activities, gradually they got accustomed to...*

Table 4 summarizes the general responses of the students at the end of six-week period of teaching practicum.

Table 4: Categorization of the total week's responses for question 3

<b>Q3: What action (if any) did anybody take that you found most puzzling / confusing?</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>
Daydreaming of some students			✓			
Disturbing their friends		✓		✓	✓	✓
Laughing at their friends	✓				✓	✓
Making too much noise	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
chatting		✓		✓	✓	
Playing with mobile phones	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Yelling at each other		✓			✓	✓

In the light of answers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> question, the most puzzling or confusing actions that they encountered during their 6-week teaching practicum period were playing with mobile phones, making noise and disturbing the classmates. They reported that all those actions negatively influenced their concentration in the class and they were distracted. For example, S4 said that,

*I could not believe how they used mobile phones in class while I was trying to teach something, some were watching videos, some were playing games, some were chatting.... that was really annoying and disturbing.... I could not decide what could be done for a while...it was really hard to deal with classroom activities*

Additionally, one more excerpt from S6 was added.

*S6: There was always a chaos and noise in the class.....sometimes I really felt headache...suddenly I decided to change their sits to put an end the noise in the classroom.... but it took only a few minutes...*

The 4th question of the CIQ was to determine the most important information that they had learnt throughout this period.

Table 5: Categorization of the total week's responses for question 4

<b>Q4: What was the most important information you learned during today's class?</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>
Need to be prepared for the class		✓	✓			✓
The importance of classroom management		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maintaining the authority			✓		✓	
Language proficiency	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Totally three suggestions were given by the participants and all of them were agree with the idea of classroom management and additionally the importance of language proficiency. For instance, S1 stated that,

*Throughout my teaching practicum period what I learned was how classroom management was important because without maintaining the discipline in the classroom, whatever you did would be meaningless. It should also be noted here that a 'good' teacher should always come to class being prepared...*

Furthermore, four students reported the importance of language proficiency in foreign language classrooms for effective communication and healthy interaction. Of these participants, S5 explained her observations as follow:

*S5: In addition to several incidents, we experienced within this six-week practicum period, one of the most information that I learned was the importance of language proficiency in the target language because some students in my class are not sufficient enough to express their ideas or to convey the message.... I understood that to be a proficient teacher was really important; otherwise, you cannot be successful at teaching, directing classroom activities, interacting with the target language, etc.*

Finally, as the responses given to the 5<sup>th</sup> question, participants were all agree with the 'large number of the students' was the most prominent event that had surprised them during that period. Moreover, 'lack of interest', 'lack of motivation' and 'limited concentration span' were the other important events for them.

Table 6: Categorization of the total week's responses for question 5

<b>Q5: What about the class this six-week surprised you the most (your reaction to what went on, what someone did, or anything else that occurred to you or affected you)?</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>
Large Number of the students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of contribution	✓	✓				✓
Concentration span	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Technical problems		✓			✓	
Proficiency levels			✓			✓
Encouraging students to participate				✓		
Lack of motivation	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Lack of interest	✓	✓	✓			✓
Fear of nothing to say			✓		✓	
Unfamiliarity to communicative approaches				✓	✓	✓

Their answers are elucidated as follows:

*S4: From the beginning of my practicum experience, number of the students in my class negatively affected my motivation and I was shocked when I entered in my class because students were too many in my class.... I often forgot what to say, I had really hard times to organize classroom activities, to set up classroom for pair work activities, etc..... their lack of interest for the lesson, on the one hand, was another surprising reaction of the students for me...they often lost their concentration...they frequently asked irrelevant questions...it was so demotivating....*

*S1: Too many students in the class...In the future I do not have to teach at crowded classes, I hope. Everything was problem...duplicating sufficient enough worksheets, asking questions, controlling listening and speaking activities, and so on.... their unwillingness about participation, lack of interest for learning..... it was really an embarrassing experience for me...I sometimes felt insufficient...not to know what to do ...*

*S6: The most surprising reaction for me during six-week period was the mood and misbehavior of some students in my class...they were generally in a sense of unwillingness... less contribution, lack of interest, demotivation...I was really frustrated...*

Subsequently, some important feedbacks were taken from the answers of two questions on determining the actual and designated identities that reflected their professional developments. Answers were shown below:

Table 7: Responses of the students' actual and designated identities

<b>What kind of teacher are you? (before practicum process)</b>	<b>What kind of teacher will you be? (after practicum process)</b>
S1: I believe that I am a strict teacher.	S1: I didn't change my mind; I will be a strict teacher.
S2: I suppose that I am an authoritarian teacher.	S2: Being an authoritarian teacher will suit me!
S3: I am not sure but I think I am an optimistic teacher.	S3: I felt a bit insufficient. Unfortunately, I will be a pessimistic teacher, I guess.
S4: I am tolerant and helpful teacher.	S4: If I work in Turkey, I think I won't be so tolerant.
S5: I think I am a moderately proficient teacher.	S5: I want to be a bit more experienced teacher.
S6: I am an observer and feedback organizer as a teacher.	S6: In addition to my previously mentioned role as a teacher, I will be a bit strict and authoritarian teacher.

Actual identities often guided prospective teachers' moods and how they monitored themselves throughout the practicum. On the other hand, designated identities appeared from time to time depending on factors at a particular time of teaching. The answers of the participants accentuate the realization that they were generally influenced by external factors. It was observed that the actual identities of S3 and S4 changed from 'positive attitude' to 'negative attitude' because of some demotivating factors such as misbehaviors, unwillingness, lack of participation of students, etc. that they faced during their teaching practicum. Additionally, depending upon the excerpts of the students it is possible to get idea about their designated identities that may influence their professional developments and careers. It

must be noted here that while the actual identities of S1 and S2 remained the same with their designated identities, the designated identities of S3, S4, S5 and S6 became different from their actual identities at the end of the practicum. Additionally, changes in professional identity, from actual to designated, had taken place when the prospective teachers were challenged to reconstruct their practices to match with their surroundings (Sudtho et al., 2017).

As encapsulated by the excerpts of participants and the findings, there were critical incidents that prospective students in this study describe when reflecting on their teaching practices. Those incidents generally resulted from uncertain, unplanned, unexpected and some problematic situations such as,

1. Classroom misbehaviors
2. Insufficient language proficiency
3. Finding themselves insufficient
4. Lack of motivation

### **Discussion**

One of the most important contributions of this present study was to help student teachers gain useful insights and remedial opportunities about teaching experience during their teaching practicum period. Critical incidents mentioned by student teachers generally shed light to the development of their teaching identities. Most of the findings of this study were similar to the results of several studies such as Farrell (2008, 2009); Lengeling and Mora Pablo (2016) because all indicated that critical incidents were significant factors in the development of teacher identity.

The first question of the CIQ was to determine the student teachers' the most or the least engaged moments at the classroom and how they related with the environment. As mentioned previously, majority of them most engaged to maintain the discipline in the classroom, so they stated that they spent much effort to control the classroom. Besides, to organize and follow the classroom activities are the other factors that engaged them most. There is a similarity with the responses of the participants and the findings of Goodell's (2006) research conducted by students at Mathematics departments. With her research, Goodell put forward that 83% of the students had problems with classroom management. On the other hand, participants explained that using videos or slides helped them relaxed for a while, thus while students were dealing with the video-based exercises, they felt least engaged.

On the basis of the evidence gathered from the second question, participants focused on the importance of pair and group work activities at the classroom because they found them the most affirming and helpful activities for students. They generally stated that they sometimes suddenly decided to organize those activities as a part of their critical incidents. The answers given to this question support the findings of Zani and Suely Nogueira (2006) because they claimed that interaction between people in groups was highly important and it allowed students to participate in their own development.

The third question aims to clarify the factors which raise the possibility of some certain critical incidents may become negative initial conditions emerged as obstacles to learning. In line with the data obtained from the third question, it was found that playing with mobile phones, making too much noise and disturbing to each other were among the most puzzling and/or confusing actions. They stated that they generally did not decide what they would do in those situations since they had never thought that they faced those events. They had to give some instant decisions because those behaviors were directly affecting the mood of the other students in the class. In his article, Farrell (2008) emphasized how classroom participation and behavior of the students influenced the atmosphere in the classroom. These findings; therefore, support the responses of the participants in this present study.

In response to the fourth question, the majority of the participants indicated the importance of classroom management, preparation for the lessons and also language proficiency for the lessons were the most prominent information they learned throughout their teaching practicum period. Of these, preparation was believed to help them overcome several problems occurred in classrooms and improve their professional development. Lack of preparation leads to feel of insecurity on student teachers. Besides, language proficiency was accepted by student teachers as essential for classroom interaction, following the instructions, expressing ideas, doing in class activities, etc. It can be concluded that those results were similar to the findings of Farrell (2004) because he reported that the most critical incidents were in language proficiency problem.

The fifth question tried to identify which events, actions or situations caused negative attitudes and how they emerged. Therefore, the answers of the participants for the last question have led us to conclude that large number of the students, limited concentration span and lack of motivation were the most surprising factors that affected them much. Especially S4, from Ukraine, was one of the most complaining students from all those demotivating and upsetting events. Although all of the participants had prepared several materials and come to classes having been prepared, yet some students seemed not to be interested in the lesson. This situation was explained as a result of several factors related to the student's participation in the classroom (Fu et al., 2012, as cited in Permatasari, 2018). For example, the classroom's atmosphere, students' motivation, student's interest, concentration, etc. Actually, those findings were consistent with the findings of this present study and the answers given to the fifth question.



Furthermore, in order to learn their actual and designated identities two questions were asked to the participants. The responses validated that their critical incidents which they had experienced provoked their designated identities, influenced their roles of teacher and caused them to change their decisions. Only S1 and S2 did not change their identities. It was found that at the beginning of the practicum period generally, they had positive attitudes toward teaching, but at the end of the process their positive attitudes turned into negative attitude as a result or effect of either internal or external factors. These factors can be categorized and summarized as follows:

*Table 8: Effect of internal and external factors*

<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
insufficient experience	classroom space
anxiety	large number of students
excitement	concentration problems of the students
feel of being monitored by their classmates and teachers	demotivated students
adaptation problem	limited classroom participation misbehaviors

Regarding the results obtained from the interview, it can be concluded that two types of identities can shape the prospective teachers' professional identities because our beliefs about something can play an important role in our daily lives. Therefore, it is possible that those beliefs may affect the role of prospective teachers to become successful teachers (Pajares, 1992). Those beliefs, mostly core beliefs, can easily change depending upon some factors mentioned at Table 8. Briefly, when affected by different factors, it was observed that prospective teachers tended to set new goals of achieving and forming new professional identities in order to eliminate and overcome each classroom situation.

### Conclusion

It must be noted here that teaching practicum provides lots of opportunities for prospective teachers to cultivate their competencies and readiness to groom themselves for teaching profession, to be aware of their weaknesses in teaching process, to learn how to overcome some unwanted or unexpected situations in classes, to analyze and criticize their present knowledge and talents on teaching, etc. Correspondingly, this present research attempts to crystallize the six ELT prospective teachers' professional identity formation through the perspectives of critical incidents. The findings put forward that prospective teachers' experiences helped them identify and be aware of their negative and positive critical incidents.

The findings also informed us that several factors played main roles on student teachers' critical incidents. For instance, regarding the responses of the participants it can be stated that classroom space and atmosphere, materials, excitement and anxiety of the prospective teachers, etc. are the effective factors. Of course, these are not the only main problems. But in addition to these factors, undoubtedly, one of the most remarkable ones are the students themselves since they directly affect the mood and decisions of the prospective teachers throughout the practicum. Their lack of interest, demotivation, short concentration span, misbehaviors, lack of classroom participation, etc. are among the factors caused by students.

Critical incidents may be useful for student teachers to prepare for their future careers and developments. Information gathered from all critical incidents, especially positive ones, are always useful for not only for students but also for teacher trainers because thanks to explanations and confessions of the student teachers, educators and teacher trainers may be informed about to redesign and reorganize their programs and courses at the faculties.

Another striking contribution of critical incidents is to activate or trigger the actual and designated identities of student teachers to make them be aware of their professional developments. While actual identities reflect the observation of student teachers how they view themselves during the practicum process, designated identities, on the one hand, occur at different parts of teaching process when they are affected by certain factors or situations. This is important for professional development and to gain experience because they will learn how to cope with unexpected classroom events. In line with this, the responses of the student teachers participated in this present study put forward very useful information for themselves because in this way they found an opportunity to compare, share and criticize their critical incidents at the end the practicum process.

Blumer (2005) explained the factors affecting the professional identities under three headlines: social, physical and abstract objects. Taking this view into consideration, it is notable to categorize the critical incidents of the participants of this study. For instance, abstract objects, as a reflection of actual identity, refer to the participants' own beliefs and/or comments about their professional development. Regarding the findings of this study, most of the participants stated that they had been influenced by their self-realizations. On the other hand, physical objects which include classroom space, course materials, etc. and social objects such as co-teachers, classmates, students, etc. related with designated identities because they directly influenced their roles, moods and ideas. Therefore, it can be understood from the excerpts of the participants, all these objects highly affected their actual and designated identities throughout

the practicum process. Correspondingly, all these factors will help prospective teachers to increase their awareness and also modify and adapt their professional identities to achieve their goals in teaching process.

### Recommendations

In terms of pedagogical perspective, it must be kept in mind that critical incident should never be ignored and neglected because it is critically important for teachers' development. Comments, views and ideas gathered from the critical incidents are always helpful for prospective and especially for inexperienced teachers. Furthermore, critical incidents serve prospective teachers to be aware of their own beliefs on teaching. Another important contribution of critical incidents is to help teachers become reflective teachers. Also, it may be valuable to state here that teaching practicum at faculties of education should be expanded throughout a year and not only be limited with one or two months. All teachers at the faculties should help them about professional noticing. They may be warned about the possible problems that they may encounter at schools and teachers may organize debate programs about how they may overcome those problems. Student teachers, teacher trainers, educators, colleagues, etc. may benefit by sharing and comparing different critical incidents of varied prospective teachers. Additionally, to facilitate learning and teaching, analysis of critical incidents should be encouraged. Student teachers may prepare their own portfolios including their critical incidents to indicate their experiences. It is also important to mention that critical incidents help and improve student teachers' both professional and personal developments. The practicum teachers at the faculties of education should also be aware of the possible factors affecting prospective teachers and their core beliefs to help them make sense of the difficulty of teaching and professional identity formation.

### Limitations

Besides the contribution of this research to the field, it has also some limitations. For example, this study was limited to six prospective teachers majoring at a state university in Samsun. Therefore, it should be recommended to make a new research with a large number of students. Additionally, private university students at ELT departments can also be included in other studies to compare and contrast their critical incidents according to the status of the universities. Since this study was conducted by only female students, the gathered data may be limited to give necessary information on critical incidents; therefore, it may be suggested to include male students for further studies. Another weakness is the fact that the number of the questions on CIQ. If some more questions are added, it may be more satisfactory to get more detailed information. It is recommended for other researchers that if they want to conduct research more than six weeks, they may get different and more detailed results.

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