
Unpacking the Complexities of Teacher Identity: Narratives of EFL Teacher in Indonesia

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Abstract

The participant in this study was an English teacher who also held the position of vice principal, and the researchers investigated the complications involved in the construction of a teacher's identity for a teacher of English in Indonesia, representing the expanding number of English instructors. This study used an integrated perspective to investigate the development of English teacher identities, drawing insights from Barcelos' (2015) theory of the relationship between teacher beliefs, teacher identity, and teacher emotions. The approach of narrative inquiry was utilized for the analysis of the data. By conducting an exploration of the life histories of the participant who had learned English and gone on to become an English teacher, this study was able to capture the dynamics of how the fundamental beliefs and feelings of the focused participant interacted with one another and formed the identity of the teacher. This was accomplished by focusing on how the participants had learned English and gone on to become English teachers. To reach this goal, the life stories of individuals who had previously studied English and gone on to become English instructors were investigated.

Keywords: EFL teacher, teacher beliefs, teacher emotions, teacher identity

INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity has attracted the curiosity of experts in a variety of areas, particularly about its significance. Identity is a part of the assimilation, accommodation, and evaluation processes (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2011; Vignoles et al., 2002). Identities continue to evolve, enabling the creation and establishment of identities in certain professional groups and communities, such as teachers and nurses (Goodolf & Godfrey, 2020; Schaap et al., 2021). The concept of identity continues to adapt following advances (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014), such as technology and 21st-century competency, as a result of diverse changes in many areas. Identity is one's verbal and implicit response to the question "Who am I?" or "Who are you?" in given conditions, both individually and collectively (Schwartz et al., 2011). A person's identity is a collection of meanings about his or her function in the social framework in which he or she lives

and interacts with society in specific situations (Stets & Serpe, 2013). However, the meaning of identity is always tied to a set of meanings that define a person's function in a profession or place within a certain community group (Burke & Stets, 2009), such as a teacher's professional identity.

Teachers are tasked with constructing, reconstructing, and preserving their real selves to be more competent, enthusiastic, and compassionate educators amidst sudden educational developments. In contrast, the concrete routes to raising teachers' professional identities had borne a tremendous burden due to the dynamic constructs building over this protracted process and the external influences imposed by educational institutions, such as political, social, and cultural issues. All of these aspects of identity creation are intimately linked to Reeves's (2018) theory of teacher identities, which states that teachers' identities depend strongly on both internal and external pressures, causing them to position themselves as

the wanted educators they aspire to be. Concerning this very dynamic process of building identities, schools, and programs for training and educating teachers must give teachers many chances to build their identities in a more meaningful way.

Nevertheless, the purpose of this study is to contribute to this line of inquiry by dissecting the complexities that lie behind the development of the teacher identity of one Indonesian English instructor. In particular, the purpose of this research is to explain how a person's interaction with their personal histories and the circumstances of their social lives influenced their attitudes and feelings concerning studying and teaching English. This will be accomplished by providing an in-depth description of the paths taken by English teachers on their way to becoming English teachers. These feelings and beliefs, in turn, are what contribute to the development of their identities as teachers.

According to Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015), research on many aspects of the inner lives of language instructors has provided substantial insights into the activities of language teachers as well as their interactions with students and other people. The beliefs, knowledge, and emotions related to language learning and teaching that emerged from their personal and language learning histories, as well as their experiences in teacher education, as well as their teaching practices, are at the core of their inner lives (Burns et al., 2015; Golombek & Doran, 2014). These beliefs, experiences, and emotions interact with one another to affect the identity development and decision-making processes of educators (Barcelos, 2015).

While the different aspects of teachers' inner lives have been studied and explored as distinct lines of scholarship in language teaching research, such as teacher agency (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019), teacher beliefs (Farrell & Ives, 2015), teacher emotions (Benesch, 2017), and teacher identity (Norton, 2013), less attention has been paid to the interaction of these constructs and their impact on language teachers' professional development (see exceptions of Bukor, 2015; Wolff & De Costa, 2017 as examples). According to Barcelos (2015), the intrinsic and interactive relationship between these constructs helps us to get a thorough understanding of the complexities inherent in teachers' practices and decision-making processes. This exhaustive perspective is likewise provided by Bukor (2015). In the study, Bukor proved that the basic ideas, perceptions, and emotions of language instructors that came from their familial and educational backgrounds

affected their professional judgments and practices. Instead of focusing on a particular aspect of teachers' professional life, he suggested viewing them as whole people and recognizing the dominant influences that influenced their growth. In answer to this issue, this study examines the dynamic interplay between the professional identities, beliefs, and emotions of one English language instructor, as well as the effect of these structures on the English teacher's professional life.

Teacher identity

Identity is a person's perception of their relationship to the world, how that relationship is formed over time and place, and how the individual views the possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013). Research on the identities of language educators has seen an increase in attendance during the past two decades (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Cheung et al., 2015; Yuan, 2019). Researchers have applied a variety of theoretical approaches, such as the sociocultural technique (Johnson, 2009) and the sociopolitical approach, to study the multifaceted idea of teacher identity (Morgan, 2016). In recent academic research, the poststructuralist theory of identity has been given a lot of attention. This theory says that identity is fluid and changing and that it is formed and negotiated by the personal agency and outside forces (Aneja, 2016; Norton, 2013).

Teacher emotions

Emotions, which have been the subject of research in the field of education for a long time as an essential component of teachers' inner lives, are a crucial component of teachers' inner lives (Hargreaves, 1998). One of the challenges associated with gaining knowledge of emotions is that they are difficult to conceptualize due to the complexities of emotions (Zembylas, 2007). Research on teacher emotions has shown that teachers' emotions profoundly impact their teaching approaches (De Costa et al., 2018), as well as their interactions with students and others (Li & Rawal, 2018). The emotional experiences of teachers are a factor in both the retention rate and turnover rate of teachers (Gu & Day, 2013).

Additionally, the emotions of teachers regarding their ideas about teaching were explored (Barcelos, 2015; Golombek & Doran, 2014). Barcelos (2015) investigated the interdependent and reciprocal connection that exists between the beliefs and emotions of teachers. Emotions provide validity to beliefs, which in turn generate ideas, which in turn form emotions. This link was also investigated by Golombek and Doran (2014),

who found that the student teacher's (Josie's) feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt indicated areas of cognitive dissonance between her views about an ideal teacher and reality. Golombek and Doran (2014) found that the student teacher's (Josie's) feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt indicated areas of cognitive dissonance between her views. This discrepancy also drew attention to the fact that there was a window of opportunity for alternative teacher beliefs to be created with the help of teacher educators. Golombek and Doran (2014) recognized "the professional self as both a thinking and feeling actor," and because of this, they pushed for the incorporation of teachers' emotional experiences into their professional development as a beneficial resource.

Teacher beliefs

It is well established that the idea of teachers' beliefs has an impact on both how teachers learn and the choices that they make, and this aspect of "teacher cognition" is extensively investigated (Borg, 2003; Burns et al., 2015). In their review article, Burns et al. (2015) acknowledged that while traditional teacher cognition research frequently adopted a cognitive approach that examines beliefs as fixed mental concepts, more recent research has paid more attention to the social and historical contexts within which teachers learn to teach and experience teaching. This is because traditional research on teacher cognition frequently adopted a cognitive approach that examines beliefs as fixed mental concepts rather than as fluid mental concepts (Burns et al., 2015; Li, 2013).

This research continues this line of investigation by looking at the perspectives of teachers through the lens of a social viewpoint. The research of Barcelos (2015) and Skott (2015) suggests that ideas held by educators are seen to be socially and historically created as well as contextually positioned. A person's sense of self and their ability to make decisions are both impacted by their beliefs since beliefs are a component of a person's sense-making system, which helps them understand the world and find solutions to problems (Barcelos, 2015). Extensive study has been done to explore the link between the beliefs of instructors and the methods that they use to educate (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Farrell & Ives, 2015). Additionally, the link between teacher beliefs and other parts of teachers' inner lives, such as teacher emotions and teacher identity, has garnered the attention of a large number of academics in recent years (Burri et al., 2017).

In conclusion, teachers establish their pro-

fessional identities via the process of interpreting and reinterpreting the various experiences they have had throughout their lives, most notably the experiences they have had learning and teaching languages. Their fundamental thoughts and feelings, which have emerged as a result of their relationships with other people, have an impact on the processes of interpretation and reinterpretation that they engage in. As a result, emotions, beliefs, and one's identity all have close connections that are highly interactive and mutually beneficial (Barcelos, 2015). This study adopts an integrated perspective to investigate (1) the emotions and beliefs of one English teacher regarding English teaching and learning, and (2) how her emotions contribute to the development of her professional identity. Taking into consideration the intricate relationships that exist between these three concepts, this study adopts an integrated perspective to do so.

METHODS

This qualitative research was conducted utilizing a narrative inquiry methodology. Narrative research studies human experiences and how their physical, social, and cultural environment influences and shapes their individual experiences (Haydon et al., 2018). This is following the opinion of Clandinin who believes that narrative research is a construct of structured experience that is told in a narrative style. Moreover, the narrative is both a phenomenon and a method, with the former reflecting the life being researched and the latter referring to the process by which a researcher analyzes the phenomenon and recounts action research (White, 2015). The research studies the perspective of an English teacher by focusing on how his journey became an English instructor for elementary school pupils and how he established his identity as an English instructor. Therefore, although this research may be valuable for triangulating the opinions of researchers with English teachers and education providers, this work's major objective is to give English instructors' viewpoints in creating their personality constructs as professional English teachers.

The investigation was done in an elementary school in Medan where the writers knew the participant directly. Data was acquired through semi-structured interviews with the individual. Researchers visited with participant multiple times during the data collection process to get detailed and rich data.

Participant

An English instructor working at a private elementary school in the city of Medan was the first person to take part in this research. In addition to his role as an assistant principal at the school, she is an engaged educator in the classroom. She was the firstborn of a total of four children in his family. She is a mother to two girls. She was graduated from one of the elementary schools located outside of Medan before moving on to the next level. Because she was one of the exceptional kids at the school, she was able to get into the junior high school of his choice when she was in middle school. She subsequently pursued her study at Madrasah Aliyah in Medan City while she was a senior in high school. Following that, the desire among our participants to continue their studies and improve their English language skills grew and make the occupation of English instructor the primary focus of her life.

During the time that data were being collected, problems of anonymity and confidentiality were brought up with a participant and explained to her, this was done out of respect for ethical considerations (Fithriani, 2018). After determining who would take part in the study, the first author, who is also a faculty member at the institution, verbally disseminated the information. The information was relayed to the principal by the first author, who also explained the goals of the study. This was accomplished in fulfillment of the research requirements imposed by the educational institution. After ensuring that all of the research requirements were satisfied, the researchers set up interview times.

Data Collection

In this investigation, narrative inquiry methodology is utilized as a research instrument, and semi-structured interviews play that role. The purpose of interviewing this kind is to acquire information that is exhaustive and thorough from a greater number of participants. Audio researchers record interviews that are performed in Indonesian, with the consent of the participant. The audio tape was transcribed word for word, and the results were then translated into English.

We conducted an interview with the participant so that we could learn about the process she went through to develop her professional identity as an English instructor. Instead of confining the participant's responses to the areas that we identified as potential problems based on a literature review, the semi-structured interview method allows the participant to talk about what they feel is most important to them. We ask

unanswered questions in order to stimulate conversation about her choice to pursue a career as an English instructor as a way of life. We have scheduled a face-to-face interview that will last for sixty minutes and will be semi-structured. But the real interview only lasted for half an hour, and after that, we agreed to continue the conversation over WhatsApp and the phone in order to gather more detailed information.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The information collected from participant in the process of becoming an English teacher is presented in the next section. We specifically describe how individuals form their teacher identity within the context of their separate teaching jobs, and we expose how their views and feelings are formed within this context. Constructed by their contacts with other people, there is a strong connection between these students and their teachers' identity formation.

A woman who is a part of our participant's family belongs to the lower middle class. Our participant's parents' education only went as far as high school and elementary school whose occupation is trading. It shapes how participant constructs her personal identities as English teacher by giving her an economic context. We learned this through the outcomes of our interviews.

"Since I stopped paying the noble school costs from elementary school through high school, thanks to my parents' prayers, I was able to avoid both receiving a scholarship and paying school fees. This is due to the fact that I am one of the best students in my class." (Excerpt 1)

The participant takes advantage of this opportunity to further her education by enrolling in postsecondary institutions and concentrating on English. When she was a senior in high school, one of her English teachers encouraged her to pursue her interest in the language by awarding her a scholarship that she used throughout her academic career. It was the positive demeanor and friendliness of her English teacher that sparked her interest in the language and led her to select English as her major of study when she moved on to further her education in college. In her journey in studying English, she found some phases:

Lack of Ability in English

The participant self-motivated herself throughout her schooling, from junior high school to senior high school, to study and perfect

her command of the English language by engaging in extra tutoring sessions outside of school, making it less difficult for her to pick up the English language. Therefore, it is possible to assert that the additional tutoring she received enabled her to become a student who stood out from the rest of her class in terms of her command of the English language. This can be found in excerpt 2.

“My abilities come from a school background, which is outside of the city, where it is unusual to find persons with English capabilities. As a result, I sought out supplemental instruction, which ultimately resulted in my becoming one of the students in my class with the highest English proficiency.” (Excerpt 2)

Based on how the data were explained before, it is clear that the participant is a student who speaks English better than any of their other friends. However, in some of the other findings, we discovered that the participant had a difficult time. He discussed the challenges she faced with her English skills when she was a student at the university level. This is due to the fact that while she was attending a tertiary level of education in North Sumatra, she encountered numerous people not only from within the province but also from other parts of the country. During this stage of her life, she had trouble acquiring a command of the English language. One of the ways in which her achievement in the English language differs from that of pupils attending other schools is the fact that this is one of those ways.

Becoming English Teacher

Participants in this study all decided at some point in their lives to work in education, namely as English teachers. Beginning with an interest in the inspiration that she received from her previous English instructor, which led to her falling in love with the language of English, There was no evidence uncovered that pointed to the challenges she faced on her path to becoming an English instructor. It can be located in excerpt 3.

“The fact that I focused my studies at university on English, I am now in the profession of teaching English. However, when I am teaching, I also contribute to the development of students’ religious literacy. So that my pupils can communicate well in English and, without a doubt, behave well.” (Excerpt 3)

According to the facts shown above, it is not sufficient to just teach English in order to qualify as an English teacher. However, as educators, one of our primary goals is to instill in our students a mannerly demeanor in both the classroom and the real world. So ensuring that the participant, in addition to teaching English, also communicates the ideals of decency and respect

in behavior.

My Crisis as English Teacher

During the process of analyzing the data, we discovered a number of additional recurring themes of discoveries. According to the account provided by the participant, she mentioned that while she was working as an English instructor, she went through numerous phases of crises during the process of teaching and learning. When the pupils being taught have more knowledge than the teacher, which can be found in the following example: excerpt 4, this is one of the crisis phases that one goes through in the process of becoming an English teacher.

“The children in today’s schools are far more intelligent than those I attended. When I’m in the classroom with my students, there are occasions when someone points out the errors I’ve made in my instruction. One of these errors is when I mispronounce terminology or explain terms in a way that makes them sound like they have the wrong meaning.” (Excerpt 4)

According to the data presented above, the participant said that a lack of increasing skill as an English teacher was one of the elements that contributed to the difficulty that they experienced when attempting to teach English. Where the rapid development of the world requires improvements in the realm of education, particularly for a teacher, and where these developments are required.

In this study, the complexity of the process of identity formation for English teachers in primary schools is investigated. To be more specific, this research offers the feelings and beliefs that were generated via their teaching experience, and it examines how these feelings and beliefs affected their professional trajectory as English teachers. The findings of this research contribute to the ongoing research on language teachers in two different ways. To begin, the utilization of an integrated framework makes it possible to grasp the evolution of the teacher identity that is both subtle and thorough. Second, research offers a deeper comprehension of the working conditions and challenges faced by private English teachers in a variety of educational settings.

Toward an integrated framework for examining the identity of professional educators

This study employs an integrated framework to look at the relationships between teachers’ identities, beliefs, and emotions. It also looks at how participants’ emotions and beliefs shape their teacher identities.

The teacher’s sense of self as a non-native

English speaker is shaped by feelings associated with a figure that is far removed from native English-speaking teachers and their assurance in speaking native English accurately. Her inferiority complex and lack of confidence in her English proficiency may be caused by the widespread “native speaker” concept (Holliday et al., 2015). That is, native English speakers are perceived as ideals whose identities emanate professional authority and legitimacy, whereas non-native English teachers are seen as having categorical deficiencies (Comprendio & Savski, 2019). The participant struggles to establish a sense of professional legitimacy and is constantly looking for outside confirmation of her English proficiency. This badly impacts their professional well-being and may lead to her abandoning the field.

In the participant’s situation, where the learning environment affects how well someone picks up a foreign language. As a result, the participant put a lot of effort into developing his identity as an English teacher through extracurricular activities. This self-assurance gives her a consistent framework for her thoughts and actions when learning and teaching English, which motivates her to continue studying the language especially when she entered the high desert, where she encountered many adversaries and a barrier to her ability to advance her English language skills.

English teacher professional development

This study sheds light on some of the struggles and challenges that English teachers face in their professional lives, highlighting a critical but under-researched area of the English teaching profession. It also highlights the perspective of English teachers, which has not previously been investigated.

The path that the participant took to become an English teacher can be seen as a metaphor for the life of a child who came from a middle-class to the upper-class economic background as well as a social background that was considered incompatible with the acquisition of a foreign language.

When discussing the identity of the ‘teacher,’ terms such as ‘unqualified,’ ‘test drilling,’ and ‘remote interaction with students and colleagues’ came up in the conversation. Even though she was able to build an identity as a legitimate professional through the extraordinary effort she put into customizing instructions and creating a caring relationship with students, this method of teaching English is only possible by aligning English lessons with Islamic religious values. She was

able to build an identity as a legitimate professional through these efforts. This teaching approach requires a significant amount of time and effort, which raises questions about how sustainable it is and whether or not it is even viable, which can lead to burnout among teachers. Because of this, there are many unanswered issues about how she may transition into a teaching profession that is both viable and enjoyable in the schools where he currently works.

CONCLUSION

The results of our study, which investigates the ideas, identity, and feelings of the instructor, shed light on how the teacher’s experience evolved from one of learning English to one of teaching English. By conducting an exploration of the life histories of participants who had learned English and gone on to become English teachers, this study was able to capture the dynamics of how the fundamental beliefs and feelings of the focused participant interacted with one another and formed the identity of the teacher. This was accomplished by focusing on how the participants had learned English and gone on to become English teachers.

This research, regardless of the particulars of the circumstance, ought to be considered an essential component of language teacher education. Even though the focus of this study is on English teachers, we have a strong opinion that the findings of this study are relevant not only to English teachers but also to teachers of other languages. This is despite the fact that the study was conducted on English instructors. We have high hopes that future research will continue along this new path away from the deskilling of teachers and instead embrace the identities, beliefs, and emotions of teachers. This can be accomplished by putting the developmental relationship that exists between teacher identity and emotions at the forefront of the research that is carried out. In the course of our own investigation, we came upon this particular finding.

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