Research paper

The moral identity profiles of inspiring social studies teachers☆

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This study aims to explore the moral identity profiles of inspiring social studies teachers. In the research conducted with the systematic grounded theory method, data were collected from 14 teachers using in-depth interviews. These data were analyzed with the technique of continuous comparative analysis. The results show the theoretical items that explain the theory to be gathered around the core category of moral identity and to be constituted of self traits; referenced worldview and beliefs; personality characteristics; ideals, and goals; past experiences; social influences; and educational approach. This study contributes to the explanation of moral identity of inspiring teachers.

1. Introduction

The literature refers to teachers who are positive models for their students and leave a positive mark in their lives as inspiring teachers (ITE). Information about the characteristics of inspiring teachers is usually obtained from the memoirs written by their students. Elizabeth Brown,who her students remember as an inspiring teacher, is a teacher who performs successful works in her field, communicates effectively, has a strong visual memory, and encourages, inspires, and supports her students (Varley, 2010).

Corwin Johnson, one of the inspiring teachers of the legal profession, is something of a legend among his students due to being innovative, humble, gentle, humorous, ironic, sharing, enlightening, intellectual, and in love with his profession (Schwartz & Atlas, 2005). Meanwhile, what makes Dr. Jimmy Ledingham an inspiring teacher is how he behaves toward his patients and interns. Douglas (1999) described him as supportive, sensitive, and concerned with his patients and trusting with his students. Douglas described being influenced by him during her first internship years and wanting to become a person like him. As can be seen, inspiring teachers have many qualities that bring personality and moral traits to the fore in the teacher.

As a prerequisite of moral behavior, an individual must first of all know what is good and true. However, knowing these does not mean a person will act morally. Of two siblings who grow up in the same family and learn the same value judgments, one may become a police officer and the other a criminal. Two teachers who graduate from the same faculty may have different perceptions, skills, and willingness to teach. As such knowledge alone is not what makes a difference. Cognitive development theorists have drawn attention to types of cognition such as moral knowledge, moral attitudes and values, moral judgment, and moral reasoning. These types of cognition are undoubtedly effective in the process of motivating moral action but are insufficient at explaining moral action (Blasi, 1980).

Emotions as well as knowledge motivate moral action. Feelings such as sympathy, empathy, and guilt can be accepted as feelings that play an important role in motivating moral action. However, emotions can change instantly when affected by an individual's biological, physiological, economic, and social life or when the source of the action may have resulted from feeling guilty as opposed to choosing to do what is morally right. Thus, the source of moral behavior must itself be intentional and conscious. While performing an action, a person must do it deliberately with the intention of doing good. Therefore, both moral action and moral emotions are determined by one's concern for morality (Blasi, 1999).

Some studies have explained the source of motivation for an individual's moral behavior to be explained by different identity

categories. These identities are associated with the stages of ego development as defined by Loevinger (1994) and are as follows: social role identity, observed identity, identity management, and identity as authenticity. These four identity modes are thought to motivate one's moral behavior (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Blasi & Milton, 1991). Knowledge, emotion, and identity, while undoubtedly important, are not enough for motivating moral action. Without knowledge, forming accurate judgments about what is morally good or bad is difficult. Developing an inclination toward a belief, value, or behavior is also difficult without emotion and identity. However, a more holistic and complex structure exists in the background of moral actions. Blasi (2004) pointed to this structure and established the concept of moral identity based on the degree of objectively valuing morality. Blasi's views are based on the concept of self. The solution to finding the motivational source of a behavior involves consciously going through the details on self-conceptual, subjective, and mediational processes.

Moral identity, which is also considered as social identity in social cognitive theories and associated with cognitive schemas, is accepted as the degree of importance of the desire to be a moral person in one's identity and a self-regulating mechanism that motivates moral action (Blasi, 2004; Hardy & Carlo, 2011). One's moral identity being of utmost importance to one's self may be associated with certain beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, moral identity has been integrated with self-concept. In this context, Aquino and Reed, 2002 identified two dimensions for moral identity: internalization and symbolization. The dimension of internalization is concerned with the degree to which the self-concept is central to moral characteristics. The dimension of symbolization is aimed at understanding the extent to which a person's traits are reflected in their actions. In short, internalization is about how a person defines their self, and symbolization is about how much one reflects one's self onto their behaviors.

How moral identity develops and the role school has in this regard are as important as the building blocks of moral identity. Interactions in school create a social environment and cultural context for students (Karaman et al., 2023). The moral identity of individuals who spend a significant part of their day at school is affected by their experiences at school. These experiences shape the learnings that form one's self and identity (Carrillo & Karvelis, 2023). School provides students with the opportunity "to discover self and moral judgment and transform them into a moral identity" (Atkins et al., 2004, p. 69) and affects moral identity with the individual's moral self that emerges in the interactive process with the environment (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009).

Education in schools is carried out within the framework of standards outlined in instructional programs. Particularly, the social studies curriculum holds significant standards supporting moral identity (Jackson, 2023). Also, it aims to cultivate good citizenship through an interdisciplinary and holistic approach (Lotivio-Bedural et al., 2019) and prepare individuals for life (Manfra et al., 2023). Many values such as justice, friendship, honesty, which form the basis for moral action, and skills such as problem-solving, willpower, critical thinking, are included in the social studies curriculum (Cathy et al., 2023; Ministry of National Education, 2023; Odebiyi, 2021). All of these knowledge and skills in the curriculum are delivered by the expert practitioners in schools, who are teachers (Manfra et al., 2023). Therefore, the moral identity of a social studies teacher is highly significant for the construction of students' identities and the success of educational programs.

In Türkiye, social studies teachers are expected to have subject area, general culture, and pedagogical knowledge and skills (General Directorate of Teacher Training and Development of the Ministry of National Education, 2017 [MoNE TTDGM], 2017). Additionally, teachers are expected to have a supportive attitude towards their students (Cook & Anderson, 2023), maintain positive communication with them (Liu et al., 2023), participate in various courses related to teacher education (Schnellert & Kozak, 2023), feel a sense of belonging to the school (Cook & Anderson, 2023), and educate their students with curriculum-appropriate activities during the educational process

(Karaman et al., 2023).

Teachers' competence in lesson design and implementation skills is associated with their self-efficacy (Odebiyi, 2023), while their emotional connection with students and leadership are related to their motivation (Çetinkaya & Arastaman, 2023). It is believed that the central psychological structure motivating teachers is their moral identity. Explaining the main motivational source of moral action only using the theories on knowledge, emotion, identity, or self is likely insufficient, and although these theories are important, moral identity has a more holistic and complex structure. Therefore, the prediction is that many dimensions, mediators, and sub-dimensions can be found within the structure of moral identity, and the interdimensional hierarchy and interactions can be explained in detail with an exploratory approach.

The aim of this study emerged in two stages, starting with curiosity about inspiring social studies teachers' inspirational process. The study thus asks the tentative question: What are inspiring social studies teachers' processes of inspiration? Secondly, the emergence in the research process of the core category of the concept of moral identity and its reflections on education shaped the research purpose and questions. The aim of this research is to explore the moral identity profiles of inspiring social studies teachers in terms of their profiles structures, dimensions, and sub-dimensions. This research is carried out using systematic grounded theory and its problem statement has formed as follows: What is the structure of the moral identity profiles of inspiring social studies teachers?

2. Method

2.1. Research model

This research is a theory-building study conducted using the systematic grounded theory, a qualitative research method, developed by Glaser and Strauss (2006). According to them, grounded theory can be defined as a research method that attempts to discover theory from a rich source of data. Grounded theory provides systematic and flexible guidelines for data collection and analysis to create theory from qualitative data. Grounded theory begins with inductive data, employs constant comparative methods between data and analysis through iterative strategies, and utilizes flexibility tailored to the research problem (Charmaz, 2015). The focus of the study involves the actions and interactions in the data, as well as the meaning embedded in the process due to the nature of grounded theory. Also, the study has not begun with theoretical acceptance (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2014).

2.2. Study group

2.2.1. Determination of the study group

In grounded theory research, the study group is determined using theoretical sampling, a purposeful sampling method. To determine the basic qualifications of the teachers who'll be participating in the theoretical sample, some memories and biographies written about the teachers were examined. In addition, the question "What comes to your mind when I say, 'A good teacher … ?" was asked to some parents and academicians, with their answers being noted. The identified characteristics enabled a basic criterion to be determined in the theoretical sampling. Following these criteria, participant announcements were made on social media. In addition, members from the media, academicians, teachers, and union members around the researcher were informed about the research and asked to recommend teachers who possess the specified qualifications.

This research places importance on the teachers participating in the study to have some common qualities of inspiring teachers. The number of participants was determined in accordance with the theoretical saturation. Data were repeated for the first four participants. After six participants, temporary categories began to form (Details are explained in the analysis section). Due to the theoretical saturation being reached

and theoretical completion becoming clear at 14 people, the number of participants ended here.

2.2.2. Characteristics of the study group

The study group is comprised of 14 social studies teachers working in different schools across Türkiye. Each of these teachers has managed to take teaching beyond teaching, conquered the hearts of their students, and inspired very important positive transformations in their lives. Table 1 provides demographic information about the teachers.

Table 1 provides information about some characteristics of the teachers in the research study group such as gender, professional experience, age, city, education, and family status, as well as the participant code and the number of interviews.

2.3. Data collection

2.3.1. Interview form

The focus with grounded theory is on obtaining the meaning embedded in experiences while deciding on the study's data collection tools. This study's main data collection tool is the interview form the researcher developed using the relevant scientific criteria. The form consists of 24 open-ended questions aimed at recognizing teachers in terms of their material and moral integrity. The questions on the form consist of the themes of psychological structure and characteristics, immediate environment, professional experiences, goals, and ideals.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face (for Istanbul) and online (for other cities) by appointment by the responsible researcher, twice for each participant. The aim of the interview is to get to know the teacher in a versatile and in-depth manner. For this reason, many open-ended questions were included in the interview form: "What can you say about your features that make you who you are?", "What are the characteristics that people around you talk about in common about you?", "What kind of environment would I encounter if I attended your classes as an observer?", "How do you resolve a dramatic situation that has arisen in your classroom?", "Can you tell us about a time when you were influential in the behavioral transformation of your students?"

2.3.2. Supplementary data collection tools

The study also uses some complementary data collection tools such as composition works, observation notes, research notes, and memos.

Composition: We asked a group of pre-service teachers via composition paper consisting of one question: "Please, write about all the positive and negative aspects of a teacher who was very influential in your life with your experiences." We aimed to understand whether the subject is worth studying or not. It was a preliminary study, not relevant to the main focus of this work.

Observations: Observations in the study were carried out by the responsible researcher in schools in Istanbul, with permission from the school administration. One hour before the interview, the researcher went to the school and freely observed the teachers' interactions in their natural environment. In addition, the researcher observed and noted the sincerity, behavior, gestures, and facial expressions of the teachers during the interview.

Research Notes: The responsible researcher also kept research notes throughout the entire research process. These notes are about the participants' behavior during the invitation and after the interview, their work consistent or inconsistent with their narrative, their feedback, and also about difficulties encountered during the study, notes for the next interviews, etc.

Memos: In addition, the researcher wrote memos as explanatory, guiding, formative, and supplementary additional data source at each stage of the continuous comparative analysis.

2.4. Procedures

2.4.1. The role of the researcher

In this research, the researcher is active as an observer, interviewer, data collection tool developer, and theorist. In the continuous comparative analysis process, which has been preferred due to grounded theory being used as the method, the researcher worked in interaction with the participants during the analysis process, which continued up to the data collection and theory construction. As this is the case, the researcher took certain precautions to overcome subjectivity issues.

Table 1
Characteristics of the teachers constituting the study group.

Number of Interviews	Participant Code	Gender	Professional Experience	Age	Interviewed City	Education	Family Information
Interview 1 Interview 2	P1	Male	18	42	İstanbul	Master's Degree	Married 2 Children
Interview 3 Interview 4	P2	Male	17	40	İstanbul	Master's Degree	Married 2 Children
Interview 5 Interview 6	P3	Female	16	42	İstanbul	Bachelor's Degree	Married 2 Children
Interview 7 Interview 8	P4	Female	10	55	İstanbul	Bachelor's Degree	Single
Interview 9 Interview 10	P5	Male	16	43	Malatya	Bachelor's Degree	Not Specified
Interview 11 Interview 12	P6	Male	8	30	Manisa	Doctoral Degree	Married 1 Child
Interview 13 Interview 14	P7	Male	15	35	Nevşehir	Bachelor's Degree	Married 2 Children
Interview 15 Interview 16	P8	Female	20	41	İstanbul	Master's Degree	Married 2 Children
Interview 17 Interview 18	P9	Female	6	27	Antalya Gazipaşa	Bachelor's Degree	Married 1 Child
Interview 19 Interview 20	P10	Female	20	40	Antalya	Bachelor's Degree	Married 3 Children
Interview 21 Interview 22	P11	Male	5	28	Şanlıurfa	Doctoral Degree	Married 1 Child
Interview 23 Interview 24	P12	Female	26	52	İstanbul	Master's Degree	Married 3 Children
Interview 25 Interview 26	P13	Female	11	33	Siirt	Master's Degree	Married 2 Children
Interview 27 Interview 28	P14	Male	13	36	İstanbul	Master's Degree	Married 2 Children

2.4.2. Stages of research process

The study's research was carried out in the following stages: Exploring the problem in nature, research design, application, and report writing. In the first phase of the research, The responsible researcher discovered the phenomenon of differences in behaviors and willingness of some of the teachers she met at the schools she was involved in. A research idea was formed on this subject (Preliminary studies were explained in the sub-title of composition in the data collection section). The second stage involved the design of the research. This stage also includes determining the method, theoretical sampling, determining the criterion, announcing the participants, and participant transportation. The third stage is a complex process that involves the preliminary interviews with the participants, interview preparations, data collection, and continuous comparative analysis that started with the first interview; the formation of temporary categories; access to new data sources; theoretical saturation; formation of the theory, and the detailed literature review. This stage progressed in the form of a network of relations as opposed to hierarchically. The last stage involves the writing of the research report.

2.4.3. Measures to enhance the quality of research

For the purpose of enhancing the scientific quality of the research, the following measures have been taken in regard to credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability. The scientific quality of the study was ensured by taking into account the criteria of the systematic grounded theory approach, accompanied by information from certain sources (Creswell, 2015). Multiple data collection methods (triangulation/variation) have also been used. An objective attitude was adopted and attention paid to theoretical sensitivity. In the observed schools, notes were taken to describe the environment and teachers as well as explanatory notes for the research process. During the interviews, emotional reactions and facial expressions showed the candidness of their answers. Before proceeding to the next question during the interview, the participants' statements were summarized and their confirmation was obtained with questions such as "Is this what you mean?" and "Did I understand correctly?" The concepts revealed in the analysis process were formed from the data. Interview data as well as observation and research notes were constantly compared in terms of confirming each other. The resulting theoretical items were discussed with academicians who are experts in their fields. After forming the theory, a detailed literature review was made. The dimensions and sub-dimensions of the theory have been explained in detail and supported by direct quotations. Detailed information was given about all components and processes of the research.

2.5. Data analysis

The research data have been analyzed using the continuous comparative analysis technique. Before the analysis, the participating teachers were coded as P1, P2, up to P14. Each interview was audio recorded with the participants' permission and then transcribed. The coding process for these texts began using the program MAXQDA 12. The analysis process started coding the data line-by-line. The data collection and analysis process was carried out together. The study applied the analysis stages of open coding, axis coding, and selective coding as formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

In the open coding phase, the data began to repeat around many concepts such as motivation, love of the profession, empathy, recognition and guidance, inspiration, being a model, taking responsibility, cheerful temperament, authority, effective communication, values, experience, active training, problem solving, determination, cooperation, idealization, etc., and the data set reached saturation point. At the end of the analysis, many concepts that could be temporary categories began to appear such as self-describing traits, beliefs, skills, values, love of the profession, ideals, environmental influences, personality, temperament, etc.

In axis coding, conditions, results, and actions were questioned between the concepts, and their connection with the sub-dimensions of the categories was established. For example, many sub-dimensions, which express the passion of the teacher for his profession, such as devotion to the profession, continuing his profession with love, lifelong learning effort, and being an idealist in his profession, etc. were found to be associated with the "love of profession" category. At the end of these analyzes, 13 categories and sub-dimensions specified in this study emerged. The resulting theoretical items were discussed with academicians from different disciplines such as psychology, social psychology, international relations, social studies, and educational sciences.

In the selective coding stage, the concept of moral identity as the core category explained the theory as the concept that brings other categories together. Categories such as self traits, personality characteristics, ideals and goals, referenced worldview and belief, social influences, past experiences, and educational approach were found to be associated with teachers' moral identity structures. Thus, the main subject was shaped in this final analysis phase, and moral identity theory became the focus of the research. At the end of this stage, the literature was examined in detail in attempt to connect with the theory. Upon completion of the analysis, 8065 codes, 13 categories, and 71 subcategories were obtained structured around the core category of moral identity and contributed to explaining the theory. Information related to this subject is given in Table 2.

3. Results and findings

This section involves the results and findings from the research question, "What kind of structure does the moral identity profiles of inspiring social studies teachers consist of?" In this context, findings are included regarding the dimensions, sub-dimensions, and functioning of the structure that creates the moral identity profiles of inspiring social studies teachers. Inspiring social studies teachers will be referred to as ITEs.

3.1. Moral identity profile of inspiring teachers

Fig. 1 shows the theoretical items of the theory that formed as a result of the analyses, namely the structure that constitutes the moral identity profile of the ITEs.

Examining the information in Fig. 1 shows the basic structure of the theory obtained in the study. The core category of the theory is moral identity. The categories around it explain the structure of moral identity. Accordingly, ITEs' moral identity involves self traits, referenced worldview and beliefs, personality traits, ideals and goals, past experiences, social influences, and educational approach.

3.1.1. The dimension of self traits

Self traits constitute a very important dimension of moral identity. The self, relational self, and temporal self have been discovered within the scope of the ITEs' self traits.

3.1.1.1. Self traits. ITE's self traits consist of the sub-dimensions of self-perception, self-esteem, self-design, self-control, self-evaluation, and self-consistency. Among the ITEs' identified relational self traits are the sub-dimensions of corporate vision, multiple social roles, adoption, and idealization. Two basic dimensions have been identified in the ITEs' temporal self traits: goals, change and experience.

Based on the ITEs' self-perceptions, the intensity of values and competencies draws attention. According to Hardy and Carlo (2011), a moral identity can be formed when an individual's self is structured with moral values. Values have been determined to be heavily involved in the ITEs' self-perceptions. These values are given in Fig. 2.

When examining Fig. 2, the teachers are seen to have a values-intensive sense of self. Justice, sacrifice, humility, responsibility,

Table 2
Data obtained as a result of continuous comparative analysis.

Number of Codes	Number of Subcategories	Number of Categories	Core Category	Influencers 7 Categories	Affected 6 Categories [a]
8065	71	13	Moral Identity	Self traits	Attracting interest and participation in the lesson
				Personality characteristics	
					Educational activities outside the classroom
				Referenced worldview and belief	
					Improving educational conditions
				Ideals and goals	
					Obstacles encountered in education
				Educational approach	
					Behavior transformation process
				Past experiences	
					Workload
				Social influences	

[a] These 6 categories explain the aspect of the moral identity of inspiring teachers reflected in the educational process. Therefore, its details are not included in the findings section of this article.
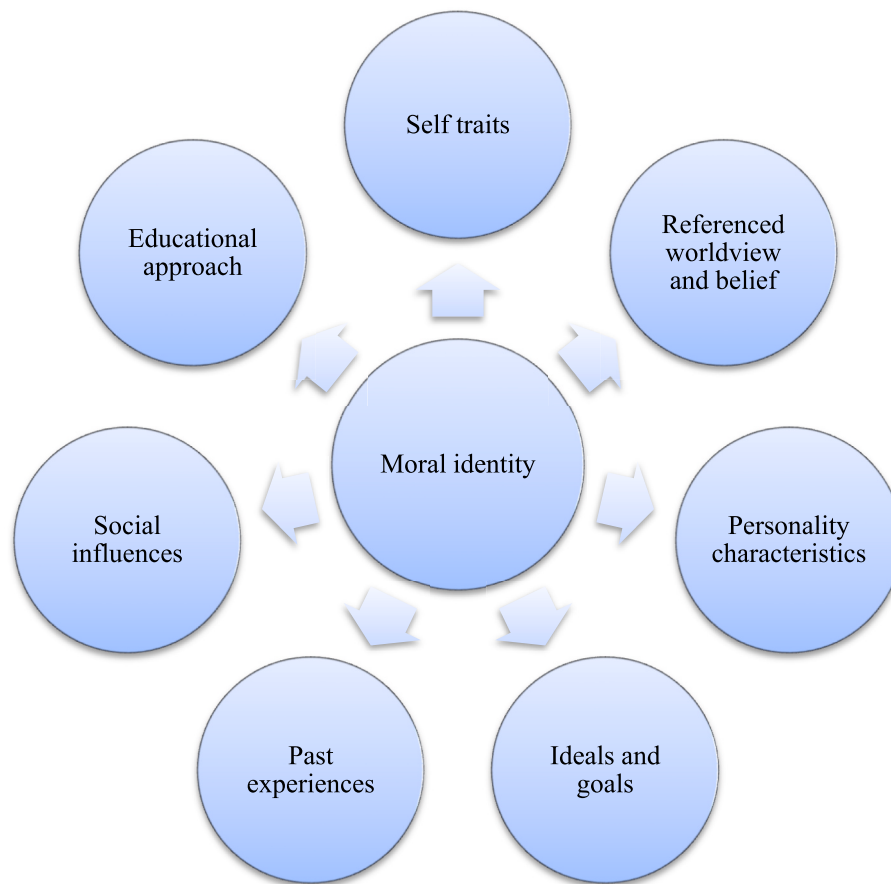

Fig. 1. Moral identity profile structure of inspiring social studies teachers.

confidence, honesty, struggle, helpfulness, benevolence, respect, diligence, courage, equality, thankfulness, patriotism, tolerance, friendship, mercifulness, temperance, patience, sensitivity to cultural heritage, compassion, love, loyalty, ethical stance, giving importance to family unity, hospitality, scientificity, altruism, love of service, not being wasteful, sensitivity to the natural environment, frugality, peace, and cleanliness are the values the teachers defined themselves with which the people around the ITEs agree. Justice, sacrifice, humility, responsibility, confidence, honesty, struggle, and helpfulness are seen to be predominant among these values.

ITE prefers to be fair in their discourse, behaviors, and decisions and to defend justice in every situation. P2 show his fair approach to his students: "Negatives are everywhere. They bind individuals individually. If a ship has10 criminals and one innocent, you cannot sink that ship. Even if nine are guilty, there is only one innocent. It's like this … No matter what, I have to think about the innocents there [among the students]. This is how I try to work." P13 said, "I am making a decision as I believe it will be a fair choice". All of the teachers make sacrifices for students on many issues such as time, effort and money. P6: "I have spare time for my students.", "I give free courses." Other values of the participants, also, guide their behaviors.

Another important sub-dimension in ITEs' self-perception is competencies. Competencies are gathered under two basic categories: individual and professional competencies. Individual competencies are
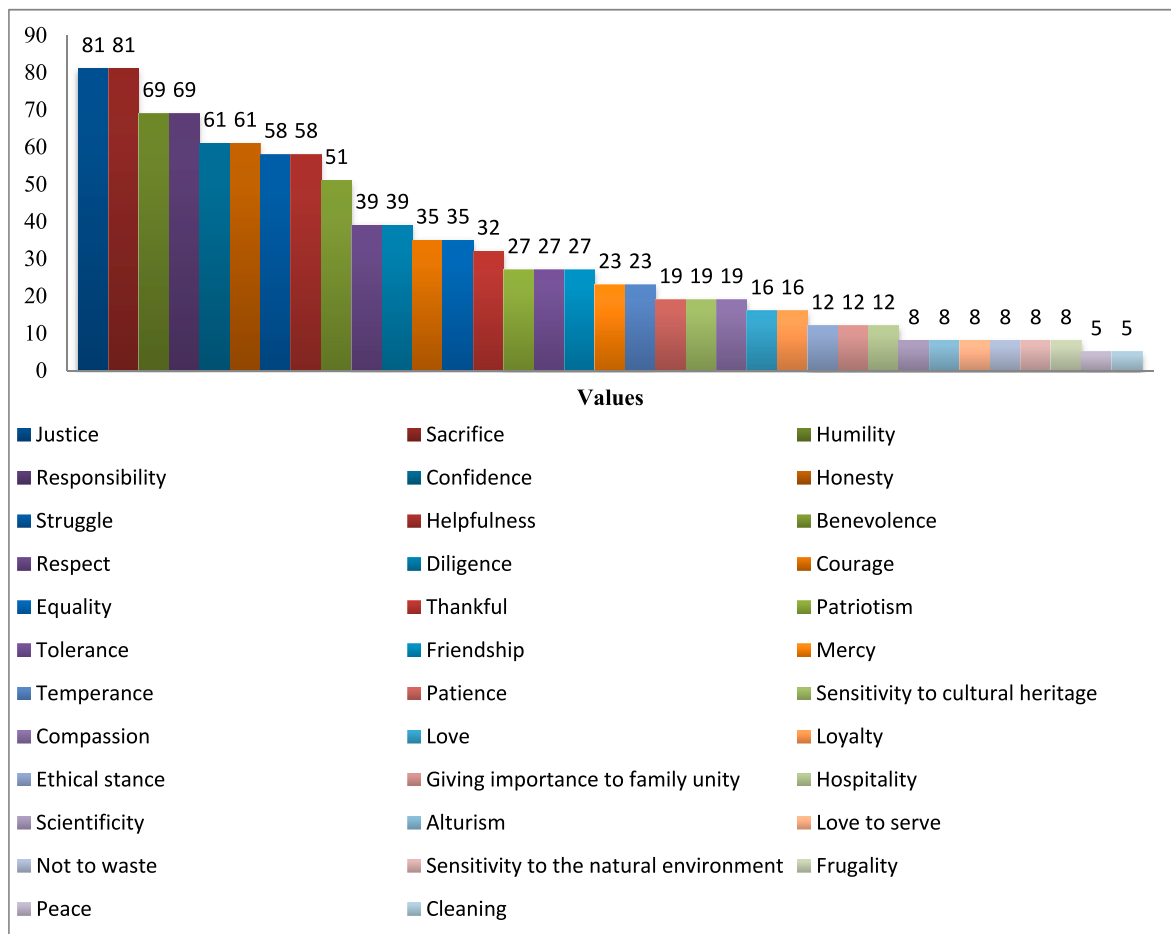
Fig. 2. Graph of the values regarding inspiring social studies teachers' self-perceptions.

found as having effective communication, determination, perseverance, self-confidence, time management, planning, and high achievement and being investigative and solution-oriented. Which of these competencies have greater weight has been examined, with Fig. 3 showing the order of importance for these competencies in the inspiration process.

When examining Fig. 3, ITEs' most prominent feature in the individual competence dimension has been determined as effective communication. This can be said to be followed by determination,

solution-oriented, perseverance, self-confidence, time management, planning, investigative, and high achievement. One remarkable finding is that high achievement appears as the least effective feature. Due to their profession, teachers are in intense communication with their students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and individuals who work in society's educational institutions. Effective communication skills play a central role in teachers' behaviors by influencing the way they present their moral identity. P3, P9, P11, P12 said, "I think I can approach the
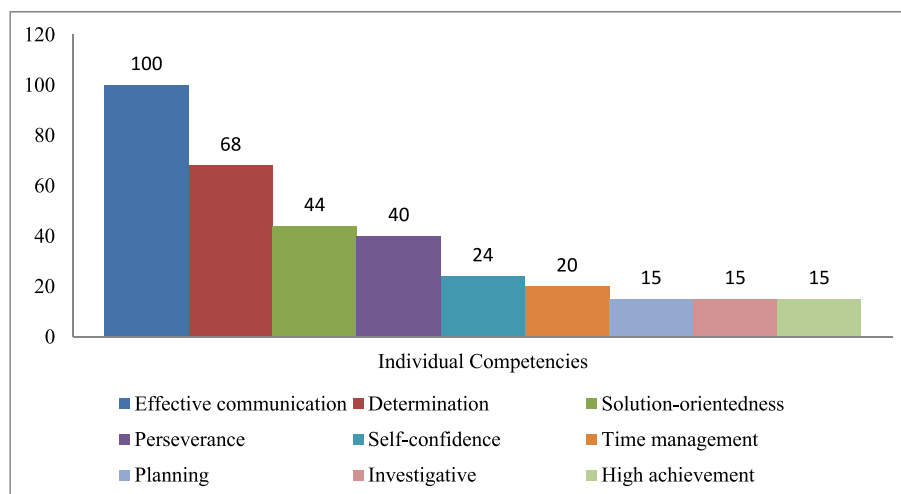

Fig. 3. Individual competencies chart of inspiring social studies teachers.

person in front of me with understanding by empathizing." P8 said, "It is very important for me to be frank and sincere."

Professional expertise, moderate authority, guidance, cooperation, consultation, and crisis management have been found among the ITEs' professional competencies identified under the dimension of self-perception. ITEs demonstrate professional expertise in their student approaches, knowledge, competence, professional approach, and productivity. P9, P5, P8: "I am aware that every student has a different character and capacity." P4, P7, P8, P10, P12: "I am caring and patient in matters related to the personality development of my students." P1: "In my lessons, I use different methods for children who learn in different ways." P4: "I choose my words meticulously." P11, P5, P4, P8, P7, P6, P1, P13, P14: "I try not to reflect my personal problems in my lessons" P13: "I touched life!" P14: "I want to start writing a book of my dreams as soon as possible." They also have a moderate authoritarian stance. Because of this, these teachers can take charge in class, and natural respect for them develops. All teachers generally formed this stance with their "sweet-hard" and "principled" behaviors. P12: "But do I shout a lot? No, I'm not shouting. Do I scold too much? No, I don't scold. But I make a rule. Then I follow those rules." P10: "Because, as I say, I don't bend too much about my principles and values."

Self-esteem is another ITE self-feature and consists of two categories: professional status and love of the profession. The ITEs stated teachings' economic status in society to not be at the desired level, and although teaching has lost some respect in society, it is still considered a sacred profession. The professional status has affected teachers' self-esteem. P2: "When I told my relatives for the first time that I was eligible for university entrance, a relative who was a shepherd in the village said to me: 'to be a teacher? Never mind!' That was my first disappointment." They continue to teach in an idealistic, dedicated, responsible, and professionally motivated manner. As a result of all these, ITEs maintain self-esteem by saying "I am glad I am a teacher!" They have a predisposition to teaching and a desire for lifelong learning. The fact that these teachers feel productive, beneficial, efficient, happy, proud, satisfied, and successful indicates that they have achieved professional satisfaction. P4, P8, P10, P14: "As I inspire students and receive positive feedback from my students and parents, I am renewed. I am once again passionate about my profession." All the teachers indicated their main source of motivation to be their love of students and showed this by saying, "I forget everything outside when I enter the classroom because of the love for my students."

Another self-trait of the ITEs is self-design. Self-design consists of the sub-dimensions of high awareness and ideal teacher perception. ITEs are highly aware of human behaviors. Their criticism of the teachers' room and their colleagues' behaviors demonstrates their high awareness of human behaviors. ITEs attribute dignity and sanctity to teaching. According to ITEs, an ideal teacher should have the vision of the profession, be open to lifelong learning, touch lives, and have positive moral values. Also, the ideal teacher should be both an effective master of education and a positive role model when touching human life. According to ITEs, teachers should be "virtuous", "lifelong learners", "undertaking the vision of the profession", and "masters of education". P1, P5, P7, P10: "I think a good teacher should be moral and behave in accordance with ethical principles." P10: "This is a process … Teaching never ends."P1, P4, P5, P6, P8, P14: "Teaching is a sacred profession." P6, P1, P8, P10: "The teacher is a role model for the student in his/her behavior."

Other self traits ITEs should have are self-control and self-evaluation. Self-control consists of the sub-dimensions of self-awareness and self-control. Self-evaluation consists of the sub-dimensions of self-criticism, openness to criticism, empathy, and conscience. For ITEs, self-evaluation starts with self-criticism and self-control starts with self-awareness. ITEs evaluate the self based on conscience and attaches importance to ease of conscience. P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P13, P14: "I take into account other people's criticism of me because they are like our mirror." P2, P3, P8, P9, P10, P12: "When I evaluate my behavior, I listen

to my conscience". P6, P8, P10, P12: "At the end of the day, I should be able to say with a clear conscience that I put my head on the pillow." As a result of the analyzes, it was determined that all of the teachers were aware of many features about themselves, questioned themselves and provided control over their behaviors. Finally, one of ITEs' core self traits is self-consistency. Teachers take a consistent stance with their discourse and actions and tend to behave naturally. P8 emphasized the effect acting consistently has on human personality. P8 said, "I like to act as I am." P10 said, "Tell them differently, act differently elsewhere, I don't do things like that." P12: "People can say, one thing but do another. But morality is not like that. There is no hypocrite in morality.", "I behave in the same way with my students as I am at home." P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P14: "I apply what I say in my own life."

3.1.1.2. Relational self traits. Relational self traits arise from the individual's social relationships. Teachers have intense interactions and communications with their students, parents, administrators, colleagues, and authorities of the social institutions with whom they establish contact for educational purposes. In these intense interactions and communications, teachers are affected by the character traits and behaviors of the people they encounter, the positive or negative feedback they receive, and the results of their own behaviors. This effect shapes self traits and activates certain psychological mechanisms such as self-evaluation. ITEs relational self traits have the sub-dimensions of the vision of the institution, multiple social roles, adoption, and idealization.

The vision of the institution encompasses all the ideals the institution has reflected on teachers based on school climate; it encompasses the programs and trainings that motivate teachers, adds value to them, and encourages them. P14 states that, in the background of his behaviors, the vision of the institution he works for is very effective as it values people. P14 said, "The vision of the institution I work with that values people is also effective in my behavior." In addition, the multiple social roles teachers undertake in the family and school, their responsibilities toward these roles, and the feedback they receive about fulfilling their responsibilities affect ITEs' self traits that arise from their bilateral relations. P8 explained her multiple roles by saying, "I take care of children; I teach and have made an academic career." ITEs embrace and defend the school, the student, and the educational goals. Teachers stated adopting their students as their children, with marital status and having children affecting this. All of the teachers said that "I adopt my students as my own child". Especially after becoming a mother or father, this tendency becomes stronger. P12 said, "I always saw myself as a teacher who understood students very well, but after I became a mother, I started to put them in my own child's place." Teachers who have sustainable communications with their students have idealized experiences that consist of the sub-dimensions of being remembered, loved, and respected and being role models. All of the teachers gave examples of being "role models" to their students among their experiences. All of P9's female students adopted her hairstyle and clothing style. P9: "One day, when I came to the classroom, all of my female students had hair like mine."

3.1.1.3. Temporal self traits. Temporal self traits are related to the self traits expressed in terms of the past, present, and future. Traits targeted five years ago or five years later may differ or resemble current traits. Two basic dimensions have been identified for ITEs' temporal self traits: goals, change and experience. Goals consist of the sub-dimensions of short-term goals, educational goals, and individual goals. Change and experience consist of the sub-dimensions of improving experience, changing in line with negative effects, changing in line with neutral effects, changing in line with positive effects, and not changing.

ITEs usually have annual short-term educational and individual goals. Scientific studies, projects, publishing a newspaper, writing a book, traveling, attending a cooking class, academic career, etc. are

among statements. ITEs learn from each experience. All ITEs said, "I learn from my past experiences." P8: "I definitely see the mistakes I made before. Now I try not to make those mistakes." Experiences often bring change. For ITEs, experiences contribute to getting to know people better, gaining foresight, having different perspectives, gaining work experience, and obtaining professional knowledge and professionalization. All of the teachers stated that they have experience from year to year with the passing of time. P4 said, that the experiences she gained over time contributed to her work experience and professional knowledge. P5: "I feel a little more experienced and competent day by day." As for gaining experience, ITEs experience positive changes such as moderation in responses, increased determination, combativeness, plan flexibility, love of their profession, intellectual flexibility, awareness, self-acceptance, patience, time management, positivity, selective friendships, realistic idealism, specialization in communication, gaining tolerance, anger control, mercifulness, avoiding prejudice, and character maturity. P3: "I gained different perspectives over time. I know people better. I gain foresight ….I see one stage ahead." ITEs also experiences negative changes such as less conversations with colleagues, abandoning their academic career, eroding their idealism, increased workload, professional fatigue, and loss of energy. ITEs also experience neutral effects such as goal prioritization and changing values. ITEs' determination, continuity of energy, personality, perseverance, willingness, and idealism do not change over time. P13: "My perseverance and desire remain the same, but the difference in experience is of course great".

3.1.2. The dimension of referenced worldview and beliefs

One of the dimensions identified for ITEs' moral identity profile is referenced worldview and beliefs. This dimension is divided into two sub-dimensions: ideology and religion. Ideology has the sub-dimensions of socialism, liberalism, nationalism, conservatism, and political Islam. The participants with socialist ideologies have been determined to be left-of-center social democrats, those with conservative ideologies to be right-of-center conservatives, some of whom are also nationalist (idealist), and those with nationalist ideologies to be extreme-right Kemalists. Some participants refer to religion rather than their ideology in regard to their behaviors. P11: "When I do good things, I do it for Allah.", "So, while doing a kind of goodness, I also include my religious beliefs". Those who refer to religion are gathered under the dimensions of Islam-Alevi and Islam-Sunni. Ideology and religion are used by some together. A centre-right nationalist conservative can also refer to religion. P1: "I said that I am a nationalist. I think it's important to be able to push yourself back. Why? for the homeland."Beliefs and ideologies feed ITEs' self; shape their actions, discourse, and thought structure; and affect their moral identity. P10: "I am a person committed to the republic and reforms" P12: I said, "My aim is to raise a good person, teacher." While appearing to involve quite a variety of different ideologies and beliefs, ITEs' common goal is to raise a good person. A very remarkable issue is the common goal of everyone, regardless of their belief system, in this context, to raise "good people".

3.1.3. The dimension of personality traits

Another important dimension affecting ITEs' moral identity is personality traits. These directly affect ITEs' moral identity and emerge in their self-perceptions, their social relations, and their behaviors in the education and training process. ITEs have been identified as having the following personality traits: calm, leader-like, gentle, cool-headed, cheerful, extroverted, curious, detail-oriented, sharp memory, emotional, perfectionist, and harmonious. Emotional personality traits have the sub-dimensions of emotional sensitivity and emotional depth. When facing negative events, ITEs seek harmonious ways of working instead of complaining; they maintain their calmness and composure. Their leader-like, curious, detail-oriented, sharp memory, perfectionist, cheerful, extroverted, and highly emotional personality traits are also reflected in their expressions and behaviors.

Some of the expressions reflecting the personality traits of ITE are as follows: P3, P14: "… I approach calmly and patiently." P13: "I generally have a harmonious structure." P14: "I think I have leadership qualities." P11: "They say you are a curious person." P6, P8, P11: "I want to do the best and the most perfect in what I do", P6: "It is said that I draw attention by being very active in my social circle." The personality traits of the participants were also significantly reflected in their behavior during the interview.

3.1.4. The dimension of ideals and goals

The dimension of ITEs' ideals and goals consists of the ideal of raising people and has the sub-dimensions of nurturing beliefs, the intended type of person, and identity construction. ITEs have the ideal of raising people, which is fed by their intentions such as valuing people, winning over students, doing good, and being useful. ITEs aim to ensure the students they educate become active citizens and useful individuals. By initiating the identity building process for this purpose, ITEs desire to develop many skills such as empathy, communication, self-confidence, and willpower as well as many values such as historical awareness, respect, compassion, fear of God (love of Allah), responsibility, courage, justice, gratitude, honesty, and hard work. By planning to increase their students' academic success, knowledge, and status, ITEs also want to be effective at building their students' personalities, preparing them for life, and achieving positive behavioral transformation. All ITEs said, "I target to raise individuals who are beneficial to society and people" P4: "I think the purpose of people being in the world is to be useful to people." P7: "It doesn't matter if others appreciate it, I just try to be useful to people." P5, P12: "For the sake of Allah, I try to move people towards the better" P2, P4, P5, P8, P9, P11: "I want to win every student my hands touch."

3.1.5. The dimension of past experiences

ITEs' moral identity is influenced by their past experiences. The dimension of past experiences has the sub-dimensions of culture, family, teacher, health, victimization, and career choice. The sub-dimension of family involves economic situation, parents' occupations, family problems, family education, mother's attitude, and father figure. Reasons such as expecting to be appointed, perceiving the profession as easy, ideal from youth, the close environment as a teacher, expectations from the social environment, and choosing based on the university entrance exam score are effective on ITEs' choice of profession. Expecting to be appointed is related to the profession's employment conditions, fear of not being appointed, and living conditions. Perceiving the profession as easy is based on the perception of teaching as a female profession (i.e., gender factor). Adopting teaching as an ideal from youth includes interest in the field, human-centered professional interest, and the idea of being a teacher. Sometimes a close teaching environment is effective in choosing teaching, and ITEs achieve this by guiding, being a role model, and having the opposite effect. Alongside all these, the most basic factor for ITEs' career choice is having an adequate university entrance score.

Some of the past experiences of teachers that affect their moral identity are as follows: P11: "I experienced life difficulties. So, I can understand people." P13: "I used to play teaching when I was little because it was my dream job." P4,P12: "A teacher I admired was my role model." P7 and P8: "I was impressed by the expectation of my social environment." P7: "The village headman used to say to me that you would be a great man. It has been very effective on me." P1: "What I learned in my family shaped the sense of responsibility in my character." P2: "I think the habits that I learned from my father are the basis of my distant approach."

3.1.6. The dimension of social influences

Another dimension affecting ITEs' moral identity is the dimension of social influences. Social influences reveal the self as well as construct teachers' self traits. ITEs' attitudes and behaviors toward social effects are concrete clues of their moral identity structure. ITEs encounter social

influences caused by effects from the school environment, gender, and society. The environment in which the school is located influences issues such as financial opportunities in education, student behavior profiles, approach toward the teacher, educational cooperation from the family, and communications with colleagues. Gender is effective on issues such as disrupting classroom discipline, respect for the teacher, and grasping things quickly. Issues such as girls' not being educated, the country's developmental level, extended family structure, having parents who farm or do animal husbandry, communication ties between parents, the popularity of positive science in society (social sciences are unpopular), terrorism, and social dynamics are gathered under the dimension of social impact. Of these sub-dimensions, social dynamics are divided into the categories of technology addiction, harmful habits in the school environment, intergenerational conflict, and social change. Social change is related to student profiles, the education system, educational technologies and methods, fewer devoted teachers, and corrupted social values.

Social influences affect the moral identity structure of the teacher, and besides, teacher behaviors in the face of social influences provide clues that reveal their moral identity characteristics. P9: "I work at the village school. I try to perform more so that my school is less affected by the impossibilities in the village." P10: "Families in slums are not interested in education. So we take more responsibility." P8, P9, P13: "Some people send their children to school with many sacrifices, but some families do not want them to be educated because they see them as a work force. That's why I tried to persuade families many times."

3.1.7. The dimension of educational approach

Another important dimension in ITEs moral identity is the educational approach. Alongside the other dimensions, ITEs' moral identity is also nurtured by the educational approach. This dimension has the sub-dimensions of expert teachers, active students, morality-focused education, valuing the individual, and education-priority teaching. As a result of the analyses, the findings regarding ITEs' educational approaches can be interpreted as resembling an eclectic structure of various educational philosophies where ITEs put the teacher and student at the center of education. They focus on education rather than teaching and often emphasize moral education. According to the ITEs, they prioritize personality integrity, character education, and moral qualities where the teacher should act like a teacher in education and the student should act like a student. Although there are many clues about ITEs' educational approach, some of them can be explained as follows: ITEs: "The moral development of my students is much more important to me than just teaching.", "Of course I am an expert on the subject, but I pay attention to the fact that my lessons are interesting.", "Morality is at the heart of my education." P5, P7, P9, P13 educate students under very difficult conditions. All their efforts are to ensure that students learn in a better learning environment, using adequate educational materials. That is, they aim to create equality of opportunity in education. In both cases, teachers find the necessary resources and support. As a result, teachers place morality at the center of education. They adopt an understanding of education in which the teacher is an expert and the student is active.

3.2. The functioning model of moral identity

As a result, the study's analyses have determined a harmonious functioning to exist within ITEs' moral identity structure. Fig. 4 provides the model showing this operation.

As seen in Fig. 4, the source of motivation for ITEs' behaviors is moral identity and is nurtured by the individual's personality traits. Self traits are affected by the categories of past experiences, personality traits, referenced worldview and beliefs, ideals and goals, educational approach, and social influences. The self is a central concept in moral identity. The other processes shown in Fig. 4 operate within the framework of the self's relationship with moral identity (Ersoy, 2018). In summary, the structural working of our theory, which we support with citations in all results and findings section, can be explained in this way.

4. Discussion

This research was carried out using the systematic grounded theory approach with the aim of exploring inspiring social studies teachers (ITEs) moral identity profiles. This is the first study to explain the moral identity structure of ITEs. Previous studies have separately discussed ITEs and the issues of moral identity. Various biographies and memoirs (Arnau, 2000; Douglas, 1999; King, 2004) as well as scientific studies are found about some of the traits of effective teachers (Barr, 1958; Derounian, 2017; Ibad, 2018; Külekçi, 2018; Lupascua et al., 2014). Studies on moral identity are generally about topics such as what moral identity is, how it develops, and its motivating effect on human behaviors (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Grover, 2014; Jeong & Han, 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Kekes, 2001, pp. 110–135; van Gils & Horton, 2019).

Unlike existing studies in the literature, the current study explains ITEs' identity structure of moral identity overall through its dimensions
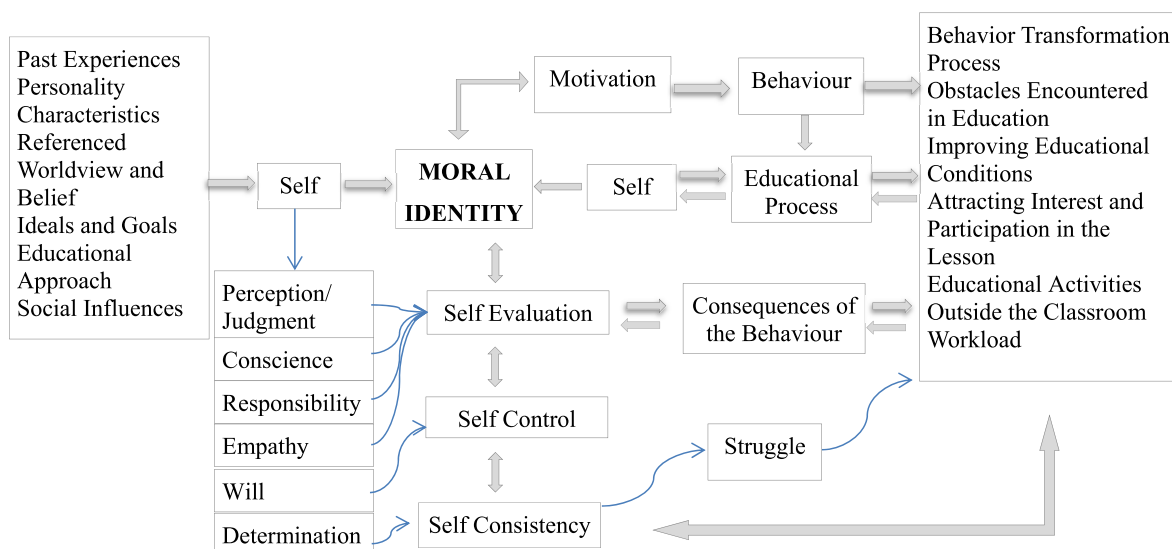

Fig. 4. Moral identity functioning model of inspiring social studies teachers.

and sub-dimensions. Reimer (2016) explained moral identity in connection with categories such as self, personality, social impact, moral values and goals, and conscious feelings. Both Reimer's and the current study have revealed moral identity to have multidimensional aspects such as psychology, emotion, temperament, belief, social environment, experience, and society. This situation also confirms Blasi (1999), who discussed whether the source of moral identity is emotion and stated emotions alone to be unable to inspire moral identity. At the same time, the current study's findings pointing toward the social and cultural aspects of moral identity support studies that have drawn attention to the influence of culture and beliefs, as well as the social environment (e.g., family, society, school, group of friends) on moral identity (Atkins et al., 2004; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Tappan, 2006).

This study has found self traits to be the central category of moral identity. Moral identity operates interactively with processes such as self, self-evaluation, self-control, and self-consistency. Blasi's (2004) self-model, which supports the self-centered moral identity approach, includes the processes of "mastery and self-control, ownership and appropriation, conscious self-definition, internal organization, and coherence" (p.342).

The characteristics that define ITEs' moral identity are integrated with self traits. As the importance of the features defining moral identity in the self increases, the tendency a person has toward moral cognition and moral behavior increases (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Studies have also determined self alongside ITEs' perceptions toward values to affect human behaviors and motivate the intention behind behaviors. Therefore, enhanced positive self-perception is an important characteristic of qualified teachers (Sripai & Wanawan, 2018; Yeung et al., 2014; Zlatković et al., 2012).

Positive values are an important characteristic of inspiring teachers because teachers' values affect their students, colleagues, and society. With this influence, values lie at the base of the behaviors that will shape teachers' personal and professional existence. This is supported by the many studies that have explained the importance of teachers' values (Brady, 2011; Mahmood et al., 2017; Sunley & Locke, 2010; Tirri, 2010). When examining the structure of self-identity in detail, the values under the dimension of self-perception are seen to be intense. Many values that make up positive self traits shape moral identity and meet the positive values teachers expect.

According to this study, ITEs feel valued because they perform a sacred and respected profession. Love of profession feeds ITE's self-esteem. The positive effects of improved self-esteem on many issues such as life satisfaction, burnout, values, and altruistic behaviors has been supported by some research (Aðalsteinsson et al., 2014; Baumeister et al., 2003; Dilmaç & Ekşi, 2012; Mbuva, 2016; Tagay, 2015; Tunde & Oladipo, 2013). In addition, ITEs have developed a high awareness of the environment and have ideal teaching perceptions. ITEs' motivation to reach the ideal in self-design is internal. Positive self-design supports the development of positive qualities (Chapman, 2010; De Caroli & Sagone, 2012).

The categories of consistent discourse and actions and honest behavior have been identified under the sub-dimension of self-consistency in ITEs' self traits. Consistent behavior that surrounding people can predict is based on the assumption of self-consistency theories stating, "People want other people to behave predictably" (Swann et al., 1987, p. 881). When ITEs sense a behavior that is inconsistent with their own, they tend to evaluate themself, check their own behavior, and adjust it. According to self-consistency theory, this behavioral tendency is seen in individuals with a developed moral identity (Stone, 2003; Xu et al., 2017). In this context, the category of self-evaluation shows ITEs to act based on their conscience and to have strong willpower over their behaviors. Many studies are found to support the important evaluative role the conscience has over human behavior (Chuang, 2017; O'Shea, 2018; Schalkwijk, 2018) and the effect will power has on self-control (Henden, 2008; Inzlicht et al., 2014).

ITEs' other self traits are the traits of relational self and temporal self.

Relational self traits are the characteristics teachers have that emerge from their relations with other people. ITEs' have a highly developed relational self. ITEs who tend to adopt students, the school, and the educational goals (i.e., each element of education) and strive to fulfill every role in the educational process as well as in social and family life without neglecting these. Similar characteristics can be seen in individuals with developed relational self traits in the related literature (Chen et al., 2011; Cross et al., 2000; Du et al., 2017; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

The traits that change or are desired to change from the past to the present and again in the future are related to temporal self traits. ITEs determine their individual and educational goals for 1–5 years. They develop these goals through their experiences, and the goals undergo some changes over time. Cheng et al. (2009) found future-oriented self-design to positively affect ITEs' subjective well-being and welfare. ITEs maintain their characteristics such as energy, personality, perseverance and willingness, and idealism from day one without change. Having experienced positive changes in many subjects such as maturity, compassion, tolerance, and anger control, ITEs develop with experiences. Studies showing the characteristics of the human self to be able to change positively or negatively over time support the dimension of the temporal self (Brown et al., 2011; Hall & Fong, 2007; Rutt & Lockenhoff, 2016).

Another important element of ITEs' moral identity profile is the dimension of referenced worldview and beliefs. Beliefs in religion and ideologies affect ITEs' moral identity. This finding is supportable by many studies that have found religion and ideology to affect attitudes, behaviors, and the self (Al-Domi, 2015; Donahue & Nielsen, 2005; Salgado, 2014). However, another element in ITEs' moral identity profile is the dimension of ideals and goals. ITEs have the ideal of raising people. The content of this ideal is in line with the education system's expectations (Ministry of National Education, 1976, 2018, 2023). Some studies are found to show similarities for the ideals and goals of other teachers with ITEs' ideals and goals (Fletcher, 2001; Kozikoğlu, 2017; Kuusisto & Tirri, 2014; Parsons, 2002).

Another significant dimension of ITEs' moral identity structure is personality traits. ITEs have the personality traits of being calm, leader-like, courteous (gentle personality), cool-headed, cheerful, extroverted, curious, detail-oriented, sharp minded, emotional, perfectionist, and harmonious. Teacher personality traits like these were included in the study conducted by Hotaman (2012). A teacher's personality is as important as their field expertise, and is very essential in developing students' characters (Ahmad et al., 2017). Personality also affects their individual and organizational behaviors (Kokkinos, 2007). Also, it plays an important role in their affective life (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021), and in their teaching experiences (Ozel, 2007).

The dimension of past experiences is also an important element of ITEs' moral identity profile. Studies have shown the attitudes and behaviors of the family, the parents within the family (Augustine and Stifter, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Radu, 2018), teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward children (Blazar, 2018; Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Markelz & Taylor, 2016), and culture (Chiu et al., 2015; Cronk, 2017) to be effective on children's self, success, attitudes, and behaviors. Some of past experiences disrupted education for a short time, but the ITEs quickly compensated for these problems.

Another important element in ITEs' moral identity structure is the dimension of social influences. The environment in which the school is located affects financial opportunities, student behavior profiles, approaches toward the teacher, educational cooperation from families, and communications with colleagues. Studies provide that school environment (Hallinan, 2008; Usaini et al., 2015), school and family cooperation (Ersoy, 2013; Tóblova et al., 2020) and the social, economic, and cultural level of the family as a whole (Chevalier & Lanot, 2002; Lin & Lv, 2017; Rus, 2021) affects many issues related to education.

An ITE's personality is undoubtedly reflected in their behaviors

within the educational process and therefore in their approach to education. The dimension of educational approach is yet another significant element in ITEs' moral identity structure. ITEs' educational approach is different from that of teachers who explain education according to the educational philosophies of progressivism, existential education, reconstructionism, perennialism, and essentialism (Gezer, 2018; Yazon & Ang-Manaig, 2018). Teachers focus on students, but they achieve this not by using a constructivist or progressive approach but with an eclectic approach in which the teacher is an expert and the student actively participates in education. ITEs' educational approach prioritizes education over teaching, and morality is at the center of education.

A teacher's material and spiritual qualities are very important for realizing educational goals and raising generations equipped with positive qualities. This study's inspiring social studies teachers are ideal teachers who touch human lives, leave positive marks on their students and social environments, and act as positive role models for people. This study was carried out using systematic grounded theory with the aim of exploring the moral identity profile of inspiring social studies teachers. This study examined only inspiring teachers. The suggestion to further research, the functioning of the moral identity structure of all teachers can be investigated. The second suggestion can be made to consider these ITE characteristics as a guide in selecting, training, and employing teachers and in expanding the theory to other teaching branches.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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