

Pre-service English Teachers' Perceptions on Their Professional Identity through LinkedIn-Mediated Activities

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Abstract

Pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers need to strengthen their sense of professional identity in both real-world communities and social media. The purposes of this study are to describe how LinkedIn-mediated activity shapes pre-service English teachers' professional identity and to investigate the perceptions of pre-service English teachers on their participation in LinkedIn-mediated early professional development activities. Three pre-service English teachers enrolling in Teacher Professional Development coursework and participating in LinkedIn-mediated activities throughout the coursework were invited to participate in in-depth interviews. The findings revealed two themes. The first is LinkedIn-mediated early professional development activities that raise awareness on developing the current professional digital footprint. The second is LinkedIn-mediated early professional development activities help them to figure out expected teacher-selves in the future even though after graduation they may take non-teaching career. Implications for future pedagogical practice in the Teacher Professional Development coursework is that the activities involved in LinkedIn should be sustained and enhanced to support the pre-service English teachers to shape their professional identity as future English teachers.

Keywords: EFL pre-service teachers, LinkedIn-mediated activity, professional identity

INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity emerges in interdisciplinary science from psychological theory, social psychology, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies (Leary & Tangney, 2003) and now has a special place in language education (Preece, 2016). In teacher

education, early teacher professional development plays an important role in constructing pre-service teachers' professional identity. Different platforms for teacher professional development have been advocated and enacted. For example, blogs are deemed as an alternative platform for engaging pre-service teachers in the construction and negotiation of their professional identity (Deng & Yuen, 2013). Identity is defined by Norton (2000) and Norton & DeCosta (2017) as to how one understands its relationship with the world and how these relationships are constructed in space and time, as well as how one understands future possibilities. Gee (2000), using a sociocultural lens to define identity, emphasizes the notion of "being recognized as a certain kind of person" in a given context in defining identity and offers four ways to view identity depending on the process, which includes: nature identity, institution identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity.

For a long time, social media have been used as formal and informal learning media tools (Dutta, 2010; Tess, 2013; Donlan, 2014). Transnational language learners, for example, can use social media to connect with their past, present, and future selves and develop their transnational identities (Thorne & Black, 2011; Krutka, 2014 De Costa & Norton, 2017; Varghese et al, 2016). Furthermore, social media as a learning tool provides a space for learners to develop their professional identity through language and literacy development.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in researching the professional identity of pre-service English teachers (Gu & Lai, 2019; Nguyen & Dao, 2019; Widodo et al, 2020). Despite the importance of social media in supporting professional development (Heidari et al, 2019; Iredale et al, 2019; Mart & Campbell-Barr, 2020), little is known about how a professional social media platform, such as LinkedIn, supports pre-service English teachers' professional identity, particularly in Indonesia context (Donlan, 2014; Fowlie & Forder, 2019; Hapsari & Mukhlas, 2018). To fill this gap, this study aims to describe how LinkedIn is used to enhance pre-service English teachers' professional identity and investigate their views on their experiences in LinkedIn-mediated activities.

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, pre-service English teachers need to develop their sense of identity in both real communities in society and online platforms that actively use English as a medium of communication (Hapsari & Mukhlas, 2018). In the coursework where the research was conducted, the development of a Linked social media professional account is one of the tasks of students who take Teacher Professional Development coursework. From the preliminary research findings related to this coursework, Hapsari & Mukhlas (2018) found that Linked in could be a mediating tool for setting potential English teacher identities by raising awareness in their professional practice.

Similar to this finding, Heidari, Salimi, & Mehrvarz (2020) argue that online social networks in higher education settings can help students develop their professional identities by acting as a mediator. Furthermore, the motivational influence includes trust,

pleasure, and goal achievement, which is the most important factor in shaping pre-service teachers' perceptions of social media use (Saini, 2018). Fowlie (2019) found that pre-service teachers have positive attitudes toward using LinkedIn to find work and build new professional networks, which is closely related to their teacher identities. The alumni factor is important in providing examples of professional identities that students can aspire to and informing a powerful network for new LinkedIn users to connect with, giving them the confidence to use the platform more actively. Being recognized for a social role or taking on functional identities within social practices is part of participatory learning in practice in sociocultural perspectives, which is also important for language and literacy development (Gee, 2000). Having a sociocultural lens in observing the language and literacy development of pre-service English teachers in developing their professional identity, this research focuses on how the pre-service English teachers proceed with their institution, discourse, and affinity identity in their LinkedIn-mediated activities during their enrollment in Teacher Professional Development coursework in the university.

METHOD

This research was conducted in Teacher Professional Development coursework where the first author taught pre-service English teachers. It employs Connelly & Clandinin's (1990) narrative inquiry method. Three pre-service English teachers (pseudonyms A1, A2, and A3) were invited to participate. Ethical approval was obtained from the researcher's institution. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, organized in a minimalist manner, and described in detail to achieve trustworthiness in interpretation during the coursework. The three participants were chosen to be interviewed because they made the most to reach all-star profile in developing their Linked-In account.

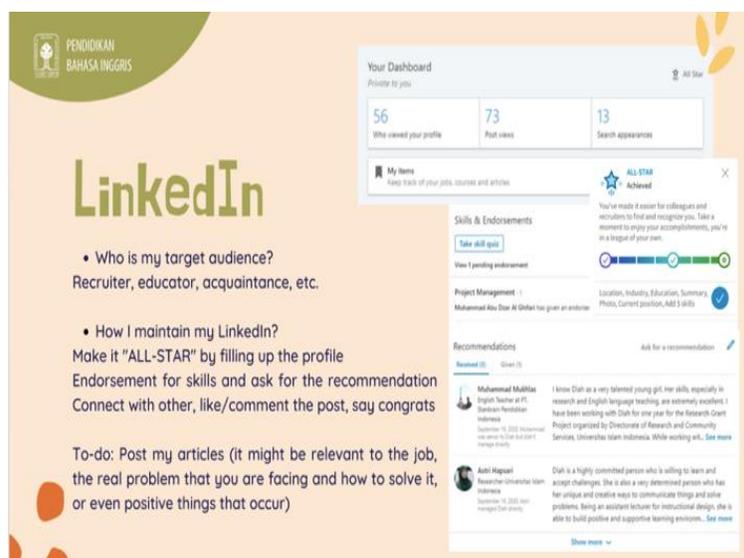


Figure 1. Coursework material encourages developing an all-star profile on LinkedIn

During their learning process in the coursework, the three participants were given several tasks in the coursework to create a LinkedIn account, update their professional experience in their profile, explore LinkedIn features, create a new post that relates to their interests, expands their networking with professionals, and reflect their experience in using LinkedIn. Before they were given instructions to develop their LinkedIn profile, they were introduced to the opportunities they would have by using LinkedIn as a professional social media platform. To make the most of the opportunities on using LinkedIn, the students were encouraged to have a five-stars quality profile in their professional account on LinkedIn

These activities were intended to engage the pre-service English teachers to construct their professional identity while taking the coursework. After they developed their LinkedIn profile, they were asked to post their experience on their google site to enhance the meaning-making of their experiences.

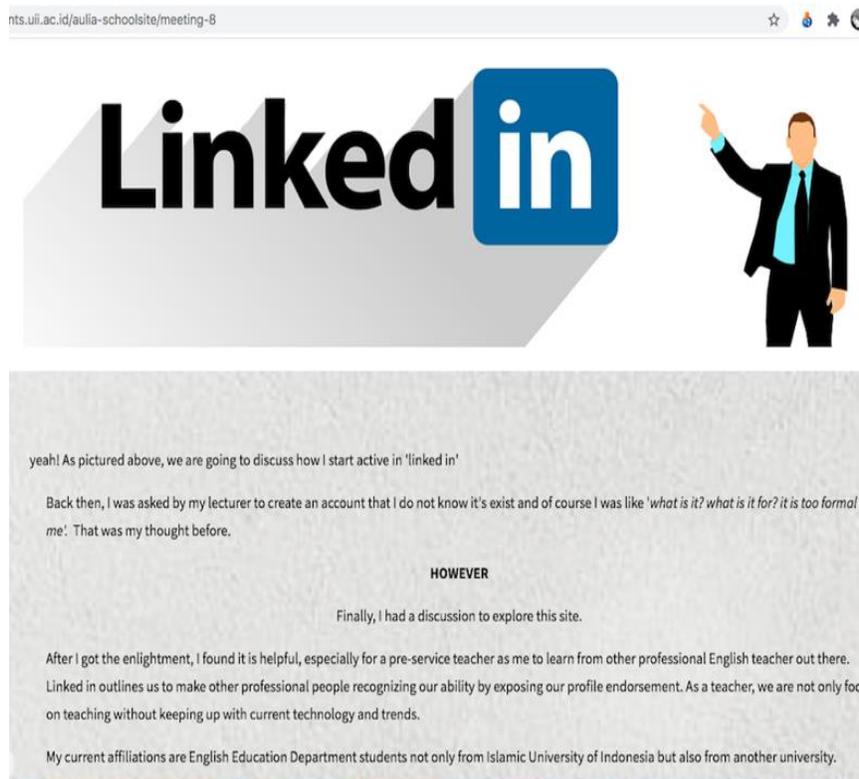


Figure 2. A student's post on her LinkedIn experience

The research personnel consist of one chairperson and three other researchers. The lead researcher is in charge of writing research proposals, designing research design, and reporting research results. The others were assigned to validating interview instruments and collecting data including invitations to participate as research participants, asking for research subjects' approval, and coding transcription results of interviews.

In this research, Gee's (2000) concept was employed to develop a research instrument before interviewing to classify the development of professional identity mediated by activities on LinkedIn. The elements examined: are nature identity, institution identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 30 minutes. They answered 20 questions related to English teachers as a professional career choice, professional identity, and their LinkedIn-mediated activities to develop their professional identity. Johnson and Golombek (2011) argue that a narrative is a mediational tool and the act of narrating as a cultural activity can also influence how one proceeds to understand what one is narrating about. As a consequence, the interview questions delivered in a narrative inquiry method were also intended to scaffold the participants' meaning-making process to understand how they can benefit from LinkedIn during their learning process to build their identity as professional English teachers. Thematic analysis was done to analyze the data.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting the patterns of themes in the data and then organizing data in a minimalist manner and describing the data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Using thematic analysis is effective in linking the relationship between the theoretical concepts and their themes (Nowell et al, 2017). Thematic analysis assists the researchers to identify, analyze, and report the patterns (themes) within data, linked with its theoretical relationship to answering research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aims of the study are to describe how LinkedIn-mediated activity shapes pre-service English teachers' professional identity and to investigate the perceptions of pre-service English teachers on their participation in LinkedIn-mediated early professional development activities. From the observation of the three participants' activities during and after the coursework, LinkedIn mediated activities are proven to enhance their identity as future English teachers during the coursework, but they may choose various professional career and development after graduation. Participant A1, now working as an English teacher in a learning center (or *Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat/ PBKM*), describes himself in LinkedIn profile as an English teacher, a writer, and a researcher. In his profile description, he highlights his experiences in writing academic publications: a proceeding and a journal article and presenting those manuscripts in international conferences. Meanwhile, Participant A2, now pursuing her graduate degree in English language education, does not update her LinkedIn profile after the coursework, and still describes herself as student at English language department. In real professional path, undocumented in LinkedIn, Participant A2 has taken experience as an English Tutor in a language laboratory. Participant 3, now working as a project management and communications officer in a business consulting and services which is a member of UN

Global Compact Indonesia Network., describes himself as a bachelor education degree, majoring in intercultural communication, translation, interpreting, and sociolinguistics. He highlights his accomplishment in Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiatives, Language Ambassador, Southeast Asia Teacher Awardee, and Australia Field Study Program awardee, and World Culture Forum delegates.

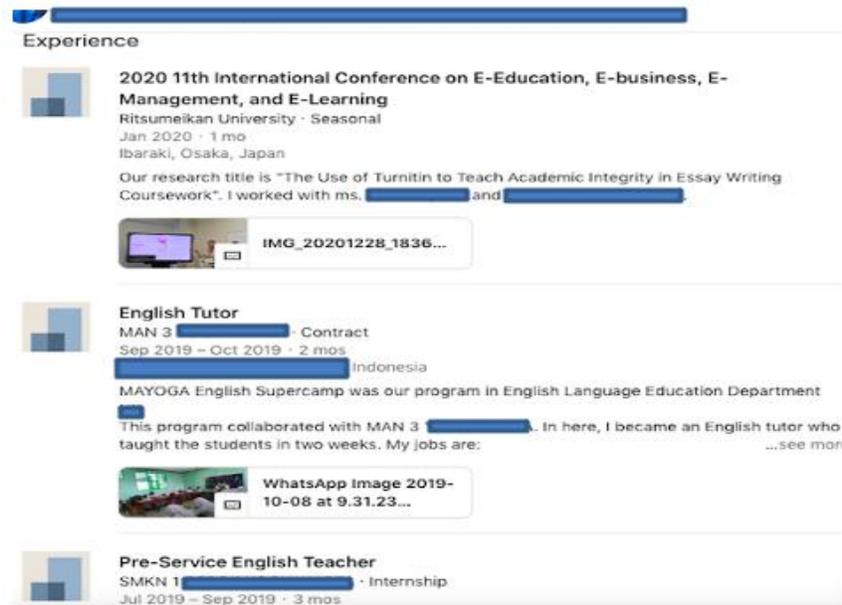


Figure 3. Participant A1 LinkedIn profile

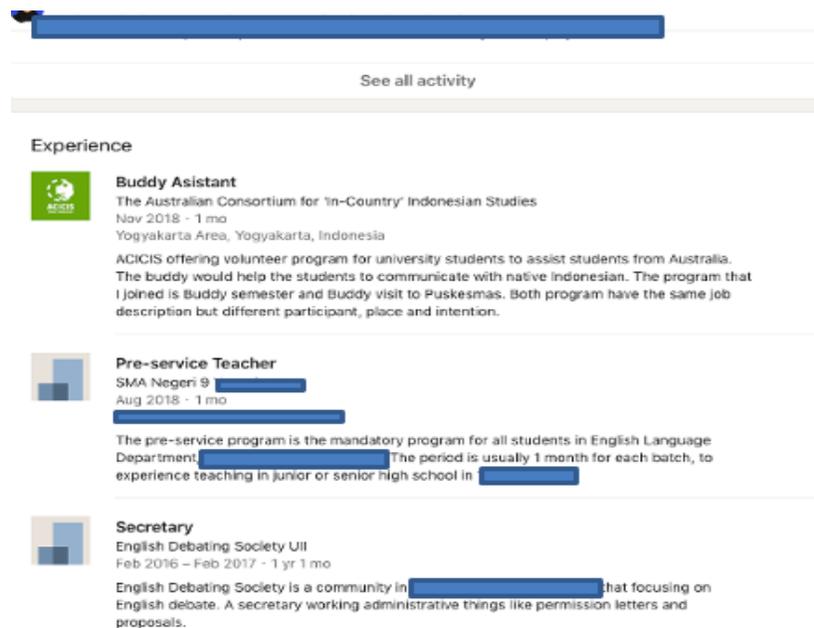


Figure 4. Participant A2 LinkedIn profile

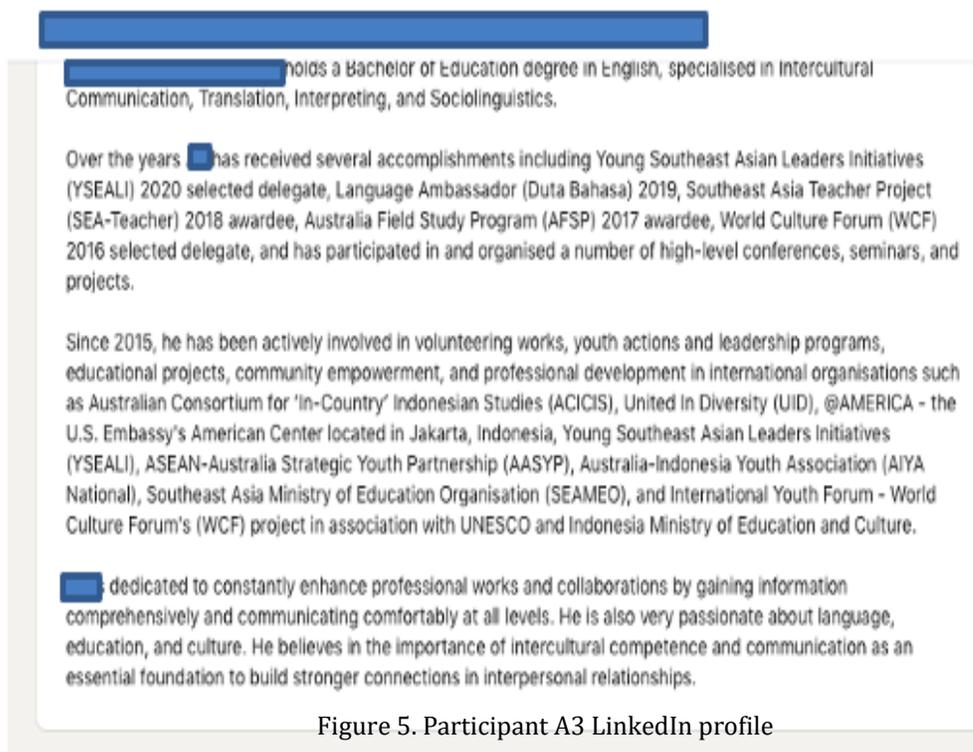


Figure 5. Participant A3 LinkedIn profile

The first opportunity is enhancing professional visibility. By updating online curriculum vitae, they can represent themselves that they are committed to professional development. The second opportunity is networking. As pre-service English teachers, they can connect to professional educators, administrators, and education companies that can be beneficial for their professional growth. They can also expand their professional community by sharing knowledge, engaging in discussions, and asking questions that potential employers can trace. The participants view LinkedIn as a professional social media platform that enhances their professional identity construction as English teachers (during their experience in developing the profile on the coursework). However, as they graduate and building their career, only Participant 1 who works as an English teacher. Participant 2 decides to continue her study in a graduate school of education. Meanwhile, Participant 3 works as an officer. According to Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004), this sense of identity influenced by LinkedIn-mediated activity encourages pre-service teachers to enhance their professional development experiences that align with their professional development goals. Their activities in updating their skills, experiences, and interests and providing evidence, such as relevant pictures as artifacts of their professional activities help them to enhance their institution and discourse identity.

Two themes emerge related to their experiences in LinkedIn-mediated activities: raising awareness on developing professional digital footprints and helping to figure out expected teacher-selves in the future, even though it does not necessarily make them choose an English teacher as a profession after graduation.

Raising Awareness of Developing Professional Digital Footprints

Developing their online CV on LinkedIn was proven as mediating activity that help the participants become more active in pursuing experiences related to English language teaching, therefore, scaffolding their sense of agency as future English teachers.

... I thought LinkedIn was only a tool to make a curriculum vitae (CV). After exploring it further in classroom activities, I found that I can use LinkedIn **to personalize my profile**. We can **update our activities**, such as: **participating in a seminar or teaching programs**, and upload our photos. **Thus, through LinkedIn, people can see our profiles on how much we participate in different teaching programs nationally and internationally** (A1).

While doing LinkedIn-mediated activities in the coursework, I [gradually] understand that in making a CV **I can add teaching experiences, such as my teaching internship and intercultural experiences in Australia and Yogyakarta** (A2).

This **[LinkedIn profile] will be a stimulus**. I want **to add more experiences** to my profile. Because LinkedIn is social media, there will be many people who will look at our profile. Thus, I want to be looked at as **a person who has a lot of experience in the field**. I enrolled in the community, such as International Youth Forum in education and Southeast Asia teachers. I now realize "to build a good career is not only to have cultural and English experience but also **to build your online professional career platform** (A3).

By updating their profiles and documenting pictures, the participants add a sense of agency which encourages them to enhance their professional identities as future English teachers. LinkedIn provides a secure online environment that encourages affinity identity to build a CV as a global English teacher with extensive intercultural experience. LinkedIn assists them in creating what Gee (2000) refers to as discourse space, which is a space to build/her experiences over time, allowing them to have a unique trajectory. Because their trajectory and narrativization are individual acts, but LinkedIn as a discourse space is socially and historically formed, their unique trajectory and narrativization (Misler, 2000) from their description of the LinkedIn CV are what potentially change core professional identity.

Helping to Figure out Expected Teacher-Selves in the Future

LinkedIn-mediated activities nurture the participants' sense of belonging in the English language teaching profession.

... I think LinkedIn facilitates us to **make connections within the professional field**. I want to be **a creative teacher or even more**. I can be as **it is presented on LinkedIn...My willingness to teach has arisen**. There are a lot of potential employers: a private course, school, or university. I have been willing to teach since I was in junior high school. Then, my intention **became stronger** ..(A1).

According to A1, his natural identity, as expressed in his statement "I have been willing to teach since I was in junior high school...", becomes more aligned with his future career goals. "Then, my intention became stronger" as a result of a series of experiences during his undergraduate studies that shaped his institution, discourse, and affinity identity, as stated in his LinkedIn profile (Gee, 2000). By establishing a network with

particular persons, groups, or institutions, LinkedIn helps him to figure out his expected teacher-self in the future.

I want to be a **creative teacher or even more**. I can be as **it is presented on LinkedIn...My willingness to teach has arisen**. There are a lot of potential employers: a private course, school, or university (A1).

Narrating from A1's LinkedIn-mediated learning experience in the transcript, it can be interpreted that LinkedIn allows him to externalize his understanding of how he shaped his learning experience in building his LinkedIn profile to shape his professional identity as a future English teacher. Furthermore, narrative as externalization prompts him to ask probing questions (Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Meanwhile, A2 perceived that the tasks that lead them to create and develop her LinkedIn profile help her to be aware of her capability to be a teacher.

Fulfilling our LinkedIn profile can form our image through our achievements, biography, and others that show our capability to be a teacher...(A2)

Sfard & Prusak (2005) emphasize the idea that individual voices that shape personal identity usually combine into the voice of community (p.15), which causes professional identity to become dynamic over time, as A2 describes in her description of her experiences with LinkedIn.

Finally, even though no data explicitly state that A3 develops his identity as a future English teacher through LinkedIn-mediated activities, LinkedIn helps him to explore his experiences in an international education forum and international pre-service English teacher internship and to build a good career based on this foundation for his future.

Yes, I didn't make a LinkedIn profile in one day, but it was a step-by-step process. There are many components to be filled out such as teaching experience, organization experience, as well as abilities, and skills. For instance, I will fill out my profile in this part today, meanwhile, other parts will be filled out later. **It is a gradual process**. I didn't do it in one day because our life will always change. There will **be changes of improvement in the future**. Then, I will upgrade it (A3)

It can be learned from A2 and A3's experiences that they may be exposed to different affiliations, but in the communities, they strengthen the discourse identity and affinity identity to becoming future professional English teachers who are willing to go the extra mile to sharpen their language, critical thinking, and leadership skills. Even though time proves that A2 and A3 takes different direction in professional path. A2 choose to pursue her master degree in English language education while A3 chooses to build non-teaching English career. These findings relate to Olsen (2018)'s argument that identity can be viewed as a label as a result of influences from "immediate context, a prior construct of self, social positioning, and meaning system (p.139)" from sociocultural perspective. A3 expands his affinity outside teaching career.

Gee (2000), on the other hand, warns us about "non-sanctioned and sanctioned A-identities." Using postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard (1989, 1995) and Lyotard

(1984, 1997) to explain how new signs and simulations in the new capitalist world "detach themselves from any reality they signify or simulate" (p.115-116). Gee (2000) demonstrated that a degree from a reputable university is a sign that one is "worthy" to be an elite in our society, because, as he further explains, being an elite is increasingly composed of a set of signs—really a whole "portfolio" of signs (i.e., the "right" schools, degrees, trips, experiences, and possessions) rather than any substantive accomplishments (Gee, 2000, p.116)

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to describe how LinkedIn is used to shape pre-service EFL teachers' professional identities and to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of their experiences in LinkedIn-mediated activities in Teacher Professional Development coursework. To summarize the findings of the interview and the perspectives of the three participants, two themes emerged: (1) LinkedIn-mediated activities raise pre-service English teachers' awareness of the importance of developing a professional digital footprint; (2) LinkedIn-mediated activities assist them in determining their future teacher identities even though after graduation they may take non-teaching career. Their current activities, as described on LinkedIn, strengthen their identity as future EFL teachers. They were authorized by the institutions that gave them certificates to have acquired certain skills in English language teaching by attending seminars and programs related to English language teaching, for example. LinkedIn also promotes a discourse of professional participation, which strengthens the specific professional traits of pre-service English teachers. Implications for future pedagogical practice in the coursework include the continuation of LinkedIn-related activities to support pre-service English teachers' professional identity construction.

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