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Emotional Intelligence and Professional Identity of Student Teachers During Practicum

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Abstract

Every profession has its own professional identity, and the teaching profession is not excluded. A teacher's professional identity potentially affects their commitment, attitude, and belief in fulfilling the teaching tasks. In this study, the student teachers' professional identities are investigated along with their emotional intelligence. A quantitative study was conducted to identify the level of emotional intelligence and professional identity as well as the relationship between the two variables. A total of 301 student teachers, under the same intake period (June 2020) from the campuses of Teacher Education Institutions in the Central Zone, Malaysia answered the questionnaire of this study. The analysis revealed that the student teachers had high emotional intelligence and possessed a high level of professional identity. The Spearman correlation coefficient results showed that there was a strong and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and professional identity among student teachers, $r(301)=0.614$, $p=0.000$ ($p<0.01$). This finding provided evidence that emotional intelligence plays an important role in the development of professional identity among student teachers. The findings of this study can also serve as a guide to help the Teacher Education Institutions in this country plan and design relevant curricula and programmes that incorporate emotional intelligence so that the professional identity of student teachers can be more effectively cultivated and promoted.

Keywords: Student Teachers' Professional Identity, Emotional Intelligence, Practicum

Introduction

Professional identity that encompasses positive attitudes, commitments, values, beliefs, and a sense of self is one of the characteristics that determine an individual's career success (Davey, 2013; Bentley et al., 2019). Professional identity is highly required in many professions as it contributes significantly to an employee's retention, professional development, and professional competence which are all essential in determining long-term success (Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Within the context of the teaching profession, professional identity refers to how an individual justifies themselves as a teacher, including their sense of belonging towards the teaching career and satisfaction with their contributions to the teaching field (Beijaard et al., 2004). Professional identity in teachers can also be defined as the commitment to upholding ethical standards that contribute to the teachers achieving the required level of

professional standards where this commitment can significantly impact their students' academic success (Javier & Cecilia, 2016; Suarez & McGrath, 2022). The formation of professional identity among teachers is considered an important part of teacher education as it contributes to the development of professionalism. Furthermore, the OECD highlights that the development of professional identity among teachers is one of the innovative approaches to promoting and implementing better education policies and practices to support teachers' growth (Suarez & McGrath, 2022).

Aspects of professional identity can be trained as early as possible for young professionals who are majoring in specialised fields such as nursing, medicine as well as teaching (Park & Hong, 2022; Lima et al., 2020; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010). Furthermore, the development of professional identity usually begins during the initial training stage (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010). For student teachers, the initial training stage which is known as practicum is a preparation stage to experience real-life teaching and actual classroom settings at school while developing their professional identity (Chong et al., 2011). The development of professional identity among student teachers is a dynamic and complex process that can be influenced by various factors at school such as the school environment, relationships with students and other teachers, mentoring styles, training curricula, and the student teachers' emotional experience (Juairiah et al., 2020; Mahaya, 2016; Chong et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2022). Student teachers who have strong professional identities are better at dealing with challenging educational tasks compared to those with lower professional identities. For this reason, it is important that their professional identities are studied through different lenses, including the lens of emotion (Chen et al., 2022).

Emotional intelligence along with professional identity plays an important role in educational settings (Butakor et al., 2020). It refers to an individual's ability to understand, express, regulate, and perceive the flow of their emotions to accomplish better psychological adjustment in stressful and challenging situations. (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence is one of the important skill sets for student teachers as it helps them recognize, assess, and apply their emotions more effectively during practicum so that they are better able to adapt to unfamiliar teaching and learning situations which can progressively help them develop their professionalism as a teacher (Ngui & Lay, 2020; Salovey & Mayer, 1989). Chen et al (2022) suggested that when a teacher has a weak emotional state, it can trigger self-conflict and lead to negative perception towards their profession. Subsequently, this unresolved issue may ultimately lead to a professional identity crisis where the teacher experiences a loss of sense of belonging to the profession and may consider quitting and leaving the teaching profession altogether (Bolívar et al., 2014).

The challenges of practicum are varied, and these may potentially induce emotional issues for the student teachers (Chen et al., 2022). To ensure that student teachers can maintain their ability to teach under pressure, it is thus essential to understand the emotional intelligence of student teachers during practicum. Behaviour of problematic students and negative mentoring relationship have been found to affect the emotional state of student teachers, and indirectly these may create conflict with their professional identity during practicum (Juairiah et al., 2020; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Emotion has been proven to influence an individual's thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs, as well as their identity construction (Butakor et al., 2020). In other words, the emotional issues faced by student teachers can

potentially influence their perception of the teaching profession and affect the development of their professional identity during practicum (Chen et al., 2022). However, there is a lack of evidence in the education field regarding the role of emotional intelligence in the development of professional identity (Butakor et al., 2020).

While studies related to professional identity among schoolteachers have received increasing attention among researchers, there have not been many studies comparatively on student teachers (Hanna et al., 2020). Moreover, the development of professional identity among student teachers is even less discussed in the context of Malaysia (Mahaya, 2016). It is reported that student teachers in this country experience various challenging situations during practicum including difficulty in controlling problematic students, issues of teacher readiness and teaching efficacy, and inability to effectively deliver teaching in the classroom (Siti, 2013; Noor Lela & Nor Atikah, 2018; Norhaili et al., 2021), which can potentially impact their professional identity development process as future educators. The objectives of this study are to identify the level of professional identity and emotional intelligence of student teachers during practicum as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and their professional identity.

This study will further reveal the role of emotional intelligence in shaping the professional identity of student teachers during their practicum days. These findings allow the teacher education authorities especially the curriculum makers who design teacher-training programmes, to understand the value of practicing emotional intelligence as a skill to foster the development of professional identity among student teachers. Additionally, the findings of this study provide significant contributions to enrich the existing academic literature in the field of teacher development, particularly regarding the factors that support the student teachers' professional growth. By understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and professional identity, the skills of applying emotional intelligence in teaching and learning situations can be incorporated into training, developing a sense of professional identity that significantly benefits the student teachers.

Literature Review

Professional Identity

Professional identity refers to a cognitive mechanism consisting of beliefs, perceptions, and understanding towards one's professional role through the interactions with the working environment and work tasks, which can in turn influence the person's attitudes and behaviours over time (Clarke et al., 2012; Sachs, 2005). The concept of professional identity can be viewed as (i) an entity that exists within the individual, social, and cultural aspects; (ii) a continuously developing construct that has multiple dimensions, subject to the career environment; (iii) formed through human relationships; and (iv) influenced by emotions and perceptions in the form of judgments (Davey, 2013; Suarez & McGrath, 2022).

Every profession, including the teaching profession, has its own specific professional identity (Suarez & McCrath, 2022). A teacher's professional identity is often associated with their perceptions, beliefs, motivation, and attitudes towards their responsibilities as an educator (Mahaya & Razak, 2020; Pillen et al., 2013; Beijaard, 2004). According to Berger and Lê Van (2019), a teacher's professional identity can influence their commitment to carrying out their responsibilities as a teacher and their confidence in their teaching skills. A teacher's

professional identity is their self-image as a member that belongs to the teaching profession (Zhao & Zhang, 2017). This is also consistent with Sachs' (2005) view that professional identity among teachers is the core of the development of the teaching profession and represents their self-perception of their profession in school, including "how to be...", "how to act...", and "how to understand..." to advance their career. This demonstrates the importance of developing professional identity among teachers as a source of motivation for them to remain committed in the face of new changes and challenges in education and to enhance their competency in achieving higher levels of career performance by nurturing excellent students (Zhao & Zhang, 2017).

For teachers, the development of professional identity begins at an early stage, particularly during the teacher training stage at school (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010). According to Beijaard et al (2004); Chong et al (2011), the development of student teachers' professional identity is a dynamic process that can change over time based on the environment, personal experience, social interactions, and well-being. Zhao & Zhang (2017) also suggested that student teachers' professional identity can be influenced by their perceptions of the teaching profession through actual experiences during practicum. In Indonesia, student teachers' professional identity was explored by Ilfiandra et al (2018) who measured student teachers' professional identity through the dimensions of knowledge about professional practice, experience with the profession, perception of the profession, and professional self-efficacy. The results of their study showed a decline in student teachers' professional identity overall in semester 5 compared to semester 1. Meanwhile, Chong et al (2011) conducted a study on 114 student teachers in Singapore to compare their overall professional identity in the final year. Their study showed a decline in the student teachers' overall professional identity in the fifth year compared to the first year. The researchers suggested that most of the student teachers faced difficulties in transferring the theories and practices they had learned in their institutions to the actual teaching situation in the classrooms, resulting in a feeling of unpreparedness for the real teaching environment (Chong et al., 2011). This may lead to the teachers feeling disillusioned and doubtful of their career choice, which may directly affect their professional identity (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010).

Emotional Intelligence

According to Goleman (1997), emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to express emotions effectively even in negative and stressful situations. Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence encompasses five domains: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-regulation, (3) self-motivation, (4) empathy, and (5) social skills. The first attribute, self-awareness, is an individual's ability to be aware of their own emotions and to identify the source of those emotions. The second attribute, self-regulation, is the ability to manage emotions even under pressure, control negative emotions, and bounce back quickly from emotional stress. The third attribute, self-motivation, is an individual's ability to use willpower to achieve personal goals and to persist in the face of challenges. The fourth attribute is empathy, which helps individuals to recognise and understand the emotions of others and make rational decisions based on the perspectives of others. Finally, social skills enable individuals to build positive relationships with others, handle emotions effectively during communication with others, and create a cooperative and team-oriented environment within an organisation. These five attributes are the foundation for emotional intelligence, which for student teachers is

important as it would enable them to effectively express, manage, and use emotions during their practicum in schools (Ngui & Lay, 2020).

The teaching profession is a demanding and high-stress career that requires a high level of emotional intelligence for teachers to be able to manage emotions professionally (Syiem, 2012). Butakor et al (2020) also showed that teachers with higher emotional intelligence value the teaching profession more, display positive ownership, and have a high desire to advance their careers, and in doing so, continuously seek to develop their professional identity. Meanwhile, Curci et al (2014) found that teachers' emotional intelligence plays an important role in forming a positive learning environment and significantly increases their student's academic performance.

Teachers who have a high level of emotional intelligence tend to show more compassionate behaviour towards their students and this in turn, leads to the formation of a strong bond of trust between them (Aldrup et al., 2022). Such teachers are better equipped to understand the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of their students because of their heightened emotional intelligence. Practicum is known to be a source of stress and anxiety among student teachers (Danyluk, 2013). The ability of student teachers to recognise and regulate emotions is important in handling practicum challenges. Thus, it is necessary to look into the emotional intelligence of student teachers in view of its significant impact on their well-being and teaching performance (Tuyakova et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the study by Ngui and Lay (2020) on a sample of 200 Malaysian student teachers demonstrated that emotional intelligence is among the positive psychological elements that positively enhance their confidence, stress tolerance, and resilience in handling emotional disturbances during practicum. Thus, in addition to exploring the level of emotional intelligence of student teachers who are undergoing practicum for the first time, this study also attempted to determine the influence of emotional intelligence on the development of the professional identity of student teachers during the practicum, which has not been studied extensively in the global context (Chen et al., 2022).

Research Methodology

The study sample consisted of 301 student teachers ($n = 301$) who were pursuing a Teaching Programme bachelor's degree from several Institutes of Teacher Education (ITE) in the Central Zone of Malaysia. The ITE campuses included ITE Bahasa Antarabangsa, ITE Bahasa Melayu, ITE Ilmu Khas, and ITE Pendidikan Islam. The selected sample comprised student teachers from the same intake who were undergoing their first phase of the practicum. The student teachers were selected through simple random sampling. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table was used to identify the sample size which was calculated at 282 from the 1,040 student teachers' population of the ITE from the Central Zone.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire used for data collection contained three sections. Section A was used to collect the demographic data of the respondents in terms of gender, programme, year of intake, and ITE campus. Section B contained 22 questions which were adapted from the *Emotional Quotient Inventory* (Norah et al., 2003) and the *Emotional Intelligence Scale* (Mehta & Singh, 2013). The emotional intelligence questionnaire consisted of 5 constructs, namely Self-Awareness (6 items), Self-Regulation (4 items), Self-Motivation (4 items),

Empathy (4 items), and Social Skills (4 items) which were used to identify the level of emotional intelligence among the student teachers. Section C contained 27 questions that were adapted from the *Teacher Identity Measurement Scale (TIMS)* by Hanna et al (2020). The questions were used to measure the level of professional identity of the student teachers. Three main constructs were measured, namely Motivation (5 items), Self-Image (8 items), and Perception of Task (14 items). Both emotional intelligence and professional identity were measured based on a five-point Likert scale, scored from 1 to 5, to determine the level of agreement, with 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = disagree; 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.

Three experts were selected to validate the instrument. The number was based on Lynn's (1986) suggestion that the experts selected for instrument validation should consist of between 3 to 10 people from the relevant fields. For the instrument review and validation process in this study, two of the experts chosen were from the educational psychology field and one was from the teacher education background. The instrument was translated from English to the Malay language using the forward-backward method to ensure the meaning of each item was retained. It was then reviewed by the experts to ensure suitability of the items for the context of educational psychology and student-teacher education in Malaysia. A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the instruments. The pilot study involved a total of 28 student teachers who shared the same characteristics as the sample of this study. The questionnaires were distributed online to gain access to participants from other states than the ones in the Central Zone of Malaysia.

The collected data were analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27.0 to obtain Cronbach's Alpha coefficient which was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for emotional intelligence and professional identity are shown in Table 1. According to Pallant (2001), Cronbach's Alpha coefficient which is more than 0.6 is considered high and acceptable. Thus, the results showed that the instrument had good reliability, supporting its use in the next phase of the study.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each variable in this study

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient
Emotional Intelligence	22	0.888
Professional Identity	27	0.908

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS version 27.0. A descriptive analysis was performed to obtain the mean score to determine the level of professional identity and emotional intelligence of the student teachers during practicum. To interpret the level of each variable, the mean score range proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) was referred to, as shown in Table 2. Meanwhile, inferential analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the two variables. The non-parametric test, Spearman Rho test was used to examine the correlation between the variables. Table 3 presents the interpretation of the effect size based on the correlation coefficient as proposed by (Cohen et al., 2007).

Table 2

Mean Score Interpretation (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)

Mean Score	Level of Interpretation
4.01 – 5.00	High
3.01 – 4.00	Medium High
2.01 – 3.00	Medium Low
1.00 – 2.00	Low

Table 3

Correlation Interpretation (Cohen et al., 2007)

Coefficient, r	Correlation
± 0.81 – 1.00	Very Strong
± 0.51 – 0.80	Strong
± 0.31 – 0.50	Medium
± 0.21 – 0.30	Low
± 0.01 – 0.20	Very Low

Results

Descriptive analysis

This section presents the results of the descriptive analysis performed on the respondents' demographic data. A total of 301 respondents participated in this study. Table 4 presents the demographic information of all the respondents. Data showed that 75 of the respondents (24.9%) were male while 226 respondents (75.1%) were female. The distribution of the respondents based on their ITE showed that 101 student teachers (31.6%) were from ITE Bahasa Antarabangsa, 95 were (31.6%) from ITE Bahasa Melayu, 50 were (16.6%) from ITE Ilmu Khas, and 55 were (18.2%) from ITE Pendidikan Islam took part in this survey.

Table 4

Respondent's Demographic Profile

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	75	24.9
	Female	226	75.1
Institute of Teacher Education (ITE)	ITE Bahasa Antarabangsa	101	33.6
	ITE Bahasa Melayu	95	31.6
	ITE Ilmu Khas	50	16.6
	ITE Pendidikan Islam	55	18.2

Level of Professional Identity

This section presents the findings of the descriptive analysis performed on the data to identify the level of professional identity among the student teachers during practicum. The mean score and standard deviation (SD) for each dimension and sub-dimensions are recorded in Table 5. Based on the results, the level of professional identity among the student teachers in this study was overall high (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.393). Among the dimensions, Perception of Task recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 4.33, SD = 0.380), followed by Self-image (Mean 4.13, SD = 0.465), while Motivation recorded the lowest mean score (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.579).

Table 5

Level of Professional Identity

Dimension/sub-dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Motivation	4.01	0.579	High
Intrinsic Value of Work	4.01	0.579	High
Self-image	4.13	0.465	High
Teacher Identity	4.04	0.499	High
Sense of Belonging to the Teacher Community	4.22	0.507	High
Perception of Task	4.33	0.380	High
Perception of Education	4.33	0.439	High
Perception of Teaching	4.34	0.404	High
Overall (Professional Identity)	4.19	0.393	High

Level of Emotional Intelligence

Five dimensions were used to measure the level of emotional intelligence among the student teachers in this study. Table 6 shows the mean score and standard deviation obtained for each dimension. The overall emotional intelligence level of the student teachers was high (Mean = 4.02, SD = 0.378). The results showed that the dimensions of emotional intelligence that obtained the highest mean score were Empathy (Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.461), followed by Self-awareness (Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.375), Social Skills (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.477), and Self-Motivation (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.521) which were all within the high-level range. Self-Regulation was ranked at a medium-high level; it obtained the lowest mean score among all the dimensions of emotional intelligence (Mean = 3.78, SD = 0.606).

Table 6

Level of Emotional Intelligence

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Self-Awareness	4.11	0.375	High
Self-Regulation	3.78	0.606	Medium-High
Self-Motivation	4.01	0.521	High
Empathy	4.14	0.461	High
Social Skills	4.05	0.477	High
Overall (Emotional Intelligence)	4.02	0.378	High

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Professional Identity

This section presents the results of the correlation analysis performed to identify the relationship between emotional intelligence and student teachers' professional identity during practicum. A null hypothesis was constructed to test the relationship.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and professional identity.

Table 7 shows that the results of the Spearman correlation coefficient obtained for the relationship between both variables were significant ($p < 0.01$). Accordingly, H_{01} was rejected. Based on the results, the coefficient value obtained for the relationship between emotional

intelligence and professional identity was [$r=0.614$, $p=0.000$], indicating a strong correlation. It was therefore concluded that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and professional identity.

Table 7

Relationship between emotional intelligence and professional identity

	Professional Identity		Correlation strength
	Coefficient, r	Sig. p	
Emotional Intelligence	0.614	0.000**	Strong

**significant at 0.01 level.

Discussion

Professional Identity of Student Teachers

The descriptive analysis showed that the level of professional identity among the student teachers in the Central Zone of Malaysia was high. This suggests that student teachers in Malaysia are beginning to inculcate a strong sense of teacher identity within themselves, see themselves as a teacher, and have a positive perception of the teaching profession. Professional identity could have been developed positively among the student teachers during practicum due to several factors. Firstly, it could be due to the positive experiences gained during their practicum at school, which directly and indirectly helped the student teachers develop their professional identity. In the Malaysian context, this result is in line with the findings of Mahaya and Razak (2020) where in their study, they found that the student teachers from the North Zone of Malaysia showed positive development in their professional identity during practicum. The researchers suggested that the role of mentor teachers and the school environment contributed to the positive development of professional identity among the student teachers in their study. This suggests that the practicum environment in Malaysia has been structured effectively with supportive mentor teachers and a conducive school environment to support young educators in terms of professionalism, motivation, and a sense of teacher identity. This is in line with the view from Zhao & Zhang (2017), the experiences of student teachers during practicum as well as the working environment at school can be the factors that shape their general conceptions about being a professional teacher and help develop their professional identity.

Furthermore, the results of this study reflected that the student teachers embraced a high sense of self-image as a teacher and that the student teachers' perception towards education and teaching is positive. This is most likely due to their personal views towards the teaching profession which could be perceived as more idealistic at the beginning of their journey as a teacher. Having this view is important as a teacher, but the process of professional identity formation is an ongoing process and is prone to change as they come to experience the reality of teaching and learning situations as well as the real life of a schoolteacher once they are in the profession. As suggested by Chong et al (2011), it is therefore vital to examine teachers' professional identity at the exit point of a teacher training programme to ensure the consistency of professional identity among the graduating student teachers.

In the dimension of motivation, the biggest motivation for the reason the student teachers wanted to be a teacher was "I like teaching". This result indicates that the student

teachers are driven by the desire to teach, forming an intrinsic motivation to teach. This finding is also in line with the study by Chong and Low (2009), where they found that the majority of student teachers choose teaching careers due to intrinsic motivation. Among the descriptions given by student teachers in their study included "being a teacher is a noble profession and teaching is my passion". In addition, this finding of the present study supports the concept propounded in Self-determination Theory which states that motivation is activated by one's internal sources (intrinsic motivation) where individuals pursue a goal voluntarily and have a high interest in something (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In contrast, most of the student teachers in this study disagreed with the statement "I want to have my own class" as their motivation to be a teacher. Although the student teachers in this study demonstrated a high motivation to be a teacher, the desire to have their own class was still low. It is believed that classroom teachers have a larger scope of duties and carry a bigger responsibility to manage a classroom effectively for students (Norfatin, 2021). With this in mind, classroom teachers therefore need to always update themselves with the relevant and latest information to maintain the quality of the classroom. This may be seen as a big task for student teachers who are still in the process of learning to cope with the other tasks of being a schoolteacher. This finding also suggests that even though the student teachers have formed their identity as a teacher, their confidence to become classroom teachers might still require improvements during the training.

Emotional Intelligence of Student Teachers

The overall level of emotional intelligence among the student teachers of this study was high. This finding suggests that the student teachers from the Central Zone of Malaysia have a high ability to understand, recognise, and express their emotions calmly during practicum. In the Malaysian context, this result is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Ngui and Lay (2020) where the researchers concluded that student teachers are capable of managing emotions during practicum, which subsequently builds their resilience. This indicates that Malaysian student teachers are able to cope with the setbacks from practicum tasks with more mature emotions. Meanwhile, the findings of this study contradict the findings of Tuyakova et al (2022), where the researchers noted moderate levels of emotional intelligence among their student teachers. Corcoran and Tormey (2013) also found low levels of emotional intelligence among their student teachers during training in their study. In producing quality and competitive student teachers, emotional intelligence, which has been applied in certain specialised courses in the teacher training programme (Rafiza & Siti, 2013), helps increase the awareness of student teachers in this country towards the use of emotional intelligence and the practice of these skills in teaching and learning situations. This suggests that student teachers may benefit from the implementation of such programmes for the development of their emotional intelligence.

The dimension of empathy achieved the highest level for the construct of emotional intelligence among the student teachers in this study. This indicates that the student teachers can understand and relate to the feelings of others. Empathy is one of the important personalities of being a teacher; it can be used to understand and recognise the emotions and situations experienced by their students, enabling the teachers to help students overcome their weaknesses. The item "I am willing to provide the best service to others" was agreed upon by majority of the respondents, indicating the high level of willingness of the student teachers to do their best to nurture their students. It is believed that exposure to the concept

of empathic skills by fostering a sense of love and affection towards students in the teacher training programme has contributed positively on personality development among student teachers (Rafiza & Siti, 2013).

The study found that the student teachers' self-regulation was scored at the lowest level compared to other dimensions of emotional intelligence. The item "I can handle pressure without trembling too much" recorded the most disagreement among the student teachers. This finding suggests that many student teachers are still at a stage that requires guidance in terms of handling teacher tasks such as student discipline management, teaching, and classroom management, which are believed to trigger stress. This indirectly causes the practicum to be a high-pressure situation for many student teachers (Danyluk, 2013). The challenges of practicum such as student discipline issues, workload, and fear of mentor-teacher monitoring can also cause stress for student teachers. In this regard, self-regulation is one of the techniques to regulate behaviour as it helps student teachers to adapt to the new environment, eventually improving their performance during practicum. For this reason, student teachers who lack experience in handling stress need to be exposed to alternative strategies through the internalisation of self-regulation to improve these skills to cope with the challenges in school during practicum.

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Professional Identity

Results from the inferential analysis indicated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and student teachers' professional identity. This finding indicates that emotional intelligence plays an important role in the development of professional identity among student teachers during their practicum. This finding supports the views of Chen et al (2022) and Lemarchand-Chauvin and Tardieu (2018) who highlighted the importance of effectively managing emotions for student teachers to develop their professional identity while going through their practicum. This present study has contributed to the research gap by identifying the role of emotional intelligence in developing student teachers' professional identity during practicum. In addition, the correlation analysis also proves there is a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and the development of the professional identity of student teachers. The findings of this study carry the implication that professional development not only relies on pedagogical skills and knowledge but also the emotional state of teachers so that they are better able to handle real-life challenges at school. An individual's ability to practice stable emotions in the workplace can help them deal with problems and conflicts more maturely (Lemarchand-Chauvin & Tardieu, 2018). This is also consistent with the theory of emotional intelligence that emphasises a balance of awareness, regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills to achieve emotional stability and happiness in the workplace (Goleman, 1997), significantly improving work performance and satisfaction with the profession. For this reason, it is recommended that the enhancement of emotional intelligence among student teachers is given attention so that they develop and sharpen their ability to be aware of social skills, stay motivated, have self-control, and are empathetic towards students during practicum and subsequently develop their professional identity.

Conclusion

Knowing student teachers' professional identity status is crucial to understanding how much they are willing to continue to passionately teach. It is concluded that the student teachers in this study possessed a high level of emotional intelligence and professional identity.

Statistically, this study has proven that emotional intelligence plays an important role in the development of professional identity among student teachers who are undergoing practicum. It is important to emphasise that the self-regulation of student teachers should be given more attention by the respective teacher education authorities. This consideration will allow for the introduction of more relevant training or courses to help student teachers adapt to various teaching and learning situations by utilising self-control and awareness to achieve higher emotional intelligence that can effectively contribute to the formation of a stronger sense of professional identity.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, this study relied on self-reported measures which could introduce self-report bias. Therefore, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of emotional intelligence on professional identity, it is recommended that future research incorporates respondent interviews or utilises a mixed-method research design that combines both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Additionally, this study only focused on a sample of student teachers from the Central Zone of Malaysia which may be too small for the findings to be generalisable and to make inferences about the entire population in this country. Hence, future research may want to consider involving all 27 institutions of teacher education across the country to provide broader evidence and comprehensive information regarding the professional identity of student teachers in the Malaysian context. This study also only involved the student teachers undergoing the first phase of practicum; it is recommended that future studies be carried out to track the development of professional identity among student teachers who are in their second phase of practicum. In doing so, a comparison study can be conducted to examine the changes in the pattern of professional identity which are important to be identified to ensure the consistency of professional growth of young educators in the future.

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