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Exploring Teacher Idealism: The Concentric Model, Narrative Identity, and Agency in English Language Teaching in Türkiye

KEMAL SINAN ÖZMEN
English Language Teaching Program, Gazi University
Ankara, Türkiye

ESRA HARMANDAOĞLU BAZ
Common Courses Department, Ankara Music and Fine Arts University
Ankara, Türkiye

Abstract

Teacher idealism, the ethical, aspirational, and future-oriented dimension of professional identity, remains under-theorized in second language teacher education (SLTE) despite its central role in sustaining pedagogical agency and professional resilience. Drawing on the Concentric Model of Teacher Idealism (Özmen & Harmandaoğlu Baz, 2026), this narrative inquiry examines how three in-service English language teachers in Türkiye narrate, sustain, and enact teacher idealism amid intensifying systemic demands. Through reflective written testimonials and semi-structured interviews, the study offers a narrative elaboration of the model's six identity layers: Ethos, Ideal-Self Schema, Enacted Identity, Professional Cognition, Disciplinary Knowledge, and Axiomatic Frame, as they are shaped by institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal forces. Findings reveal that teacher idealism functions as an enduring, ethically grounded stance rather than a naïve or early-career disposition, enabling moral agency, pedagogical integrity, and professional resilience under conditions of policy pressure, performativity, and cultural erosion. The analysis identified three contextual fields, institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal/global, illustrating that idealism is not an internal trait but a contextually mediated and discursively negotiated dimension of professional identity. Implications are drawn for SLTE programs, advocating for narrative reflection, ethical inquiry, and contextually responsive

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pedagogical environments that nurture teacher idealism as a critical professional resource.

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INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to remain a committed, morally invested teacher when the systems surrounding teaching increasingly reward compliance over conviction? This question sits at the heart of a growing concern in teacher education: the under-theorization of teacher idealism as a distinct and consequential dimension of professional identity. Teacher identity research has examined how teachers construct, negotiate, and perform professional selves across social and institutional contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Lasky, 2005; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Yet within this body of work, the aspirational and ethical core of that identity remains largely unexamined: what teachers believe teaching should mean, what kind of teacher they seek to become, and how they sustain that vision under pressure.

In this study, we address this gap through the Concentric Model of Teacher Idealism (Özmen & Harmandaoğlu Baz, 2026), a framework developed and validated to conceptualize teacher idealism as a layered dimension of professional identity. The model defines teacher idealism as teachers' ethical, aspirational, and future-oriented commitment to what teaching ought to mean, what students deserve, and what kind of teacher they seek to become. It organizes this construct across six interrelated layers spanning moral purpose, imagined professional selves, enacted practice, professional cognition, disciplinary knowledge, and systemic awareness. Grounded in sociocultural (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978) and poststructural understandings of identity (Foucault, 1980; Morgan, 2007), the model treats these dimensions as socially mediated and discursively shaped rather than as stable personal traits.

Although constructs such as teacher commitment (Bullough Jr. & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Park, 2005), an idealistic perspective on teaching (Maaranen, Pitkäniemi, Stenberg, & Karlsson, 2016), and teacher passion (Benekos, 2016) have been investigated in teacher education research, these constructs do not fully account for the layered, identity-forming, and contextually negotiated nature of teacher idealism. Teacher commitment primarily concerns teachers' sustained attachment to and investment in the profession; teacher passion

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foregrounds emotional energy, enthusiasm, and affective engagement, and idealistic perspectives on teaching generally refer to value-oriented beliefs about what teaching should accomplish.

This distinction also explains why teacher idealism is situated within teacher identity research. While teacher identity scholarship has thoroughly examined how teachers construct, negotiate, and perform professional selves across sociocultural and institutional contexts, the specifically aspirational and moral dimension of this identity work remains less visible when idealism is treated only as commitment, passion, or early-career enthusiasm. In this study, teacher idealism is therefore treated as a specific dimension of teacher identity rather than as a synonym for identity itself. It captures the ethical, aspirational, and future-oriented commitments through which teachers interpret their professional purpose, evaluate their practice, and position themselves within educational systems.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is not simply that teacher idealism has received limited attention, but that its lived, narrative, and contextual dimensions remain insufficiently understood in teacher education. Although teacher idealism has been developed and validated as a layered construct through the Concentric Model (Özmen & Harmandaoğlu Baz, 2026), less is known about how its layers are experienced, narrated, and enacted by teachers in their professional lives. This study addresses that gap by examining teacher idealism as the focal construct and narrative identity as the analytical lens through which it becomes visible.

The study is situated in Türkiye, where English language teachers work within a highly centralized education system shaped by national curriculum mandates, high-stakes examinations, and uneven institutional conditions. These pressures provide a particularly revealing context for examining how teachers sustain ethical and aspirational commitments while negotiating standardization, changing public perceptions of teaching, and broader sociocultural expectations (Polat, 2013; Yıldız, 2017). Within this context, the study does not seek to develop a new model or propose a revised framework. Rather, it uses the existing Concentric Model to explore how teacher idealism is narrated, sustained, challenged, and enacted in teachers' lived professional experiences. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do English language teachers narrate teacher idealism in their professional life stories?
2. What do these narratives reveal about how teacher idealism is shaped across institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal contexts?

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teacher Identity, Discourse, and Power: Sociocultural and Poststructural Foundations

Teacher identity research shows that professional selves are shaped through social participation, institutional discourse, and reflective practice (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Varghese et al., 2005). From a sociocultural perspective, teachers' ideals develop through interaction with students, mentors, colleagues, and professional communities (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Poststructural perspectives, on the other hand, emphasize that these ideals are also shaped by policy regimes, institutional norms, and discourses that authorize some forms of teaching while marginalizing others (Ball, 2003; Foucault, 1980).

Teacher idealism can therefore be understood as a socially mediated, psychologically imagined, and discursively negotiated dimension of professional identity rather than as a private sentiment or individual trait. Sociocultural perspectives explain how ideals are formed through participation in professional communities, interaction with mentors and students, and engagement with cultural narratives about what teaching should accomplish (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Psychological perspectives on possible selves further illuminate how teachers imagine desired and feared professional futures, turning idealism into a standard against which they evaluate their current practice (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Poststructural perspectives complement these views by showing that not all ideals are equally legitimized. For example, institutional discourses may privilege commitments to measurable achievement, curriculum compliance, and examination performance, while constraining ideals associated with critical pedagogy, civic responsibility, student autonomy, or culturally responsive teaching (Ball, 2003; Foucault, 1980). Such differences matter because they shape which versions of the "good teacher" become institutionally recognizable and which are treated as impractical, resistant, or professionally marginal.

Despite institutional pressures, teacher idealism may persist through practices of ethical self-formation (Foucault, 1985; Morgan, 2007). In practical terms, teachers may critically examine institutional expectations, refuse routines they consider ethically compromising, and deliberately cultivate classroom practices that preserve student dignity, dialogue, and professional integrity. Through such decisions, teachers continually shape the kind of professional they seek to become while negotiating the demands placed upon them. This view is also

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supported by research on student teachers' personal practical theories. Maaranen et al. (2016) show that these theories are shaped by underlying beliefs, experiences, values, and conceptions of good teaching. Their findings suggest that an idealistic view of teaching can contribute to the development of professional identity and commitment, even when some ideals are difficult to realize in practice.

The Concentric Model of Teacher Idealism: Reconceptualizing Aspirational Identities

The Concentric Model of Teacher Idealism (Özmen & Harmandaoğlu Baz, 2026) provides the conceptual framework for the present study because it explicitly theorizes teacher idealism as a layered dimension of teacher professional identity. Developed and validated in a prior study, the model conceptualizes teacher idealism through six interrelated layers: Ethos, Ideal-Self Schema, Enacted Identity, Professional Cognition, Disciplinary Knowledge, and Axiomatic Frame. These layers are not presented as discrete traits, but as mutually connected dimensions through which teachers' moral commitments, aspirational self-understandings, enacted practices, pedagogical reasoning, disciplinary investments, and systemic awareness are organized.

The model is grounded in sociocultural and poststructural understandings of teacher identity. From a sociocultural perspective, associated with Vygotskian theory, teacher idealism develops through mediated social interaction, participation in professional communities, engagement with cultural tools, and relationships with students, colleagues, and mentors (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). From a poststructural perspective, associated with Foucauldian thought, teacher idealism is also shaped through discourse, institutional power, normalization, and the professional subject positions made available within educational systems (Foucault, 1980; Morgan, 2007). The model brings these perspectives together by treating teacher idealism as both socially mediated and discursively shaped.

Each layer captures a distinct but interrelated dimension of teacher idealism. Ethos refers to the moral and ontological commitments that orient teachers' sense of professional purpose, including commitments to students' dignity, civic consciousness, and social justice in education. Ideal-Self Schema refers to the aspirational images through which teachers imagine the kind of teacher they seek to become. Enacted Identity captures how teachers translate ideals into classroom action and professional conduct under institutional constraints, reflecting the relationship between professional commitment, situated judgment,

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and reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Professional Cognition refers to the beliefs, assumptions, and reflective judgments that mediate pedagogical decision making (Borg, 2006). Disciplinary Knowledge concerns teachers' subject-area and pedagogical expertise, including their capacity to translate professional knowledge into meaningful instruction (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Axiomatic Frame refers to teachers' awareness of the institutional, cultural, and ideological assumptions that shape what teaching is expected to be, including how they negotiate, resist, or accommodate standardization, inherited norms, and policy pressures. The present study extends this discussion by examining how the six layers of teacher idealism become narratively visible in teachers' lived professional accounts. Figure 1 visualizes this theoretical

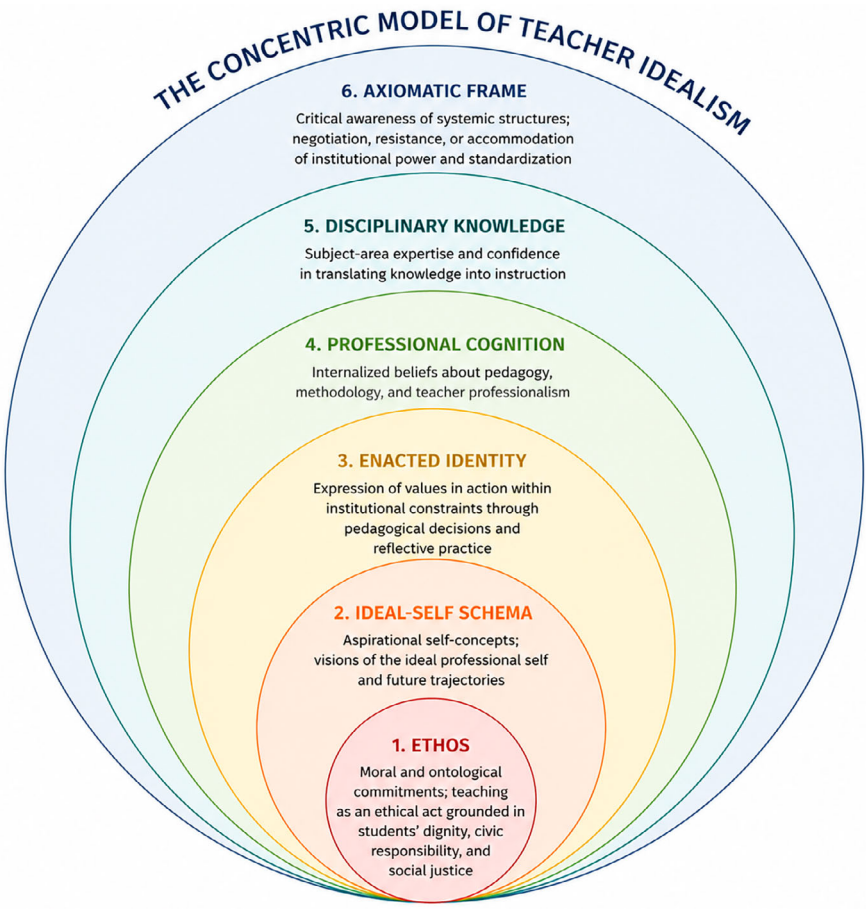


FIGURE 1. Teacher idealism framework.

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architecture by presenting teacher idealism as a layered identity construct.

This conceptual framing informs the methodological design presented in the next section, where narrative inquiry is used to examine teacher idealism as it appears in teachers' professional life stories.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs narrative inquiry to examine how teacher idealism is narrated, sustained, and enacted across teachers' professional life stories. Narrative inquiry is a particularly fitting methodology for examining teacher identity, as it highlights the storied, evolving, and contextually embedded nature of professional selves (Barkhuizen, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In line with previous studies on teacher identity (Yazan, 2018), the study is anchored in the assumption that professional narratives provide access to how teachers construct, negotiate, and enact their professional selves. In this study, however, identity and idealism are not treated as two separate phenomena to be operationalized independently. Rather, teacher identity is understood as the broader narrative field within which teacher idealism becomes visible. Teacher idealism is examined as the ethical and aspirational dimension of identity, expressed through the values teachers defend, the professional selves they imagine, the pedagogical choices they make, and the ways they respond to institutional constraints. Narrative inquiry is therefore appropriate because teachers' stories reveal not only what they do professionally, but also what they believe teaching should mean and what kind of teacher they seek to become.

Context and Participants

The broader educational context in Türkiye is marked by ongoing neoliberal reforms, national curriculum standardization, and increasing cultural conservatism (Yıldız, 2017), all of which exert significant influence on how teachers conceive of their roles, identities, and moral commitments. Since the 1980s, the adoption of neoliberal educational policies in the country has increasingly prioritized high-stakes standardized testing over foundational educational values and pedagogical norms (Polat, 2013). Scholars argue that this policy shift has contributed to changing public perceptions of teachers, who are

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increasingly viewed as exam facilitators tasked with preparing students for the next educational cycle (Polat, 2013; Yıldız, 2017).

Participants (Table 1) were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) to ensure in-depth engagement with individuals capable of articulating reflective and experience-rich narratives about teaching and idealism. The sample included three English language teachers representing different stages in their careers and working across a range of institutional settings. The sampling was guided by three criteria. First, participants needed to be practicing or recently active English language teachers with sufficient professional experience to reflect on the development of their ideals over time. Second, they needed to represent different career stages and institutional locations so that teacher idealism could be examined across varied professional trajectories. Third, they needed to be willing and able to produce reflective written testimonials and participate in follow-up interviews focused on professional values, formative experiences, and tensions between ideals and institutional realities. The final sample therefore included a veteran teacher, a mid-career public-school teacher, and an early-career teacher with rural teaching experience.

Bilge's narrative embodies a deeply internalized sense of teaching as a moral calling, shaped by discipline and the ethical modeling of professional values. Tuna's account reveals a sustained commitment to pedagogical integrity and civic-minded teaching in tension with standardized curriculum pressures. Deniz adds generational diversity; her narrative presents idealism as a form of resistance in constrained educational environments.

Data Collection

Data collection followed a two-stage narrative inquiry design comprising reflective written testimonials and semi-structured follow-up

TABLE 1
Participant Profile

Participant pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Teaching experience	Current institutional context
Bilge	57	Female	34 years	A private language institute in an urban setting
Tuna	32	Male	9 years	Public middle school in a provincial town
Deniz	27	Female	5 years	Previously situated in a rural Anatolian context

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interviews, collected in mid-2024 during the summer break. The testimonials served as the primary data source, eliciting extended first-person accounts of participants' teaching histories, formative experiences, professional values, and evolving ideals. Each participant responded to the same four open-ended testimonial prompts: "Describe the experiences or people that first shaped your desire to become an English teacher"; "Recall a moment when your ideals about teaching were challenged by classroom, institutional, or social realities"; "What values or commitments do you consider non-negotiable in your teaching practice?"; and "What kind of teacher do you still hope to become?" These prompts were designed to elicit formative experiences, critical incidents, ethical commitments, and imagined professional futures while allowing participants to narrate idealism through their own professional histories rather than respond to predefined categories from the Concentric Model. The testimonials were developed iteratively: Participants first produced an initial narrative response, after which the researchers identified only points requiring clarification or elaboration without adding interpretive content. Participants then expanded their accounts accordingly, producing final testimonials of approximately 1,500 words each. Unlike the common testimonial prompts, the follow-up interview questions were participant-specific. They were developed from each written narrative to clarify chronology, elaborate institutional and emotional turning points, and explore connections among professional ideals, identity, and contextual pressures.

These interviews served various methodological purposes. They enabled member checking, ensuring the trustworthiness and internal coherence of the written stories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were invited to review and comment on initial interpretations of their narratives, enabling a dialogic stance between researcher and participant. In addition, the interviews were instrumental in filling narrative gaps, especially where testimonials lacked elaboration on institutional contexts, emotional struggles, or ideological turning points. The interviews also helped delimit the analytic focus by distinguishing material directly related to teacher idealism, professional identity, and institutional experience from peripheral biographical details that did not inform the research questions. Prompts for interviews were derived both from the testimonial texts and from theoretical constructs related to teacher identity and idealism (Yazan, 2018). Interviews lasted between 40 and 65 min and were conducted via secure video conferencing platforms in English. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and returned to participants for verification.

Ethical integrity was prioritized at all stages of data collection. All participants were assigned pseudonyms and identifying details such as

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institutional names and geographic markers were anonymized. Participants received a comprehensive informed consent form outlining the purpose of the research, data handling procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. All procedures were conducted in line with the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Statements for Higher Education Institutions.

Regarding researcher positionality, the researchers acknowledge that complete neutrality is neither possible nor necessarily desirable in qualitative inquiry. As teacher educators professionally embedded in the Turkish educational context and personally invested in questions of teacher idealism, our interpretations were inevitably shaped by our own experiences, commitments, and assumptions. Rather than attempting to eliminate this subjectivity, we sought to make it visible and to manage its influence reflexively. To do so, we used open-ended and non-leading prompts, invited participants to verify interview transcripts and comment on initial interpretations, maintained reflective analytic journals throughout data collection and analysis, and engaged in peer debriefing with a colleague experienced in narrative inquiry. These strategies were intended to support transparency, reflexive accountability, and trustworthiness in the interpretation of participants' narratives.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was structured in two interconnected phases, narrative analysis and thematic coding, to balance the holistic interpretation of each participant's lived story with the abstraction of shared constructs relevant to teacher idealism. This two-phase analytic approach reflects a common strategy in narrative inquiry research, in which individual stories are analyzed both as cohesive wholes and as sources of recurring themes (Barkhuizen, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative Analysis

The first analytic phase treated each reflective testimonial and its corresponding interview transcript as a unified narrative text. These texts were analyzed using a holistic-content approach (Barkhuizen, 2011), which prioritizes the temporal sequence, voice, and internal logic of the participant's story. Special attention was paid to turning points, recurring metaphors, and the subjective framing of

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challenges and commitments, key indicators of identity negotiation and ideological positioning.

Drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework, narratives were interpreted through three dimensions of experience: temporality (how identity and idealism evolved over time), sociality (interactions with institutions, students, and peers), and place (geographic and institutional contexts of practice). This allowed the research to situate teacher idealism not as a static trait but as a dynamic construct embedded in relational, historical, and cultural processes. To ensure credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researchers maintained analytic memos, reflective journals, and margin annotations during narrative readings.

Researcher memos were treated as analytic records rather than as a third data source. They were used to document emerging interpretations, methodological decisions, affective responses, and questions for follow-up analysis. These memos supported reflexive engagement with the data and helped the researchers track how interpretations developed across narrative and thematic phases.

Thematic Analysis

Following narrative analysis, the data underwent thematic coding informed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial codes were generated from the testimonials and interviews before being compared with the six layers of the Concentric Model, which functioned as sensitizing concepts rather than as a fixed coding template.

The thematic analysis followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The Concentric Model did not function as a fixed coding template imposed on the data; rather, the six layers of the model served as sensitizing concepts that helped the researchers attend to possible ethical, aspirational, enacted, cognitive, disciplinary, and systemic dimensions of teacher idealism. Codes were first generated from the testimonials and interview transcripts, and only then compared with the model to examine where participants' narratives elaborated, complicated, or clarified its layers.

The themes were then reviewed for internal coherence and cross-case relevance through repeated comparison with the raw narratives, analytic memos, and participant-specific narrative portraits. In the subsequent stage, each theme was defined and named in relation to both the participants' accounts and the conceptual focus of the study. Illustrative quotations were selected only after the themes had been refined, so that excerpts functioned as evidence of the analytic pattern rather than as isolated examples fitted into predetermined

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categories. Analytic decisions were guided by the study's aim: to examine how teacher idealism is narrated in English language teachers' professional life stories and how it is shaped across institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal contexts. This aim aligns directly with the two research questions: RQ1 focuses on the narrative meanings and manifestations of teacher idealism, while RQ2 examines the contextual fields within which teachers' ideals are sustained, challenged, and enacted. A colleague with expertise in narrative inquiry and teacher education reviewed and confirmed the theme-code alignment, supporting the credibility and interpretive rigor of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings in relation to the study's twofold purpose: to examine how teacher idealism is narrated in participants' professional life stories and to explore how it is shaped across institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal contexts. The Concentric Model functions as the interpretive framework across both parts of the analysis. RQ1 focuses on the narrative meanings and manifestations of teacher idealism, while RQ2 examines the contextual fields within which those ideals are sustained, challenged, and enacted.

Narrative Portraits of the Participants

Before the cross-case thematic analysis, brief narrative portraits are provided to situate each participant's account within a coherent professional story and to indicate the trajectories, formative experiences, and contextual tensions through which teacher idealism acquired meaning in their lives.

Bilge's narrative is marked by continuity, discipline, civic responsibility, and a sense of giving back to the broader social context in which she was educated. After 34 years of English language teaching, primarily at a state university, she retired from her university position but continued teaching with a reduced workload at a private language institute. She presents this transition not as a departure from teaching but as a continuation of a commitment central to her professional identity. Her account also reflects a sustained scholarly orientation: long experience does not, in her view, remove the need to engage with research, reconsider professional assumptions, and remain responsive to students. Administrative expectations, changing institutional conditions, health-related difficulties, and the accumulated demands of teaching tested her ideals over time, yet she translated

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them into enduring routines of preparation, mentoring, materials development, and pedagogical attentiveness. Bilge's story therefore illustrates idealism as ethical continuity sustained through professional seriousness and intellectual humility rather than external recognition.

Tuna's narrative is organized around resistance, pedagogical imagination, and civic response. A public middle-school English teacher in a provincial town, he traces important elements of his professional orientation to teachers who recognized and encouraged him before he had fully imagined himself as an educator. A high-school English teacher prompted him to consider teaching, while a university methodology professor presented language education as intellectually serious and ethically consequential work. These formative encounters provided images of the teacher he hoped to become, alongside cultural representations of meaningful teaching. His entry into professional life, however, exposed him to standardized expectations, limited institutional support, professional devaluation, and colleagues who regarded sustained effort as a path toward exhaustion. Rather than allowing these pressures to define the limits of his work, Tuna sought to preserve pedagogical integrity through everyday decisions such as adapting materials, reconsidering assessments, and responding closely to students' needs. His story frames teacher idealism as a form of sustained commitment grounded in the tension between inherited professional aspirations and the institutional realities of school life.

Deniz's story reflects early-career self-anchoring, moral inheritance, and the search for professional coherence. With 5 years of experience, including teaching in a rural Anatolian context, she presents idealism less as settled certainty than as an ongoing effort to become the kind of teacher she believes students deserve. Her account is shaped by limited resources, institutional distance, uneven professional recognition, and the challenges of developing a professional identity during the early years of teaching. Earlier encounters with teachers and teacher educators provided important reference points in this process. In particular, a professor's advice that teachers should derive their self-respect from the importance of the profession rather than from public perceptions became a durable source of professional orientation. Deniz also draws on civic memory, especially her reference to Atatürk, as a reference point in her developing teacher identity. These influences do not remove uncertainty from her account; rather, they help her reconnect with her professional commitments when they are tested. Deniz's story therefore illustrates idealism as self-anchoring through the interaction of moral inheritance, pedagogical responsibility, and a professional self still in formation.

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RQ1: Narratives of Teacher Idealism

RQ1 examines how teacher idealism was narrated across participants' professional life stories. To improve the readability of the analysis, Table 2 first presents the main codes, corresponding thematic layers, and illustrative quotations derived from the narrative exemplars. The table thus provides an organizing map for the discussion that follows. The subsequent sections elaborate how these themes appeared in participants' accounts and how they correspond to the six layers of the model.

TABLE 2
Themes, Codes, and Illustrative Quotations from Narratives

Theme	Code	Illustrative quotation
Ethos	National debt Reason to teach Hope for country's future Ethical diligence Mentor influence Scholarly understanding of teaching Civic responseCommunity's needs	"I feel a debt, yes, a national one… It's how I honor those who dreamed [this country] into being." "I don't cut corners, not because someone is watching, but because it matters." "Teaching? Teaching is my response. It is my resistance."
Ideal-Self Schema	Aspirational modeling Self-formation through teaching Pedagogical inheritance Pedagogical self-improvement Moral aspiration Ethical dimension	"That's who I want to be… Like in Dead Poets Society." "You are not just teaching a language… You are shaping how someone meets the world." "I want students to learn not despite me, but because of me."
Enacted Identity	Professional resistance Hidden curriculum Value-driven pedagogy	"Even if the administration wants something else… I do what is right." "My hidden curriculum… It's in how I respond to silence, struggle, and small victories."
Professional Cognition	Reflective loyalty Scholarly beliefs Emotional literacy Critical thinking	"Don't trust yourself too much. Trust journals. Trust your students' responses." "The real qualification… is whether you've made peace with your own complexity."
Disciplinary Knowledge	Interdisciplinary literacy Field literacy Pedagogical maxims	"Materials developer, tester, mentor… each role builds upon the others." "Learners learn despite teachers… But I want them to learn because of me."
Axiomatic Frame	Institutional dissonance Impact of admins and families Cultural resistance	"Frustration is a kind of privilege… Especially when the system fails." "Some colleagues are wonderful… but I've stopped looking sideways. I look forward."

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Ethos: Teacher Idealism as Moral and Civic Responsibility

Across the three narratives, Ethos emerged as the moral core of teacher idealism: the layer through which participants understood teaching as a civic and ethical responsibility rather than merely an occupational role. This core was not presented as abstract belief but as a standard for judging one's actions under institutional and social pressure. Bilge, for example, framed teaching through civic indebtedness, describing it as "a debt, yes, a national one." Her statement, "I don't cut corners, not because someone is watching, but because it matters," shows how idealism becomes an internalized professional standard rather than a response to surveillance or external reward. In this sense, her ethos reflects a self-regulating moral orientation: teaching matters because students deserve seriousness, preparation, and care.

Tuna's account similarly positioned teaching as a moral response to systemic failure. His statement, "Teaching is my response. It is my resistance," does not present idealism as innocence or professional optimism. Rather, it casts idealism as a form of agency within constraint. When he states that "a teacher has no right to shut down just because the system fails," he links professional responsibility to a wider civic imagination. Here, idealism functions as a resource for sustaining action when institutional conditions invite resignation.

Deniz's ethos was articulated through moral inheritance and self-anchoring. Her reference to Atatürk, the founder of modern Türkiye and a central figure in the country's civic-educational imagination, "He would want me to be a good teacher. So I try," situates her professional purpose within a broader historical and civic narrative. At the same time, her statement, "The version of me who teaches, that's my best self," shows that idealism also works inwardly, as a way of becoming ethically coherent through teaching. Her professor's advice to take self-respect not from society's view of teachers but from the intrinsic importance of the profession further reinforces this point. Across these accounts, Ethos operated as a moral compass through which participants resisted the reduction of teaching to public status, institutional compliance, or technical delivery. This ethos frames teaching as an inherently meaningful, civic, and ethical act rather than a role dependent on public recognition or institutional reward.

Ideal-Self Schema: Teacher Idealism as Aspirational Selfhood

The participants' narratives also revealed Ideal-Self Schema as an aspirational layer of teacher idealism, formed through remembered

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teachers, prior experiences as students, professional models, and imagined futures. In this sense, teachers' idealism was shaped not only by participation in current professional communities but also by earlier encounters with teachers who modeled what meaningful teaching could look like. These remembered experiences functioned as preprofessional sources of idealism, providing images, values, and standards that participants later reinterpreted in their own teaching.

Tuna's ideal teacher image was shaped by lived mentorship and cultural representation. He recalled a university professor who taught methodology "like it was a sacred art," making teaching feel intellectually and morally consequential. His reference to Dead Poets Society, "That's who I want to be," shows how cultural narratives can become resources for imagining a desired teaching self. Rather than imitating an idealized figure, Tuna used such images as professional benchmarks.

Deniz's aspirational self was expressed through the desire for students to learn "not despite me, but because of me." This statement captures a central tension in teacher idealism: the teacher wants to become pedagogically meaningful rather than merely present. Her habits of arriving early, rehearsing lessons, and engaging students' questions were shaped by the memory of a high school teacher who once told her she had "the fire" to teach. "I'm still trying to prove him right," she confessed, revealing an idealism grounded in emotional inheritance and pedagogical loyalty.

Bilge's ideal-self schema was less theatrical but equally demanding. Her claim that "the classroom deserves my full alertness" and that teaching is "movement, mental, emotional, physical" constructs the ideal teacher as intellectually prepared, ethically alert, and bodily present. She recalled how a younger colleague was surprised that she never sat during class, to which she replied, "That's because I'm working." For her, the ideal teacher is not one who performs but one who refines: "There's always something to learn, something to improve. When you understand what teaching truly entails, you never quite feel adequate." These reflections offer a vivid portrayal of how aspirational identities are lived, tested, and continuously reimagined through daily practice.

These narrative patterns show that aspirational identity was not detached from practice. Participants used remembered teachers, idealized images of teaching, and formative studenthood experiences to interpret their daily work, evaluate their adequacy, and sustain professional direction under constraint. In this respect, Ideal-Self Schema worked as a bridge between Ethos and Enacted Identity: It translated moral purpose into an imagined professional self that could be pursued, revised, and tested in practice.

Enacted Identity, Professional Cognition, and Axiomatic Frame also appeared in participants' accounts, though often as connective layers

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rather than separate narrative episodes. Enacted Identity was visible in participants' accounts of translating ideals into situated pedagogical action, such as adapting lessons, responding ethically to students' needs, or continuing to teach according to professional values despite institutional pressures. Professional Cognition appeared in the reflective judgments through which participants evaluated teaching, learning, and their own adequacy as educators; Bilge's emphasis on trusting scholarly journals and students' responses, for example, positioned professional judgment as an ongoing reflective practice. Axiomatic Frame emerged in participants' awareness of the wider assumptions shaping education, including standardization, professional devaluation, imported policy trends, and inherited cultural expectations about teaching. These three layers therefore helped explain how teacher idealism moved from moral purpose and aspirational selfhood into practice, reasoning, and systemic awareness.

Disciplinary Knowledge: Teacher Idealism as Pedagogical Responsibility

Disciplinary Knowledge also appeared as a central layer of idealism, particularly in Bilge's emphasis on continuous learning. Her statement, "When you understand what teaching truly entails, you never quite feel adequate. There's always something to learn, something to refine," positions subject and pedagogical knowledge as an ethical responsibility rather than a technical possession. Knowledge, in her account, is not accumulated once and then applied routinely; it must be renewed because students, classrooms, and professional expectations continue to change.

Bilge's sense of perpetual incompletion does not signal professional insecurity; rather, it reflects epistemic humility in the face of teaching's complexity. Her statement positions disciplinary knowledge as something continuously renewed through experience, reflection, and responsiveness to classroom realities, closely aligning with Shulman's (1987) notion of the wisdom of practice. In this sense, knowledge becomes part of teacher idealism because it enables teachers to act responsibly on their moral and pedagogical commitments. Across the narratives, disciplinary knowledge was therefore not treated as a technical possession alone, but as a professional resource through which teachers translated ethical purpose into instructionally meaningful practice.

The RQ1 analysis shows how teacher idealism was narrated through participants' moral commitments, aspirational selfhood, pedagogical action, reflective judgment (Farrell, 2015), disciplinary responsibility,

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and systemic awareness. The following section turns to how these narrative patterns were shaped across institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal contexts.

RQ2: Contextual Shaping of Teacher Idealism

RQ2 examines what the participants' narratives reveal about how teacher idealism is shaped across institutional, sociocultural, and macro-temporal contexts. Although the Concentric Model informs the interpretation of the narratives throughout the findings, this part of the analysis focuses specifically on the contextual fields within which teachers' ideals were sustained, challenged, and enacted. This focus reflects the established understanding that teacher identity is constituted through interaction with institutional conditions, social relationships, cultural meanings, and historically situated discourses rather than developed independently of them (Lasky, 2005; Sachs, 2001; Varghese et al., 2005). Repeated comparison across the three accounts identified three intersecting fields of experience: immediate institutional practice, broader sociocultural meanings attached to teaching, and historical or transnational pressures shaping educational work.

Institutional Context: Idealism in Everyday Professional Negotiation

At the institutional level, teacher idealism was narrated through everyday encounters with schools, administrators, colleagues, and classroom expectations. These conditions did not simply surround participants' ideals; they defined the situations in which those ideals could be enacted, modified, or constrained. This finding is consistent with poststructural accounts of teacher identity, which emphasize how institutional discourses make particular forms of professional conduct recognizable and legitimate while marginalizing others (Ball, 2003; Foucault, 1980; Morgan, 2007).

Bilge described idealism as ethical continuity maintained through routine professional discipline. She recalled, "A young instructor once shadowed me… after the first week, she said, 'You never sit during class.' I smiled and said that's because I'm working. Teaching is movement, mental, emotional, physical." Even after retiring from a state university, she continued teaching part-time, explaining, "I cannot not teach. This work is how I live well. This is who I am." Her account suggests that idealism was sustained less through institutional recognition

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than through embodied habits of preparation, attentiveness, and professional responsibility. In her narrative, maintaining pedagogical standards became a practice of ethical self-formation through which she preserved continuity between her professional values and her everyday conduct (Foucault, 1985; Morgan, 2007).

Tuna's account located idealism in the friction between pedagogical commitments and institutional fatigue. He described colleagues who regarded teaching as an underpaid and underappreciated occupation, but he resisted allowing this discouragement to determine his own practice: "Some colleagues say, 'We're underpaid. Underappreciated. This is a dead-end job.' I don't argue. But I also think frustration is a kind of privilege . . . teaching is my response. It is my resistance." His efforts to redesign tests, adapt materials, and support students beyond routine requirements show how idealism became enacted through ordinary but consequential pedagogical decisions. Such practices illustrate how teachers may negotiate performative institutional conditions without either fully accepting or completely escaping them (Ball, 2003).

Deniz's narrative similarly showed how early-career idealism was tested by limited recognition and institutional neglect. Her response was not to deny these conditions, but to use them as occasions for ethical self-positioning. As she explained, "I keep doing what is right. And when I'm unsure, I pause, not to seek approval, but to re-anchor myself in purpose." Her account suggests that institutional uncertainty intensified the need for an internal point of professional reference. This reflects Lasky's (2005) argument that teachers' identity and agency are negotiated through their interaction with changing institutional demands and professional vulnerabilities. Across the three narratives, the institutional context therefore operated as the immediate field in which idealism was enacted, disciplined, and repeatedly tested.

Sociocultural Context: Idealism as Civic and Moral Positioning

Participants also situated teacher idealism within broader cultural narratives about the social value of teaching, civic responsibility, and professional recognition. At this level, idealism was not limited to classroom conduct; it became a way of interpreting what teaching meant within a society and what obligations accompanied the role. Sociocultural perspectives help explain this process by showing how professional meanings are mediated through participation in communities, relationships with significant others, and culturally available narratives

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about what teachers should represent (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998).

Tuna's statement, "Teaching is my response. It is my resistance," connected his classroom practice to wider concerns about professional devaluation, public discouragement, and the erosion of educational meaning. Teaching became the form of action available to him in response to these conditions. His idealism therefore functioned simultaneously as pedagogical persistence and civic positioning: remaining committed to students was also a refusal to accept diminished cultural expectations of what teachers and schools could accomplish. His account supports the view that teacher identity is not only individually narrated but also negotiated through broader social discourses about professional value and legitimacy (Sachs, 2001; Varghese et al., 2005).

Deniz framed her professional purpose through civic memory. She explained, "There's a name, a face, that sits at the center of my moral compass: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk . . . I owe it to him to walk the path well." This reference did not function merely as biographical background. It located her desired teacher self within a national narrative that associates education with social responsibility, modernization, and public service. Her account demonstrates how culturally circulating figures and historical narratives can become symbolic resources through which teachers imagine and evaluate their desired professional selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Wenger, 1998).

These narratives show that sociocultural context shaped both the content and perceived legitimacy of participants' ideals. Public perceptions of teaching, inherited civic narratives, and culturally circulating images of the good teacher provided standards against which participants interpreted their professional commitments. Such meanings could support idealism by giving teaching a wider moral purpose, but they could also intensify the tension between teachers' aspirations and the diminished recognition they encountered in professional life. In this respect, idealism was socially mediated but also discursively contested, since different cultural and institutional narratives authorized different versions of what counted as responsible teaching (Foucault, 1980; Morgan, 2007).

Macro-Temporal and Global Context: Idealism amid Policy Circulation and Educational Change

A third contextual field concerned pressures extending beyond participants' immediate institutions and national professional cultures. These included transnational policy trends, neoliberal forms of

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educational governance, and broader historical changes in how educational value and teacher responsibility were defined. In Türkiye, such changes have been associated with curriculum standardization, high-stakes examination systems, and increasingly performance-oriented understandings of educational work (Polat, 2013; Yıldız, 2017).

This field was most explicit in Tuna's narrative. He criticized the decontextualized adoption of external policy trends: "They import the latest policy trends with no context, like they're buying education wholesale. And we are the ones left to assemble the pieces in classrooms that were never consulted." His account positioned teachers at the point where large-scale policy circulation becomes local pedagogical responsibility. Reforms developed elsewhere were experienced not as abstract policy discourse, but as practical demands that teachers had to interpret, adapt, and sometimes resist within classrooms whose circumstances had not shaped those reforms.

Tuna's narrative therefore reveals a temporal and transnational dimension of teacher idealism. His commitments were negotiated not only against current institutional conditions, but also against changing policy orthodoxies that defined effective teaching through standardization, transferability, and measurable outcomes. Ball's (2003) analysis of performativity is relevant here because it explains how policy regimes can reshape teachers' professional judgments and their understandings of what legitimate practice should involve. From a sociocultural perspective, however, teachers do not simply receive such policies unchanged; they interpret and reconstruct them through historically and institutionally situated professional activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

The macro-temporal/global field was less explicit in Bilge's and Deniz's accounts, whose narratives centered more strongly on institutional practice and civic meaning. This uneven distribution is analytically important. It indicates that the three contextual fields did not operate with equal visibility in every professional story. Rather, participants emphasized different contextual pressures depending on their career trajectories, institutional locations, and the events through which they narrated their ideals. This variation is consistent with narrative understandings of identity as temporally developing and differently positioned across professional lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Varghese et al., 2005).

Figure 2 synthesizes these patterns by situating the six existing layers of the Concentric Model within the contextual conditions through which they were sustained, challenged, and enacted. The contextual fields are not additional layers of the model; rather, they represent the

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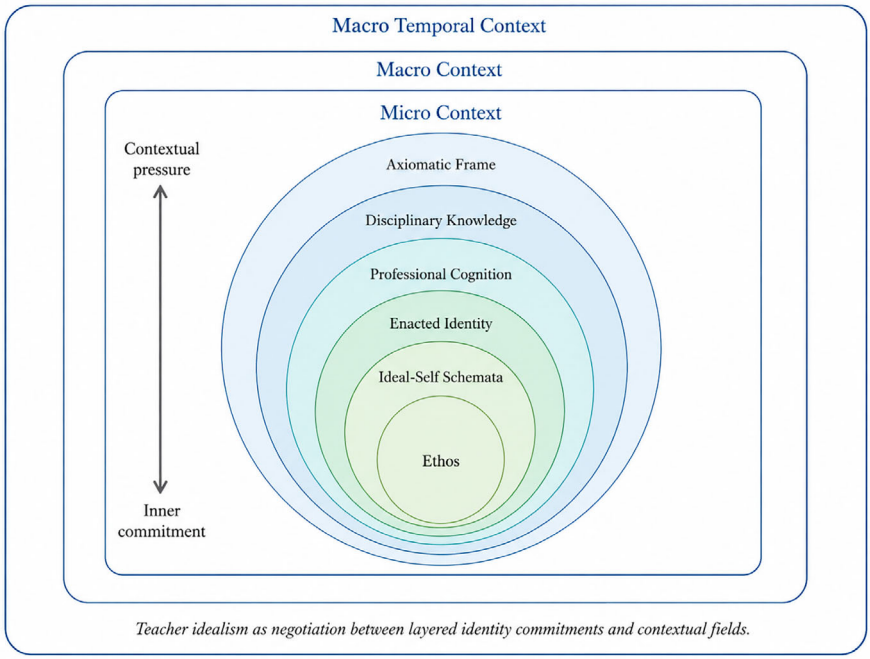


FIGURE 2. Teacher idealism framework within wider contextual domains.

environments within which its existing layers become visible and are negotiated in professional experience.

CONCLUSION

This study addressed the dynamics of teacher idealism by examining how three English language teachers in Türkiye narrated it as an ethical, aspirational, and contextually mediated dimension of professional identity. The study offered a narrative and contextual elaboration of the Concentric Model of Teacher Idealism, showing how its layers become visible in teachers' lived professional experience. Across the narratives, Ethos appeared in accounts of teaching as civic responsibility and ethical continuity; Ideal-Self Schema in aspirational images of desired teacher selves; Enacted Identity in everyday negotiations with institutional expectations; Professional Cognition in reflective judgments about teaching and professional adequacy; Disciplinary Knowledge in the treatment of professional learning as an ethical responsibility; and Axiomatic Frame in participants' awareness of the institutional, cultural, and policy assumptions shaping their work. The

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study's contribution therefore lies in giving narrative texture to a model previously developed and validated at a conceptual and quantitative level.

The study also reinforces a central insight of teacher identity research: context is constitutive of professional identity (Lasky, 2005; Sachs, 2001; Varghese et al., 2005). It shows how this principle operates specifically in relation to teacher idealism, which was shaped through institutional routines, national–cultural meanings attached to teaching, and broader educational pressures such as standardization and policy borrowing. Teacher idealism, the narratives suggest, is best understood not as a fixed internal orientation but as an ethically grounded stance continually mediated by contextual conditions. The three contextual spheres identified in the analysis, micro-institutional, macro-sociocultural, and macro-temporal/global, provide a more situated account of how teacher idealism is shaped and reshaped through teachers' interaction with wider educational conditions. From a poststructural perspective, these contexts can be understood as discursive fields in which teacher subjectivity is shaped, regulated, and performed (Morgan, 2007). From a sociocultural perspective, they also function as spaces of mediation in which teacher idealism can be supported, constrained, or reoriented through participation in professional and institutional life.

Implications for Teacher Education

The model's emphasis on contextual sensitivity carries important implications for the design and philosophy of teacher education. If teacher idealism is formed and enacted across institutional, sociocultural, and global terrains, then teacher preparation should move beyond reductive models of skill acquisition and decontextualized professional competencies (Johnson, 2009). Instead, teacher education programs can cultivate situated, reflective, and dialogic learning environments (Barkhuizen, 2017) in which preservice teachers examine the ethical foundations of their practice, confront the sociopolitical forces that shape schooling, and imagine the kind of professionals they aspire to become.

Such environments can support multiple forms of professional knowing that are often marginalized in competency-based teacher preparation. These include critical engagement with policy and theory, reflection on the emotional labor of teaching, personal testimony about formative educational experiences, and moral imagination about what schooling could and should become. From this perspective, teacher idealism should not be treated as an abstract personal quality

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or a naïve disposition. Rather, it can be approached as a reflective, ethical, and contextually mediated dimension of teacher development.

Teacher educators can support this development through structured reflective activities. One possible activity is an "ideal teacher genealogy," in which student teachers identify remembered teachers, classroom experiences, or cultural images that shaped their sense of meaningful teaching. This activity can help them examine how their ideal-self schema has been formed through prior experiences as students. A second activity is a "values-to-practice narrative," in which student teachers write about a core teaching value and then describe how that value could be enacted in a specific classroom decision, such as responding to a struggling learner, adapting a textbook activity, or addressing unequal participation. This connects Ethos with Enacted Identity. A third activity is a "constraint and agency reflection," in which student teachers analyze a realistic institutional constraint, such as exam pressure, rigid curricula, or limited resources, and consider how a teacher might preserve pedagogical integrity within that condition. This supports awareness of the Axiomatic Frame while encouraging professional cognition and ethical agency.

These activities can be integrated especially into methodology courses, including courses on teaching language skills, integrated language skills, and practicum. Such courses already ask student teachers to connect theory, pedagogy, and classroom decision making; they can therefore provide productive spaces for examining how ideals are formed, tested, revised, and enacted under micro- and macro-level conditions. In this way, teacher education can help student teachers articulate their ideals before entering the profession more fully, while also preparing them to sustain those ideals within the complex realities of educational practice.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research should explore the dynamic interplay between personal narrative, professional identity, and sociopolitical context. One promising direction lies in longitudinal narrative studies that trace the evolution of teacher idealism across different stages of professional life, from preservice formation through induction and into mid- or late-career transitions. Such studies could reveal how idealism is sustained, reshaped, or contested over time and under changing institutional and political conditions.

In addition, comparative narrative inquiries across different national, cultural, or policy contexts could illuminate how structural conditions influence the formation and articulation of teacher idealism. For

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instance, how do teachers in centralized versus decentralized systems narrate their professional ethos? How does teacher idealism manifest under authoritarian versus democratic regimes, or in neoliberal education markets versus public-service-oriented frameworks?

Finally, there is an urgent need to examine how teacher education programs can intentionally nurture idealism as a legitimate and vital dimension of professional development. Intervention-based research, such as pedagogical design studies or narrative curriculum interventions, could assess the impact of structured narrative practices, like testimonial writing workshops or critical storytelling forums, on preservice and in-service teachers' evolving sense of purpose, agency, and pedagogical ethics.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

THE AUTHORS

Kemal Sinan Özmen is a Professor of English Language Teaching at Gazi University. His research interests include language teacher education, reflective practice, classroom discourse, and curriculum development in ELT. He has published on teacher learning, professional identity, and innovation in English language teaching. He currently serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Language Learning and Teaching (JLTL). Esra Harmandaoğlu Baz works as an Associate Professor of English Language Teaching in Common Courses Department at Ankara Music and Fine Arts University. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Language Teaching and Learning. Her research interests are technology integration into language learning and teacher education, web technologies in language learning and teacher education, and intercultural competence.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors confirm that data sharing is not applicable because the participants were assured that the data would only be used for publication.

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