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Analysis of the profile of primary school teacher candidates' readiness in the context of teachers' professional competencies: Students' self-reflection

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ABSTRACT

The readiness of prospective teachers is a key factor in ensuring the quality of education at the elementary school level. However, the existing literature often places too much emphasis on the mastery of technical skills, while neglecting the internal professional identity that is formed through self-reflection. This study aims to analyze the readiness profile of prospective elementary school teachers within the framework of four professional competencies namely, the pedagogical, professional, personal, and social domains while identifying the subjective meaning of the teaching profession through students' self-symbolization. A descriptive approach with a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from seventh-semester PGSD students via a validated 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire, followed by qualitative data collection through observation and narrative reflection. Quantitative results indicate a high level of readiness, with average scores of 4.03 for pedagogical competence, 4.14 for professional competence, and 4.20 for personal competence, while social competence achieved a very high score of 4.50. Qualitative findings reveal that students demonstrate readiness by applying innovative models such as PjBL and integrating digital tools based on HOTS. Additionally, symbolic reflections such as the coconut tree and the candle illustrate that students view teaching as a transformative calling that requires resilience and dedication. This study fills a research gap by linking standardized competency assessments with symbolic self-reflection. The findings suggest that teacher education institutions should integrate reflective practices into their curricula to strengthen professional identity beyond academic mastery. This study presents a new diagnostic framework for assessing teacher readiness through a combination of psychometric data and in-depth qualitative insights.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is key to raising educational standards and improving student learning outcomes. Data from the show that professional development and reflective practice among teachers are essential foundations for improving school quality. In line with this, the (OECD, 2022) emphasizes that strengthening teacher capacity is a strategic step toward optimizing learning, particularly in developing countries. The close relationship between teacher quality and student

academic success is also highlighted in recent studies by Darling-Hammond et al., (2020) and Konig et al., (2020), which identify teachers as the most influential factor in schools.

In accordance with the regulations set forth in Law No. 14 of 2005 and Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005, a teacher in Indonesia must meet standards of pedagogical, social, personal, and professional competence to be considered a qualified professional. These four dimensions are not merely formal requirements but rather key parameters in determining the effectiveness of teaching. This becomes increasingly significant at the elementary school level, where teacher competence is crucial to the success of building students' academic foundations and shaping their future character (Republik Indonesia, 2005).

The effort to prepare prospective teachers with professional competencies is the main responsibility of Teacher Training Institutions (LPTK) (Dockendorff & Zaccarelli, 2025). Higher education institutions that provide teacher training are expected to produce graduates who not only have pedagogical knowledge, but also professional readiness in carrying out teaching practices in schools (Fitriati et al., 2024). Various academic programs are designed in the teacher education curriculum, including Basic Education Courses, Basic Teaching Skills (microteaching), and field practice activities such as School Field Introduction (PLP) and Field Experience Practice (PPL). Research shows that teaching practice and experience-based learning contribute significantly to the professional readiness of prospective teachers (Khasawneh, 2023; Wasserman et al., 2023).

A number of studies show that the readiness of prospective teachers is influenced by various factors, both academic and personal. Mastery of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is one of the important factors in supporting the readiness of prospective teachers to integrate technology into learning (Sierra et al., 2023). In addition, teaching motivation and field practice experience also play a role in shaping the professional readiness of prospective teachers (Winícius et al., 2023). In teacher education, the process of reflecting on learning experiences is also considered important because it can help students develop their professional identity as prospective educators (Diknem & Demirer, 2022; Yue et al., 2024).

Although these studies have provided an overview of the factors that influence the readiness of prospective teachers, most of them still focus on external factors that influence teaching readiness, such as mastery of learning technology, teaching motivation, and field experience (Mohamed et al., 2022). However, there is a critical research gap in how these competencies are internally processed and interpreted by the candidates themselves. Specifically, existing literature remains remarkably limited in examining teacher readiness through the lens of self-reflection within a comprehensive framework of professional competencies. Most assessments remain descriptive or purely psychometric, failing to capture the qualitative essence of professional identity. This study addresses this gap by positioning self-reflection not merely as a supporting tool, but as the primary analytical framework to evaluate how prospective teachers internalize professional standards

Self-reflection is an important process in teacher professional development because it allows individuals to review their learning experiences, evaluate their abilities, and identify aspects that need to be developed in their teaching practice (Pratt & Hodges, 2023). The concept of reflection in education has long been a concern for experts, including through the reflective ideas put forward by John Dewey and the concept of reflective practitioners developed by Donald Schön, which emphasizes the importance of reflection in teacher professional development (Schon, 1983). Building upon this theoretical foundation, the novelty of this research lies in its unique integration of symbolic self-reflection as a bridge to assess professional readiness. By mapping these reflections directly onto the four pillars of teacher competence, this study provides a more holistic and internal perspective that has been overlooked in previous psychometric-heavy research.

Based on this gap, this study offers an approach that emphasizes the self-reflection of prospective elementary school teachers in understanding their professional readiness. The novelty of this study lies in the use of symbolic self-reflection as a tool to bridge the gap between theoretical competency mastery and practical professional awareness. This attempt to map the readiness of prospective teachers within the framework of professional teacher competencies through self-reflection not only describes the level of student readiness but also shows how students interpret the learning experiences they have gained while studying at the LPTK. Therefore, addressing the aforementioned literature gap, this study aims to (1) describe the profile of prospective elementary school teachers' readiness within the framework of the four professional competencies of teachers and (2) describe the symbolization of students' self-reflection in interpreting their readiness to become professional elementary school teachers.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive approach using mixed methods to evaluate the professional readiness of prospective teachers through self-reflection (Sugiyono, 2021). The analysis was conducted comprehensively by combining quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from observations.

The research involved seventh-semester PGSD students taking the Elementary Science Education Development course, given that they have equipped themselves with various educational theories and practices. Data collection was conducted through participant observation in the classroom as well as the distribution of a perception questionnaire consisting of 30 statements. This questionnaire instrument was designed based on four professional teacher competencies using a 1-5 Likert scale.

To ensure data quality, the instrument underwent expert validation by specialists in the field of elementary education. Students' readiness levels were assessed based on their scores in each competency dimension, the detailed indicators of which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicators of Readiness for Prospective Elementary School Teachers

Number	Competence	Indicators
1	Pedagogical	(a) Understanding student characteristics; (b) Mastery of learning theory; (c) Mastery of teaching methods; (d) Mastery of the Merdeka Curriculum; (e) Delivery of material in language appropriate to the age of the students; (f) Conducting assessments in line with learning objectives.
2	Professional	(a) Mastery of teaching materials; (b) Understanding of learning outcomes in the curriculum; (c) Selection of appropriate operational verbs (KKO); (d) Utilization of various learning resources, both conventional and ICT-based; (e) Habitual reflection and provision of feedback; (f) Variation in the use of learning media.
3	Personality	(a) Performing tasks enthusiastically; (b) Being creative in designing learning activities; (c) Being able to control emotions; (d) Being disciplined; (e) Being willing to make sacrifices; (f) Being willing to spend time; (g) Setting an example for students; (h) Maintaining personal hygiene.
4	Social	(a) Accepting differences in ethnicity and other backgrounds; (b) Communicating politely with stakeholders; (c) Being adaptive to the conditions of partner schools; (d) Using polite written language when communicating via mobile devices.

Students' competency levels are determined by categorizing their average scores into the following intervals: scores ranging from 1.00 to 1.80 represent the Very Low category, while scores ranging from 1.81 to 2.60 are classified as Low. Furthermore, the Moderate category falls within the 2.61 to 3.40 range, the High category within the 3.41 to 4.20 range, and Very High achievement is indicated by scores between 4.21 and 5.00.

In addition to quantitative data, this study also collected qualitative data in the form of student reflection narratives. The qualitative data consisted of two forms, namely: (1) reflective statements in the form of real experiences representing each statement in the questionnaire; and (2) symbolization of the spirit of the teaching profession as described by students. The qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to strengthen the interpretation of the research results. The data was analyzed qualitatively to strengthen the interpretation of the research results.

Qualitative data analysis was carried out through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. During the reduction stage, the researcher systematically coded the reflection narratives to identify recurring themes related to professional identity and symbolic meaning. The findings were then triangulated with the quantitative results to provide a robust and transparent explanation of the students' readiness. These stages include the process of selecting, simplifying, and interpreting data so as to provide a clearer picture of the readiness of prospective elementary school teachers in the framework of teacher professional competence.

RESULTS

1. Readiness of Prospective Elementary School Teachers for the Teaching Profession.

The evaluation of prospective elementary school teachers' readiness was conducted by examining four key competency pillars: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social dimensions. A summary of the average scores for each of these competencies is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Readiness of Prospective Elementary School Teachers.

Number	Types of Competence	Average Score	Category
1	Pedagogical Competence	4.03	High
2	Professional Competence	4.14	High
3	Personal Competence	4.20	High
4	Social Competence	4.50	Very High

The analysis results show that social competence has the highest score in the very high category. Meanwhile, pedagogical, professional, and personality competencies are in the high category. A comparative analysis across indicators reveals that students feel most confident in interpersonal interaction (social), yet exhibit the lowest mean in pedagogical mastery. This gap suggests that while students possess strong relational foundations, they still encounter cognitive challenges in complex instructional design. This shows that students are well prepared in social and personality aspects, but strengthening pedagogical competence still needs attention because this competence is the basis for managing the learning process effectively.

2. Findings on the Readiness of Prospective Elementary School Teacher Students

To obtain a more comprehensive picture, the quantitative data were further elaborated through qualitative analysis. The qualitative findings serve to explain the high statistical scores by identifying specific behavioral evidence observed during the research. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Findings on the Readiness Activities of Prospective Elementary School Teacher Students)

Competence	Findings on Activities
Pedagogical	Students demonstrated the ability to recognize learner characteristics through field experiences (PLP). They applied innovative models such as PjBL and PBL while utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar platform, providing a practical context for the 4.03 pedagogical score.
Professional	Students mastered teaching materials and utilized HOTS-level operational verbs (KKO) and digital platforms, offering a qualitative basis for the 4.14 professional score.
Personality	Students exhibited discipline and creativity in designing innovative media, showing emotional maturity when interacting with diverse student behaviors.
Social	Students communicated professionally with stakeholders and adapted effectively to partner school environments, directly validating the "Very High" quantitative score of 4.50.

3. Reflection of Symbolization on the Calling of the Teaching Profession

The high quantitative readiness scores are fundamentally rooted in the students' internal perception of their future role. These symbols include clocks, coconut trees, candles, flowers, and butterflies, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Student Self-Symbolization in the Teaching Profession

The clock symbol represents an awareness of time management in learning. The coconut tree symbolizes resilience and societal utility. Meanwhile, the candle symbol represents the dedication required to impart knowledge. The flower depicts continuous growth and adaptation, while the butterfly represents the professional transformation process. These symbols provide a profound explanation for the high personality and social scores; students do not perceive these competencies as mere technical requirements but as a moral commitment or a "calling." The transformation symbolized by the butterfly reflects the cognitive journey from learner to professional educator, explaining why students proactively engage in mastering HOTS and digital tools despite the pedagogical complexities identified in the quantitative data.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings confirm that prospective elementary school teachers possess adequate readiness in four key competency areas. The highest achievement was observed in the social aspect, with a score of 4.50 (very high), while the personality, professional, and pedagogical aspects scored 4.20, 4.14, and 4.03, respectively, all rated as high. This ability to build strong social relationships demonstrates the students' readiness to navigate the dynamics of a school environment involving numerous stakeholders. International literature emphasizes that the effectiveness of 21st-century teaching is largely determined by a teacher's communication skills and social adaptability (Admiraal et al., 2019; Fischer et al., 2024).

In the domain of pedagogical competence, students demonstrated the ability to identify student characteristics and develop relevant lesson plans. This success was evident in the implementation of innovative instructional models, such as PBL and PjBL, during teaching practicums. The adoption of these models indicates students' transition toward a student-centered learning paradigm. This aligns with the needs of 21st-century education, which prioritizes communication skills, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Anggraeni et al., 2023; Zhang & Ma, 2023). Previous studies reinforce these findings by stating that problem-based and

project-based methods are effective in stimulating active engagement and honing students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Saad & Zainudin, 2022).

Students have demonstrated the ability to effectively utilize various digital platforms, ranging from Quizizz to Google Classroom, as learning support tools. This ability to integrate technology aligns with the TPACK framework, which posits that technological proficiency must go hand in hand with pedagogical knowledge and subject-matter expertise (Schmid et al., 2024). Competence in TPACK aspects significantly influences students' readiness to undertake field practice. Therefore, the technological literacy demonstrated by students serves as a key indicator in measuring their future professional readiness.

In terms of professional competence, the research findings indicate that students have made efforts to master the learning material before teaching and to understand the learning outcomes in the curriculum. Students were also able to design learning objectives using operational verbs (KKO) that foster higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Integrating HOTS into instruction is crucial for encouraging students to think critically, creatively, and solve problems independently (Kania & Kusumah, 2025; Liu et al., 2024). Mastery of learning content and the ability to design HOTS-based learning activities have a positive influence on students' readiness to pursue a career as teachers (Muhibbudin et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, in terms of personal competence, students demonstrated various positive attitudes such as discipline, responsibility, and commitment in carrying out their duties as prospective teachers. Activities such as arriving on time, completing tasks well, and participating in various student activities showed motivation and sincerity in preparing themselves as educators. Previous studies have shown that student involvement in academic activities and student activities related to the teaching profession can increase students' interest and readiness to become professional teachers (Lopez-Martin et al., 2023). In addition, students' ability to control their emotions and demonstrate exemplary attitudes in their interactions with students also reflects the development of personality competencies that are important in the teaching profession.

Another interesting finding in this study is the reflection of symbolism used by students to interpret the calling of the teaching profession. Through this reflection, students represent the meaning of the teaching profession through various symbols such as clocks, coconut trees, candles, flowers, and butterflies. These symbols describe the values of teacher professionalism, such as commitment to time, resilience in facing challenges, dedication to imparting knowledge, and the process of self-transformation in the journey to becoming an educator. This symbolic reflection shows that students do not only view the teaching profession as a job, but also as a calling that requires dedication and moral responsibility. Previous research shows that self-reflection is an important strategy in teacher education because it can help students develop awareness of their professional identity and make sense of their learning experiences (Myllykoski-Laine et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the readiness of prospective elementary school teachers is not only influenced by their mastery of academic competencies, but also by their

practical field experience, use of technology in learning, and ability to reflect on the meaning of the teaching profession. The combination of learning experiences, teaching practice, and self-reflection are important factors in shaping the professional identity of students as future educators.

The implication of this study is that teacher training programs must prioritize deep reflective practices alongside technical skills to ensure that candidates do not only know how to teach, but also understand their identity as educators. However, this study is limited by its small sample size and its reliance on self-reported data, which may reflect perceived rather than actual classroom performance. Future studies should include direct long-term classroom observations to verify these self-perceived readiness levels in a real-world teaching environment.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that prospective elementary school teachers possess a robust level of readiness across four professional competencies, with social competence achieving the highest category followed by strong pedagogical, professional, and personal readiness. This readiness is evidenced by the students' ability to implement innovative learning models, integrate technology through TPACK, and design HOTS-oriented instructional tools, while their symbolic reflections reveal a deep internalization of teaching as a transformative calling characterized by resilience and commitment. These findings imply that professional identity is successfully formed when academic mastery is paired with reflective awareness, suggesting that Teacher Training Institutions (LPTK) should further formalize structured self-reflection activities within the curriculum to solidify this professional transition. Consequently, it is recommended that faculty members and curriculum designers prioritize the integration of symbolic and narrative reflection exercises in microteaching and field practice courses to help students bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and the emotional demands of the profession. Future researchers are also encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to observe how these perceived readiness levels manifest in actual classroom performance during the initial years of teaching service across more diverse institutional contexts.

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