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‘What Kind of Teacher I Wish to Be’: Exploring Prospective English Language Teachers’ Future-oriented Identities

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Abstract: Studies on identity has shown that future-oriented thinking could be a useful framework for studying teacher identity development and in the contexts of language teacher preparation; however, research into the future-oriented dimensions of teacher identity is still rather limited. Therefore, in this case study, how prospective English language teachers envision their possible selves as future teachers were explored. Writings from the 56 participants were used as a method of data collection to provide a more profound analysis of the contextsensitive nature of their future-oriented identities. Following an interpretive analysis of qualitative data, the findings revealed two patterns in the participants’ future-oriented identity work: highly developed and (under)developed possible selves as L2 teachers. Both groups of participants appeared to be quite diverse in the nature of their hopes and fears as well as in their exercises of agency and response to tensions and challenges of language teaching. Also, participants’ possible language teacher selves seemed to be classified into three primary categories (i.e., L2 teacher development, L2 teacher competency and L2 teacher proficiency). Based on the findings and discussions, how future-oriented perspective may inform teacher identity development and teacher preparation in the context of language teaching was discussed. Several recommendations for further research and preparation of prospective language teachers were made

Keywords: Identity, possible selves, language teacher education, teacher preparation, hopes, fears.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing interest in understanding teachers’ future-oriented self-concepts, also termed as ‘possible selves’ (Markus & Nurius, 1986) regarding teaching, especially in current L2 (second language) teacher identity research (Hiver, 2013). In response to the social turn in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (Block, 2003), L2 teacher learning has been conceptualized as a dialogic process of co-constructing knowledge, rather than simply a process of translating theories of linguistics and/or SLA into effective classroom practices (Johnson, 2016). Accordingly, the recent decade has witnessed a noticeable growth in studies on how L2 teachers construct their professional identities while participating in varying communities, interacting with individuals, and positioning themselves (and are positioned by others) in social settings (Yazan, 2018). A specific strand of research is regarding the role of future thinking in L2 teacher

identity, particularly how language teachers envision their possible selves as teachers (i.e., their hoped-for and feared selves) (see, e.g., Hiver, 2013; Kubanyiova, 2009; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Rahmati et al., 2019).

Research has identified that possible selves theory can offer a useful framework for studying teacher identity development, particularly in the contexts of teacher preparation where prospective teachers seek self-definitions or are encouraged to do so (Lutovac, 2020). To date, however, there is little empirical evidence of mapping future-oriented dimensions of identity through possible selves theory for understanding pre-service teacher identity development, especially in the context of L2 teaching. The majority of research studies on identity development in language teacher education have explored linguistic and professional identities of non-native speaking (NNS) teachers in educational contexts (e.g., Aneja, 2016; Varghese et al., 2016) and sociocultural identities of language teachers in their social contexts (e.g., Tsui, 2007). While research indicates that identity development is a future-oriented process (Lutovac, 2020; Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008), there is a dearth of research on a future aspect of identity in light of possible selves theory (Kumazawa, 2013). In particular, it is not clear what kind of teacher prospective language teachers hope to become, expect to become, and fear becoming in the future. To fill such a void in the literature, this paper reports on a qualitative study of Turkish students' future-oriented identities as prospective teachers at a pre-service language teacher education program.

Theoretical framework

Identity and possible selves theory

The current body of research, heavily influenced by the social turn in SLA, has started to focus more on the role of identity in L2 teacher education (Hiver, 2013). This recent thread of research has adopted a poststructuralist and critical approach to L2 teacher identity development, which rejects the essentialist conceptualizations of self (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). As described by many poststructuralist scholars (Johnson, 2016; Norton, 2010), in other words, identity is an unstable, multiple, situated, and context-dependent phenomenon (Wenger, 1998). Moreover, becoming a teacher is an identity construction process, whereby individuals negotiate their sense of self by generating possible selves or holding images concerning who they expect to become or fear becoming (Krzywacki, 2009). Thus, the construct of possible selves theory is of importance in identity exploration and development (Lutovac, 2020).

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), possible selves refer to individuals' future-oriented representations of self. Possible selves are primarily associated with self-concepts concerning how they view their potential and about their future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In particular, these future-oriented self-concepts might be either positive and represent what one would like to become (i.e., hoped-for selves) or might be

negative and represent what one wants to avoid (i.e., feared selves) (Oyserman & James, 2015). Akin to identity, these future-oriented self-concepts are also not fluid, fixed and uniform, rather they are dynamic, open to transformations and are impacted by contextual factors and personal past experiences (Hong & Greene, 2011).

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of possible selves in directing one's behavior and actions in the present (Oyserman & James, 2015). As such, one significant contribution of possible selves is concerning with the *motivational influence* (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). Individuals tend to eliminate the gap between their current and future selves (Oyserman & James, 2015). Thus, possible selves facilitate one's motivation (Oyserman et al., 2004). Second, possible selves have also a *self-regulative function* (Hamman et al., 2010). These future-oriented self-concepts function as 'roadmaps' (Oyserman et al., 2004) or 'behavioral blueprints' (Robinson et al., 2003) that facilitates making judgments about whether some possible selves are possible while others are not (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). In other words, they provide a clear goal to work towards or avoid (Oyserman et al., 2004).

Possible selves theory may allow for better understanding prospective teachers' past and present experiences and the process of creating possible selves (Pellikka et al., 2020). Given these future-oriented identities contributes to self-improvement, change and growth, which are viewed as critical in the way of becoming a teacher (Lutovac, 2020), this study was based on the possible selves theory.

Literature Review

Much of the extant work on the theory of possible selves in general has focused on individuals' transitional period in their lives (Hamman et al., 2010, 2013). Despite the prolific research on teacher identity, the study of possible selves in the context of teacher preparation and development has been a relatively uncharted area (Hamman et al., 2013; Kumazawa, 2013). For example, Hamman et al. (2010) investigated the possible selves of student teachers and new teachers. They revealed four categories of possible selves concerning professionalism, interpersonal relationships, classroom management and instruction. The authors indicated that student teachers tended to be more task-focused (interpersonal, management, instruction) whereas new teachers were more quality-focused (professional qualities) in terms of their possible selves. Hamman et al. (2013) explored student teachers' possible selves in their final practicum semester. They revealed the categories of expected possible selves, including learning to teacher and professionalism, as well as feared possible selves, including loss of control, uninspired instruction, and uncaring teacher. The authors also discussed the role of these results in teacher retention and attrition.

Hong and Greene (2011) examined pre-service teachers' hoped-for selves and feared selves and the experiences that shape their possible selves. The authors found six categories: sufficient/insufficient

content knowledge, well-managed/poorly-managed classroom, effective/ineffective teaching, being caring and helpful/not being caring and helpful, having positive/negative attitudes toward students and teaching, and demonstrating leadership/not being liked or respected by fellow teachers. The most frequent comments were related to hopes for being effective and fears of being ineffective. The authors also highlighted stronger impact of past experiences than the impact of teacher education on the development of possible selves.

In the L2 teaching context, however, research into the theory of possible selves is still rather limited (Hiver, 2013; Kumazawa, 2013), and there is a lack of comprehensive understanding about what kind of possible selves prospective language teachers hold with regard to L2 teaching. Kubanyiova's (2007, 2009) studies introduced the concept of 'possible language teacher selves' as a construct through which to investigate L2 teacher development. In a longitudinal study on eight Slovakian L2 teachers, Kubanyiova (2009) conceptualized *Possible Language Teacher Self* as: 'Ideal Language Teacher Self' which relates to identity goals and aspirations; 'Ought-to Language Teacher Self' which concerns with teachers' responsibilities and obligations and 'Feared Language Teacher Self' that is related to language teaching anxiety resulted from a fear of failure. The author further discussed the significant role of ideal self in L2 teachers' conceptual development and motivation. Also, she revealed that factors such as large workload, unsupportive working environment and gap between ideal and actual selves made a negative motivational impact on the ideal self.

White and Ding (2009) also addressed the ideal and ought-to teacher selves perspective to explore how the self-concepts of 23 teachers in the U.K., China and New Zealand impacted and was impacted by their engagement in the domain of e-learning. The authors highlighted the motivational power of possible selves for teachers when taking actions about their teaching. In the Japanese context, Kumazawa (2013) investigated the relationship between possible selves and motivation among four novice L2 teachers. The researcher found that teachers had clear ideal selves at the pre-service stage whereas contextual constraints and classroom realities led to the conflicts between the ideal and actual selves. However, teachers could find a better harmony between their ideal, ought-to, and actual selves through reflection and exercising agency. Similarly, Hiver (2013) examined how seven in-service Korean language teachers' possible selves impacted their professional development choices and concluded that the participants' possible selves were either guided by their motivation to repair their perceived inadequacies, or to enhance the self. The least important motive for teachers' professional development choices was reported as adhering to normative obligations.

Most researchers agree that possible selves could offer a versatile framework for exploring the future-oriented dimensions of teacher identity (Kumazawa, 2013). It is critical for pre-service teachers to construct vivid self-concepts concerning teaching so that they could understand their progress toward their goals (Hamman et al., 2013); have

motivational support to pursue these goals in the present (Yowell, 2000), and develop possible selves strategies or display self-regulative behaviors to move towards hoped-for selves or avoid feared selves (Lutovac, 2020). Furthermore, prospective teachers' hopes and expectations might be considered as their self-perceptions that, a certain extent, reflects their current situation and contexts (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In that regard, the learning experiences, including the coursework and fieldwork, in addition to the experiences with teacher educators and mentors may enable future teachers to revise their possible selves (Hadi, 2019; Lutovac & Kaasila, 2014; Meyers et al., 2017) and such situational factors could impact their exercise of agency (Furlong, 2013). Prospective teachers' imaginations of professional roles could also be challenged by the realities they faced during their internships (Christofferson & Sullivan, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Tekir & Akar, 2019). Examination of possible selves is critical to gain insights into pre-service teachers' identity development and to predict their future thinking and action (Lutovac, 2020). Therefore, understanding prospective teachers' future-oriented identities is important.

Purpose of the study

The literature on possible selves in the context of L2 teacher education indicates that there is a lack of in-depth qualitative studies with individuals from different settings because of the context-specific nature of self, which limits the generalizability of findings across contexts (Taylor et al., 2013). As stated before, less attention is also given to how pre-service teachers' future-oriented identities are formed and the process of becoming a teacher in subject specific contexts (Lutovac, 2020). Previous studies call for greater attention on a more complete understanding identity in general and teacher identity, in particular, to enhance the ways in which teacher education institutions are conceived (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Given the lack of a comprehensive understanding about future-oriented dimensions of L2 teacher identity, the overall aim of this study is to explore how prospective language teachers envision their possible selves as future teachers. More specifically, prospective teachers' hoped-for selves and feared selves in an L2 teacher education program were analyzed. In line with the research aims, in this study, the following research questions was investigated: 'What do prospective English language teachers envision their possible selves as future teachers? What are their hopes and fears concerning L2 teaching?' It is also important to note that possible selves, future-oriented identities and future-oriented selfconcepts are used as interchangeable concepts in this manuscript.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and uses case study design to explore the emerging professional identities of prospective language teachers. Given the objective of this study, case study is appropriate to provide a comprehensive description of the participants' future-oriented identities concerning teaching and to interpret the phenomenon in their worlds (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Case study is particularly suited for the present study since it allows researchers to understand and inquire into the complexities of identity development in its real-life context (Yin, 2009). Moreover, case study could be a valuable tool to shed light on the ways in which participants form their possible selves from different perspectives (Stake, 1995). This paper does not target empirical generalizability; however, the examination of cases could offer a comprehensive picture of a complex phenomenon to be researched over time (van Lier, 2005).

Setting and participants

The present study was undertaken in a four-year teacher education program at one of the major research universities in central Turkey. This pre-service English language teacher education program, on its official website, acknowledges that it seeks to prepare students as fully qualified English language teachers for primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions. Therefore, the program claims to offer a rigorous undergraduate curriculum, involving a wide range of courses in English language, methodologies, educational sciences, English literature, linguistics, and school-based practicum courses (i.e., School Experience and Practice teaching). Those who fulfilled the success requirements of the program are awarded a bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching. Data set of this study was collected at one of the school-based practicum courses offered in the last year of the program for pre-service English language teachers. There were ten sections (almost 250 students) in the practice teaching course at the time of data collection. However, only eight of the instructors who taught the practicum course allowed the researcher to ask students to write a reflection paper upon their possible selves about L2 teaching. From a pool of 93 pre-service English language teachers, 56 participants (49 female and seven male) volunteered to participate in this study. All the participants who agreed to participate in this study were senior year students and completing their practicum semester in the department. The selected participants' age ranged from 21 to 25. All the participants were Turkish, and they all completed their final teaching practicum at placement schools.

Data collection

In this study, writing by participants was considered as a method of gathering data on future-oriented identities about L2 teaching. This method was chosen because it facilitates a more profound analysis and understanding of the context sensitive phenomenon, not available from large-scale positivistic, survey-based research methods (Clarke, 2020). With this in mind, student writings as a way of collecting the stories of emerging teacher identity has been found useful in the study of possible selves than other methods (Whitty, 2002). Participants were prompted to reflect on and write about their descriptions of their possible selves relating to L2 teaching through a series of open-ended questions such as: *Imagine that you have started to work as an English teacher at a school. What type of teacher you hope to be? What type of teacher you fear becoming?* The prompts also asked participants to consider: why do they want to become a teacher; how confident they are in their teaching ability; how much they feel like a teacher; whether they feel prepared to be an English teacher, and to describe the experiences that made them feel this way. These open-ended questions can be viewed as a way to understand highly complex and dense feelings and processes (Hiltunen et al., 2020).

Data analysis

Student writings were analyzed by employing qualitative content analysis (Newby, 2014) which is based on systemic realization of the following steps: (1) familiarization with the data through multiple reading of the text; (2) identification of meaning units; (3) division of the categories into subcategories; (4) interpretation of the categories with subcategories. By way of the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), categories that emerged from one group were compared and contrasted with those from the other group to discern similarities and differences.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the preliminary findings were sent back to the participants for feedback through a member checking procedure after completing the analysis and interpretation of the data (Newby, 2014). Of the 56 participants contacted, five shared their comments. For ensuring the credibility of data analysis, the extracted data were read and reviewed by two colleagues who are working as instructors in the field of language teaching (Merriam, 2009). The agreed analyses and interpretations were used, and these were then compared and discussed. In case of disagreement, the final interpretations were negotiated to develop a shared coding scheme.

Findings

As the analysis indicated, two types of future-oriented identity work as prospective language teachers were identified. The contrasts between the cases concerning the vividness of their possible selves and the balance

between these selves helped to identify two categories of future-oriented identity work. Although some similarities that cut across the cases in participants' writings on their future-oriented identities as prospective teachers were captured, they convey divergent stories in a sufficient depth. As evident in the data, the participants seemed to be quite diverse in the nature of the possible selves they envisioned as a language teacher. The findings point to two emerging patterns based on the degree of elaboration of participants' possible selves and also balance between these selves across the student writings: *highly developed and (under)developed possible selves as L2 teachers*.

Highly developed possible selves as L2 teachers

As the analysis indicates, 18 out of 56 participants seemed to establish a well-elaborated L2 teacher vision and were able to describe their visions. These participants were also highly motivated to become an English teacher and incorporated L2 teaching into their future plans. They were characterized by the balance between their possible selves and goal-orientedness. Most of the participants reported that they aspired to become an English teacher because the job would let them “to make a difference in the students' growth through English”, “to create a change for a better society” and “to connect with the young generation”.

Although the participants in this group possessed multiple future-oriented identities, they regarded their ideal images as ‘professional and innovative L2 teacher’ as the primary ones. In parallel, the student writings revealed that possible teacher selves that are ‘L2 teacher development-based’ and ‘L2 teacher competency-based’ were strongly present” (see Table 1). As for the possible selves focused on L2 teacher development, prospective language teachers on one hand spoke about keep up with the recent trends and focus of language teaching. These participants highlighted the desire to have good grasp of content, mastery of subject matter, continuous learning and keeping up-to-date, as well as being goaloriented.

Table 1
Data excerpts describing hoped-for possible selves

L2 teacher development

I think the English teacher should be expert in the field. (P2) I want to be a teacher who always try to increase my expertise and experience. (P8) I am going to always be engaged in my profession. I know that I have to keep up-to-date on new digital technologies and apps. (P15) A good teacher should look forward to how s/he could grow. This would help maintain everything and keep on the top of my content. (P4) I hope to be a teacher who is fine where I am at, I mean, to be expert in my subject matter. I won't stop studying and keep learning more and more. (P13)

L2 teacher competency

As a teacher, I will not use the traditional grammar-translation method. (P3) I would like to try out creative teaching methods and ideas. (P2) I hope that I will not repeat things well; instead, I will spice them up purposely changing my teaching methods. (P9) I will strive to come up with creative teaching ideas, so that my classes will not be boring. (P6) I hope to utilize enjoying and creative teaching ideas with the help of digital tools. There are many practical websites for digital storytelling, role-plays or intercultural learning. I plan to integrate them all into my classes. (12) ... but a teacher should work hard to make learning interesting and fun ... It is so sad for a teacher to have students saying 'I am bored' or 'It's boring'. (P16)

In this type of future-oriented identity work, the focus was also on 'L2 teacher competency'. In particular, participants' possible selves were focused to a great extent on becoming an active and competent user of innovative and creative teaching methods. Besides, participants' hoped-for selves related to L2 teacher competency involved the references to instructional strategies including individual learning support, differentiated instruction, variety in the classroom, using sufficient and authentic tasks, creating alternative scenarios and designing and implementing different materials in the classroom.

Analysis also revealed that participants in this group were more likely to balance their hoped-for and feared possible selves: between what kind of teacher they wish to become and what kind of teacher they do not wish to become. For the feared selves of participants with well-developed possible selves, data excerpts were also about the possible selves focused on L2 teacher development and L2 teacher competency (see Table 2).

Table 2
Data excerpts describing feared selves

L2 teacher development
<u>I don't want to</u> be the type of teacher who is tired at the end of the day. (P2)
<u>I am afraid of</u> this kind of stress in the long run because sometimes you feel like you squeeze so much into a term. <u>It may be</u> frustrating. (P13)
<u>In my opinion</u> , it is important to know how to protect myself against suffering from teacher burnout. <u>I am worried</u> about that. (P9)
<u>I fear</u> becoming a monotonous teacher who cannot keep himself/herself up-to-date with recent trends. (P5)
<u>I fear</u> forgetting about what drove me to teaching in the first place one day. (P14)
L2 teacher competency
<u>A teacher should never</u> have habits of boring teachers. Giving worksheets over and over and over again makes classes dull. (P12)
<u>I don't want</u> to become a traditional teacher who is obsessed with pen-and-pencil entrance exams. (P11)
<u>I don't know</u> if I have to use traditional methods. We, <u>as teachers, should</u> incorporate teaching ideas that pique curiosity and motivation. (P8)
<u>It's difficult and a big risk</u> to use digital boards in the classroom. I tested it during the practicum. It would have been better to know how to integrate such technology tools into my classes. <u>I think I am not good</u> at it. (P1)
<u>My biggest fear is</u> to become an English teacher who does not care about pupils. (P2)
<u>I don't wish</u> to become a teacher who uses the same materials in my classes or just teach students the material that is already in the coursebook. (P10)

Some of the participants' possible selves emphasized their worries about reaching the breaking point, stress and emotional exhaustion when considering the challenges of teaching. One participant also stressed the need to learn proactive strategies to deal with the threat of burnout. These participants also wanted to avoid becoming a 'boring', 'uninspired' and 'discouraging' L2 teachers. More specifically, their feared possible selves involve the references to an image of a pen-and-pencil type of teacher who is strictly adhered to the traditional teaching methods. The findings suggest that these participants could balance their positive (hoped-for) and negative (feared) possible selves, which points to their motivation for becoming a teacher.

The participants in this group appeared to have positive views of themselves as competent future L2 teachers in terms of their teaching skills. It was evident in the data that all thirteen participants established confidence in their abilities as competent, effective language teachers. The analysis indicates that students with positive orientations towards the future appeared to be highly motivated to take agentive actions required to achieve their hoped-for selves as professional and innovative L2 teachers. In that regard, some of the participants wrote about their desire to utilize diverse professional development resources, such as conferences, workshops, and international projects so that they could continue to build their teaching skills and be better equipped to become professional teachers. Also, these participants were more likely to take initiatives and sought for strategies for professional learning opportunities at diverse teaching settings (i.e., private tutoring or institutions), which allowed them to feel adequately prepared for teaching and close the gap between

their current selves and positive possible selves. Although they had also negative possible selves (i.e., feared selves), the availability of well-elaborated possible selves seemed to motivate to behave in a goal-directed manner. In addition to their deliberate efforts to develop their possible selves, most of the participants also underscored the role of mentor teachers and teacher educators in forming strong possible selves. They stated that encouragement, the possibility to deal with dilemmas and tensions during the practicum period, and constructive feedback during the practicum period were beneficial in building their positive images of themselves as competent future teachers.

(Under)developed possible selves as L2 teachers

At the opposite of the spectrum are the possible selves of prospective language teachers with (under)developed visions of ideal language teacher selves. Similar to the former pattern, participants in this group (38 participants) also wanted to become a language teacher since teaching would allow them “to make a difference in young people’s lives”, “to inspire the next generation”, “to prepare students as 21st century citizens” and “to become a role model”. This cohort included the prospective language teachers who either were likely to own a vision of L2 teacher, though not vivid and specific enough to be described or were not able to develop a substantial image of ideal language teacher self. Contrary to the former cohort, some of the participants in this group lacked any clear visions of their future teacher selves, and more importantly, building their hoped-for language teacher self did not come as easily as it did for the other participants.

In this pattern, most of the participants tended to remain in the teaching profession. However, six of them appeared to be undecided to remain or were less likely to view teaching as the final destination although they appreciated particular features of teaching, such as job security or connecting with individuals. Instead, they hoped to have private-sector career prospects upon graduation, even work abroad at various international enterprises. Rather than foreseeing themselves as L2 teachers in classroom contexts, they were more inclined to envision their possible selves in the specific form of competent L2 users that can speak English fluently in international contact situations.

Despite their weaker visions of language teacher selves, this cohort of prospective teachers spoke about the type of teachers they hope to and/or fear becoming. Analysis revealed that the hoped-for selves of participants (see Table 3) with (under)developed possible selves often included L2 teacher competency-based possible selves focused on instructional strategies. In this pattern, hoped-for selves revolved around becoming practitioners of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), incorporating intercultural and/or multicultural understanding into lesson plans, promoting open-mindedness and respect, high-student engagement, differentiation, using diverse and interactive teaching

methods, supporting student learning, being motivating and encouraging and understanding challenges and anxieties of students.

Table 3
Data excerpts describing hoped-for possible selves

L2 teacher competency
<u>I believe I can break the traditional way of English teaching.</u> (P27)
<u>I would like to</u> teach English but also prepare pupils to be citizens of the 21 st century. <u>I am going to</u> focus on globalization multiculturalism, respect, open-mindedness etc. (P32)
<u>I think</u> I am not good at understanding different student profiles. <u>I would like to</u> possess an extremely thorough understanding and knowledge of differentiated instruction. (P41)
<u>I think an English teacher should</u> build connections between L2 learners' cultural background and their classroom learning experience. (P22)
<u>I would like to</u> become a mindful, inspiring and encouraging teacher... (P19)
<u>I want to</u> be able to understand the challenges and anxieties students might undergo when trying to learn a different language and culture from their own. (P38)
<u>I think a teacher</u> should have more patience because we, as teachers, have the privilege of being in a very important position in students' lives. (P55)
Language learning is a difficult process. So, <u>I believe</u> that an English teacher should guide and offer support and advice for pupils when needed. (P52)
<u>The more you</u> enjoy in your classes, <u>the more pupils</u> will enjoy. (P51)

The participants also highlighted the teacher's role in the classroom referring to becoming more of a facilitator, scaffolding L2 learning for pupils. These possible selves also included the idea of inspiring and encouraging learners as their role models to make them realize their fullest potential. As an example, one pre-service teacher stressed the importance of powerful modeling so that it could be an efficient learning tool.

The findings showed that the proportion of feared compared to hoped-for language teacher selves appeared to be dominant for student writings concerning L2 teacher competency focused on instructional strategies and management, monitoring, and interaction as well as L2 proficiency (see Table 4). Many of these participants wanted to avoid becoming 'authoritarian', 'harsh', 'demanding' and 'punitive' teachers who are preoccupied with enforcing strict discipline. Through participants' perspectives, 'becoming an authoritative teacher' who blends a caring atmosphere with firm, but fair discipline would allow them to have superior learning outcomes. In many writings, the fears of poor time management as well as monitoring difficult behaviors were also at the forefront. In several writings, participants reported feared selves focused on becoming 'uncaring' and 'uninspiring' teacher, building weaker relationships with students and disorganized instruction.

Participants' L2 teacher competency-based feared selves pertained to instructional strategies were also strongly present. Their fears included possible selves, such as bad grasp of content, overreliance on lesson plans and having many students who fail. Similar to the participants in the former group, these participants' feared selves revolved around teaching students with diverse needs and profiles. More specifically, they involved the references to teaching different age groups, such as young and adult L2 learners.

Participants also reported their L2 proficiency-based feared selves, which revealed their need to have stronger linguistic knowledge and better confidence in speaking. These participants recognized as their weaknesses the inability to use English language like a native speaker. Feared possible selves mostly focused on making grammar mistakes and stuttering while speaking since they seemed to believe their students would be judgmental and critical of their language skills.

Table 4
Data excerpts describing feared possible selves

L2 teacher competency

Still, my biggest fear is not being able to manage the class. (P31) I have problems with classroom management. I'd really want to be an extremely good classroom manager. (P29) During my internships, the gap was a big shock. I found myself in difficult situations where it was hard to monitor disruptive behaviors in class. This is one side of myself I fear remaining unprepared, and I know I need more experience and confidence. (P19) I am afraid of talking in a monotone voice, which makes me a boring teacher. (P56) I really don't want to be an unapproachable teacher. (P52) During my internships, when the unexpected occurs, it becomes difficult for me to keep on track. I try to avoid wasting class time. (P52) I have the fear of not being able to answer students' questions in classes (P23) I still detailed on syllabus or lesson plans. (P29) I went to two different practicum schools and based on my experiences; I have to learn to teach students with diverse profiles. (P43) There is a mismatch between theory and practice. I had frustrating experiences with the 1st graders. I really don't want to teach young learners. (P37)

L2 proficiency

Speaking fluently is one of the most important qualities of an English teacher, so I need to improve my language skills (P22) I would really want to be able to explain my point and get it across to the students. (P33) For example, I want to simply express my point. I want to use English as if it's my mother tongue. (P24) During my internships, I made serious grammar mistakes and it was frustrating for me. As a teacher, I am afraid of making grammar mistakes in the classroom. (P51) I fear becoming an English teacher who have a bad command of English grammar. (P28)

Many examples of their feared possible selves reference to the challenges, tensions and conflicts between their ideal language teacher selves and current selves. Giving more details about their fears based on their practicum experiences in the writings, most participants attributed these serious discrepancies between their ideal and current language teacher selves to the lack of sufficient practice opportunities in "real settings with real students" (P31). In this respect, participants emphasized the need for more authentic tasks wherein they could explore the possibilities of meaningful and realistic practice.

As opposed to the academic training sources, many of the participants expressed greater satisfaction amongst experiential training sources such as mentoring from teachers and supervised practicum. Akin to the former group, many referred to successful experiences during their internships. They reported that the mentor and the teacher educator were important motivators in building their confidence and positive self-images during their internships.

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to investigate a group of prospective language teachers' possible selves at a pre-service teacher education program in Turkey. Given the gap in the literature on future-oriented identities in the context of teacher preparation and development, this study points to the potential of possible selves theory in providing analytic concepts to better understand images of self-as-teacher (Kumazawa, 2013). While derived from a small-scale study, the findings suggest that prospective teachers claim and form diverse and multiple forms of possible selves when describing the kind of language teacher they wish to be or fear becoming (Hiver, 2013). This study revealed two different patterns of future-oriented language teacher identity work: (a) *highly developed* that is characterized by goal-orientedness, optimistic view of L2 teaching and balanced possible selves and (b) *(under)developed* that is characterized by the lack of vivid visions of teaching, irresolute goals and imbalanced possible selves. Of particular note is that these patterns should not be considered as reductionist categories into which a language teacher might belong to forever losing the possibility to move across different patterns. As reported by many scholars (Rahmati et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2013), these patterns are relational. In other words, since identity construction includes "a mixture of being in and being out" (Wenger, 1998, p. 165), language teachers might reconcile forms of different possible selves at any given time in any given setting.

Participants with highly developed possible selves appeared to possess specific and clear visions of the future. These participants hope to reach their possible selves. In their writing, they were likely to balance their hoped-for and feared possible selves: between how they desire to become and how they avoid becoming. Likewise, individuals build self-images that they wish to achieve, and they would tend to avoid. These prospective language teachers balance their hoped-for and feared possible selves. These findings suggest that the balance between these possible selves serves to motivation (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2014; Yowell, 2000). On the other hand, participants with (under)developed possible selves were more concerned about their future and owned vague ambitions and irresolute plans to become a teacher. This was indicated through the common use of the utterances in the student writings "I have the fear of ...", "My biggest fear..." and "I am afraid...". Such expressions of uncertainty might demonstrate that prospective language teachers are struggling (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). These possible selves appeared to be less clear and feared possible selves were more likely to dominate over hoped-for teacher selves in the data. This shows that unbalanced possible selves suggest fewer efforts to achieve and avoid these possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The analysis indicated that participants' possible language teacher selves might be classified into three primary categories (i.e., L2 teacher development, L2 teacher competency and 'L2 proficiency'), revealing a distinction as demonstrated by previous studies between task-focused

and quality-focused possible selves (Hamman et al., 2010, 2013). L2 teacher competency-based possible selves pertained to both instructional strategies and monitoring, management and interaction. The former relates to teaching techniques and methods to help students accomplish tasks whereas the latter focuses on management and discipline issues and interaction with individuals. The findings of this study suggest that participants in each pattern appeared to formulate hoped-for selves and feared selves that are *task-focused* reflecting the category of L2 teacher competency. This is in line with the literature indicating that prospective teachers might experience struggles when considering their future-oriented identities much beyond their immediate role and context (Hamman et al., 2010).

To start with, L2 teacher competency-based possible selves focused on instructional strategies seemed to dominate the student writings. In the construct of the L2 teachers they wish to become, prospective teachers in two types of future-oriented identity work focus mainly on differentiated instruction, using different, interactive teaching ideas and methods as well as being motivating and encouraging. Many participants' feared selves related to this category are bound up with bad grasp of content, addressing student with individual needs and profiles and overreliance on syllabus. Second, L2 teacher competency-based possible selves concerning management, monitoring and interaction were reported only by the participants with (under)developed ideal images as L2 teachers. Taken together, the greater proportion of feared selves related to instructional strategies and management, monitoring, and interaction may indicate a limited focus in the language teacher education context where participants of this study studied. In this respect, limited opportunities to practice implementing evidence-based strategies during the practicum (Christofferson & Sullivan, 2015), and overemphasis on theories of teaching and less focus on practice continue to be important concerns in the field of L2 teacher preparation (Tekir & Akar, 2019). Since the participants in this study consistently complained about the gap between theory and practice in the program, L2 teacher education programs should offer students more integrated and coherent curriculum that link coursework and clinical work (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Also, participants' desire to have more opportunities for teaching practice could also be interpreted as prospective language teachers' feeling the need for more extended practicum experience rather than the traditional one-day-a-week (Meyers et al., 2017). Third, most of the participants, that is, those with (under)developed possible selves narrated feared selves related to L2 proficiency. These proficiency-based possible selves are related to their sense of self in their own ability to use English competently. Thus, generating supportive curriculum provision which combine language use, language objectification, and language acquisition should be offered to prospective language teachers to facilitate the development of their English proficiency and pedagogy (Hadi, 2019).

Lastly, only prospective language teachers with highly developed possible selves formulated L2 teacher development-based possible selves

that were *quality-focused* as it pertains to teacher self-concepts to achieve high standards and to seek opportunities for increasing teacher expertise (Hamman et al., 2010). Of particular interest is the highly developed possible teacher selves in relation to the teacher development. This elaborated sense of teacher self might be thought of as an advantageous positioning as this allowed them to cope with the future and move beyond their fears (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2014). Contrary to the participants with (under)developed possible selves who possessed doubts and worries about language teaching competence and lack personal agency to learn as prospective teachers, their choice to distance themselves from the feared selves and seek out opportunities to practice teaching outside the university classroom (i.e., private tutoring and teaching in different institutions) could be taken as manifestations of agency (Kumazawa, 2013). The different exercises of agency and responses to challenges is important as they highlight the dynamic process of future-oriented identity work as either bridging the gap between the current selves and hoped-for selves or increasing the gap between the current selves and feared selves (Hamman et al., 2010). Considering the significant impact of future thinking on the exercise of agency, it is critical for language teacher education programs to apply possible selves theory to the development of prospective teachers (Hamman et al., 2013; Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008).

Research suggests that past experiences with pre-service teachers' school time and experiences with teacher educators and mentors during practicum are extremely influential in the formation of future-oriented teacher identity development (Pellikka et al., 2020; Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). For most of the participants, encouragement, support and constructive feedback from mentors and supervisors during internships were beneficial for building their positive visions of themselves as competent teachers and strengthening their motivation for teaching (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2014). These findings also suggest that imagining a possible self of being successful (or vice versa) may lead to enhanced performance and increased efforts (Oyserman & James, 2015). The deconstructing and reconstructing process of teachers' self-concepts can help future teachers to make a 'journey inward' or 'self-searching journey' and contribute to their understandings of themselves in a higher degree of self-awareness (Kumazawa, 2013). Such an empowering setting where future teachers are provided with opportunities for 'critical reflection and inquiry' is important to help them revisit their past and become active agents of their own development (Furlong, 2013). In enabling prospective teachers to have a strong sense of self as a teacher and formulate their identities, the teacher educators should engage them with future-oriented talk in the context of language teacher education.

Although this study has implications for pre-service language teacher education, given the unique setting in which the study took place and the scope and sample size of the study, findings are not generalizable. The student writings of 56 participants were insufficient to explore the complexity of identity development of prospective language teachers.

The writings of this cohort might provide a picture of the emergent pre-service teacher identity development. Also, the self-reported data were elicited through the student writings might not be accurate or complete due to social desirability bias or other reasons. Therefore, it would be desirable to triangulate their student writings with teacher educators and mentors' accounts to provide a holistic perspective of prospective language teachers' possible selves. Further research could also complement the writing data with other data sources, such as in-depth interviews.

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Declaración de intereses

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