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PEDAGOGICAL MODELS AND PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHER IDENTITY

Professional identity is a key outcome of initial teacher education because it shapes how pre-service teachers understand their professional roles, respond to classroom situations, exercise agency, and develop commitment to teaching. This study compares four pedagogical models widely used in teacher preparation – Community of Practice, Experiential Learning, Reflective Practice, and Simulation-Based Learning – with particular reference to pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language. It also examines whether integrating these models can provide more comprehensive support for professional identity development than their separate application. The study combined a theory-informed comparative review with a pilot evaluation of the proposed PERS cycle. The conceptual analysis drew on 26 foundational and recent English-language publications published between 1983 and 2026. The pilot involved 32 pre-service EFL teachers enrolled at a university in Kazakhstan. Over four weeks, participants completed 16 academic hours of PERS-based activities. Questionnaire data were analysed descriptively, while 64 reflective entries produced at the initial and final stages of the pilot were analysed using a structured rubric covering pedagogical interpretation, evidence-based reasoning, consideration of alternative courses of action, and professional decision-making. The comparative analysis showed that Community of Practice primarily supports professional socialization and recognition; Experiential Learning strengthens authentic practice and adaptive action; Reflective Practice promotes self-understanding and identity coherence; and Simulation-Based Learning provides opportunities for safe rehearsal and professional decision-making. The PERS cycle integrates these strengths through participation, experience, reflection, and simulation. Pilot results indicated that professional decision-making confidence increased from 3.18 to 3.87 points, while theory–practice integration increased from 3.09 to 3.81. Reflective entries demonstrating analytical, evidence-based, and action-oriented reasoning increased from 28.1% to 65.6%. These findings suggest the practical feasibility of the PERS cycle, although larger controlled studies are needed to confirm its effectiveness.

Keywords: professional identity, pre-service, EFL teachers, pedagogical models, reflective practice, simulation-based learning.

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Педагогикалық модельдер және болашақ ағылшын тілі мұғалімдерінің кәсіби бірегейлігін қалыптастыру

Кәсіби сәйкестік – бастауыш мұғалімдерді даярлаудың негізгі нәтижесі, себебі ол болашақ мұғалімдердің өздерінің кәсіби рөлдерін түсінуін, сыныптағы жағдайларға реакцияларын, бастамашылығын және оқытуға деген берілгендігін қалыптастыруға ықпал етеді. Бұл зерттеу мұғалімдерді даярлауда кеңінен қолданылатын төрт педагогикалық модельді тәжірибе қауымдастығы, тәжірибелік оқыту, рефлексивті тәжірибе және модельге негізделген оқытуды салыстырады, әсіресе ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқытатын болашақ мұғалімдерге баса назар аударады. Сондай-ақ, бұл модельдерді біріктіру кәсіби сәйкестікті дамытуға оларды бөлек пайдаланудан гөрі жан-жақты қолдау көрсете ала ма, жоқ па, соны қарастырады. Зерттеу теориялық тұрғыдан негізделген салыстырмалы шолуды ұсынылған PERS циклінің пилоттық бағалауымен біріктіреді. Тұжырымдамалық талдау 1983 және 2026 жылдар аралығында жарияланған 26 негізгі және заманауи ағылшын тіліндегі басылымдарға негізделген. Пилоттық зерттеуге Қазақстан университетінде оқитын 32 болашақ ағылшын тілі мұғалімі қатысты. Төрт апта ішінде қатысушылар PERS негізіндегі тапсырмалардың 16 академиялық сағатын орындады. Сауалнама деректері сипаттамалық статистика әдістерімен өңделді, ал пилоттық зерттеудің бастапқы және қорытынды кезеңдерінде дайындалған 64 рефлексивтік жазба педагогикалық жағдаяттарды түсіндіру, дәлелдерге негізделген пайымдау, баламалы әрекет тәсілдерін қарастыру және кәсіби шешім қабылдау өлшемдерін қамтитын құрылымдалған рубрика бойынша талданды. Салыстырмалы

талдау тәжірибе қауымдастығының негізінен кәсіби әлеуметтену мен тануды жеңілдететінін; тәжірибелік оқыту шынайы тәжірибені және бейімделгіш әрекетті нығайтатынын; рефлексивті тәжірибе өзін-өзі түсіну мен жеке бастың үйлесімділігін арттыратынын; ал модельдеуге негізделген оқыту қауіпсіз тәжірибеден өту және кәсіби шешімдер қабылдау мүмкіндіктерін беретінін көрсетті. PERS циклі қатысу, тәжірибе, рефлексия және модельдеу арқылы осы күшті жақтарды біріктіреді. Пилоттық зерттеудің нәтижелері кәсіби шешім қабылдауға деген сенімділік 3,18-ден 3,87 ұпайға дейін, ал теория мен тәжірибенің интеграциясы 3,09-дан 3,81-ге дейін өскенін көрсетті. Аналитикалық, дәлелді және әрекетке бағытталған пайымдауды көрсететін рефлексивті жазбалардың үлесі 28,1%-дан 65,6%-ға дейін өсті. Бұл нәтижелер PERS циклінің орындылығын көрсетеді, дегенмен оның тиімділігін растау үшін үлкен бақыланатын зерттеулер қажет.

Түйін сөздер: кәсіби сәйкестік, мұғалімдерді даярлау, шетел тілі мұғалімі ретіндегі ағылшын тілі, педагогикалық модельдер, рефлексивті тәжірибе, модельдеуге негізделген оқыту.

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Педагогические модели и формирование профессиональной идентичности будущих учителей английского языка

Профессиональная идентичность является ключевым результатом начального педагогического образования, поскольку она формирует понимание будущими учителями своих профессиональных ролей, их реакцию на ситуации в классе, проявление инициативы и развитие приверженности преподаванию. В этом исследовании сравниваются четыре педагогические модели, широко используемые в подготовке учителей: сообщество практиков, экспериментальное обучение, рефлексивная практика и обучение на основе моделирования, – с особым акцентом на будущих учителях английского языка как иностранного. Также рассматривается вопрос о том, может ли интеграция этих моделей обеспечить более всестороннюю поддержку развития профессиональной идентичности, чем их раздельное применение. В исследовании сочетается теоретически обоснованный сравнительный обзор с пилотной оценкой предложенного цикла PERS. Концептуальный анализ основан на 26 основополагающих и современных англоязычных публикациях, опубликованных в период с 1983 по 2026 год. В пилотном исследовании приняли участие 32 будущих учителя английского языка как иностранного, обучающихся в университете Казахстана. В течение четырех недель участники выполнили 16 академических часов заданий на основе PERS. Данные анкет были обработаны с использованием описательной статистики, а 64 рефлексивные записи, подготовленные на начальном и заключительном этапах пилотной апробации, проанализированы с помощью структурированной рубрики, включающей педагогическую интерпретацию, аргументацию на основе фактических данных, рассмотрение альтернативных вариантов действий и принятие профессиональных решений. Сравнительный анализ показал, что сообщество практиков в первую очередь способствует профессиональной социализации и признанию; экспериментальное обучение укрепляет аутентичную практику и адаптивные действия; рефлексивная практика способствует самопониманию и согласованности идентичности; а обучение на основе моделирования предоставляет возможности для безопасной отработки и принятия профессиональных решений. Цикл PERS интегрирует эти сильные стороны посредством участия, опыта, рефлексии и моделирования. Результаты пилотного исследования показали, что уверенность в принятии профессиональных решений увеличилась с 3,18 до 3,87 баллов, а интеграция теории и практики – с 3,09 до 3,81. Доля рефлексивных записей, демонстрирующих аналитическое, основанное на доказательствах и ориентированное на действия рассуждение, увеличилась с 28,1% до 65,6%. Эти результаты свидетельствуют о практической осуществимости цикла PERS, хотя для подтверждения его эффективности необходимы более масштабные контролируемые исследования.

Ключевые слова: профессиональная идентичность, подготовка будущих учителей, преподаватели английского как иностранного, педагогические модели, рефлексивная практика, обучение на основе моделирования.

Introduction

Initial teacher education involves more than developing subject knowledge and teaching skills. Pre-service teachers must also learn to understand

the moral, relational, linguistic, and institutional expectations of the profession and determine their own place within them. This process is commonly explained through the concept of teacher professional identity. It is generally viewed as flexible

rather than fixed, shaped by both personal and social factors, and continuously revised through experience, communication, recognition, and professional participation (Beijaard et.al., 2004; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). A systematic review of 412 studies showed that current research covers teacher development, professional communities, subject areas, career transitions, identity tensions, and institutional settings (Rushton, 2023). Although this broad literature confirms the importance of professional identity, it also reveals a practical difficulty: teacher education programmes often recognise its value without clearly identifying the pedagogical conditions that support its formation.

Teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL teachers) are expected to become confident language users, models of English, communicators, evaluators, interpreters of the curriculum, and members of the school community. Confidence in language proficiency may be accompanied by uncertainty about classroom authority, while earlier learning experiences may conflict with communicative teaching approaches. University expectations may also differ from the realities of school practicum. Such tensions affect whether future teachers see themselves as legitimate professionals, apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom situations, and maintain their commitment when practice does not match their initial expectations.

The gap between theory and practice is also linked to professional identity. A pre-service teacher may understand how to plan a lesson but still feel uncertain when students react unexpectedly, mentors favour other methods, or school routines limit new ideas. Identity develops as these tensions are examined and resolved. Different pedagogical models support this process in different ways: Community of Practice through participation and recognition, Experiential Learning through action and revision, Reflective Practice through analysis and self-evaluation, and Simulation-Based Learning through rehearsal, feedback, and decision-making in a safe environment.

Most studies examine these models separately. Practicum research focuses on authentic experience and mentoring, reflective journal studies on professional awareness, community-based research on belonging and collaboration, and simulation studies on readiness and flexible response. Although each approach is well supported, there is little guidance on how they can be integrated within teacher education. This also makes the search for one “best” model misleading, since dif-

ferent aspects of professional identity may develop through different mechanisms.

This article compares four pedagogical models by their role in professional identity formation and proposes an integrated framework for pre-service EFL teacher education. It examines the mechanisms activated by each model, the identity dimensions they support, and their possible sequence within the Kazakhstani context. The analysis is guided by three hypotheses: each model has a dominant identity-forming mechanism; no model supports all identity dimensions equally; and a sequenced hybrid framework offers broader developmental support than the isolated or parallel use of the four models.

In addition to the conceptual comparison, the study includes a pilot empirical evaluation designed to examine the initial feasibility of the PERS cycle and to identify whether participation in its activities is associated with changes in pre-service teachers’ professional reasoning, reflective depth, and confidence in pedagogical decision-making.

A fourth exploratory question was formulated for the pilot phase: What preliminary changes in professional reasoning and reflective practice can be observed after pre-service teachers participate in a structured PERS cycle?

Its practical contribution consists of a set of activities and assessment indicators connecting university courses, microteaching, mentoring, digital learning, and school practicum, complemented by an exploratory empirical evaluation of the PERS cycle based on questionnaire data and reflective artefacts from pre-service teachers.

Literature review

Teacher professional identity as a multidimensional construct

Professional identity is particularly significant in initial teacher education. It includes teachers’ understanding of themselves, the kind of professionals they intend to become, and the values that guide their decisions. This identity develops through interaction with students, mentors, colleagues, institutions, and professional communities. It is also expressed in practice through classroom decisions, communication, routines, emotional responses, and the application of professional knowledge. At the same time, teacher identity is not fixed; it changes as previous learning experiences, current participation, and future professional aspirations are reconsidered (Beijaard et.al., 2004; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Rushton, 2023).

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop caution against defining professional identity as a fixed set of personal characteristics, emphasizing that it develops through continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of professional experience (Beijaard et al., 2004). Akkerman and Meijer (2011) similarly present identity as a complex construct that may be simultaneously coherent and multiple, continuous and changing, as well as individual and socially shaped. This perspective is particularly relevant to EFL teacher education, where student teachers may see themselves at the same time as language learners, university students, beginning teachers, cultural mediators, and future members of the profession. Tensions between these roles should not be viewed solely as weaknesses. When teacher education programmes create opportunities for reflection and discussion, such tensions can support professional growth and a more coherent understanding of the teacher's role.

Professional identity is closely related to agency. Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016) argue that pre-service teachers do not simply adopt existing professional norms but actively interpret, negotiate, reject, and integrate different experiences in the process of identity formation. Their capacity to exercise agency, however, depends on the opportunities available for meaningful participation and on the extent to which they are recognized as legitimate members of the professional community. Teacher identity should therefore be understood neither as a purely internal psychological construct nor as a direct outcome of socialization. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of self-interpretation, context-dependent action, and social recognition.

Studies in language teacher education show that professional identity develops through the interaction of reflection, discourse, and participation in educational activities (Wenger, 1998). Longitudinal and practice-oriented research indicates that pre-service teachers may gradually move beyond simplified, technique-focused views of teaching toward a broader understanding of learners, context, instructional modality, and professional problem solving (Kolb, 1984). Research involving pre-service English teachers also suggests that their professional identity combines linguistic competence with personal qualities and pedagogical knowledge, demonstrating that subject expertise alone does not fully define the teacher's role (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). This multidimensional understanding is further supported by the English Teacher Identity Measure, which examines identity through

related components, including self-efficacy, professional beliefs, future orientation, and perceptions of the teaching career (Yan et al., 2024). In language teacher education, identity is closely connected with beliefs, motivation, agency, classroom practices, and the ways in which student teachers position themselves as future members of the profession. Richards (2023) therefore argues that identity should be treated as a central component of language teacher education rather than as an indirect outcome of methodological preparation. Longitudinal evidence also indicates that professional identity may change substantially across successive phases of teacher education. Haghighi Irani et al. (2020) identified shifts from one-dimensional to multidimensional perceptions of teaching and from problem analysis toward problem-solving as pre-service teachers progressed through a three-phase teacher education programme.

Community of Practice

The Community of Practice perspective views learning as a gradual process of participation in socially organized professional activities. Newcomers usually begin with peripheral involvement, during which they observe established norms, acquire shared language and tools, and progressively take on more significant responsibilities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger later emphasized that participation contributes not only to the development of knowledge and skills but also to identity formation, as membership in a community changes how individuals understand both the practice and their own professional role (Wenger, 1998). In initial teacher education, such communities may include university peer groups, school departments, mentoring networks, professional learning groups, and online professional communities.

Recognition gained through participation serves as a central mechanism of professional identity formation. Pre-service teachers begin to perceive themselves as members of the profession when their ideas and actions are acknowledged by peers, mentors, and experienced educators as meaningful contributions to shared practice. Activities such as collaborative lesson planning, peer review, inquiry-based group work, co-teaching, and professional dialogue with mentors provide opportunities to observe, discuss, and critically interpret established professional norms. Professional learning communities may also foster a research-oriented identity by creating a collaborative environment in which questions, evidence, and uncertainty are examined collectively rather than treated as individual concerns (Levin & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2023). The so-

cial nature of identity construction is also evident in research on English language preservice teachers participating in academic and other communities. Posada-Ortiz (2022) demonstrates that professional identity changes over time and emerges through the interaction of personal, social, and cultural dimensions, reinforcing the importance of participation and recognition in teacher development.

Participation, however, does not necessarily lead to constructive professional identity development. Communities of practice may reinforce established routines, limit the involvement of newcomers, or equate professional belonging with conformity. In EFL teacher education, for example, novice teachers may gain recognition primarily by reproducing a mentor's preferred instructional approach, even when it is inconsistent with communicative, multilingual, or inclusive principles. For this reason, participation should be accompanied by structured discussion of power relations, access to professional roles, and the legitimacy of alternative pedagogical practices. The principal strength of this model lies in its capacity to foster professional belonging and disciplinary discourse. Its main limitation is that inclusion in a professional community may occur without sustained experimentation or sufficiently critical reflection.

Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning conceptualizes professional knowledge as emerging through a cyclical process that integrates concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Within teacher education, practicum, service learning, classroom observation, microteaching, project-based activities, and lesson study may serve as experiential learning contexts when pre-service teachers are required not only to carry out instructional tasks but also to analyse their experiences, draw conceptual conclusions, and revise subsequent practice.

The central identity-forming mechanism of this model is professional enactment. For pre-service teachers, professional identity becomes more tangible when an anticipated teaching role is translated into concrete pedagogical practice. Designing an EFL lesson, responding to learners' language use, managing classroom interaction, and modifying instructional tasks in response to feedback provide practical evidence of their capacity to perform as teachers. Such experiences may strengthen professional self-efficacy, while also exposing tensions between an idealized image of teaching and actual performance. These tensions contribute to identity

development only when practical experience is supported by guidance, reflection, and relevant conceptual knowledge.

Research on teaching practicum identifies authentic classroom experience as an important context for professional identity formation, emotional adjustment, mentoring, and pedagogical learning (Zeivots et al., 2024; Cabaroğlu & Öz, 2025). Recent evidence from EFL teacher education similarly indicates that teaching practicum functions as an important context in which professional identity is configured through classroom experience, socialisation, and interaction with members of the school community (Ardi et al., 2023). However, the developmental value of practicum differs considerably depending on the school context, mentor support, placement duration, and assessment requirements. Practical experience may reproduce ineffective teaching patterns when feedback remains superficial or when pre-service teachers are judged mainly on their conformity to established expectations. Experiential Learning therefore offers considerable potential for connecting theoretical knowledge with classroom practice, but experience alone does not necessarily lead to improvement. Professional growth requires systematic reflection, constructive dialogue, and repeated opportunities to test and revise pedagogical decisions rather than merely adapt to existing routines.

Reflective Practice

Reflective Practice emphasizes the systematic interpretation of professional activity. Schön differentiates between reflection-in-action, which takes place during an evolving professional situation, and reflection-on-action, which involves the retrospective analysis of completed practice (Taşdemir & Seferoğlu, 2022; Schön, 1983). In teacher education, reflective journals, critical incident analysis, video-based reflection, stimulated recall, portfolios, mentoring discussions, and practitioner inquiry are commonly used to identify and critically examine assumptions that often remain implicit in pedagogical decision-making. Content analysis of pre-service EFL teachers' portfolios has shown that reflective artefacts can provide evidence of changes in professional beliefs and emerging teacher identities, supporting their use not only as instructional tasks but also as qualitative indicators of professional development (Marković et al., 2022).

The central identity-forming mechanism is the development of narrative and interpretive coherence. Reflective practice enables pre-service teachers to relate their previous learning experi-

ences to current classroom situations and emerging professional goals. Yuan and Mak(2018) demonstrated that reflective learning and identity development arise through the interaction of practice, discourse, and activity rather than through individual introspection alone. Similarly, Mumford and Dikilitaş(2020) found that structured online interaction can strengthen reflective thinking among pre-service language teachers. Reflection on critical incidents also promotes professional awareness by encouraging TESOL student teachers to reassess their beliefs, assumptions, emotional responses, and possible courses of action (Karim et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, reflective practice is often reduced to a formal academic requirement. Descriptive journals may record classroom events without critically examining their causes, implications, underlying interests, or consequences for future action. At the same time, reflective writing should not automatically be equated with critical reflection. Turhan and Kirkgöz (2023) found that even after extended practicum observation, teacher candidates did not necessarily reach a high level of criticality, which supports the use of explicit analytical criteria, collaborative discussion, and structured prompts. Reflection may also become overly individualised when institutional conditions and professional community norms are overlooked. Its effectiveness therefore depends on carefully designed prompts, appropriate conceptual frameworks, relevant evidence, professional dialogue, and constructive feedback. Reflec-

tive Practice is particularly valuable for developing professional self-understanding, ethical awareness, and identity coherence. However, its impact remains limited when reflection is disconnected from opportunities to apply, evaluate, and revise emerging interpretations in practice.

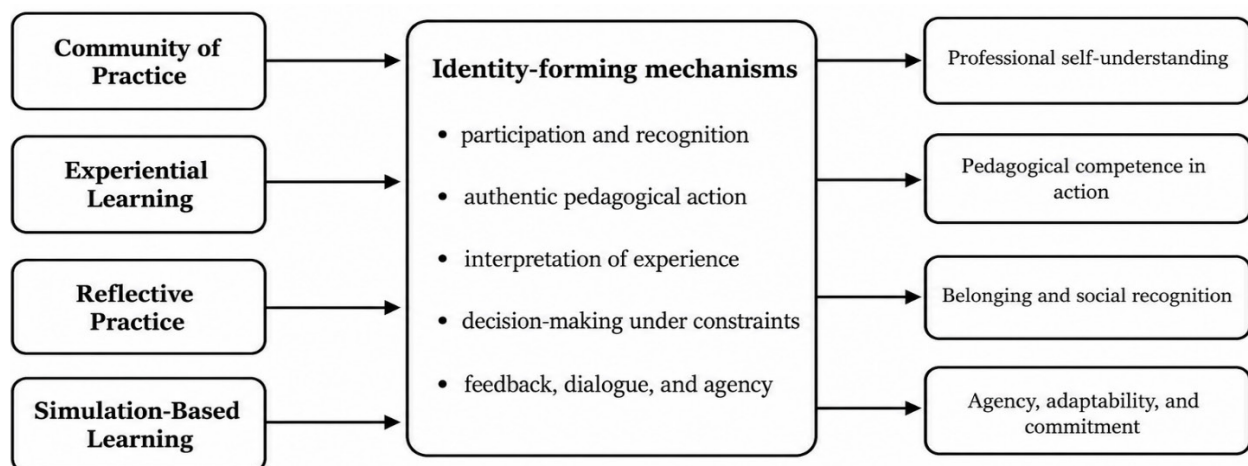
Simulation-Based Learning

Simulation-Based Learning creates structured representations of professional practice. These may take the form of role plays, standardized learners or parents, branching digital scenarios, mixed-reality classrooms, case-based conferences, and online environments. Its defining characteristic is not the level of technological complexity, but the purposeful design of situations in which participants are required to make decisions, respond to consequences, and engage in guided debriefing.

The central identity-forming mechanism is protected rehearsal, which allows pre-service teachers to explore professional roles before or alongside high-stakes practicum experiences. Online classroom simulations have been specifically used to support professional identity development by engaging novice teachers in scenarios that require them to interpret role expectations and make context-sensitive decisions (Carrington et al., 2011). Recent studies further suggest that simulation can broaden awareness of alternative responses, support professional development, and strengthen preparedness for complex educational situations (Levin & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2023; Flavian & Levin, 2024).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Linking Pedagogical Models, Identity-Forming Mechanisms, and Professional Outcomes



Note: Developed by the authors based on Beijaard et al. (2004), Akkerman and Meijer (2011), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), Kolb (1984), Schön (1983), Carrington et al. (2011), Levin and Muchnik-Rozanov (2023), and Flavian and Levin (2024).

Simulation is particularly valuable for preparing pre-service teachers to respond to rare, sensitive, or complex situations that may not arise during a limited practicum placement. Such situations may include handling parental complaints, responding to discriminatory language, supporting learners experiencing anxiety, managing multilingual classroom interaction, or adapting instruction when technology fails. Structured debriefing enables participants to compare their intentions and decisions with the actions taken and with established professional standards. However, simulations may simplify the complexity of classroom life or place excessive emphasis on individual performance rather than sustained relationships. Their effectiveness therefore depends on realistic scenario design, skilled facilitation, and explicit connections to authentic teaching practice. Simulation contributes most strongly to professional decision-making and adaptive agency, while its main limitation lies in the risk of equating successful performance in a simulated setting with consistent competence in real classrooms.

Methodology

The study employed a two-stage research design combining a theory-informed comparative review with an exploratory pilot empirical evaluation. The first stage examined the identity-forming mechanisms of four pedagogical models: Community of Practice, Experiential Learning, Reflective Practice, and Simulation-Based Learning. The second stage evaluated the feasibility of the proposed PERS cycle through a small-scale implementation with pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language. The empirical component combined quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative analysis of reflective artefacts.

The analytical corpus consisted of 26 key English-language publications issued between 1983 and 2026. Relevant sources were located through structured keyword searches in ERIC, academic publisher databases, and Google Scholar. These searches were supplemented by backward citation tracking of recent systematic reviews and empirical studies. The search strategy combined terms such as “pre-service teacher professional identity,” “EFL teacher identity,” “community of practice in teacher education,” “experiential learning and practicum,” “reflective practice among pre-service language teachers,” and “simulation-based teacher education.” Seminal publications were included when they established the theoretical foundations of a particular pedagogical

model. More recent studies were given priority when they addressed pre-service teachers, language teacher education, practicum experiences, professional identity development, or simulation-based learning.

Sources were included if they met at least one of four criteria: they defined teacher professional identity or one of the four pedagogical models; reported empirical findings on identity development among pre-service teachers; examined professional learning mechanisms relevant to identity formation; or presented evidence from EFL/TESOL teacher education or the Kazakhstani context. Studies addressing only general student achievement, in-service training without clear implications for professional identity, or technology acceptance without reference to professional learning processes were excluded. The final corpus was deliberately selective and is therefore presented as a comparative conceptual synthesis rather than a comprehensive systematic review.

To minimize the risk of overinterpretation, a conservative scoring procedure was adopted. Where the evidence was inconsistent or the proposed mechanism depended substantially on the quality of facilitation, the lower rating was assigned. Aggregate scores were used solely as a descriptive indicator of profile balance and were not intended to rank the relative effectiveness of the models. The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the dominant identity-forming mechanism and principal limitations of each model were identified. Second, the resulting six-criterion profiles were compared to evaluate H1 and H2. Third, the complementarities among the models and their sequencing requirements were examined to develop the integrated PERS cycle and assess H3.

Pilot empirical evaluation of the PERS cycle

The pilot study involved 32 pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language enrolled in a teacher education programme at one university in Kazakhstan. The participants completed a four-week PERS sequence comprising 16 academic hours. The pilot was embedded in regular methodology and professional preparation activities and was organised around four consecutive but interconnected phases: Participation, Experience, Reflection, and Simulation.

During the Participation phase, students worked in stable professional learning groups, discussed classroom cases, collaboratively planned teaching activities, and provided evidence-based peer feedback. The Experience phase included microteaching and analysis of selected teaching episodes. During

the Reflection phase, each participant prepared a structured reflective entry focusing on pedagogical decisions, learner responses, contextual factors, and possible alternative actions. The Simulation phase involved role-based and scenario-based professional situations followed by guided debriefing.

A brief 10-item questionnaire was administered before and after the pilot. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and addressed five dimensions derived from the conceptual framework: professional self-understanding, confidence in professional decision-making, professional agency, theory–practice integration, and readiness to reconsider and modify pedagogical practice. Given the exploratory nature and limited sample size, questionnaire data were used primarily for descriptive analysis rather than causal inference.

Qualitative data consisted of 64 reflective entries: 32 produced during the initial stage and 32

at the end of the PERS sequence. The entries were coded according to four levels of reflective depth: descriptive reporting of events; explanatory interpretation of causes and contextual factors; analytical consideration of alternative pedagogical responses; and evidence-based and action-oriented reflection linking interpretation with a specific plan for subsequent professional action. The use of reflective artefacts was informed by previous EFL teacher education research demonstrating the value of portfolios and structured reflection for examining emerging professional identity (Marković et al., 2022; Turhan & Kirkgöz, 2023).

Participation in the pilot was voluntary. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of anonymised data for research purposes. Questionnaire responses and reflective artefacts were coded so that individual students could not be identified. Participation or non-participation had no effect on academic assessment.

Table 1
Comparative Analysis of Four Pedagogical Models

Model	Core mechanism	Typical EFL activities	Primary identity contribution	Main design risk
Community of Practice	Participation, recognition, shared repertoire	Peer lesson planning; mentor dialogue; professional learning groups; co-teaching	Belonging, professional language, recognition as a legitimate participant	Conformity, unequal access, or reproduction of weak routines
Experiential Learning	Action, feedback, conceptualization, renewed experimentation	Practicum; microteaching; lesson study; school projects; service learning	Enacted competence, adaptive action, evidence of becoming a teacher	Experience without structured interpretation or reliable feedback
Reflective Practice	Interpretation of action, assumptions, emotions, and alternatives	Journals; critical incidents; video reflection; portfolios; stimulated recall	Self-understanding, ethical awareness, identity coherence	Descriptive or ritualized reflection detached from action
Simulation-Based Learning	Protected rehearsal, decision-making, debriefing, transfer	Role play; virtual classroom; parent conference; branching scenarios; case simulation	Agency, preparedness, response repertoire, confidence under uncertainty	Low authenticity, performance without transfer, technology dependence

Note: compiled by the author.

Results and discussion

Distinctive identity-forming mechanisms

The findings support H1 by showing that each model influences professional identity through a distinct primary mechanism, despite some overlap in their secondary effects. Within a Community of Practice, identity becomes socially recognized as

novices participate in shared professional activities and receive validation from others. Experiential Learning gives identity a practical dimension because novices demonstrate professional competence through lesson planning, explanation, interaction, and adaptation. Reflective Practice supports the interpretation of identity by helping novices identify their assumptions, tensions, emotions, and future

professional intentions. Simulation-Based Learning, in turn, provides opportunities to rehearse professional roles, compare alternative forms of action, and revise emerging professional identities before entering situations with significant real-world consequences.

This distinction helps explain why all four models may produce positive outcomes while fostering different forms of professional learning. A collaborative cohort may strengthen a sense of belonging without improving responsiveness in the classroom. An intensive practicum may enhance classroom management skills without helping student teachers articulate their professional values. Reflective writing may deepen self-awareness while having limited influence on actual teaching behaviour. Similarly, simulation may improve preparedness for a parent meeting without demonstrating the ability to sustain professional relationships over an extended period. The central question, therefore, is not whether a model is effective in general, but whether its dominant mechanism corresponds to the specific dimen-

sion of professional identity that the programme seeks to develop.

The EFL context further supports a mechanism-specific understanding of professional identity development. Language teachers must continually negotiate the relationship between linguistic and pedagogical authority. A pre-service teacher may demonstrate advanced English proficiency while lacking confidence in managing classroom interaction. Conversely, another may feel pedagogically competent but remain uncertain about accent or linguistic accuracy. Participation in a professional community can help normalize these tensions and provide access to shared professional discourse. Authentic teaching experience enables novices to test their ability to use English as a medium of instruction. Reflection helps distinguish subjective linguistic insecurity from evidence of pedagogical competence, while simulation offers repeated opportunities to practise questioning, feedback, error correction, and decision-making in multilingual classroom contexts.

Table 2

*Comparative profile across six identity dimensions
Ordinal Analytical Profile of Model Coverage on a 0–3 Scale*

Model	Self-understanding	Enactment	Belonging	Agency	Theory–practice	Feasibility	Total*
Community of Practice	2	2	3	2	2	2	13
Experiential Learning	2	3	2	3	3	2	15
Reflective Practice	3	2	2	3	2	3	15
Simulation-Based Learning	2	3	1	3	3	2	14
Total scores reflect the breadth of analytical coverage and should not be interpreted as effect sizes or statistical rankings.							

Note: compiled by the author.

The analytical profile presented in Table 2 supports H2, as none of the four models achieves the highest rating across all criteria. The Community of Practice model provides the strongest support for professional belonging and recognition. However, its contribution to self-understanding, professional enactment, and agency is more moderate because these outcomes depend largely on the quality and depth of participation. Experiential Learning demonstrates particular strength in professional enactment, agency, and the integration of theory with practice. Its implementation, however, relies on access to well-supported placements, effective

mentoring, and opportunities for repeated experimentation. Reflective Practice offers the strongest basis for professional self-understanding and can be integrated relatively easily across courses. Nevertheless, its capacity to influence professional action depends on the use of evidence, structured dialogue, and constructive feedback. Simulation-Based Learning also provides substantial support for enactment, agency, and theory–practice integration, although its contribution to social belonging is more limited unless simulations involve collaborative tasks and meaningful participation by peers and mentors.

The total scores further demonstrate why a straightforward ranking of the models would be inappropriate. Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice receive identical totals, yet these scores are derived from markedly different analytical profiles. Comparable breadth of coverage therefore does not indicate functional interchangeability. A programme with substantial practicum provision but limited opportunities for professional dialogue may benefit more from structured reflection than from additional field experience. Conversely, a programme that emphasizes theoretical reflection but offers restricted access to authentic classroom settings may require simulation and microteaching. Where cohorts experience professional isolation or inconsistent mentoring, the development of a stronger community structure may be more necessary than the introduction of further individual assignments.

The central finding concerns complementarity rather than competition among the models. The limitations of each model are largely addressed by the strengths of the others. Community participation provides the shared language and social context needed for meaningful reflection, while practical experience supplies the concrete situations that reflection seeks to examine. Reflection, in turn, generates alternative interpretations and possible courses of action that can be tested through simulation. Simulation enables pre-service teachers to rehearse these

responses before returning to authentic practice with a broader range of professional strategies. When the process reconnects with the professional community, peers and mentors can assess the transfer of learning and collectively reconsider established norms of practice.

The pilot findings provide preliminary empirical support for this proposed complementarity. The questionnaire results showed positive changes across several professional-development dimensions rather than in a single isolated indicator. In particular, the increase in theory–practice integration from 3.09 to 3.81 and in confidence in professional decision-making from 3.18 to 3.87 is consistent with the proposed interaction between enacted experience, structured reflection, and simulation.

The reflective artefacts provide a complementary perspective. The increase in analytical and evidence-based/action-oriented entries from 28.1% to 65.6% suggests that the participants increasingly interpreted pedagogical situations in terms of causes, alternatives, evidence, and subsequent professional action. Such changes are consistent with research demonstrating the contribution of structured reflection, portfolios, practicum, and reflective mentoring to professional identity development among pre-service language teachers (Marković et al., 2022; Ardi et al., 2023; Ardi et al., 2025).

Table 3
Pilot empirical findings
Pre- and Post-PERS Indicators in the Pilot Group

Indicator	Pre-PERS M	Post-PERS M	Change
Professional self-understanding	3.31	3.88	+0.57
Confidence in professional decision-making	3.18	3.87	+0.69
Professional agency	3.22	3.78	+0.56
Theory–practice integration	3.09	3.81	+0.72
Readiness to reconsider and modify practice	3.47	4.00	+0.53

Note: scores were obtained on a five-point scale.
This table was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of materials

The descriptive results indicate a positive direction of change across all five dimensions included in the pilot questionnaire. The largest change was observed for theory–practice integration, where the mean score increased from 3.09 to 3.81 points (+0.72). Confidence in professional decision-making

increased from 3.18 to 3.87 (+0.69), while professional self-understanding increased from 3.31 to 3.88 (+0.57). Positive changes were also recorded for professional agency (3.22 to 3.78) and readiness to reconsider and modify pedagogical practice (3.47 to 4.00).

Because the pilot involved a small one-group sample and an exploratory questionnaire, these differences should not be interpreted as causal effect

estimates. Their value lies in showing whether the direction of change is consistent with the developmental mechanisms proposed by the PERS framework.

Table 4

Changes in the Depth of Reflection in Student Reflective Entries

Level of reflection	Initial stage, n (%)	Final stage, n (%)
Descriptive	15 (46.9%)	4 (12.5%)
Explanatory	8 (25.0%)	7 (21.9%)
Analytical	6 (18.8%)	11 (34.4%)
Evidence-based and action-oriented	3 (9.4%)	10 (31.3%)
Total	32 (100%)	32 (100%)

Note: Percentages were calculated within each assessment stage (n = 32)

Source / Note: This table was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of materials

The qualitative analysis revealed a marked shift in the depth of students' reflection. At the initial stage, 46.9% of entries were predominantly descriptive and mainly reproduced classroom events without examining their causes or considering alternative pedagogical responses. Only 28.1% of the initial entries reached the analytical or evidence-based and action-oriented levels.

At the final stage, the proportion of descriptive entries decreased to 12.5%, whereas 34.4% of the entries demonstrated analytical consideration of alternative pedagogical responses and 31.3% connected evidence-based interpretation with a concrete plan for subsequent action. Taken together, the two higher levels accounted for 65.6% of final reflective entries. This shift suggests that participants increasingly moved from reporting what happened toward explaining why it happened, considering alternative decisions, and identifying how subsequent teaching could be modified.

The debriefing discussions conducted after role plays and simulation tasks showed a similar developmental tendency. During the first simulation activities, participants predominantly evaluated decisions in binary terms as "correct" or "incorrect." By the final stage, their explanations more frequently included learner characteristics, classroom context, anticipated consequences, and alternative courses of action. This observation complements the reflective-journal data and suggests that the Simulate phase may contribute to expanding rather than merely reproducing students' professional response repertoires.

The PERS cycle as an integrated pedagogical model

The comparative analysis provided the conceptual basis for H3, while the pilot findings offered preliminary empirical support for the feasibility of the proposed PERS cycle: Participation, Experience, Reflection, and Simulation. The order of these stages reflects a deliberate pedagogical logic. Participation precedes and accompanies practical experience by giving novice teachers access to professional discourse, shared expectations, and interpersonal support. Experience is essential because professional identity develops through enacted practice rather than through observation and discussion alone. Reflection enables participants to interpret practical events and transform them into meaningful professional learning. Simulation subsequently provides a structured setting in which revised interpretations and alternative responses can be tested before they are applied in authentic contexts. As a recurring process, the PERS cycle does not position simulation as a replacement for practicum or reflection as its final stage. Instead, each stage informs the next cycle of professional participation and practice.

During the Participate phase, pre-service EFL teachers work in stable professional learning groups of four to six members and engage regularly with mentor teachers. Their activities include analysing classroom cases, collaboratively planning lessons, conducting peer observations, and establishing shared principles for evidence-based feedback. This phase is intended to strengthen professional belonging, support legitimate participation, and develop

familiarity with the discourse of teaching. Assessment should focus on the quality of engagement rather than attendance alone and may include contribution records, the substance of peer feedback, and evidence that participants apply shared professional concepts in discussion and practice.

During the Experience phase, pre-service teachers engage in progressively more complex forms of professional practice, including teaching short lesson segments, conducting classroom observations, supporting language clubs, and completing practicum-related tasks. These activities should develop from clearly defined assignments toward more integrated professional responsibility. For instance, a student teacher may initially prepare instructions for a communicative activity, subsequently implement the activity in a microteaching session, and later adapt it for use in an authentic school lesson. Evidence of learning may include lesson materials, observation notes, samples of learner work, and mentor feedback. The principal identity-related aim of this phase is to support the transition from an imagined understanding of the teaching role to its practical enactment.

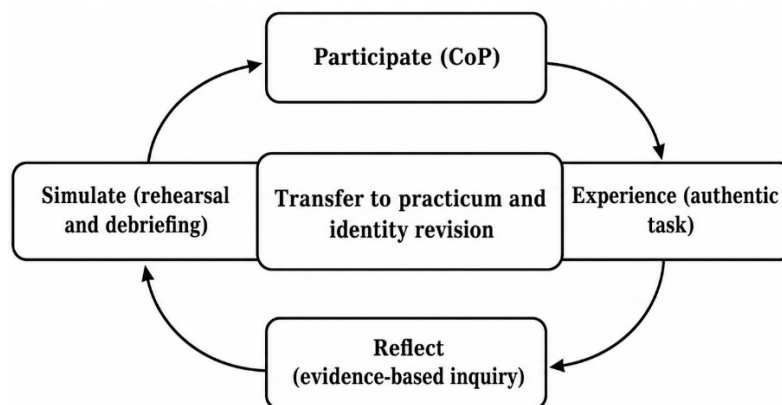
During the Reflect phase, evidence derived from practical experience is examined through a structured analytical protocol. Participants consider the intended objectives, the events that occurred, the assumptions underlying their decisions, learners' responses, and the contextual factors that influenced

the situation. They then identify alternative courses of action supported by relevant theory and available evidence. Critical incidents should encompass both successful and problematic episodes to prevent reflection from becoming exclusively focused on shortcomings. The use of video recordings, lesson transcripts, learner-generated materials, and peer observation data can minimise dependence on retrospective memory and support more accurate and evidence-based interpretation (Wenger, 1998; Schön, 1983; Yan et al., 2024).

During the Simulate phase, participants rehearse revised professional actions in scenarios designed to introduce greater complexity or additional constraints. In the context of EFL teacher education, such scenarios may involve mixed-proficiency groups, reluctant learners, parental concerns regarding communicative approaches, mentor expectations favouring grammar-translation methods, or technological disruptions during online instruction. Each simulation is followed by a structured debriefing that examines participants' decisions, language use, emotional responses, and the transferability of the experience to authentic teaching contexts. The purpose is not to reproduce an idealised script, but to broaden novices' repertoire of possible responses and make the development of professional agency observable (Carrington et al., 2011; Levin & Muchnik-Rozanov, 2023; Flavian & Levin, 2024).

Figure 2

The PERS Cycle as an Iterative Framework for Professional Identity Development through Participation, Experience, Reflection, and Simulation



Note: compiled by the author.

Implications for EFL teacher education in Kazakhstan

The PERS cycle is particularly applicable to teacher education in Kazakhstan, where preparation programmes must respond to multilingual learning environments, national curriculum requirements, the growing use of digital technologies, and the practical conditions of school-based training. Recent research published in the *Journal of Educational Sciences* highlights the importance of systematic pedagogical support for strengthening the professional competence of pre-service English teachers in rapidly evolving digital contexts (Salybekova et al., 2026). Within this setting, an emphasis on professional identity extends competence-based reforms by examining how acquired knowledge and pedagogical skills are integrated into a coherent, sustainable, and context-sensitive professional stance.

The implementation of the proposed framework does not require the introduction of four separate courses. Instead, its components may be integrated into existing modules in teaching methodology, educational psychology, assessment, digital pedagogy, and school practicum. The central condition is the continuity of evidence-based learning and sustained dialogue concerning professional identity. For example, a lesson plan developed within a methodology course may subsequently be used for microteaching, reflective analysis, simulation, and adaptation during practicum. Professional learning groups may remain stable throughout the semester, while mentor teachers provide authentic classroom cases and formative feedback. Digital platforms can facilitate video-based analysis, reflective portfolios, and branching scenarios; however, technology should support the pedagogical sequence rather than determine its structure.

Mentor preparation is a critical condition for the effective implementation of the PERS framework.

Recent research on reflective mentoring during EFL teaching practicum shows that systematic reflection, supportive mentor relationships, connections between past and present experiences, and explicit theory–practice links can facilitate professional identity construction among pre-service teachers (Ardi et al., 2025). When university instructors advocate reflective and learner-centred approaches, while school mentors encourage imitation and the avoidance of pedagogical risk, pre-service teachers may encounter conflicting expectations regarding professional practice. Such tensions can contribute to professional learning only when they are explicitly acknowledged and critically examined. Mentor orientation should therefore address the identity-related objectives of practicum, the logic of the PERS sequence, and the use of a shared language for formative feedback. Feedback should also clearly differentiate adherence to established school routines from professional decisions grounded in pedagogical evidence.

Assessment should similarly extend beyond isolated performance scores. Professional identity cannot be ethically represented by a single test, nor should identity-related measures be used to classify students as either suitable or unsuitable for the teaching profession. Nevertheless, professional development may be documented through multiple indicators, including the quality of pedagogical reasoning, readiness to reconsider and modify practice, use of evidence in decision-making, participation in collaborative activities, ability to articulate professional values and boundaries, and transfer of learning from simulated situations to authentic classroom practice. Validated instruments, such as the English Teacher Identity Measure, may form one element of a broader system of mixed evidence, provided that they undergo appropriate contextual adaptation and validation before use in the local setting (Yan et al., 2024).

Table 5

Proposed Implementation of the PERS Cycle in a Pre-Service EFL Teacher Education Programme

Programme stage	PERS emphasis	Core activities	Evidence of learning	Identity outcome
Years 1–2: foundations	Participate + reflect	Professional learning groups; teacher narratives; observation of EFL lessons; guided reflective prompts	Concept maps; narrative statement; peer-feedback records	Initial professional vocabulary, belonging, realistic future self
Year 2–3: methodology	Experience + reflect	Microteaching; task design; video analysis; learner-language cases	Lesson artefacts; annotated video; evidence-based reflection	Enacted pedagogical role and emerging self-efficacy

Table continued

Programme stage	PERS emphasis	Core activities	Evidence of learning	Identity outcome
Year 3: rehearsal	Simulate + participate	Parent conference; inclusive classroom scenarios; digital failure; multilingual interaction	Decision log; debriefing analysis; revised response plan	Agency, adaptive repertoire, professional communication
Year 3–4: practicum	Full PERS cycle	School teaching; mentoring; inquiry project; repeated simulation of critical incidents	Portfolio linking plans, observations, reflection, and transfer	Integrated professional identity grounded in authentic practice
Programme exit	Synthesis and projection	Identity conference; portfolio defence; professional development plan	Triangulated portfolio; self-assessment; mentor and peer review	Coherent but revisable professional position and career commitment

Note: compiled by the author.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the empirical component was exploratory and involved a relatively small convenience sample of 32 pre-service teachers from a single teacher-education context. The pilot therefore cannot establish causal effectiveness or support broad generalisation to other institutional or national settings. Second, the pilot did not include a control or comparison group, and the questionnaire results should consequently be interpreted as descriptive evidence of developmental tendencies rather than intervention effects. Third, part of the empirical evidence was based on self-reported perceptions. This limitation was partially addressed by triangulating questionnaire responses with the qualitative analysis of 64 reflective entries. Fourth, the four-week duration of the pilot was insufficient to determine whether the observed changes would be sustained during extended school practicum or subsequent professional employment. Finally, the comparative ratings of the four pedagogical models remain interpretive analytical judgements rather than standardised measures of effect.

Building on these preliminary pilot findings, future research should evaluate the PERS cycle through longitudinal, multi-institutional, and quasi-experimental studies involving larger samples and appropriate comparison groups. One feasible design would compare a conventional sequence of methodology courses and teaching practicum with a curriculum that systematically incorporates the PERS cycle across two or more universities. Professional identity development should be examined longitudinally through validated scales, reflective artefacts, classroom observations, interviews, and mentor assessments. The principal outcome should extend beyond increases in identity scores and consider the degree of alignment among professional reasoning,

enacted practice, participation in professional communities, and commitment to a teaching career. Process-oriented evidence is equally important. Future studies should therefore determine which phases contribute most strongly to change, which groups of pre-service teachers benefit, how mentoring conditions shape outcomes, and whether learning achieved through simulation and microteaching transfers to authentic school settings.

Future research should also address issues of inclusion and multilingualism in professional identity development. Conceptions of the “good English teacher” may restrict identity formation when they privilege a particular accent, personality type, or instructional style. Community-based and simulation activities should therefore represent diverse and equally legitimate ways of enacting the role of an EFL teacher. Further studies should examine whether the PERS cycle enables pre-service teachers to develop linguistic confidence without reinforcing native-speaker norms, adopt learner-centred practices while maintaining curricular responsibilities, and use digital technologies effectively without replacing professional pedagogical judgement.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis indicates that each pedagogical model contributes to professional identity formation through a specific mechanism. Communities of Practice foster a sense of professional belonging and recognition, whereas Experiential Learning supports the development of practical competence and the capacity to respond adaptively to classroom situations. Reflective Practice promotes professional self-awareness and coherence in teachers’ understanding of their roles, while Simulation-Based Learning strengthens decision-making skills

through guided rehearsal in a low-risk environment. Although these mechanisms are interrelated, they cannot be regarded as equivalent or mutually substitutable. The findings therefore challenge the view that any single pedagogical model can adequately address the multidimensional process of becoming an EFL teacher.

The findings provide support for all three analytical hypotheses. First, each pedagogical model is characterized by a distinct dominant mechanism of professional identity formation. Second, none of the models demonstrates comprehensive coverage of all six identity dimensions. Third, a systematically sequenced hybrid framework offers greater conceptual coherence and balance than the use of any single model. The proposed PERS cycle integrates participation, experience, reflection, and simulation into an iterative process through which revised professional action is continuously tested in authentic practice and reconsidered through professional dialogue.

The pilot implementation adds an initial empirical dimension to the conceptual framework. Across the five questionnaire dimensions, positive descriptive changes were observed following the PERS activities. The most pronounced changes concerned theory–practice integration (3.09 to 3.81) and confidence in professional decision-making (3.18 to 3.87). Qualitative evidence also indicated a shift in the nature of professional reflection: the proportion of entries demonstrating analytical or evidence-based and action-oriented interpretation increased from 28.1% at the initial stage to 65.6% at the final stage.

These findings do not establish the causal effectiveness of the model because the pilot involved only 32 participants, had no comparison group, and lasted four weeks. Nevertheless, the convergence between questionnaire tendencies and changes in reflective artefacts provides preliminary empirical support for the feasibility of using PERS to con-

nect professional participation, enacted experience, structured reflection, and simulation within pre-service teacher education.

For teacher education programmes in Kazakhstan, the principal practical implication is the need to ensure continuity across existing coursework and practicum rather than introduce isolated innovations. Professional learning communities, evidence-based microteaching, structured reflection, scenario-based rehearsal, and mentor-guided school experience should be connected through common artefacts, concepts, and assessment criteria. Professional identity should therefore be understood as a developmental trajectory reflected in professional reasoning, participation, practice, and commitment, rather than as an abstract individual attribute. Further research should extend this pilot through longitudinal and multi-institutional studies with larger samples and comparison groups, with particular attention to the transfer of learning from university-based PERS activities to authentic classroom practice.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest

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